

The Black Fountain:
Childhood and Class in Eighteenth-Century England

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Abstract

“The Black Fountain: Childhood and Class in Eighteenth-Century England” explores the nature of childhood as it was experienced by the poor in the eighteenth century. The scarcity of direct accounts from children at this level of society necessitates a creative examination of available sources: by combining quantitative records—such as workhouse admissions and discharge records or the registers of the philanthropic organizations of the capital—with qualitative sources—such as newspaper accounts, the work of pamphleteers, and parliamentary and court debates—this study overcomes the limitations of the fragmented evidence of childhood and reconstructs a more complete picture.

These findings highlight the difficulties in capturing children's attitudes and opinions due to the absence of their personal narratives: interpreting quantitative sources is not without challenges, because they reflect societal biases and perceptions of the time. This study thus adopts an analytical approach that reads institutional records “against the grain,” illuminating the ways that institutions processed and categorized children, but also uncovering instances where children managed to elude or subvert these systems. “The Black Fountain: Childhood and Class in Eighteenth-Century England” also recognizes the agency of impoverished children within the constraints imposed by their circumstances. Although these children faced material deprivation and had limited decision-making power, they actively shaped their own lives and resisted societal expectations.

This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of childhood in the eighteenth century. By synthesizing quantitative and qualitative sources and emphasizing the agency of young individuals, this study challenges prevailing narratives of innocence, vulnerability, and victimhood and unveils the resilience and active participation of children in shaping social, cultural, and economic structures of their time. This exploration offers valuable insights into the lives and experiences of marginalized children, enriching our understanding of this period in history.

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Introduction

The very active measures put in execution by the Civil Power, for these late years, to suppress robberies, and other disorders in and near this metropolis, have, from time to time, produced to the view of the magistrates, a number of distressed friendless boys, from eleven to fourteen years of age, and upwards, unprotected by parent or parish, who gain their miserable livelihood by pilfering and stealing; and of these objects there never were more than at present; and though at first they content themselves with picking of pockets, and stealing of trifling things out of shops, their wants being few, and their experiences small, yet as they grow up, their fears lessen, their strength increases with their courage, and their expenses, occasioned by women, make them undertake the most daring enterprises; and from this black fountain it is that the late gangs of house-breakers, street-robbers, and foot-pads, have been supplied; which makes me ardently wish for an immediate establishment of this radical cure.¹

– John Fielding

We often assume that childhood is a universal experience in life. Many commentators in the modern age have expressed the belief that children have all been revered since time immemorial: Allison and Adrian James argued that all societies deal with childhood “through the imposition of structures, rules and laws of different kinds.”² The fact is, the character of childhood has transformed over time, influenced by changes in laws, policies, discourses, and social practices unique to different localities and different periods.

In the eighteenth century, philanthropist Jonas Hanway—who likely did more than any other Briton to improve the lives of children during his lifetime—commented on the plight of young people in society:

If these poor babes could tell how cruelly they have been treated, the very stones... would cry out against the offenders. If we feel for liberty, are not the rights of children as sacred as any other? If we consider things in a religious view, is not man formed by his almighty creator for the

¹ John Fielding, *An Account of the Receipts and Disbursements Relating to Sir John Fielding's plan; For the Preserving of Distressed Boys, By Sending Them to Sea as Apprentices in the Merchants Service...* (London, 1769), v. All quotes in this dissertation retain the original spelling and emphasis unless otherwise indicated.

² Allison James and Adrian L. James, *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 20.

preservation his own species: and are we not prompted to consult how best to preserve and support our fellow creatures?³

Young people continued to go unprotected in the years that followed despite Hanway's pleas, and their stories remained largely untold for another two centuries. In fact, W. Clarke Hall, a barrister who worked with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), was still commenting on the issue in 1917 when he wrote, "For all the assets of which the State stands possessed, none are more valuable than the children, but of all its assets, the State has been in the past of none so wasteful or heedless."⁴

In the 1960s, Peter Laslett continued to ask why "crowds and crowds of little children are strangely missing from the written record," suggesting that

there is something mysterious about the silence of all these multitudes of babes in arms, toddlers and adolescents in the statements men made at the time about their own experience. ... It is in fact an effort of mind to remember all the time that children were always present in such numbers in the traditional world, nearly half the whole community living in a condition of semi-oblivation.⁵

It was in that very decade that the plights of young people first began to play a significant part in historical analysis. With little doubt, the most famous study to focus on children was *L'Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l'Ancien Regime*, published in 1960 by French social historian Philippe Ariès (although it is perhaps better known in English by its 1962 translation, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*). The questions it raised released a flood of publications on the subject. Although it was concerned specifically with childhood and the family under ancien regime France, the book argued that now-universal ideas about a transitional

³ Jonas Hanway, *An Earnest Appeal for Mercy to the Children of the Poor* (London, 1766), 71, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/An_earnest_appeal_for_mercy_to_the_child/bIYOAAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

⁴ W. Clark Hall, *The State and the Child* (New York: Frederick. A. Stokes, 1917), xi.

⁵ Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York: Scribner, 1966), 104.

state between infancy and adulthood were invented by modern liberal ideas: young people in the past had been entirely perceived as adults on a smaller scale: There was no notion of cumulative learning or of the particular “physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood.” Young people did not yet have any separate status at all. They simply “did not count” until they were weaned and absorbed into the “great community of men.”⁶

In the 1970s, many scholars followed Ariès’ example, taking for granted that this change he had described marked the origins of childhood, although some of his theoretical implications did come under fire. The best-known of these critiques came from American social thinker Lloyd deMause, who argued that the entire history of childhood was “a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken.”⁷ DeMause proposed a “psychogenic theory of history,” where parents themselves matured over successive generations, from a period when cruelty was commonplace to one where they were more likely to treat their children with love and kindness. He argued,

The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of childcare, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused.⁸

DeMause argued, contra Ariès, that there were six historical phases of parent-child relations, beginning with the “infanticidal” mode, which had persisted until about the thirteenth century. This first mode posited that children were “full of evil,” and parents in this period “routinely resolved anxieties about taking care of children by killing them.”⁹ Over time, they “began to accept the child as having a soul” and came to condemn treatment that resulted in their

⁶ Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1965), 411–12, 125.

⁷ Lloyd deMause (ed.), *The History of Childhood* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974), 1.

⁸ DeMause, *History of Childhood*, 1.

⁹ DeMause, *History of Childhood*, 51.

death.¹⁰ DeMause conceded that there was no real doubt that parents in the past were attached to their children, but he also insisted that parents had been unable to view their children as distinct human beings, writing, “It is, of course, not love which the parent of the past lacked, but rather the emotional maturity needed to see the child as a person separate from himself.”¹¹

DeMause’s theory culminated in the family relations of the twentieth century, when, he argued, parents began working to fulfill children’s needs instead of managing their behaviour through discipline. DeMause called this “the helping mode,” and he maintained that children reared in this way would be “gentle, sincere, never depressed, never imitative or group-oriented, strong willed, and unintimidated by authority”: he suggested that parents in this period had become the child’s servant, “rather than the other way around.”¹² But some skeptics argued that, in constructing this “horrifying dark world of childhood in the past,” deMause had ultimately provided “no systematic analysis of his sources” and had effectively “written little more than a history of child abuse.”¹³

But Ariès had other detractors: some alleged that the data he supplied had been unrepresentative, that he had over-emphasized the works of educationalists and moralists, or that he had failed to examine aspects of the relationships between economic and political factors that did not pertain to his chosen model. Feminist critics pointed out the gender bias inherent in his limitation of his thesis to the male members of the family. Others suggested that Ariès’s narrow focus caused him to virtually ignore the data on anyone below seven years of age, neglecting any

¹⁰ Many, of course, turned to less fatal but equally brutal practices, such as abandonment.

¹¹ DeMause, *History of Childhood*, 17.

¹² DeMause, *History of Childhood*, 52, 54. The implication that children were properly supposed to be the servants of adults is itself problematic by current standards.

¹³ Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 5.

acknowledgement of the biological needs of food, clothing, shelter, or affection for young children, or of their consequent dependence on adults.¹⁴

Many argued that Ariès displayed a kind of naivety in his use of historical sources: he seemed to have assumed that if aspects of the twentieth-century conception of childhood were not present in medieval Europe, earlier periods must have lacked any awareness of childhood at all.¹⁵ In fact, Ariès did not actually suggest that concepts of pre-adult stages of life had never existed: he acknowledged that ancient society had “presupposed a difference and a transition between the world of children and that of adults.” He contended that intellectuals in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds had believed that there were multiple stages of childhood—beginning with infancy and continuing to the age of seven, followed by *pueritia*, which lasted until fourteen, giving way to adolescence, and ascending from there, like steps on the way to the peak of life in adulthood.¹⁶ He argued that medieval Europeans had inherited these distinctions through the Catholic Church, but early modern people had “lost” them, only to rediscover them through a long process of change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Over this period, he reasoned, society began to realize that children were not merely smaller versions of adults: they were people of a different order altogether—more innocent and more fragile, certainly, but also more susceptible to temptation and in need of proper shaping or moulding. He maintained that a new sensitivity to the emotional needs of children seemed to be emerging by the middle of the

¹⁴ Some argued that Ariès confused prescription with practice, that his evidence lacked context. See Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2001), 12–13.

¹⁵ See Harry Hendrick, “Children and Childhood”, *Refresh: Recent Findings of Research in Economic & Social History* 15 (1992), 1; Marjatta Rahikainen, *Centuries of Child Labour: European Experiences from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 1; David Hunt, *Parents and Children in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). As Linda Pollock pointed out, “If parents totally ignored their young children, the latter would die; human infants are all too obviously dependent on adult care and protection.” Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 55.

¹⁶ Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 463.

eighteenth century, and this was discernible in the development of clothes, toys, and games designed especially for young people, and in the increasing tendency to depict the distinctive personalities of children in art.

Ariès concluded that it was thus that children came to occupy “a central place in the family.” Yet, as Doris Desclais Berkvam later suggested, this raised the question of whether there might not have been “a consciousness of childhood so unlike our own that we do not recognize it.”¹⁷ Desclais Berkvam’s statement would form the basis of many arguments about childhood through the 1980s, as many scholars contended that there might have been a continuity in the history of childhood. In her book, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations 1500–1900* (1983), Linda Pollock argued that the lack of discussion on the nature of the state of childhood in earlier periods was not necessarily proof that parents were indifferent to their children, but demonstrated instead “a lack of experience with the medium of writing as a form of expression.” She insisted that, to the contrary, “parents have always tried to do what is best for their children, within the context of their culture.”¹⁸ Pollock was critical of the work of Ariès and deMause alike, accusing them of “errors, distortion and misinterpretations dominated by myths,” and through her own close study of diaries and journals she concluded that there had been no significant changes in perceptions of childhood or in practices of childrearing in the past at all. Although premodern parents had claimed absolute authority over their children and had an

¹⁷ Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 133, 129, 412. Doris Desclais Berkvam, “Nature and Nurture: A Notion of Medieval Childhood and Education”, *Mediaevalia* 9 (1983), 165. David Herlihy, in the same way, pointed out that medieval Europeans’ attitudes to the young were simply “different,” attributing them to the “psychological and economic investment which families and societies in the past were [also] willing to make in their children.” David Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978–1991* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1995), 219.

¹⁸ Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 64.

economic interest in their survival, it did not naturally follow that they had no love for them: rather than relying on a narrative that shifted from brutality to permissiveness, Pollock sketched a stable continuity of parental love, affection, and empathy, and maintained that the very question of whether a concept of childhood existed in the past was misguided. The real question that should be asked, she argued, was what *love* actually meant. Although Pollock acknowledged that there was a marked change in this period in the language people used when speaking or writing about children, she concluded that “the texts reveal no significant change in the quality of parental care given to, or the amount of affection felt for, infants for the period 1500–1900.” Parents had always recognized the distinct nature of childhood, in other words: a loving parent-child relationship was a fundamental, timeless human experience.¹⁹

Pollock's work received support from scholars such as Keith Wrightson and Ralph Houlbrooke, and through the 1980s and 1990s the notion that the history of childhood was characterized by transformation came under constant attack: it was suggested that parents had always loved their children, and that over the years the nuclear family had proved itself fully capable of defending itself against intrusions of church or state. These scholars favoured descriptive written sources over prescriptive ones, and their extensive use of diary and autobiographical evidence showed the existence of a history of child-parent relations where changes happened only at the margins. To them, it could be said, childhood had no real history.²⁰

Yet most of the work published in subsequent years has returned to the notion of change, acknowledging that there was a significant shift in attitudes toward childhood in Western culture.

¹⁹ Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 3.

²⁰ Ralph Anthony Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450–1700* (London: Longman, 1995); Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (London: Routledge, 1982).

As the early modern era began, young people acquired their own space—they developed their own foods, their own clothing, their own music, and even their own modes of recreation. It has been argued that the formation of these distinctions created an essentially new “class” of people who would be valued for their lack of maturity rather than chastised for it.²¹ Scholars increasingly identified this class as a localized cultural or social construct, although it should be emphasized that “relative” interpretations of childhood had already been a thread in historiography as early as the first decades of the twentieth century. Attempts had been made to link the emergence of the idea to geography, as in Beatrice and Sydney Webb’s *The Break-up of the Poor Law* (1909) or O. J. Dunlop and R. D. Denman’s *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour* (1912), which both connected the emergence of the state of childhood with the history of Britain.²² Children similarly featured heavily in J. L. and Barbara Hammond’s *The Town Labourer* (1917), which dedicated two entire chapters to the plights of English climbing boys, youth factory operatives, and children in the mines.²³ Among these early works, Dorothy George’s *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1925) has been particularly influential: her graphic depictions of the experiences of parish apprentices and juvenile offenders in the metropolis have had a lasting impact on the histories of the young poor.²⁴

²¹ James Davison Hunter, “Wither Adulthood?” *New City Commons* 5 (2009), 9; Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006), 139.

²² Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb (eds.), *The Break-up of the Poor Law* (London: Longmans, 1909); Olive Jocelyn Dunlop and Richard D. Denman, *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour* (New York: Macmillan, 1912).

²³ The Hammonds argued, “During the first phase of the Industrial Revolution, the employment of children on a vast scale became the most important social feature of English life.” J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Town Labourer, 1760–1832: The New Civilisation* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1917; reprint 1920), 143.

²⁴ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1927). George’s book depicted the cruelty and hardships that children faced in unusually grim detail, but it has been suggested that the book’s criticism of Poor Law authorities, particularly their alleged abuse of the system of parish apprenticeship, was perhaps typical of the Fabian politics of its time. For some of this criticism, see Dianne Payne, “Children of the Poor in London, 1700–1770”, Ph.D. Thesis: University of Hertfordshire, 2008), 23.

Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt reinforced many of George’s sentiments in their own influential two-volume *Children in English Society* (1969), which was a comprehensive study of British children and childcare services in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, engaging with topics such as training and reform, urban vagrancy and delinquency, child pauperism, and penal transportation.²⁵ They argued that there is continuity in policy between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century, and that many of the philanthropic ventures of the eighteenth century were in fact throwbacks to Tudor paternalism, wherein delinquent parents could forfeit control over their children to local authorities that were concerned with cultures of poverty.²⁶ But because of Pinchbeck and Hewitt’s interest in the intersections between children, parents, and the state—they aimed to provide “a study of social concern for children in England,” charting the development of public policy and statutory protection for children from an institutional point of view—their work is often criticized today for focusing too heavily on the work of philanthropists rather than on the children that received their aid. Although, ultimately, they argued that parental care was influenced by social attitudes, legislation, and policy, rather than the other way around, it is striking how many recent studies in the history of childhood flow from their work.²⁷

One of the best-known British works to be published in the years since is J. H. Plumb’s article, “The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England” (1975), which argued,

²⁵ The book was based mainly on Pinchbeck’s previous body of work—much of which came out in the *British Journal of Sociology* in the 1950s—and was co-authored by Hewitt, a former student. See Ivy Pinchbeck, “Social Attitudes to the Problem of Illegitimacy”, *British Journal of Sociology* 5 (1954), 309–23; Ivy Pinchbeck, “State and the Child in Sixteenth-Century England”, *British Journal of Sociology* 7 (1956), 273–285 and 8 (1957), 59–74; Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society: From Tudor Times to the Eighteenth Century; From the Eighteenth Century to the Children Act 1948* (London: Routledge, 1969).

²⁶ Pinchbeck and Hewitt argued that the eighteenth century could be even harsher than the sixteenth for most children because of the constant imperative of parish authorities to keep rates down. Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 309–12.

²⁷ Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 8, 34.

much like deMause had done, that there was an “autocratic, indeed ferocious” posture taken toward children before the end of the seventeenth century, rooted in the belief that young people were full of “original sin.” But a “new social attitude towards children began to strengthen” during the eighteenth century; parents who had previously considered their offspring to be “sprigs of old Adam whose wills had to be broken” began to employ a more “gentle and ... sensitive approach.”²⁸ A serious shortcoming of Plumb’s analysis, however, was that his evidence was almost entirely drawn from the commercial world and the middle class: the fact is, the “new world” he described would have been alien to many, many children.²⁹

But the period described in these histories was clearly a period of significant historical change: In the eighteenth century, there was the advent of the Enlightenment and the triumph of commercialism, both often contrasted with the period of repression and corporal correction that characterized the “Puritan” era that preceded them. There was the development of the “bloody code,” and the consequent overhaul of much of the criminal justice system. The period also saw cyclical economic depressions, the onset of industrialization, the vast expansion of coalmining and the beginnings of factory work, and the rise of great industrial cities in the Midlands and the North of England. Yet there were also considerable improvements made to transportation systems across the country, creating both an exterior network of maritime coastal shipping and a more efficient interior network of coal, raw materials, and manufactured goods transported through new canals and turnpike roads. For much of the century, significantly, the country was

²⁸ Plumb argued that the traditional Christian view in Western Europe was that the sin of the sexual union that led to the conception of children ensured that all offspring were inherently evil. J. H. Plumb, “The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England”, *Past and Present* 67:1 (1975), 65, 70.

²⁹ Plumb went so far as to suggest that children “had become luxury objects upon which their mothers and fathers were willing to spend larger and larger sums of money.” This, as we will see, hardly describes the experience of many young people in England. Plumb, “New World of Children”, 90.

also at war with France: Facing the loss of the American colonies abroad and suffering from ongoing concerns about population decline at home, Britain worried about a shortage of manpower on a national scale.³⁰ There were accompanying increases in migration, urban poverty, and demand for relief, as well as a renewed preoccupation with “improving” the habits and work rhythms of the poor.³¹ Criticism of local government and the Poor Law rose, and novel modes of philanthropy were developed to fill the gap.³²

As a result of both falling infant and child mortality and a simultaneously increasing birth rate, children were becoming a significantly larger presence among the poor.³³ A number of schemes thus emerged that specifically targeted pauper children, promising moral reform and the development of a stronger work ethic to appease critics from higher in the social strata, assuring them that the nation’s pocketbook would benefit as a result.³⁴ Some of these initiatives represented full-on experiments in social regulation, influenced equally by strands within Christianity that sought to reform the morals and habits of the poor and by commercial ideals of

³⁰ Conflict spanned the eighteenth century for England, and it was only decisively ended with victories at Trafalgar in 1805 and Waterloo in 1815.

³¹ Welfare provision was becoming increasingly regulated and institutionalized. See Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries, and Paul Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Vol. I: 1700–1870* (second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³² This criticism eventually culminated in the reformation of the entire system of relief with the creation of the New Poor Law in 1834.

³³ See Anonymous, *Sketch of the State of the Children of the Poor in the Year 1756, and the Present State and Management of All the Poor in the Parish of St. James Westminster, in January 1797* (London, 1797). By 1826, as much as 40 percent of people were under the age of fifteen. Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.

³⁴ An 1802 census found that 300,000 of the 1 million people on relief were aged under 15. E.A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Appendix 3.1, 528–30; E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Davies, J. E. Oepen, and R. S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580–1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 214–42; Romola Davenport, Jeremy Boulton, and Leonard Schwarz, “The Decline of Adult Smallpox in Eighteenth-Century London”, *Economic History Review* 64:4 (2011), 1289–314. Sara Horell, Jane Humphries and Hans-Jochim Voth, “Destined for Deprivation: Human Capital Formation and Intergenerational Poverty in Nineteenth-Century England”, *Explorations in Economic History* 38 (2001), 354.

profit and loss. But other schemes that were proposed in this period were shaped by the emergence of a distinct culture of sentimentality, and for the first time British thinkers attached a concrete value to the population—one that was derived as much from feeling as from utility.³⁵

Significantly, pediatrics emerged at this time as an entirely new branch of medicine: Alysa Levene has suggested that the second half of the eighteenth century thus provided “a new reference point for thinking about the period of childhood.”³⁶ By the end of the century, something approaching the modern concept of childhood was emerging; children were broadly considered to be innately innocent creatures, and emotional investment in their happiness and wellbeing was becoming increasingly commonplace. The English philosopher John Locke had long since published his influential work on pedagogy—*Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693)—arguing that children were a *tabula rasa* at birth, or a completely clean slate: as they grew older their character could thus be shaped through education to make fit adult citizens.³⁷

This had an impact on the similarly influential Swiss-born philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Émile, or, On Education* (1762) emphasized the child’s ability to find their own moral compass with gentle guidance; it promoted a new sense of freedom embodied by

³⁵ A “discourse of character,” as Martin Weiner termed it. See Martin Weiner, *Reconstructing the Criminal: culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 38–45. See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (London, 1690); *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London, 1693); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, edited by P. D. Jimack, translated by Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1974).

³⁶ Alysa Levene, *The Childhood of the Poor: Welfare in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4.

³⁷ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. But as Pinchbeck and Hewitt pointed out, Locke’s *Report for the Reform of the Poor Law*, presented to the board of trade in 1697, betrayed a much harsher, class-driven plan for the establishment of schools of industry. See Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 309–10. Also see Anna Moltchonova and Susannah Ottaway, “Rights and Reciprocity in the Political and Philosophical Discourse of the Eighteenth Century”, in Linda Zionowski and Cynthia Klekor (eds.), *The Culture of the Gift in Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 15–36.

youth, enhanced by the emerging consumer trappings of childhood.³⁸ Although the kinds of training Locke and Rousseau advocated differed considerably from each other, it is worth stressing that both were concerned with highlighting the malleability and potential for goodness of young people: this would come to form the basis of much of the subsequent discussion on childhood.³⁹

But it needs to be stressed that the writings of middle-class intellectuals like Locke and Rousseau did not capture the experience of all children; the fact is, the ideals they presented in their writing simply did not square with the experience of the vast majority of people growing up in England.⁴⁰ The notions that they championed—however revolutionary they may have seemed at the time—had little relevance in the lives of impoverished children, who continued to live difficult lives in the world of adults. This is not to say that their emphasis on the innocence of children did not stimulate a “sentimental response” in Britons to the plight of the young poor—depictions of pauper children in art were certainly coming to reflect these sentimental ideas.⁴¹ But the lives of poor children were only indirectly affected: developments such as the emergence of schools as specialized, age-graded institutions for young people certainly had an impact on them, as did the advent of philanthropic and government agencies as a vehicle for the protection of children’s rights. But these developments were only by-products of ideas that were emerging

³⁸ Rousseau acknowledged the influence of Locke on his own work but chose to reject Locke’s emphasis on the “man in the child.” See Plumb, “New World of Children”, 64–95; Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600–1900* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994); Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: Longman, 1995), 62.

³⁹ Locke emphasized the infant’s inherent disposition toward evil, whereas Rousseau stressed the connection with uncorrupted nature. See Adriana S. Benzaquén, “Childhood, Identity, and Human Science in the Enlightenment”, *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004), 34–57.

⁴⁰ Pat Thane, “Childhood in History”, in Michael King (ed.), *Childhood, Welfare and Justice* (London: Batsford, 1981), 10.

⁴¹ See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 4, 20.

among groups from the middle classes.⁴² While parish officers and other individuals may not have had strong opinions about the state of childhood, those who framed the laws certainly did: philanthropists like Hanway were able to bring their own middle-class views of childhood to bear on the experience of poor children.⁴³ Although the impact of such ideas was admittedly limited in the eighteenth century, poor children would eventually be held up as emblematic of all of the problems of English society.⁴⁴

Since the publication of Hugh Cunningham's book *The Children of the Poor* in 1991, much more attention has been paid to social disparities in the lives of the young. Yet even in this study, Cunningham was less concerned with the actual treatment of children than with the opinions of contemporary polemicists on the ways they thought the children of the poor ought to behave, or the ways in which these young people were represented in the publications of organizations dedicated to their rescue and education.⁴⁵ More recent efforts to address these issues in the study of childhood include Patricia Crawford's work on the parents of poor children in early modern England, as well as work on British child labour by Jane Humphries, Katarina Honeyman, and Peter Kirby.⁴⁶ But perhaps closest to the concerns of this study is Alysa

⁴² It has been pointed out that the Foundling Hospital received considerable financial support right about the time that Rousseau's ideas became popular. As Levene argued, "Rich and influential patrons of children's charities enjoyed witnessing the improving effects of their social experiments with the latest philosophies." Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 175.

⁴³ See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 105.

⁴⁴ Cunningham, *Invention of Childhood*, 101. In particular, see Peter King, "The Rise of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1780–1840: Changing Patterns of Perception and Prosecution", *Past and Present* 160:1 (1998), 157.

⁴⁵ Cunningham concluded that the development of childhood was connected to emerging middle-class ideology and was heavily influenced by Protestant advice books and their notions of original sin. Hugh Cunningham, *Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 7. Also see Cunningham, *Invention of Childhood*, 101, 128.

⁴⁶ Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England, 1580–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750–1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780–1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

Levene's book, *The Childhood of the Poor: Welfare In Eighteenth-Century London* (2012), which looked at the emergence of specialized welfare services for children, including local workhouses, philanthropic organizations, parish schemes for child-nursing, as well as the more informal charity given in the home by family and friends. She argued—as Cunningham had a number of years earlier—that “by the early decades of the nineteenth century the children of the poor and their families had access to a much wider and more age-specific range of welfare options than ever before.”⁴⁷

All these studies make it clear that real knowledge of the *social* factors of identity is sadly limited: many of the changes we associate with the “discovery” of childhood would really only have been felt in the families of the middling sort and above. This study will show that, while it became common for parishes and philanthropic bodies to give support to “deserving” poor children, this aid was not extended equally to everyone: “immoral” children who committed criminal acts, were not considered to be worthy of support.⁴⁸ Many social-welfare schemes adopted an increasingly suspicious attitude to the poor, holding that the bonds of inherited

⁴⁷ Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 4, 20.

⁴⁸ Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 61, 226–8. Also see James Christian Steward, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730–1830* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995). This would later be one of the chief criticisms used to justify the establishment of the Philanthropic Society: “Most of our charitable institutions have confined their beneficence to the deserving, but *unfortunate* part of the community; whilst the offspring of the *vicious* and *dishonest* have been involved in the guilt of their parents. Those who have violated the laws in any instance have been excluded from society, or at least have been treated with extreme severity when received again with it's (sic) protection; and before this Institution, no asylum was ever opened for the *repenting* culprit, where the wanderer might be recalled from the error of his way, not by harsh and cruel treatment, but by gentleness and kindness; where he might prove the excellence and benefits of virtue, and contemplate her no longer under an austere and threatening aspect; where, by his own industry, he might contribute to his own subsistence, and be no longer under the NECESSITY of stealing for bread.” Philanthropic Society, *An account of the nature and views, of the Philanthropic Society, Instituted In MDCCLXXXVIII, For the Prevention of Crimes, by The Admission of the Offspring of Convicts, and for the Reform of Criminal Poor Children* (London, 1797), 4–5. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0109557556/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=c24b52b8&pg=1. Accessed 6 Dec. 2022.

poverty could be broken by separating children into specialist institutions and removing the influence of adult paupers.⁴⁹ In fact, after the spread of Thomas Malthus's theories about population growth, it became increasingly common to view all young children—deserving or not—as net drains on the fortunes of the state. But a particularly wary eye was cast thereafter on the threat posed by juvenile crime.⁵⁰

Social bias in the historical scholarship on childhood can no doubt be traced to the sources that have generally been used in its construction: many studies have relied on material from the visual arts, for instance, in which the poor have been historically under-represented or have been portrayed overwhelmingly negatively. William Hogarth—influential pictorial satirist and social critic—was perhaps typical of his contemporaries in portraying impoverished children almost exclusively in unsavoury situations. Amidst the chaos and filth of *Gin Lane* (1751) he depicted charity schoolgirls drinking alcohol, and he sprinkled young pickpockets among the execution-watching crowd in his portrayal of the gallows at Tyburn. In *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1751), he showed a workhouse-boy from St. Giles-in-the-Fields gambling at dice and cards in the street while other youths in the background tormented animals. It has been suggested that Hogarth was being deliberately provocative in his portrayal of the children of the poor—that he was concerned more with the promotion of the industriousness and respectability he wished to

⁴⁹ Although, as Levene suggested, the assumption of parental care and the right to nurture remained strong. See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 104, 105. Also see Barry Stapleton, “Inherited Poverty and Life Cycle Poverty: Odiham, Hampshire, 1650–1850”, *Social History* 18:3 (1993), 339–55; Heather Shore, *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge: The Royal Historical Society/The Boydell Press, 1999).

⁵⁰ Malthus argued that population tended to increase in geometrical progression while food supply increased in a more limited arithmetical progression. He argued that the former would always outrun the latter, producing mass famines, but he did not foresee nineteenth-century improvements in British agriculture, or the ability of the country to import food from other regions in the Empire. But his predictions were influential, and no doubt had a considerable influence on contemporary views of the poor. See Thomas Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population* (London, 1798).

see in the population rather than the faithful reproduction of reality—but that only serves to underline the argument that visual materials are better interpreted as prescriptive rather than descriptive sources for writing history.⁵¹ Many scholars have pointed out that artworks can be problematic resources: they were constructed by artists who held their own ideas and notions about the subjects they depict. Connections between the object and its representation are only assumptions, and they can never be taken at face value.⁵²

An even more common problem with the existing historiography of childhood is the over-reliance of many studies on reconstructions based on literary depictions: many have based their analysis on sermons or printed moral works, while others made use of pedagogical books of the period.⁵³ Although several professional authors had begun to produce exclusively juvenile literature by 1780—a number of “classics” appeared from authors such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, William Wordsworth, and Charles Dickens—young people were not the actual targets of this emerging literary market: it was expected that adults would purchase these products on their children’s behalf.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Dianne Payne wrote that “images used as social critique employ gross exaggeration to make a statement.” She argued that both artists and novelists often had their own agendas, and she concluded, “we need to question these images and search for the reality behind the satirical print, the cartoon and the printed page.” Payne, “Children of the Poor in London”, 23, 24.

⁵² See Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 88.

⁵³ Many scholars used these books as sources even though it has been shown that they were not intended for children—only after the publication of John Newbery’s *Pretty Little Pocket Book* in 1744 did children’s books become a profitable part of the literary market.

⁵⁴ As Plumb put it, “the new children’s literature was designed to attract adults, to project an image of those virtues which parents wished to inculcate in their offspring.” It was certainly “aimed at the young,” but he pointed out that it was available to them “only through the refraction of the parental eye.” Plumb, “New World of Children”, 81–82. Ballads, fables—even fairy tales and riddles—were initially aimed at adult readers. There were also various religious, political, and satirical works written for adults but subsequently consumed by later generations of young people, like John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (1563/1688), John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). See Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982), 43; Derek Jarrett, *England in the Age of Hogarth* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986); Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 299–300.

Most problematic, perhaps, was the fact that the content of literary works did not necessarily reflect contemporary ideas or practice: authors often fell outside the social groups that made up their subjects, and they only ever strayed as far as the conventions of genre allowed.⁵⁵ In hope of unearthing the more authentic “sentiments” of family relationships, a number of modern scholars have thus turned to unpublished letters, diaries, and autobiographies, but the survival of these sources is patchy, and assumptions that they more faithfully indicate changes in attitudes cannot be made with confidence.⁵⁶ Ludmilla Jordanova pointed out that many studies that make use of these kinds of personal documents claim to capture the “autonomous, authentic voice of children,” but their authors were as selective in composing them as conventional literary writers would be. The benefit of their content is limited by the presence of adult languages, mental habits, and patterns of behaviour.⁵⁷

Linda Mahood attempted to avoid these pitfalls in her study of Poor Law institutions in nineteenth-century Scotland by using transcriptions of oral interviews with former child inmates, inferring from those the ways that working-class children and their parents reacted to the system, and Heather Shore adopted a similar idea in her research on nineteenth-century juvenile

⁵⁵ Although the subjects of these literary works themselves did not often reflect the makeup of society either: see Heywood, *History of Childhood*, 6; Roger Cox, *Shaping Childhood: Themes of Uncertainty in the History of Adult-Child Relationships* (London: Routledge, 1996), 6; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London: Penguin, 1990), 258.

⁵⁶ These unpublished sources also leave out a great deal of information, which undermines any claims that their contents are the “exact truth.” They can nonetheless “present a more personal, intimate picture providing glimpses into actual households. They reveal children in their context — as part of a society with adults—rather than isolated from it. They go some of the way to revealing the actualities of childhood rather than the attitudes to it . . . Diaries are the closest we have available to direct observation of parent-child interaction and so are a very valuable source of evidence.” Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 88–89.

⁵⁷ Ludmilla Jordanova, “New Worlds for Children in the Eighteenth Century: Problems of Historical Interpretation”, *History of the Human Sciences* 3 (1990), 69–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519000300110>. Heywood concluded that such sources “depend on how the writer views the actual events from hindsight, and he may attempt to show himself in a better light.” Heywood, *History of Childhood*, 7. See John Waller, *The Real Oliver Twist: Robert Blincoe: A Life That Illuminates an Age* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2005).

delinquency, using interviews with youth offenders on the *Euryalus* hulk during the 1830s.⁵⁸ But in other kinds of oral histories, narratives of childhood are usually composed in retrospect by adults who are endeavouring to recall their upbringings, and they depend to a great degree on what their creators can remember. Memory has been shown to be notoriously selective, and this kind of re-construction unavoidably entails some distortion and shaping of the past.⁵⁹

Sources that accurately record children's attitudes and opinions, therefore, are few—and this is exacerbated by the fact that most young people were simply unable to leave their own accounts of their experiences. Some scholars have consequently tried to make do without any of the above sources at all, arguing that the voices of the young can more effectively “be teased out and captured” from institutional records.⁶⁰ But this approach too has its problems: there has been considerable disagreement about how the reader interprets those kinds of documents. Sources like the London Bills of Mortality show an increase in the ratios of baptisms to burials in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which suggests an increase in urban survival rates—generally attributed to a decline in infant mortality. But because generational poverty continued to outweigh individual merit throughout the capital in this period, the actual life-chances of those at the bottom of the social scale continued to be drastically limited.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Linda Mahood, *Policing Gender, Class and Family, 1850–1945* (London: University College London Press, 1995), 13–14. In the same way, Shore quoted interview subjects who commented on their offending behaviour, their familial circumstances, their relationships with other criminals, their experience of the custody of police and prison, and on their potential to reform, and she attempted to consider rather than merely describe their behaviour. Shore wrote: “Whilst such material needs to be viewed critically it provides at least a snapshot of the lives of juvenile offenders in the early nineteenth century.” Shore, *Artful Dodgers*, 12–13.

⁵⁹ Pollock concluded that, although such documents can provide some insights, they are “likely to reveal as much about the author at the time of writing as about his or her past.” Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 89.

⁶⁰ See Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640–1840* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

⁶¹ Estimates of infant mortality from the London bills of mortality have the rate falling from 342 deaths per thousand births in 1700–49 to 151 deaths per thousand births by the second quarter of the nineteenth century. See John

Quantitative studies have also made use of the records of the Poor Laws, from their origins under Elizabeth I through to their pronounced presence in the life of the poor in the eighteenth century. Although it has been argued that the Poor Laws provided a kind of safety net for the sick and destitute throughout the period, holes were beginning to appear in that net under the strain of population increase; poor families were increasingly being forced to seek relief from a number of other sources according to their personal circumstances, whether that was through charitable assistance or the informal aid of family and friends.⁶² But this kind of analysis necessarily fails to account for anyone who lacked a “settlement,” or whose experience fell outside the net of parish relief, forcing their families to migrate around the country or divide themselves up to survive.⁶³ Such experiences are difficult to aggregate because of the patchy survival of records of the period: incomplete figures can sometimes suggest contradictory developments.

Landers, *Death and the Metropolis: Studies in the Demographic History of London 1670–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 136. Also see Chris Galley and Nicola Shelton. “Bridging the Gap: Determining Long-Term Changes in Infant Mortality in Pre-Registration England and Wales”, *Population Studies* 55:1 (2001): 65–77; Sara Horrell, Jane Humphries, and Hans-Joachim Voth, “Stature and relative deprivation: fatherless children in early industrial Britain”, *Continuity and Change*, vol. 13 (1998) 73–115; Horrell *et al.* “Destined for Deprivation”, 362. Middling Londoners, however, grew considerably richer and experienced improved life-chances. See Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660–1730* (London: Methuen, 1989), 310.

⁶² Horrell, Humphries, and Voth have suggested that the Poor Laws were essential for the young poor in this period, because they provided the social capital needed to escape the trap of inherited poverty. See Horell *et al.*, “Destined for Deprivation.” See also Jane Humphries, “English Apprenticeship: A Neglected Factor in the First Industrial Revolution”, in Paul A. David and Mark Thomas (eds.) *The Economic Future in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 73–102.

⁶³ Settlement was usually established by having been born in a parish or fulfilling the terms of an apprenticeship there. People could also gain a parish settlement by engaging in domestic service or agricultural labour for a full year while unmarried, or by completing an indentured apprenticeship and then living in the parish for more than forty days. If all else failed, a person could claim settlement in a parish if their father had been born there. See K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity, and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 86–87.

Chapter two of this study attempts to address some of these shortcomings by comparing multiple sources—principally the Workhouse Admissions and Discharge records for St. Luke Chelsea, and St. Martin-in-the-Fields for the periods 1743–1769 and 1782–1799—to see what can be learned about childhood as it was experienced by young paupers. Adult men were segregated from women and children in these workhouses, but communal conditions still lent themselves to the spread of contagious disease. In the workhouses, residents were not allowed to be “idle”—even if they were very young or very old—and they were set to work on monotonous tasks such as breaking stones or picking oakum.⁶⁴ Although recent historians have questioned whether workhouse conditions were quite as depraved as the stories of writers such as Charles Dickens suggest, there is evidence that the poor of the period themselves regarded submission to the workhouse regime to be shameful.⁶⁵ In spite of this sense of indignity, there is contrary evidence that the institutions could play a vital part in the survival strategies of many poor families. Some of the services that were offered to workhouse inmates—including apprenticeship, addressed in chapter three—could have a significant effect on a child's subsequent life-chances. But for young people growing up outside the boundaries of conventional family relationships, the fact is that life-chances were already severely circumscribed.

Some of the ways this played out can be seen in chapter four, which looks at the nursing of poor infants and the ways this was augmented by the apprenticeship schemes of the

⁶⁴ Picking oakum was stripping out fibres from old ropes, which were then mixed with tar for purposes such as shipbuilding, plumbing, or building.

⁶⁵ See Jeremy Boulton, “Indoors or Outdoors? Welfare Priorities and Pauper Choices in the Metropolis under the Old Poor Law, 1718–1824”, in Chris Briggs, P. M. Kitson, and S. J. Thompson (eds.) *Population, Welfare, and Economic Change in Britain, 1290–1834* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014).

philanthropic institutions of the capital: when it came to younger children, this was most significant in the case of the London Foundling Hospital—discussed in chapter five and six. When it came to older children, perhaps more significant was the Marine Society, discussed in chapter seven, or the Philanthropic Society, discussed in chapter eight: all offered educational and apprenticeship opportunities that were not available to the average child.⁶⁶ Their activities show a visible shift in the ideas of childhood propagated by institutions toward the nineteenth century, as youth and poverty were increasingly equated with criminality.⁶⁷ Previous studies have been challenged by a dearth of evidence regarding this—formal cases involving young offenders were comparatively rare both because of the limitations imposed by contemporary views on criminal responsibility and, perhaps more significantly, because age was so seldom thought to be important enough to note in eighteenth-century documents. The proportion of petty offences to more serious crimes is therefore unclear, which can make long-term quantitative analyses difficult, skewing results toward particularly heinous or scandalous conclusions.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ In the case of the Foundling Hospital, these benefits were offset by the high levels of mortality that plagued the institution; in the case of the Marine Society, they were limited by the realities of sending children to war; in the case of the Philanthropic Society, they were limited by the stigma created by the institution's own publicity. See Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, 192.

⁶⁷ Scholarship has generally been hamstrung by the “dark figure” of unrecorded law-breaking: offenders were often bound over in ways that did not result in indictments, matters were sometimes settled by informal arbitration, or cases were dismissed altogether. Few of these records survive over extended periods in the eighteenth century, which means that, as Peter King lamented, “quantitative work [on them] ... is rarely rewarding.” Peter King, *Crime and Law in England 1750–1850: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46–47.

⁶⁸ Patrick Colquhoun complained of “a dread entertained by timid persons, who foolishly and weakly consider themselves as taking away the life of a fellow-creature, merely because they prosecute or give evidence; not reflecting that it is the Law only that can punish offenders, and not the individual prosecutor or witnesses.” As a result, only the more serious crimes were regularly reported—let alone recorded—especially in the case of youth. Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis: Explaining the Various Crimes and Misdemeanors which at Present are Felt as a Pressure Upon the Community; and Suggesting Remedies for Their Prevention* (1796), 226,

https://books.google.ca/books/about/A_Treatise_on_the_Police_of_the_Metropol.html?id=JBgwAAAAYAAJ. Although age is recorded in the records of many assize and Old Bailey cases, it is usually done so only in the more serious cases; in quarter sessions gaol calendars—where the majority of petty theft was prosecuted—it is seldom recorded at all.

But there are other reasons for the paucity of data: because of the limitations of contemporary literacy, children—especially poor children—do not leave many historical traces behind. Some recent work has sought to make up for some of these failings by forming prosopographical links in records of pauper life experiences across a range of institutions, using online databases such as *London Lives* and the *Old Bailey Online*, but the promise of such studies as a singular means of capturing children’s experiences remains unfulfilled.⁶⁹ This study seeks to make similar use of quantitative records—such as those of workhouses or philanthropic institutions—but it also tries to link them with more qualitative sources—such as the work of pamphleteers and biographers, contemporary newspaper accounts, and the transcriptions of debates in parliament or the courts. Much of the current research on lower-class children has devolved into analyses of the institutions that governed their lives, but this study aims to read the records of workhouses and philanthropic institutions in more oblique ways—“against the grain”—to get at the manner in which these institutions processed and categorized children and the ways children might have eluded them. By doing so, it is suggested that we can better illuminate predicaments that were particular to the young poor, helping to form a more complete picture of contemporary childhood.

In spite of the continued focus in the popular imagination on teleological notions of its “evolution,” the experience of childhood did not unfold in a neat, linear fashion—especially for

⁶⁹ See Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, *et al.*, *London Lives, 1690–1800*, <http://www.londonlives.com>; Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, *et al.*, *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 1674–1913, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org>. For criticism of the limitations of this kind of serial history, see Nicholas Rogers, “London’s Marginal Histories”, *Labour/Le Travailleur* 60, (2007), 217–34.

the poor—there were plenty of ups and downs in the narrative of “progress.”⁷⁰ This study thus conceives of childhood as a continuing process, neither fixed nor constant: its parameters and boundaries varied greatly, not made static by biology or psychology, but determined as a product of the cultural norms and values of the society that produced them. Eighteenth-century children came from a variety of backgrounds: some came from rich families; some came from poor ones. Some were born in wedlock; some were considered to be illegitimate. There was, in other words, a *plurality* of childhoods, all dependent on different historical, cultural, and social contexts. By illuminating the plights of poor children and the different ways in which these issues were addressed, this study aims to establish a more complete picture of childhood in the eighteenth century.

An important element in recovering this image is recognizing the agency that the young poor themselves had in constructing it. Of course, the choices available to poor people in this period were limited by the structures in which they lived: this is not intended to minimize the extent of material deprivation many impoverished children experienced, or the very real physical hardships that they endured: forensic evidence that has been unearthed shows how common stunted growth, bone deterioration, rickets, and traces of inherited degenerative diseases were in children’s skeletons from certain London parishes, which has made it clear just how deleterious the effects of hard labour, inadequate diet, and poor medical care really were on the bodies of the

⁷⁰ The emergence of the concept of childhood has often been cast as part of a “progressive” and “humanitarian” process, in a manner not unlike Norbert Elias’s arguments about the gradual civilization of society. In the accounts of historians like deMause, there was an evolution in children’s treatment over time, independent of the actions of individuals. See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Revised edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); deMause, *History of Childhood*. Although it predominates in the historiography of childhood, the notion that the lives of children eventually and inevitably became tolerable in the nineteenth century with the “awakening of social conscience” simply does not stand up to scrutiny.

young poor.⁷¹ Children were also subject to the authority of parents, overseers, or masters: their own inclinations or characters were seldom considered when decisions were made about their future lives. Where the adult poor had a degree of agency in their decision of whether to apply for poor relief or to enter the workhouse, these were not choices freely made by the young, who tended to require help because of their parents' circumstances rather than their own. Many existing histories of childhood have consequently been little more than narratives of parenthood, wherein children have been reduced to "objects" or passive recipients of adult knowledge.⁷²

But in the eighteenth century, children's experience of agency was largely relational in nature rather than individual: the way that young people experienced and expressed themselves as agents largely depended on interpersonal relationships they had with others. This connection to others created relational goals—they were propelled to act, not just in their own, individual interest, but in a way that might benefit their parents and family as a whole. Children's agency, in other words, was supported, enabled, and given direction by their relationships. Ignoring this context has had the effect of depriving young people of power: because they were dependent on adults, with little opportunity to express opinions on their situations or to make their own decisions, they have been treated as victims or beneficiaries of the actions of others rather than as social agents themselves.⁷³ A major concern of this study, therefore, has been to show how the

⁷¹ Newman and Gowland recently looked at the health disparities across four London parishes using the skeletal evidence of 403 children (0–17 years) between 1712 and 1854. S. L. Newman and R. L. Gowland, "Dedicated followers of fashion? Bioarchaeological perspectives on socio-economic status, inequality, and health in urban children from the Industrial Revolution (18th–19thC), England", *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*, 27: 2 (2017), 217–29.

⁷² In these studies, parents are automatically cast as models and children have automatically been given the roles of followers. See Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England*.

⁷³ See Heywood, *History of Childhood*, 4. The campaigns against child labour, penal reform, and the expansion of education sought to reduce childhood autonomy in attempt to ensure their "protection": as Anna Davin wrote, "Street arab and substitute mother were rescued, full-time employment was permitted only after the school years,"

individual's relationship to structure affected their experience: to acknowledge that the future lives of children were shaped during the formative years of childhood and to emphasize that they were not necessarily passively or submissively playing the roles assigned to them. Many poor children devised their own strategies for survival, and they resisted the idea that they should be passive, obedient, and subservient to their social superiors—by making complaints, by being deliberately uncooperative, or by running away from their masters. In fact, this study maintains that, despite their dependent roles, children were historical actors in their own right, helping to shape the social, political, cultural, and economic structures of the eighteenth century. Even poor children had voices, and the evidence suggests that many were not afraid to use them.⁷⁴

and “national and local laws restricted other forms of child employment.” In this way, protecting children from the adult world has resulted in a denial of their individual rights, as “their agency” is “conceptually denied.” Anna Davin, “What Is a Child?” in Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey, *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 29.

⁷⁴ Alysa Levene has shown how children in the workhouse at St. Marylebone used parish support as part of their strategies for dealing with poverty, entering the workhouse any number of times: chapter four of this study shows similar tactics used by children during the period of “liking” in the parish of St. Luke Chelsea, in the transition to apprenticeship, before they were formally bound. See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*.

Chapter Two: Class and Poverty

In most studies of childhood and the family, traditional historiography has tended to concentrate rather narrowly on the stories of the “middling sort.” Many scholars have defended this tight focus, arguing that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this social group was particularly important because it assumed a central role in English society for the first time. It is true that the wealth of the members of the middling sort increased in this period, and they invested in larger, more prominent homes; finer, more extravagant clothing; and they became more involved in public affairs, increasingly fashioning themselves as the “well-to-do” or the “better bred.” Generally, the larger incomes of middling individuals extended their lives and freed them to marry earlier, and their children survived more frequently into adulthood; as a consequence, middling parents increasingly invested in longer-term education and training for their offspring. But middling people also represented an exceedingly broad assemblage, coming from a wide range of material circumstances.¹

This single-minded focus on the experience of middling children has led many historians to assume that the concept of childhood itself was a middle-class ideal.² Middling parents, it was true, were able to bring up their children unusually free of responsibility, enjoying a sense of

¹ This grouping included craftsmen, manufacturers, professionals, as well as anyone else who paid the poor rate in a parish. See Plumb, “New World of Children”, 80; Peter Lindert and Jeffrey Williamson, “Revising England’s Social Tables, 1699–1812”, *Explorations in Economic History* 19:4 (October 1982), 400–01; George Rudé, *Hanoverian London, 1714–1808* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971), 82–83; Penelope Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 132–33.

² The same social factors that established the middle class as a distinct social group are thought to have produced a distinct market for toys and literature dedicated specifically to children, and increased the average age that young people left the family home. Neil Postman argued, “Unquestionably, childhood began as a middle-class idea, in part because the middle class could afford it.” Postman, *Disappearance of Childhood*, 44–45.

security that could not be experienced by groups below them on the social ladder: eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature was full of stories that followed the lives of people of this stratum of society—it was not until the Industrial Revolution that the experiences of a broader range of people would inspire the work of authors like Charles Dickens.³

Most historians estimate that the developing middle class only made up a small proportion of the population—about 20 percent: they have argued that the other eighty percent of the people were clumped together at the bottom of the social hierarchy, grouped rhetorically into a single category of “the poor.”⁴ This “lower” social group encompassed the vast majority of the English populace, yet it has often been left out of the historical record: there have been efforts to illuminate their histories, of course, but there are still many aspects of their lives that have not sufficiently been brought to light.⁵ This chapter looks more closely at one of those facets in particular—the lived experience of pauper children—as glimpsed through resources such as the workhouse admissions and discharge records for St. Luke Chelsea and St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Because of the age or literacy level of those concerned, institutional sources like these are often the only traces left of voices and experiences that have otherwise been lost to posterity. But they

³ See Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London, 1838). On balance, middling children also lived progressively more sheltered lives: this had serious consequences for their sense of agency. See Jarret, 61; Payne, “Children of the Poor in London”, 12–13; Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 414.

⁴ Paul Langford has suggested that they made up as much as 40 percent of the population. Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 61–76.

⁵ As a group, the poor incorporated farmhands, builders, factory workers, miners, domestic servants, vagrants, the sick, and the unemployed. Some commentators did try to break it into smaller elements. In the nineteenth century, Colquhoun divided the poor into five smaller groups: the “useful Poor,” who were willing and capable of labour, “who merit the utmost attention of all Governments, with a direct and immediate view of preventing their poverty from descending unnecessarily into indigence”; the “vagrant Poor,” who were capable but unwilling to labour, for whom it was a “real interest of the Metropolis” to establish an institution for their employment; the “Indigent Poor,” who were unable to maintain themselves because of sickness, disability, or the loss of employment but some of whom were “in a state to re-occupy their former station among the labouring Poor”; the “aged and infirm,” who were no longer able to work and had no other means of support; and finally the “Infant Poor,” often without parents, who were “cast upon the public for nurture.” See Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 366–69.

also contain important information about the predicaments that forced families to seek aid from outside, and about significant events that punctuated their lives. Ultimately, it is argued here that the information in these sources can provide a much-needed insight into the realities of childhood among the poor, expanding our knowledge of the social disparities that affected people throughout the eighteenth century.

Youth and Poverty

It is worth emphasizing that commentators in the eighteenth century really only defined what constituted a “poor” person in contrast with a wealthy one, often ascribing decidedly negative characteristics to them. As far back as the Tudor era, writers can be found complaining of the related “laziness” and “improvidence” of the lower orders—the Poor Laws themselves were rooted in the vagrancy laws of that period, conceived principally as a means of regulating and punishing begging.⁶ Although the concern of these laws did not fall specifically on the youngest members of society, many contemporaries expressed the fear that those that were “brought up in idleness might be so rooted in it that hardly may they be brought after to thrift and labour.” In response to these kinds of anxieties, *An Act for the setting of the poore on worke, and for*

⁶ Idleness had long been viewed as a sin: “sloth” was mentioned in the bible as one of the seven deadly sins. Proverbs 12:24 reads, “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in forced labor,” and Proverbs 18:9 says, “Whoever is lazy regarding his work is also a brother to the master of destruction.” The Vagrancy Act (1547) called for vagabonds to be branded and enslaved for two years, and although it was repealed in 1550 and the slightly less horrifying 1531 Vagabonds Act was reinstated, any “wandering” poor who stayed outside the parish welfare system to avoid work could be denied relief and might be liable to punishment for many years to come. The Vagrancy Act of 1824 (5 Geo. 4. c. 83) that was eventually passed “for the more effectual suppression of vagrancy and punishment of idle and disorderly persons” remains in force: in 2020, there were still 573 people prosecuted under the act. Hugo Gye, “Ministers under pressure to revoke law which makes it illegal to sleep rough”, [inews.co.uk](https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/ministers-under-pressure-to-revoke-law-which-makes-it-illegal-to-sleep-rough-as-10-people-a-week-prosecuted-1012306), 20 May 2021. <https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/ministers-under-pressure-to-revoke-law-which-makes-it-illegal-to-sleep-rough-as-10-people-a-week-prosecuted-1012306>.

avoyding ydleness was passed in 1575–76, requiring that raw materials be provided in cities and towns

to the Intente Yowthe may be accustomed and brought up to Laboure and Worke, and then not lyke to growe to bee ydle Roges and to the Entente also that suche as bee alreddie growen up in ydlenes and so Roges at this present maye not have any juste excuse in sayeng they cannot get any Service or Worcke... and that other poore and needye persons being willinge to worcke maye bee set on worcke.⁷

The problems attending poverty were only exacerbated by the Protestant Reformation: Catholic charities that had been responsible for providing alms to the needy were abolished. English towns were obliged to develop a mechanism of local relief, supported by compulsory taxation, which was formalized into a nationwide system with the *Acts for the Relief of the Poor* of 1597 and 1601. Widespread fears of idleness became a central element of this system: many parishes stipulated that a person was obliged to work in order to receive support. With the 1723 Workhouses Test Act, poor relief across England was made contingent on a willingness to meet that condition by entering the local workhouse—“Persistent idlers,” who were demonstrably capable of labour but were unwilling, were to be forcibly set to work in one of the Houses of Correction to be established in each parish.⁸ Legislation in 1662 and 1692 had further narrowed eligibility for aid, requiring formal proof of legal settlement.⁹

⁷ The laws stipulated that any children between five and fourteen years of age found wandering could be taken away from their parents or “keeper” by “any manner of person” who promised to bring up the child in some honest labour or occupation. The legislation also stated that runaway apprentices could be put in chains by their master, who could then “use him or her as his slave in all points” until they came of age. During this time the child would be considered the master’s personal property, to be disposed of “after such like sort and manner as he may do of any other of his movable goods or chattels.” These more extreme provisions were withdrawn two years later, but the Act of 1549 and subsequent legislation added clauses which stated that the parental rights of vagabonds with “children of tender age . . . brought up in idleness” could be forfeit. See I Edward VI, c. 3; 3 & 4 Edward VI, c. 16; 2 & 3 Philip & Mary, c. 5; 5 Elizabeth I, c. 3. 18 Elizabeth I c. 3.

⁸ 43 Eliz 1 c 2. See Steve Hindle, “Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England”, *Past and Present* 172 (2001), 44–86; Rathbone, “Vagabond!” *History Review* 51 (2005): 8–13; Paul Slack, “Poverty in Elizabethan England”, *History Today* 34 (1984): 5–13.

⁹ 43 Elizabeth I c. 2; the Poor Relief Act 1662 (14 Car 2 c 12), further tightened with 3 & 4 Will & Mar, c.11 in 1692. This legislation remained in effect until the passage of the New Poor Law in 1834.

By the end of the seventeenth century, many had come to believe in the “utility of poverty.” Political economists such as John Pollexfen argued that the very wealth of the nation hinged “upon having many people” working to build the fiscal strength of the kingdom.¹⁰ Thomas Baston wrote to the same end in 1716, arguing that “gentlemen of fortune [should] reflect that without the help of the poor or meaner sort of people, they could not be mounted so much above the common level.”¹¹ In their view, poverty was largely a problem of sufficient work being made available for the people: Edward Knatchbull's *Act for Amending the Laws relating to the Settlement, Employment and Relief of the Poor* (1722–23) aimed to facilitate employment to that end, and to encourage the systematic adoption of “the workhouse” nationwide.¹² Largely because of this, it has often been argued that the workhouse is emblematic of the operation of eighteenth-century poor relief.¹³

¹⁰ Henry Pollexfen and John Pollexfen, *Discourse of Trade, Coyn, and Paper Credit* (London, 1697), 43. But importantly he emphasized that it was vital that efforts went further than merely “obtaining more,” but “well employing those we have.”

¹¹ Thomas Baston, *Thoughts on a Trade, and Public Spirit* (London, 1716), 181. This remained the predominant attitude through the century: in 1792, “Citizen of the World” wrote, “Providence has appointed the several ranks in life to call forth our virtues; and although the rich succour the poor, it must be remembered, that the menial offices will not otherwise be supplied but by the poor.” Citizen of the World, *A letter to every housekeeper in London, on behalf of Parochial Industry Schools, for every child who has no other opportunity of receiving any instruction in the several duties of life. From a citizen of the world. Printed for J.F. and C. Rivington, No. 62, St. Paul's Church-Yard, M.DCC.XCII* (1792). Eighteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CB0126421517/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=50b7de70&pg=1. Accessed 6 Dec. 2022. 12.

¹² Edward Knatchbull, *Act for Amending the Laws relating to the Settlement, Employment and Relief of the Poor* (1722–23). 9 Geo. I c.7.—also known as the Workhouse Test Act—authorized churchwardens and overseers of the poor to “purchase or hire any house or houses” in a parish for “the lodging, keeping, maintaining and employing” of the poor, which would be promoted as a place where they could be taught skills, discipline, and piety while they earned their keep. In 1725 there was only about 129 workhouses, but within ten years of the passage of the Act it is estimated that around 700 workhouses were set up for this purpose. Joseph Downing, *An Account of Several Workhouses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor* (1724). https://books.google.ca/books?id=mNxAAAAQAAJ&dq=%22the+Parent+of+most+Disorders+in+Society.%22&source=gbs_navlinks_https://books.google.ca/books/about/Some+Few+Letters+Selected+from+an+Accoun.html?id=EhFlzQEACAAJ, 1, 10–13.

¹³ Workhouses can be traced back to the Statute of Cambridge in 1388, but they became particularly associated with the idea of work provision in the eighteenth century, with more than eighty such institutions established in London alone by 1776, with space for 16,000 people.

Initially, workhouses were promoted positively as institutions that would generate wealth for the parish; but they have become notorious in British historiography as barrack-like dormitories where men were segregated from women and children, and everyone was set forcibly to work in monotonous tasks. The communal conditions of workhouses also proved to be ideal for the spread of contagious disease, and even the poor themselves regarded resort to them as shameful.¹⁴ In practice, most proved to be financial disappointments: Joseph Downing warned his contemporaries “not to promise your selves too much from the produce of the Labour of the People.”¹⁵ Some commentators blamed these fiscal shortcomings on the small scale of the individual parish, which led to the combination of some communities into larger Poor Law Unions with joint workhouses; but before long it became clear that these unions only generated larger losses. In hindsight, this should hardly have been surprising: the people who were obliged to seek help from the parish tended to be a compromised workforce—the ill, the disabled, the elderly, or the young—and this meant their labouring capacity was already limited.¹⁶

“Industriousness” nonetheless became the gold star of deservingness; “Idleness,” conversely, was posited as a sin, or a transgression against the whole community, because the public was deprived of the individual's service. As the financial weight of poor relief increased, there was a general hardening of attitudes toward the poor: contemporaries spoke disparagingly about people who seemed to them to be suffering entirely as a result of their own lax morality.¹⁷

¹⁴ Boulton, “Indoors or outdoors?”

¹⁵ Downing, *Account of Several Workhouses*, 68.

¹⁶ See Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 148.

¹⁷ Especially the poor who were considered “able-bodied.” See Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34–41, 82–111; Alannah Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723–82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 7–8.

Commentators such as John Cary argued that it was only right that government should “provide work for those who are willing”; by extension, however, he contended that it should also “force them to work that are able.”¹⁸ An anonymous pamphlet from the second half of the eighteenth century similarly suggested that

such journeymen, day laborers, or others, who shall refuse to work the usual hours, for the price hereby stipulated, [should] immediately, by the peace officers of the parish, be carried before a neighboring Justice of the Peace, and be by him committed to Bridewell, there to be kept to hard labor till they shall think proper to obey the laws of their country.¹⁹

Some critics blamed the people’s apparent lack of an appetite for labour on the mechanism of poor relief itself—the very safety net that parishes had provided to protect them from destitution. Cary suggested that this aid only encouraged the poor “in an idle way of living contrary to their own and their nation's interests.”²⁰ To many contemporaries this demarcation between “idleness” and “deservingness” was critical because it revealed the roots of crime: Downing reckoned that idleness was “the Parent of most Disorders in Society.”²¹ The parliamentary committee formed to address the 1751 crime wave held the same perspective, blaming the spread of lawlessness on the “Habit of Idleness, in which the lower people have

¹⁸ John Cary, *Discourse on Trade* (second edition, London, 1745), 103, 105. Even at the end of the century, Colquhoun wrote about the need for a system “whereby the most deserving could be propt up, rescued from despondency, and enabled to help themselves.” Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 638.

¹⁹ Anonymous, *Propositions for Improving the Manufactures, Agriculture and Commerce, of Great Britain* (London, 1763), 68. Another argued that “it is absolutely necessary that employment should be provided for persons of every age that are able and willing to work, [although] the idle and refractory should be sent to the house of correction, there to be detained and constantly kept to hard labor.” Anonymous, *Management of the Poor* (London, 1767), 65. See Joanna Innes, “Prisons for the poor: English Bridewells, 1555–1800”, in Francis Snyder and Douglas Hay (eds.), *Labour, Law, and Crime* (1987), 83.

²⁰ John Cary, *Discourse on Trade*, second edition. (London, 1745), 103, 105. And these attitudes lingered: at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Colquhoun argued that “The funds raised for supporting the Idle Poor of this country (says this intelligent writer) are so numerous, efficient, and comfortable, as to operate against the general industry of the Labouring Poor. . . . Lodging and diet in the workhouses, in every instance, are superior to what the industrious labourer can provide for his family. It is obvious that this must have an influence over their minds, and become most injurious to the interests of society; it holds out encouragement to prefer the workhouse to labour; and, by filling the poor houses with improper inhabitants, it reduces the amount of industry.” Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 80.

²¹ Downing, *Account of Several Workhouses*, 68.

been bred, often from their youth.”²² At the end of the century, Patrick Colquhoun was still describing idleness as “a never-failing inroad to criminality,” suggesting that if idleness was left unchecked, poor Britons could become a criminal class to threaten the entire nation.²³

Many of the moral failings of English society were thus attributed to the poor’s “culture of poverty,” and the situation was only deteriorating. In 1772, Josiah Tucker argued

With regard to the morals of the poor, times were never worse. For the lower classes of the people are at this day so far degenerated from what they were in former times as to become... a proverb of reproach. Such brutality and insolence, such debauchery and extravagance, such idleness... do not reign so triumphantly among the poor in any other country.²⁴

Many argued that this “degeneration” could be seen in the increasing irreligion and dissolution of society: preindustrial rhythms of work were often nonetheless perceived to be new and profoundly negative—stubborn resistance to the prevailing ideals of industrial work discipline.²⁵

In an era punctuated by under-employment and seasonal layoffs, the efforts of the lower classes to piece together a living only helped to cement the links between idleness and crime in the minds of critics.²⁶

The attitudes of poor parents were a particular source of worry; there were concerns that the lifestyles of poor mothers and fathers would only perpetuate this cycle when it came to their

²² Anonymous, *Commons Journals*, xxvi (1750–54), 190. The committee was concerned to “shape” the next generation of Britons through a reform of the Poor Laws.

²³ Although it is worth noting that Colquhoun said a few derogatory things about the working class, to whom he attributed all sorts of “unruly passions,” “rapacious desires,” “evil propensities and noxious qualities.” Colquhoun differentiated “between the virtuous and vicious poor,” arguing that “a proper line” needed to be drawn to see “the streets of the Metropolis freed from the multitude of Beggars, without doing violence to humanity,” but he also dismissed plebian labour customs as a “system of depredation.” See Patrick Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Commerce and Police of the River Thames* (London, 1796), 84, 86, 262, 266; Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 87, 638. Also see Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged* (London: Allen Lane, 1991).

²⁴ Josiah Tucker, *Sermons* (Bristol, 1772), 70–74.

²⁵ See E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism”, *Past & Present* 38 (1967), 56–97.

²⁶ See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (London: Clarendon Press, 1971); Victor Kiernan, “Victorian London – Unending Purgatory”, *New Left Review* 1/76, November/December 1972.

children. The sluggishness of new ideas of work discipline to catch on among the poor was blamed on the disinclination of poor parents to pass on “industrious” work habits to their offspring, and on poor children who had instead come to inherit their parents’ vices. This anxiety was not new: as far back as the seventeenth century, Matthew Hale had argued that because

no provision is now made in England to give the poor honest employment ... Poor Families which daily multiply in the Kingdom... do unavoidably bring up their children either in a Trade of Begging or Stealing, or such other Idle course, which again they propagate to their Children.²⁷

Around the same time, Josiah Child bemoaned the ways in which the children of the poor were “bred up in beggary and laziness”: he believed that the habits that they learned from their parents rendered them “for ever after indisposed to labour.”²⁸ Toward the end of the eighteenth century, a “Citizen of the World” was still complaining that

In every parish there ... are some hundreds of children ... who have no means of gaining even a knowledge of the alphabet, owing either to the poverty, ignorance, or profligacy of the parent.²⁹

He continued:

They are influenced to err by the many pernicious examples daily before their eyes; by having no guide, overseer, or ruler, to check them in infancy. They are likewise influenced by bad companions, and participate with them of every disorder and every excess; their ill-governed passions together with these combined incitements, hurl and precipitate them to destruction; and thus numbers of our poor deluded brethren, for want of a warning voice, who were sent into life for different purposes, bring themselves into early disease and into every distress, and become not only a torment to themselves, but the pest and plague of society.³⁰

²⁷ Hale wrote: “And which is yet worse, Poor Families which daily multiply in the Kingdom for want of a due order for their Employment in an honest course of life whereby they may gain subsistence for them and their Children do unavoidably bring up their Children either in a Trade of Begging or Stealing, or such other Idle course, which again they propagate over to their Children, and so there is a successive multiplication of hurtful or at least unprofitable People, neither capable of Discipline nor beneficial Employment.” Matthew Hale, *Discourse Touching Provision for the Poor* (London, 1683), 79–80, <https://ota.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repository/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12024/A44144/A44144.html>.

²⁸ If this continued, Child feared the outcome would be “to stock the kingdom with thieves and beggars.” Josiah Child, *Proposals for the Relief and Employment of the Poor* (London, 1670), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/a32836.0001.001>. Thomas Firmin, too, complained of the way in which “our poor children are brought up in sloth and idleness.” Thomas Firmin, *Some Proposals for the Employment of the Poor* (London, 1678), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A41337.0001.001/>.

²⁹ Citizen of the World, *Letter to every housekeeper*, 7.

³⁰ Citizen of the World, *Letter to every housekeeper*, 7–8.

But through the following century schemes were frequently proposed that threatened to “remove” children altogether from families that did not secure work or training for their children, or that did not subject them to contemporary notions of appropriate discipline.³¹ When desperation forced eighteenth-century families to apply to the parish for relief, many found that they were indeed separated—sometimes permanently—from each other. The experience of family breakdown for the poor child was perhaps best told in the story of Robert Blincoe, who was born in 1792 and was sent to St. Pancras Workhouse at the age of four. Like many children in his position, Blincoe had an entirely new identity given to him at the workhouse—although he later learned that his family name was Blincoe, he related to his biographer John Brown that he had never learned what had happened to his parents.³² Throughout his time in the institution, Blincoe recalled being “well fed, decently clad, and comfortably lodged and not at all overdone, as regarded work.” But he also recalled yearning to escape the workhouse from an early age:

This destitute child grew melancholy. He relished none of the humble comforts he enjoyed. It was liberty he wanted. The busy world lay outside the workhouse gates, and those he was seldom, if ever permitted to pass. He was cooped up in a gloomy, though liberal sort of a prison-house. His buoyant spirits longed to rove at large. He was too young to understand the necessity of the restraint to which he was subjected, and too opinionative to admit it could be intended for his good. Of the world he knew nothing, and the society of a workhouse was not very well calculated to delight the mind of a volatile child.... Like a bird newly caged, that flutters from side to side,

³¹ It has been shown that most of these proposals were not taken up, largely because of a belief in familial “rights,” even with regards to the poor. See Alys Levene, “Family breakdown and the ‘Welfare Child’ in 19th and 20th century Britain”, *The History of the Family* 11:2 (2006), 67–79. DOI: 10.1016/j.hisfam.2006.06.001

³² Blincoe relayed his story in an interview with Bolton journalist John Brown, who claimed to authentically record the “extraordinary sufferings of Robert Blincoe,” according to “his earnest wish that those sufferings should, for the protection of the rising generation of parish children, be laid before the world.” John Brown, *Memoir of Robert Blincoe* (Manchester, 1832), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59127/59127-h/59127-h.htm>. (7) The memoirs were first published from 25 January to 22 February 1828 in weekly installments in Robert Carlile’s radical newspaper, *The Lion*, and they were subsequently reprinted as a pamphlet, also appearing in serial in Carlile’s *The Poor Man’s Advocate* in 1832. But unfortunately, none of the publications would come before Brown’s death by suicide. See John Waller has asserted that Charles Dickens based his character Oliver Twist on Blincoe. See John Waller, *The Real Oliver Twist: Robert Blincoe — A Life that Illuminates an Age* (London: Icon Books, 2005). For a slightly later experience, also see George Haw, *From Workhouse to Westminster: The Life Story of Will Crooks, M.P.* (1907), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41023/41023-h/41023-h.htm>.

and foolishly beats its wings against its prison walls, in hope of obtaining its liberty, so young Blincoe weary of confinement and resolved, if possible to be free, often watched the outer gates of the house, in the hope, that some favourable opportunity might facilitate his escape.... He wistfully measured the height of the wall, and found it too lofty for him to scale, and too well guarded were the gates to admit of his egress unnoticed.³³

In fact, he was so desperate to leave St. Pancras that he contrived to be apprenticed to a London chimney sweep at the tender age of six. Although he was not successful on that occasion, the very next year he was recruited by “Messrs. Lamberts, cotton-spinners, hosiers and lace-men, of St. Mary’s parish, Nottingham,” along with eighty other boys and girls from the St. Pancras workhouse, to work about 180 kilometres north-west of London at Lowdham Mill: this narrative chimes with descriptions of “the importation of cartloads of pauper children from the workhouses of the big towns” described in many histories published in the twentieth century.³⁴

Pauper Experiences and the Records of the Workhouse

Although Blincoe was born in 1792, his story was first published in five weekly episodes in 1828 and is almost entirely a nineteenth-century account; there are no known narratives in the eighteenth century that provide the same amount of biographical detail. For an equivalent sense of the typical experience of poor workhouse children in this earlier period, we can only assemble glimpses of their lives in the surviving documents of the workhouse. To that end, the remainder of this chapter compares the registers of the workhouses at St. Luke Chelsea and St. Martin-in-the-Fields, in order to illuminate how these institutions operated in practice, and how the

³³ Brown, *Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, 7–8, 10.

³⁴ Brown, *Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, 13. Although he eventually completed his apprenticeship at the age of 21, he continued there a further four years—until 1817—when he set up his own small cotton-spinning business. The business was destroyed by a fire in 1828, leading to a stay in Lancaster Castle as a prisoner for debt. See Joan Lane, *Apprenticeship in England 1600–1914* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), xcv; Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 107.

demographics of the populations of inmates affected the ultimate aims of each workhouse.³⁵ In the absence of documents that record the voices of workhouse children, incorporating these kinds of records of the childhood of the poor can help to shine a light—one still sorely needed—on the predicaments that poor young people faced during the most vulnerable years of their lives.

Before beginning, it is vital to establish what exactly we mean when we refer to a “child” in the eighteenth century: contemporary views were decidedly not harmonious with modern conceptions of the boundaries of childhood, but historians have been just as inconsistent with where they chose to draw these lines. Tim Hitchcock’s study of pauper children in St. Luke’s was based on an upper age limit of sixteen years; while in her book on the childhood of the poor, Alysa Levene lowered that threshold, limiting the classification of “child” to those who were thirteen years of age or younger. Even using this tighter age category, Levene found a strikingly similar proportion of child inmates to Hitchcock, which suggests that the higher ages of childhood (the ages now associated with the later “teenage” years of the life-cycle, or even “young adulthood”) were not statistically significant in the records of workhouse institutions.³⁶ This study will attempt to split the difference—focusing on workhouse children of the age of

³⁵ Tim Hitchcock, *Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges*, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799, [www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734), consulted 1 April 2014. See Peter Higginbotham, “The Workhouse”, <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Chelsea/Chelsea1743.shtml>. Information was also consulted in tables provided by Nick Rogers. St. Martin-in-the-Fields information was drawn from St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/110, March 1743–July 1769, and P74/LUK/111, January 1782–December 1801, as well as the St. Martin-in-the-Fields Pauper Biographies Project, St-Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Register, 1725–1819, *London Lives*, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div0Type=smdswhrFile&decade=174>, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div0Type=sldswhrFile&decade=175>, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div0Type=sldswhrFile&decade=176>.

³⁶ See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 109. Levene also found a similar proportion in St. Sepulchre Holborn in the second quarter of the century and in the 1760s. See also Hitchcock, *Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges*.

fourteen and below, which seems to represent a significant milestone in the lives of young inmates in these records.

*

The St. Luke Chelsea workhouse first opened in 1737 in Middlesex, near the developed west end of London.³⁷ Its population was diverse, engaging principally in market gardening throughout the first half of the eighteenth century but more in light manufacture by the second. In fact, St. Luke’s was one of the most rapidly urbanizing parishes in the metropolis, and its population of 11,604 in 1801 grew rapidly in subsequent decades. Yet the workhouse was never particularly large, with space for only seventy people, allowing the consideration of its records in their entirety for this study. This has been done for the periods 1743 to 1769 and 1782 to 1801: two uninterrupted time spans in which the records are complete.

Table 2.1 shows that from 1743 to 1769 there were 378 total admissions recorded and that there were a significant number of boys and girls below the age of fifteen in those numbers. In fact, added together, children represented the single biggest group within the workhouse.³⁸

Table 2.1: St. Luke Chelsea Workhouse Admissions 1743–1769

Males		
Age Group	Number	Proportion of Inmates of Both Sexes
5 and below	27	7.14%
5–14	21	5.56%
15–21	10	2.65%
22–40	25	6.61%
41–60	23	6.08%
60+	28	7.41%
Total # 134		

³⁷ William Gaunt, *Chelsea* (London: Batsford, 1954), 37–61; Thomas Faulkner, *A Historical & Topographical Description of Chelsea and its Environs* (London, 1810), II. Also see London Lives, <http://www.londonlives.org/static/SLDSWHR.jsp>

³⁸ The number of children in the workhouse perhaps reflects the fact that alternate sources of income were comparatively more available for adults, and particularly for men.

Females		
Age Group	Number	Proportion of Inmates of Both Sexes
5 and below	21	5.56%
5–14	31	8.20%
15–21	27	7.14%
22–40	79	20.90%
41–60	50	13.23%
60+	36	9.52%
Total # 244		

Source: Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799

Table 2.2 shows that there was a total of 405 admissions in the register for St. Luke’s between 1782 and 1801, and that more than a quarter of the institution was populated by children below fifteen years of age. This number of children was similar in the sample from 1743 to 1769: as a group, children continued to represent a similar proportion of all inmates.¹¹³

Table 2.2: St. Luke Chelsea Workhouse Admissions 1782–1799

Males		
Age Group	Number	Proportion of Inmates of Both Sexes
5 and below	26	6.42%
5–14	35	8.64%
15–21	3	0.74%
22–40	29	7.16%
41–60	51	21.59%
60+	27	6.67%
Total # 171		

Females		
Age Group	Number	Proportion of Inmates of Both Sexes
5 and below	18	4.44%
5–14	24	5.93%
15–21	30	7.41%
22–40	84	20.74%
41–60	37	9.14%
60+	41	10.12%
Total # 234		

Source: Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743–1799

¹¹³ Together, children made up 26.31 percent of the workhouse entries in the two periods in St. Luke Chelsea.

By contrast, the workhouse of St. Martin-in-the-Fields—which opened in 1725—was a much larger institution: according to a parliamentary report of 1777, it could accommodate as many as 700 people at a time.¹¹⁴ It has thus been necessary to sample a smaller proportion of the records—in this case, ten percent of the available documents—which have been constrained to match the same periods analyzed in the first institution. Table 2.3 shows that a total of 1880 admissions were thus sampled from the records of St. Martin-in-the-Fields between 1743 and 1769: there was a similar proportion of boys and girls below the age of fifteen in this group.¹¹⁵

Table 2.3: St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admissions 1743–1769

Males		
Age Group	Number	Proportion of Inmates of Both Sexes
5 and below	114	6.06%
5–14	99	5.27%
15–21	26	1.38%
22–40	104	5.53%
41–60	137	7.29%
60+	90	4.79%
Total # 548		

Females		
Age Group	Number	Proportion of Inmates of Both Sexes
5 and below	163	8.67%
5–14	96	5.11%
15–21	134	7.13%
22–40	501	26.65%
41–60	313	16.65%
60+	151	8.03%
Total # 133		

Source: St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/110, March 1743–July 1769

¹¹⁴ Located in Westminster, the population size of St. Martin’s was considerably larger. In 1801, it was recorded at 25,752. See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 28; Peter Higginbotham, “St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Middlesex, London”, <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/StMartins/>.

¹¹⁵ These figures count “entries” to the workhouse, which means the same individual could be re-counted if they entered more than once. Attempting to count discrete individuals is also made difficult by the possibility that several people could share the same name.

Table 2.4 shows that 2439 further entries were sampled from the admissions of St. Martin-in-the-Fields' workhouse from 1782 to 1801, and the proportions of ages at entry were similar to St. Luke's.¹¹⁶ It is worth noting that the number of child inmates who were aged fourteen and below declined slightly from the number recorded from 1749 to 1763: young people still made up more than a fifth of the institution, but this was undoubtedly a smaller proportion than had been recorded for the workhouse in St. Luke Chelsea.

Table 2.4: St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admissions 1782–1801

Males		
Age Group	Number	Proportion of Inmates of Both Sexes
5 And below	133	5.45%
5–14	150	6.15%
15–21	49	2.01%
22–40	153	6.27%
41–60	174	7.13%
60+	111	4.55%
Total # 749		
Females		
Age Group	Number	Proportion of Inmates of Both Sexes
5 and below	124	5.08%
5–14	133	5.45%
15–21	170	6.97%
22–40	554	22.71%
41–60	453	18.57%
60+	231	9.47%
Total # 1665		

Source: St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/111, January 1782–December 1801

The significant presence of children in the population at both institutions suggests that the aid of the young represented one of the primary purposes of the parish workhouse in this period. Many early advocates of the institutions had proposed schemes to just this end: Thomas Firmin,

¹¹⁶ Although it might be noted that adult males aged 41 to 60 were admitted in higher numbers at St. Martin's.

wanted to “set up a school in the nature of a workhouse to teach the poor children to work in.”¹¹⁷

John Locke proposed the establishment of separate but complementary institutions for the employment and housing of young people.¹¹⁸ The sheer numbers of pauper children can be confirmed by examining some of the abstracts of parish poor children registered in London parishes published by the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks (see table 2.5; 2.6), but it should be noted that these figures suggest that mortality impacted inmates differently at different ages: children who were older on entry appear to have been more likely to survive to apprenticeship age. In 1789, 82 children (almost 2%) aged 4 or over died, but 313 (15%) below the age of 4 died; in 1798, 52 children (2%) over 4 died, but 292 (13%) below the age of 4 died.

Table 2.5: Age When Entered or Re-registered across Parishes, 1789

	3mos	6mos	9mos	12mos	18mos	2yr	3yr	4yr	over 4
97 parishes within the walls	25	17	8	9	8	14	22	17	6
Died	1	2	2	4	3	–	4	2	–
16 parishes without the walls	121	15	21	30	55	33	75	81	1177
Died	21	9	5	5	9	4	8	5	14
23 parishes within Middlesex and Surrey	211	45	37	34	92	54	142	124	2072
Died	42	12	4	5	14	11	10	5	50
10 Westminster parishes	291	46	44	43	74	83	113	103	1780
Died	52	20	12	8	9	7	8	10	18

¹¹⁷ Firmin, *Some Proposals for the Employment of the poor*, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A41337.0001.001/>.

¹¹⁸ His scheme also underlined the potential impact that workhouses could have on the lives of young people. And their usefulness to society. John Locke, *Report for the Reform of the Poor Law* (London, 1697), cited in Hugh Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, 22; *Some Thoughts*, 190.

Total Across Parishes	648	123	110	116	229	184	352	325	5035
Total Died	116	43	23	22	35	22	30	22	82

Source: *Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks, An Abstract of the Annual Registers of the Parish Poor (London, 1789).*

Table 2.6: Age When Entered or Re-registered across Parishes, 1798

	3mos	6mos	9mos	12mos	18mos	2yr	3yr	4yr	over 4
97 parishes within the walls	4	4	7	7	7	13	30	34	0
Died	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	0

16 parishes without the walls	39	30	33	56	67	57	82	76	953
Died	13	4	8	6	7	5	3	2	12

23 parishes within Middlesex and Surrey	124	89	68	115	152	130	228	203	2274
Died	48	16	7	18	23	10	7	14	32

10 Westminster parishes	79	75	104	116	171	163	208	207	2180
Died	31	10	12	11	10	7	10	5	8

Total Across Parishes	246	198	212	294	397	363	548	21	5407
Total Died	92	30	28	36	40	23	22	21	52

Source: *Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks, An Abstract of the Annual Registers of the Parish Poor, from the Birth Until Apprenticed Out ... from the first day of January 1798, to the thirty-first day of December inclusive (London: Anne Rivington, 1799).*

One important issue for our purposes is how many of these children could be classified as dependents, but this is difficult to say definitively based on the surviving records. In some cases, these kinds of familial connections are not difficult to infer. Information about whether paupers arrived at the institution alone or accompanied by a family member only seems to have been recorded for St. Luke Chelsea: From 1743 to 1769, registers for that parish show that 9 percent

of boys were admitted with their mother, and another 5 percent were admitted with their mother and siblings. By contrast, children were only recorded arriving with their father in a single case. From 1782 to 1801, 6 percent of boys were admitted with their mother and siblings, 5 percent with their mother alone, and less than 5 percent with siblings alone. Clearly, children who entered the workhouse with a parent tended to enter with their mothers; while this relative absence of fathers might signify desertion, it could equally mean in those cases that fathers were simply away for work.¹¹⁹

The majority of children of both sexes were unaccompanied in both periods—69 percent in total for males and 64 percent for females—but there were various reasons given by those who entered the institution alone. There were some children who had no known parents—10 percent from 1743 to 1769, and 5 percent from 1782 to 1801. We might assume that many of these children were abandoned or fled hostile households. There were also some children whose parents were known to be alive but who claimed to be unable to care for their offspring. In these cases, there was a clear difference in gender: 19 percent was reported in the case of boys from 1743 to 1769, and 6 percent in the case of girls. In the period from 1782 to 1801, the proportion was 19 percent in the case of boys, and 13 percent in the case of girls. This discrepancy might be explained by the greater need for the unpaid labour of girls in the home—often in the form of cooking, cleaning, and taking care of siblings or aged/ailing parents. There also seems to be a fall in the number of children above the age of ten among the admissions, suggesting that some dependent children may have been left with kin when parents entered the institution.

¹¹⁹ In both periods, 21.28 per cent of children of both sexes entered with their mother, while only 2.89 percent were recorded as being admitted with their father.

Among children, the most common length of stay was one to three months, followed by a stay of two weeks to one month, suggesting—like other studies of contemporary English institutions have done—that poor families used the parish workhouse as a temporary expedient to get them through a particularly difficult time. By the same token, perhaps, paupers of other ages usually stayed in St. Luke’s just two weeks to one month, closely followed by a period of one to two weeks, then by a period of less than a week, which suggests that resort to the workhouse was usually made on a short-term basis—more than 79 percent of stays of inmates, taking all ages in the institution into account, seem to have lasted less than six months. Yet the data in table 2.7 also indicates that it was not uncommon for young people specifically to stay in the institution for a duration of one to five years, possibly taking advantage of the opportunities presented by apprenticeship placements offered by the parish.

Table 2.7: Length of Stay, St. Luke Chelsea

Age Group	1 Day or Less	Less than 1 Week	1–2 Weeks	2 Weeks to 1 Month	1–3 Months	3–6 Months	6 Months to 1 Year	1–5 Years	5–10 Years	10–15 Years	15+ Years	Unrecorded
Males, 1743–69												
5 and below	1	1	2	4	7	1	1	6	0	3	0	0
6–14	0	0	2	4	7	1	1	6	0	3	0	1
Females, 1743–69												
5 and below	0	0	4	3	5	1	2	5	1	0	0	0
6–14	0	2	2	4	7	0	3	9	0	0	0	4
Males, 1782–99												
5 and below	1	1	6	3	9	1	3	1	0	0	0	1
6–14	1	3	9	5	9	2	3	2	0	0	0	1
Females, 1782–99												
5 and below	0	1	1	3	4	0	3	0	1	0	0	5
6–14	0	0	3	2	8	6	0	3	0	0	0	2

Source: Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743–1799

Although much has been made of the reoffending of workhouse inmates, just four boys under fifteen were recorded as entering St. Luke’s more than once between 1743 and 1769, and only ten more between 1782 and 1801. This no doubt reflects the desperation that was necessary for many contemporaries to enter the workhouse at all, and for parents to willingly leave their children with the institution, no matter how desperate they might be. That said, it is worth noting that girls were placed in the workhouse somewhat more often than boys, with sixteen appearing in the register more than once between 1743 and 1769, and thirteen between 1782 and 1801, suggesting the comparatively slim prospects girls had of securing outside work to contribute to the household income.¹²⁰

Table 2.8: St. Luke Chelsea, Repeat Usage by Sex and Period

Age Group	Repeat Usage										
	1X	2X	3X	4X	5X	6X	7X	8X	9X	10X	11X+
Males, 1743–69											
5 and below	26	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6–14	18	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Females, 1743–69											
5 and below	16	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6–14	20	3	5	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Males, 1782–99											
5 and below	25	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6–14	26	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Females, 1782–99											
5 and below	14	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6–14	14	7	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0

Source: Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743–1799

¹²⁰ By comparison, a small number of individuals from 15 to over-60 were recorded as entering St. Luke’s 11 times or more. The possibility that several people could share the same name complicates these counts, which would ideally be crosschecked with other records to establish more definitively that the same person is concerned in each instance of the occurrence of the name. This is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the current study, which has had to make do with assumptions about relative ages and recorded years of birth.

Although the duration of stay for paupers of all ages went unrecorded much more often in the workhouse at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, 136 children in the register most definitely stayed one to three months, 77 stayed two weeks to one month, and a further 72 stayed one to five years.

Table 2.9: Length of Stay, St. Martin-in-the Fields

Age Group	1 Day or Less	Less than 1 Week	1–2 Weeks	2 Weeks to 1 Month	1–3 Months	3–6 Months	6 Months to 1 Year	1–5 Years	5–10 Years	10–15 Years	15+ Years	Unrecorded
Males, 1743–69												
5 and below	15	8	11	12	20	5	8	3	1	0	0	32
6–14	5	8	1	4	8	4	7	21	7	1	1	21
Females, 1743–69												
5 and below	17	22	16	16	36	14	8	6	1	1	0	26
6–14	4	15	2	3	11	10	8	19	6	1	0	17
Males, 1782–1801												
5 and below	5	6	6	13	20	3	0	0	0	0	0	78
6–14	4	6	9	9	15	8	5	14	0	0	0	80
Females, 1782–1801												
5 and below	7	3	5	11	17	8	2	2	0	0	0	69
6–14	7	2	6	9	9	8	7	7	0	0	0	70

Sources: St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/110, March 1743–July 1769 and St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/111, January 1782–December 1801

From 1743 to 1769, St. Martin’s registers also show that children re-entered the institution more often than they did at St. Luke’s: 96 boys and 81 girls in this sample were repeat users of the workhouse, and this is shown in table 2.10. The difference in the rates of repeat usage between the workhouses of these two parishes is difficult to account for, but this may be a result of different policies being pursued by the overseers and magistrates in each respective parish, which could have resulted in vastly disparate numbers. With this in mind, it seems the vast majority of paupers of all ages entered the workhouse at St. Luke Chelsea just once: 80 percent of male paupers from 1743 to 1769, and 80 percent from 1782 to 1801; 72 percent of female paupers

from 1743 to 1769, 73 percent from 1782 to 1801. At St. Martin’s, 63 percent of male paupers and 52 percent of female paupers between 1743 and 1769 did the same; between 1782 and 1801, however, less than 3 percent of all male paupers and less than 1 percent of all female paupers were recorded as entering the institution a single time—it was far more common for them to enter the workhouse two or more times. In fact, in that period 97 percent of all males and 97 percent of all females entered St. Martin’s workhouse more than once, and this is reflected in the number of times children 14 and below returned to the institution.

Table 2.10: St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Repeat Usage by Sex and Period

Age Group	Repeat Usage										
	1X	2X	3X	4X	5X	6X	7X	8X	9X	10X	11X+
Males, 1743–69											
5 and below	91	1	12	7	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
6–14	49	4	23	5	5	2	0	1	0	0	0
Females, 1743–69											
5 and below	120	1	32	6	3	0	0	0	1	0	0
6–14	59	7	20	4	4	0	1	0	0	0	1
Males, 1782–1801											
5 and below	18	94	13	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
6–14	1	64	39	15	12	7	2	2	0	0	0
Females, 1782–1801											
5 and below	11	89	15	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	1
6–14	0	66	26	21	5	5	0	0	1	1	0

Source: St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/110, March 1743–July 1769 and St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/111, January 1782–December 1801

This discrepancy is hard to account for; there were notorious harvest failures throughout the 1790s and in 1800/1801, and these were exacerbated by a blockade of French ships disrupting imports. But while these events might suggest some reasons why people might have been forced to seek aid from the parish more often during these years, they do not adequately

explain why lived experience would differ so drastically from one parish in the metropolis to another.¹²¹

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When they left the workhouse, pauper children did so for a variety of reasons. It is important to remember that workhouse residents were free to do so at any point; the workhouse was not a prison, and inmates could theoretically leave the institution at will. Whether they felt free to do so, however, is another question.¹²² Workhouse residents were, of course, not permitted to leave without formal permission, but this could be granted in the short term for any number of reasons, from visiting an ill relative to seeking gainful employment. Longer-term absences would require a formal discharge, which any pauper was able to receive on giving “reasonable notice”—typically a matter of hours. In principle, inmates could depart whenever they wished, and some did enter and leave quite frequently. Some came to the workhouse to seek treatment for illness or injury and simply moved on when they recovered; others stayed in the House until they were sent to work or to an apprenticeship. Still others, even at disturbingly young ages, died before they could ever set foot outside the workhouse walls again.

Table 2.11 shows some of the reasons pauper children left that were recorded in the register for the St. Luke Chelsea workhouse. Some were discharged from the institution voluntarily—whether they left at their own request; they ran away; or they were taken out by a friend, relative, or parent. Others were discharged from the workhouse involuntarily, and these included those who were passed to another parish, were sent to a madhouse, were judged able to

¹²¹ Bruce M. S. Campbell and Cormac Ó Gráda, “Harvest Shortfalls, Grain Prices, and Famines in Preindustrial England”, *Journal of Economic History* 71:4 (2011), 878–79.

¹²² Runaways were occasionally charged—but with the theft of the workhouse uniform. Like Blincoe, many inmates did not know they had the option of leaving. See Brown, *Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, 7–8, 10.

work or were bound as apprentices. In the records for the period from 1743 to 1769, boys represented 18 percent of those leaving the workhouse voluntarily, and a further 19 percent were involuntarily discharged. The most common reasons given for departures from this group during this period were those taken out by parents, those sent to work or apprenticed in trade, and those who died. From 1782 to 1801, the proportion of boys exiting voluntarily was 10 percent; a further 15 percent departed involuntarily. In this period, the most common reasons given were the same: they were taken out by parents, they were sent to work or apprenticeship, or they died.

Girls, by contrast, represented only 9 percent of those discharged voluntarily from St. Luke's between 1743 and 1769; even fewer—7 percent—were discharged involuntarily. This could indicate gender differences in behaviour at the institution, but it could also reflect the greater ease of securing work placements or apprenticeships for boys—although many girls that left the institution, it should be noted, were still recorded as doing so because they were sent to work. In the period from 1782 to 1801, 7 percent of girls were discharged in both categories. Most commonly girls were taken out by parents, or they left the workhouse for unrecorded reasons.

Table 2.11: Leaving the Workhouse – St. Luke Chelsea – Voluntarily, Involuntarily, and by Death, 1743–1769

St Luke, Chelsea, Males				
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Died	Other/Unrecorded
Leavers – 5 and below	13	7	7	0
Leavers – 6–14	11	8	1	1
Leavers – Total Workhouse Population	57	41	34	2

St Luke, Chelsea, Females				
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Died	Other/Unrecorded
Leavers – 5 and below	9	3	8	0
Leavers – 6–14	13	15	1	2
Leavers –	105	76	56	8

Total Workhouse Population				
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Leaving the Workhouse – Voluntarily, Involuntarily, and by Death, 1782–1799

St Luke, Chelsea, Males				
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Died	Other/Unrecorded
Leavers – 5 and below	17	1	7	1
Leavers – 6–14	11	24	0	1
Leavers – Total Workhouse Population	71	63	31	6

St Luke, Chelsea, Females				
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Died	Other/Unrecorded
Leavers – 5 and below	8	3	3	4
Leavers – 6–14	9	14	0	1
Leavers – Total Workhouse Population	99	82	41	12

Source: Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743–1799

The registers for St. Martin-in-the-Fields from 1743 to 1769 show that 45 percent of boys left the workhouse voluntarily, including those who were taken out by a relative or who chose to enter the Marine Society. By contrast, only 19 percent were discharged involuntarily, including those that were apprenticed, were passed to another parish, were sent to nurse, or were sent to the Foundling Hospital. In this period, too, the most common reasons for boys to be discharged involuntarily were being sent to work or apprenticed in trade. By contrast, 44 percent of boys departed St. Martin’s workhouse voluntarily in the period from 1782 to 1801, including those who were taken out by a parent, and those who absented themselves for reasons not recorded. Involuntary discharges made up 39 percent of the entries for boys—and these boys were most commonly sent to work or to apprenticeship.¹²³

¹²³ There were 43 entries that explicitly say the boy was sent “on liking,” and this is discussed further in chapter 3.

The records show that 41 percent of the girls in St. Martin’s workhouse were discharged voluntarily between 1743 and 1769, including those taken out by a parent, those taken out by a relative or other friend, and those explicitly listed as “on leave.” Another 26 percent of girls in this period were discharged involuntarily, including those passed to another parish, those sent to nurse, and those sent out to work—both domestically and in a factory. Between 1743 and 1769, the top reasons girls were discharged from St. Martin-in-the-Fields were those who were sent to work, and those who were taken out by parents.

From 1782 to 1801, a further 49 percent of girls were discharged voluntarily, including those taken out by a parent, who were taken out by another relative, who absented themselves, or who explicitly ran away. Girls who were discharged involuntarily represented 36 percent—including those who were passed to another parish, who were sent to nurse, who were sent to work, or who were apprenticed. The most common reasons given for their exit in that period were those who were taken out by parents, who were sent to work, and whose reasons went unrecorded.

Table 2.12: Leaving the Workhouse – St. Martin-in-the-Fields – Voluntarily, Involuntarily, and by Death, 1743–1769

St. Martin-in-the-Fields, 1743–1769, Males				
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Died	Other/Unrecorded
Leavers – 5 and below	46	11	15	31
Leavers – 6–14	40	26	4	17
Leavers – Total Workhouse Population	243	55	110	99

St. Martin-in-the-Fields, 1743–1769, Females				
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Died	Other/Unrecorded
Leavers – 5 and below	66	41	33	24
Leavers – 6–14	39	27	12	14
Leavers – Total Workhouse Population	761	140	246	199

St. Martin-in-the-Fields, 1782–1801, Males				
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Died	Other/Unrecorded
Leavers – 5 and below	66	30	34	0
Leavers – 6–14	47	70	6	6
Leavers – Total Workhouse Population	416	134	159	13

St. Martin-in-the-Fields, 1782–1801, Females				
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Died	Other/Unrecorded
Leavers – 5 and below	70	28	24	2
Leavers – 6–14	53	62	4	6
Leavers – Total Workhouse Population	1140	201	232	35

Source: St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/111, January 1782–December 1801

Conclusions

The registers of St. Luke Chelsea and St. Martin-in-the-Fields suggest a few things that may be significant to future study of the childhood of the poor. Most obviously—children made up a considerable proportion of workhouse inmates—often between a fifth and a quarter at any given time, although Tim Hitchcock’s study of pauper inmates at the workhouse at St. Luke Chelsea suggested that they formed almost a third of the total admissions to that institution by the mid-eighteenth century.¹²⁴ At both workhouses, the proportions of children were similar for either sex, which suggests that the risks of poverty were common to both boys and girls in childhood.

Although some families used the aid of the institution to provide a temporary respite from the vicissitudes of the life cycle, child inmates tended to stay in the workhouse for a much longer

¹²⁴ Their prevalence was presumably a consequence of both the growth in population and the decline in infant mortality by this period. Tim Hitchcock, “‘Unlawfully begotten on her body’: Illegitimacy and the Parish Poor in St. Luke’s Chelsea”, in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King, and Pamela Sharpe (eds.) *Chronicling Poverty* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 76, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-25260-2>. At the end of the eighteenth century, Colquhoun wrote that only “One fifth part of the gross number in a London Workhouse is generally composed of” the infant poor. Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 369.

period than paupers of other ages. Many of these long-haulers eventually left the institution to take up parish apprenticeships—which will be discussed further in the next chapter—suggesting that training and placement may have been a strong motivation for entering the institution in the first place, or that this possibility became an attractive one if parents could not place their offspring. In other cases, children were taken out of the house by parents or relatives because they explicitly did not want the children sent away from London to be nursed or apprenticed; although there was contemporary discourse around the appropriateness of removing children from poor families, there was clearly some belief in the primacy of familial rights over those of the institution or the parish. At the same time, however, some social reformers bridled at the prospect of returning children to delinquent or malfunctioning households.

For reasons of space, this study has been unable to engage with other forms of parish aid, such as outdoor relief, which often took the form of a regular dole in cash or in-kind or one-off payments to cover things such as clothing, apprenticeship fees, or lying-in expenses. In terms of the financial impact on the poor, outdoor relief was at least as important—and it was reportedly four times cheaper than the workhouse. Yet it had less impact on the formation of notions of childhood among the poor, particularly with regard to young people who were orphaned, destitute, or members of desperate families.¹²⁵ But restricting our scope to the records of indoor relief imposes limitations as well; although the workhouse may be revealing for acute crisis households, they do not by any means represent the circumstances of the entirety of the poor.

¹²⁵ J. S. Taylor characterized it as the preferred option for parish officers. James Stephen Taylor, “The Mythology of the Old Poor Law”, *Journal of Economic History* XXIV (1960), 295. See also Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700–1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 186–88; David Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790–1870* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 55.

The next chapter expands upon the sources used in this study, examining the place of education in the experience of the young poor through the charity school movement and the Sunday school movement. As we will see, work was to remain centre stage for poor children even in the pedagogical realm. We will also examine the records of apprenticeship—primarily as practiced by the parish—and its growth in the eighteenth century both as a means of ensuring older children’s suitability for work and as a means of establishing a legal settlement for them. Like life in the workhouse, schooling was not a universal experience among the poor; the forms it took were nonetheless important in developing their particular idea of childhood.

Chapter Three: Education, Apprenticeship, and Abuse

In the year 1870, schooling became compulsory in Britain; but shifts in attitudes toward education can be detected long before that point, especially toward its role in the lives of the young. Education became a central part of many welfare and charity schemes that targeted children from the eighteenth century, reflecting a conviction that the minds of the young were malleable and were capable of being shaped or moulded. This chapter looks at some of those schemes—in particular, it examines the emergence of charity schools and Sunday schools, and the ways these institutions embodied notions of class. The growth of pauper apprenticeship—and the cases of neglect and abuse that came with it—provides perhaps the best example of education provision for poor young people in this period, reflecting the notions of “appropriate” education that would spread across Britain by the nineteenth century.

The History of Education

In England during the Middle Ages, moralism had ensured that formal schooling was limited in scope for most children; many commentators were convinced that apprenticeship or service was enough education for most people.¹ Although some private educational institutions already existed and religious schools had been established by the Church, the idea of developmental learning was yet to emerge, and there was still perceived to be little benefit to literacy among the general public. But things did not greatly change in the early modern era: in many cases, schooling became even more a preserve of the wealthy, and lower social groups continued to

¹ See Postman, *Disappearance of Childhood*, 14.

receive only explicitly practical instruction. To that end, lower-class boys often went with their fathers to labour; girls were expected to assist their mothers in housekeeping and childcare.

Lower-class children learned how to work, how to beg, and how to take advantage of Poor Law entitlements and charity from their parents, and this real-world knowledge that was passed down to them was crucial in safeguarding their futures. Significantly, with the rise of commerce and industry, humanist ideals that had previously been limited to Renaissance thinkers spread throughout England, and the wealthier, elite sectors of society increasingly turned their attention toward “bettering” the physical conditions of the poor. But education remained extremely limited throughout the period—many children still received none at all. This would rapidly change at all levels of society.

By this time, three main institutions had developed within the realm of education: the elementary schools, the free schools, and the grammar schools. First—the elementary or “petty” schools—were usually run for a fee by a local housewife who taught the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic to her students. A significant number of these schools were established in the second half of the seventeenth century, largely thanks to the growth of the vernacular as the language of instruction.² Second—the free schools—focused on the instruction of mathematics, English composition, and rhetoric, multiplying under the reigns of both Elizabeth and James.³ And third—the grammar schools—concentrated on teaching English grammar and classics, preparing their students for further education at the universities or at the Inns of Court; they lost some support in the years following the Restoration because they were believed to have helped

² As opposed to Latin. See A. F. Leach, *English Schools at the Reformation*, (1896), volume 1, 105.

³ It has been argued that the growth of free schools was largely a result of a growing interest in education as a form of social control, especially with regard to poor children. See Rahikainen, *Centuries of Child Labour*, 80; Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 288.

to undermine loyalty to the King during the English Civil War. Significantly, the grammar schools also refused to adjust their curriculum despite social changes in the population; as democratic education became more desirable, the popularity of these schools waned.⁴ With the spread of the educational theories of Erasmus and the increased reach of humanistic belief in the individual's capacity for self-improvement, there was an increase in the number of “popular” schools. But at the same time, there was a temporary dip in general enthusiasm for pedagogy—many English people recoiled from a “levelling” curriculum widely thought to be too controversial for post-Restoration society.

But in the second half of the seventeenth century, learning became an important topic once again, particularly because of the writings of John Locke. Locke insisted that education was a vital part of life, and he believed that everyone had the capacity to make a productive contribution to society if they were properly educated as children.⁵ He argued that the kingdom's failure to supply the young with work represented a significant loss to society; he thus proposed the establishment of a system of institutions for the housing and employment of the poor and their children— “the nourishment and teaching” of the young that would result would “cost the parish nothing” but would help to wean impoverished children off their dependence on poor relief. The subsequent expansion of schooling in the eighteenth century would repeatedly reference Locke's adage of “moulding the man”; an unforeseen consequence of the growth of

⁴ Grammar schools had not been intended to cater only to children of higher classes, but entry had traditionally been restricted by sizable fees that in practice limited their proportion of poorer students. See Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 58; Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 287, 288.

⁵ See Lawrence Stone, “The Educational Revolution in England, 1560–1640”, *Past and Present* 28 (1964), 42.

this view was that children's entry into the adult world would thereafter be delayed until they had acquired the skills thought necessary to acquit themselves later in life.⁶

The variety of educational facilities increased between 1700 and 1770—and they multiplied even more rapidly thereafter. But gender continued to restrict educational opportunities: boys tended to receive more limited, practical, industrial training the lower they fell on the social scale, but girls' education was always restricted, regardless of class. Even if they were illiterate, boys had a broader range of possible occupations open to them; there was strong opposition to any work for girls at all, based on a belief that employment outside the home interfered with their ability to fulfill domestic duties.⁷

Gradually, education would become less restricted by gender and more restricted by age—education would become firmly associated with childhood. Although gradation of the difficulty of the curricula had not been a part of schooling in the medieval period—classes included pupils at different ages—with the chronologization of life that characterized the industrial era, schooling was increasingly thought to be appropriate for youth alone.⁸ This would be made explicit by the 1880 Education Act, which stipulated that children between five and ten years of age belonged in school, not the workplace; at the same time, this legislation would exclude adults from the classroom altogether.⁹

⁶ Anonymous, *Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Laws, Parliamentary Papers* (1817), 14–15.

⁷ A girl who had been, say, spinning from infancy, knew very little but her trade. In districts where the dominant trade was straw plaiting, similarly, girls were assumed to be “ignorant of everything” else, while girls employed elsewhere in making buttons were thought to be “so ignorant as scarcely to know how to wash and mend their own clothes.” Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 399. See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 19; Plumb, “New World of Children”, 72.

⁸ Before the advent of modern schooling, students began school as late as ten years old, and would have shared a classroom with people of all ages. Neil Postman argued that the subject matter also often repeated itself because students were constantly arriving and departing. Postman, *Disappearance of Childhood*, 14–15.

⁹ 43 & 44 Vict. c. 23. See James and James, 21.

The Spread of the Idea of Schooling

In this earlier period, wealthier people were able to devote greater resources to achieving their own children's literacy; this meant that children from middling and elite families had more extensive options for training and education, leading to greater wealth and opportunity in adulthood.¹⁰ By contrast, as David Davies pointed out in 1795, "two-thirds of the children of the poor receive[d] not the smallest degree of schooling."¹¹

In fact, there was yet little interest in learning opportunities among the lower social strata. Many people from the labouring classes were only willing or able to dedicate a short window to the pursuit of education because they were expected to work and contribute to their family financially as soon as possible; the attendance of labouring children in schools was further restricted in rural areas because of the demands of the farming year—skills in reading and writing were thus judged to be of little use to many.¹² To poorer families, just sending children to school represented a substantial cost in the form of tuition, food, and clothing, to say nothing of the cost of missed work.¹³ Where they did attend day schools, the average length of study was only around three years, so most people of this class were unable to achieve a high level of educational attainment. Many labouring children were taught to a far more limited extent at home, or they were raised to carry on their parents' work. When opportunities were few, the

¹⁰ The middling sort invested in the education of their offspring, helping to cement the notion that they, collectively, were especially concerned for their children's welfare. This was not a disinterested strategy: with limited property to inherit, education offered the only route to a comfortable living. Inadequate schooling would doom a person to a life of labour.

¹¹ David Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry: Stated and Considered, in Three Parts* (London, 1795), 96.

¹² As a result, rural literacy rates tended to be lower than their urban equivalents. Stark differences could still exist from one region to another. See R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500–1800* (New York: Longman, 1988), 13–14, 146–50.

¹³ As late as the 1850s, as much as half of the children in England still attended no school—except, in some cases, for Sunday school.

benefit of formal education appeared limited—only those who could be spared would be sent to school.¹⁴

There would be a broad movement for the provision of better educational opportunities for the poor from the late seventeenth century. The most conspicuous element of this was the charity school—an institution officially started in 1699 after the foundation of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.). The charity school movement aimed to co-ordinate limited local philanthropic efforts toward the provision of education with those of the S.P.C.K. toward the promotion of moral reform. These schools were explicitly intended for the children of the financially disadvantaged, to preserve them from vagrancy and prepare them for work. Especially in urban areas, these schools offered a solution to the problem of idleness; by “Fitting them for honest Trades or Employments, and afterwards placing them out,” poor children would be properly “shaped” and “moulded,” leading to a more industrious population overall. It was claimed that, unlike the “common Charities that People give,” which “are only the Relief of a present Necessity, and the Persons to whom they give them are perhaps on the Morrow in as much want as ever,” Charity Schools offered “a Relief for [children’s] whole Lives, if they will be but diligent and industrious.” As Richard Willis said in a 1704 sermon, it

takes them once for all out of the uneasie State of Want, and dependance upon other People, and places them in a way of comfortably providing for themselves, and it may be, in some time, of being charitable to other People; and being put into a State of honest Industry, which, with good Instruction going before, is very likely to make them honest, industrious, and useful Men.¹⁵

¹⁴ Rahikainen, *Centuries of Child Labour*, 79, 112; See Heywood, *History of Childhood*, 162.

¹⁵ Richard Willis, *A sermon preach'd in the parish-church of St. Andrew's Holborn, June 8. 1704. Being Thursday in Whitson-Week, at the first meeting of the gentlemen concern'd in promoting the charity-schools in and about the cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1704), 25–26. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0122380005/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=43ab2eb4&pg=1. Accessed 6 Dec. 2022.

Although the impact that charity schools had on working-class literacy is still not fully clear, it is certain that there was strong contemporary support for the schemes. They became one of the most popular forms of practical piety in the capital, offering a less expensive alternative to poor relief. Charity schools offered their pupils tangible material benefits—particularly in the greater life-chances and opportunities that might be available for social advancement—but they also promised further benefits to society in general.

For instance, it was suggested that by catechizing the young in the ways of Christianity, the schools would remedy the broader disorders that plagued society.¹⁶ As George Smalridge said in a sermon early in the century,

That general Reformation of Manners, which is so much Talkt of by All Pretenders to Piety, so heartily Wish'd by all sincere *Christians*, so mightily Dreaded by the Enemies of God and Godliness, would more speedily be brought about; if whilst Private Men are thus Industrious to prevent the farther Growth of Vice by an Early Instruction of Those, who are Yet Untainted with it, in the *Principles of Religion*, Publick Magistrates would at the same Time be equally Zealous in extirpating Profaness and Immorality, where they have already taken deep Root, by a Steady, Regular, and Impartial Execution of the Laws. Those who are brought up in the Belief of God, and of a Future State, will be restrain'd from Sin by a Sense of Duty to their Maker and Saviour, or by Fear of those Punishments, which are threatened to the wicked.¹⁷

Richard Willis argued similarly that these schools

will be a great Charity to the Public, as well as to the particular Persons. The great Riches of any Nation flow from the industrious and working Hands in it; 'tis these that carry on the variety of useful Arts and Manufactures, that make Riches flow in upon any People; and therefore whoever

¹⁶ It was thought that these new ideals could then be extended to parents, and all the sins of society would be eradicated. See M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Puritanism in Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 12–14.

¹⁷ George Smalridge, *The royal benefactress: or, the great charity of educating poor children. In a sermon preach'd in the parish-church of St. Sepulchre, June 1. 1710. Being Thursday in Whitsun-Week. At the anniversary meeting of the children educated in the charity schools, in and about the cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1710) 30–31. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0121697794/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=395d4bc7&pg=1. Accessed 6 Dec. 2022. To this end, the spread of these schools was only helped by Anglican fears of Catholicism: it was hoped that they might reinvigorate the catechetical method of teaching and serve as “a Fortress and a Frontier Garrison against Popery.” White Kennett, *Sermon* (London, 1706). Cited in Henry Holman, *English National Education: A Sketch of the Rise of Public Elementary Schools in England* (London: Blackie, 1898), 30.

takes People out of an idle, vagrant State, or prevents their being in such a State, and puts them in a way of Work and Industry, is a great Benefactor to the Publick.¹⁸

In fact, half-a-century later, William Sharp still considered this to be the main point in their favour:

If Compassion cannot move you, let Considerations of Interest prevail with you. For neglect this poor Man's numerous Family, leave them to follow their own Imaginations, and to make the wretched Shift they can, and experience the sad Consequence. They will grow up soon into public Nuisances; infest your Families with their idle dishonest disorderly Behaviour; fill the streets with Vice and Violence; break in upon your Comfort and your Security: take the same Persons under your Patronage, teach them what is right, find employment for their Talents in suitable Professions and Occupations, and hear how you will be repaid. They will be serviceable to you many Ways by Themselves and by their Examples; Industry, Sobriety, Good Order and Good Manners will get Ground amongst you; your City will be stock'd with honest laborious ingenious Artisans, some of the most useful Members of a Community; Wealth will encrease; *there will be no Decay, no leading into Captivity, and no Complaining in your Streets. Happy the People that are in such a Case!* and I declare to you, I know not the Work upon Earth that can promote and produce such Happiness like the virtuous Education and Employment of your Children.¹⁹

For this reason, Joseph Addison called the charity schools "the glory of the age."²⁰ Many contemporaries clearly agreed, and over the years the number of schools increased considerably. From their inception in 1699 to 1704, there were 54 schools established nationwide and supported by the S.P.C.K., with over 1000 students across thirty-two parishes; by 1729, London alone had 132 schools, accommodating 5225 students. In total the S.P.C.K. helped establish more than 1600 schools, with spaces for over 34,000 pupils. But it should be noted that the number of new foundations slowed considerably in later years. This decline may have had something to do with the growing controversy around the democratic provision of education. In *The Charity School Movement* (1938), M. G. Jones associated their drop in popularity with the

¹⁸ Willis, *Sermon preach'd in the parish-church of St. Andrew's Holborn*, 26.

¹⁹ William Sharp, *The amiableness and advantage of making suitable provision for the education and employment of poor children. A sermon preach'd at the parish-church of St. Martin in the city of Oxford, On Sunday, Sept. 28, 1755* (London, 1755), 15. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0123022608/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=4eb2e8a5&pg=1. Accessed 6 Dec. 2022.

²⁰ Joseph Addison, *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.* (London, 1721), 1:160.

growth of the workhouse movement (touched upon in the preceding chapter), which encouraged a shift in pedagogical thinking away from the provision of education as a means of general enlightenment to its delivery as a means of encouraging industry among those destined for labour—from the “catechizing” school to the “juvenile workshop.”²¹

The claims of proponents that the religious education of the Charity Schools would improve the situations of young people were causing critics to suspect that the poor might be receiving too much aid; many feared that poor children were being educated above their station. These concerns were reinforced by the publication of Bernard Mandeville's *Essay on Charity and Charity Schools* (1723), which ridiculed the very idea of equal education, maintaining that “it is requisite that great numbers” of the people “be poor” for the good of society.²² Although Mandeville conceded that some social mobility was desirable, he argued that it would occur “in the common Course of Things”—foisting inappropriate education on the lower classes was unnecessary and undesirable because, “as some of the Rich must come to be Poor, so some of the Poor will come to be Rich.”²³ Education only made the poor unsuited to labour, he wrote: “Knowledge both enlarges & multiplies our Desires”; if “the hard and dirty Labour throughout

²¹ Jones, *Charity School Movement*, 57, 92–93. Alys Levene writes, “From the beginning of the century until 1720, the average yearly number of new foundations in the capital was forty. Between 1730 and 1740, there were only five schools established. Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 6. Also see Josiah Tucker, *Sermon... for the Charity Schools* (London, 1766), 9; Benjamin Kirkman Gray, *A History of English Philanthropy from the Dissolution of the Monasteries to the Taking of the First Census* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1905), 107 <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/fmwgenma/items>; Tomkins, *Experience of Urban Poverty*, 1951; and Dianne Payne, “London's Charity School Children: The ‘Scum of the Parish’?”, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (2006): 383–397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-0208.2006.tb00655.x>.

²² Although he professed that he had no intention of preventing “them from ever rising higher in the World.” Bernard Mandeville, *The fable of the bees: or, private vices, publick benefits / With an essay on charity and charity-schools, and a search into the nature of society* (London, 1725), 328, 515.

²³ Mandeville, 515.

the Nation” performed by the “three Millions of Hands [of] the Children of the Poor” were lost by even “a tenth Part of these Children” that were made

exempt from the lowest Drudgery, either there must be so much Work left undone, as would demand three hundred thousand People; or the Defect, occasion'd by the Numbers taken off, must be supply'd by the Children of others, that had been better bred.²⁴

Some education in reading, writing, and arithmetic might be desirable, Mandeville admitted; but ultimately, he argued, “where People's Livelihood has no dependence on those Arts, they are very pernicious to the Poor, who are forc'd to get their Daily Bread by their Daily Labour.”²⁵

Other critics of education for the poor agreed that too much learning could be a problem; it made children discontent with their function in society. In 1763, one anonymous author wrote,

The charity school is [a] universal nursery of idleness; ... it [is not] easy to conceive or invent anything more destructive to the interests and very foundation principles of a nation entirely dependent on its trade and manufactures than the giving [of] an education to the children of the lowest class of her people that will make them contemn those drudgeries for which they were born.²⁶

These kinds of attitudes were especially common among the rising middle class, who themselves had benefitted from the expansion of education but who feared the competition their children might face for employment if the poor were better educated in the same way. A “Citizen of the World” thus argued,

[If] it is asked [of] me which of the two I would omit, if obliged, I would rather omit the having taught them to read, than to omit giving them full employment; for idleness, even among the superior classes, leads to much mischief; but it is far more destructive amongst the inferior ranks, whose only means of subsistence is from their labor, and if not very early habituated to work, they will contract other habits, which must inevitably lead them to plunder, and use every unjustifiable means for obtaining their daily necessary food.²⁷

²⁴ Mandeville, 212–13, 328, 516.

²⁵ Mandeville claimed that “Going to School in Comparison to Working is Idleness, & the longer Boys continue in this easy sort of Life, the more unfit they'll be when grown up for downright Labour, both as to Strength and Inclination.” Mandeville, 328–29.

²⁶ Anonymous, *Considerations on the Fatal Effects to a Trading Nation of the Present Excess of Public Charities* (London, 1763), 25, <https://0-data-historicaltexts-jisc-ac-uk.catalogue.wellcomelibrary.org/view?pubId=ecco-0881100700&index=ecco&pageId=ecco-0881100700-10>.

²⁷ Citizen of the World, *Letter to every housekeeper*, 10–11.

Advocates of the schools were conscious of this disapproval and attempted to assuage critics' fears. In 1728 Isaac Watts tried to clarify that the intent of charity schools was "to teach the duties of humility and submission to superiors." They posed no challenge to social roles, he argued,

[As] the Children of the Rich, in general, ... enjoy such an Education as may fit them for the better Businesses of Life, so the Children of the Poor ... should not be generally educated in such a Manner as may raise them above the services of a lower Station.²⁸

In 1733, another defender of the schools insisted that their purpose was

not only to instruct the children in the knowledge of the Christian religion, but also to breed them up in such a manner that as they are descended from the laborious part of mankind, they may be bred up and inured to the meanest services.²⁹

In fact, many supporters emphasized the obligation of the lower classes to labour even more than the critics of the schools. At mid-century, William Sharp thus argued that

'Tis a Thing impossible to do Good to our Fellow-Creatures in a Way more extensive and effectual than by providing Youth with *suitable* Instruction and Professions; a Work this, which, if encourag'd and pursued as it might be and ought to be, would, if not wholly supersede all other Charities, yet very much shorten the Extent and lighten the Burden of them.³⁰

In 1760, Edward Pickard similarly maintained that the "duty" of their pupils was

not to be able scholars or fine penmen ... but [to acquire only] so much reading as every Christian who values his Bible would Wish them to have, and no more writing than would be useful in the meanest situation.³¹

²⁸ Isaac Watts, *Works, Published by Himself* (London, 1753), 2: 725, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/_/NDMVAAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

²⁹ Richard Hooker, *Weekly Miscellany*, May 19, 1733. <https://newspaperarchive.com/weekly-miscellany-may-19-1733-p-1>. Quoted in James Peller Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London During the Eighteenth Century; Including the Charities, Depravities, Dresses, and Amusements, of the Citizens of London, During that Period; with a Review of the State of Society in 1807* (London, 1808).

³⁰ Sharp, *Amiability and advantage*, 6.

³¹ Edward Pickard, *Charity to orphans and other necessitous children, described and recommended. A sermon preached at Carter-Lane, April 23, 1760, for the benefit of the Orphan Working-School at Hoxton, erected the same year, and supported by voluntary Contributions* (London, 1760), 23. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0118516519/ECCO?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=99406b3e&pg=1.

Dependent on public support, the S.P.C.K. themselves came to explicitly limit the scope of general education to rote learning and to the catechism, emphasizing “contentment” with that which Providence had allotted to its students. Commentators thereafter would stress the way charity school pupils were kept busy at work—usually in spinning, knitting, or some form of household drudgery—and that they were thereby kept out of trouble.³²

In the 1780s, these efforts would be taken up by the Sunday school movement. Sunday schools were similarly financed by the voluntary subscriptions of the middle classes; advocates were driven by many of the same aims that had propelled the charity school movement. And like the charity schools, Sunday schools too promised that they could save children from vice by teaching them the Bible.³³ Although Sunday schools were theoretically open to any children, it was clear that they were designed with labouring children in mind, and these schools tried to avoid conflicting with weekday work by limiting instruction to a single day on the weekend.³⁴

One sermon claimed that

the points aimed at are to furnish opportunities of instruction for the poorer parts of the parish without interfering with any industry on the week day, & to inure children to early habits of going to Church & of spending the leisure hours of Sunday decently & virtuously. The children should be taught to read & be instructed in the plain duties of the Christian Religion with a particular view to their future character as labourers and servants.³⁵

³² Although some were eventually bound out as apprentices to learn a trade.

³³ As the number of Sunday schools increased over the decade, the schools thus helped to spread “the great principles of religion.” See Thomas Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 296.

³⁴ Jones, *Charity School Movement*, 146.

³⁵ Sermon of Reverend C. Moore, Vicar of Boughton Blaen, Kent, at St. Nicholas Church, Rochester, 1785. Quoted in J. Henry Harris (ed.), *Robert Raikes: The Man and His Work: Biographical Notes Collected by Josiah Harris: Unpublished Letters by Robert Raikes: Letters from the Raikes Family: Opinions on Influence of Sunday Schools* (London, 1899), 330, *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CPYBQQ980619684/NCCO?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-NCCO&xid=707ad7f1&pg=357. Also see John Leng, *Natural Obligations to Believe the Principles of Religion, and Divine Revelation: In Sixteen Sermons, Preached at the Lecture founded by R. Boyle* (London, 1730 edition), 5, 24,

In their emphasis on enabling individuals to read the words of the bible for themselves, the schools helped to improve literacy skills among the lower classes. Attendance was consistently high, growing in number through the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not least because they offered attendance free of charge. While it is estimated that there were 200,000 children attending the schools in England and Wales at the end of the eighteenth century, that number had climbed to 1,400,000 by 1830.³⁶ The curriculum of the Sunday schools also shifted to better reflect this plebeian audience, and they began to offer more practical training and labour opportunities. Henry Newman, the secretary of the S.P.C.K., justified this change of emphasis by arguing, “Twenty four years of experience had shewn that a working school is in all respects preferable to one without labour and [is] more in keeping with the present trend of public opinion.”³⁷

Broader Views of Poverty

But fears were growing across Europe that this kind of education might awaken the social ambitions of the poor and alienate them from manual work. The appropriateness of teaching the

29. Sunday schools thus helped to defend the peace of the sabbath against the perceived threat of growing radicalism and non-conformity. To that end, Sarah Trimmer wrote, “Wherever Sunday schools are established, instead of seeing the streets filled on the Sabbath-day with ragged children engaged at idle sports, and uttering oaths and blasphemies, we behold them assembling in schools, neat in their persons and apparel, and receiving with the greatest attention instructions suited to their capacities and conditions.” Sarah Trimmer, *Economy of Charity; or, an Address to Ladies Concerning Sunday-schools; the Establishment of Schools of Industry Under Female Inspection; and the Distribution of Voluntary Benefactions. To which is Added an Appendix, Containing an Account of the Sunday-schools in Old Brentford* (London, 1787), 15,

³⁶ By 1851 there were 23,000 Sunday schools, and enrolment encompassed as much as 55 percent, or 2.4 million children. By this time, “it was estimated that as many as three-quarters of working-class children had attended a Sunday school at some point in their lives.” See Amy J. Lloyd, “Education, Literacy and the Reading Public”, *British Library Newspapers* (Detroit: Gale, 2007); Rahikainen, *Centuries of Child Labour*, 113–14; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 226.

³⁷ S.P.C.K. Letter Book, December 15, 1722. Quoted in Jones, *Charity School Movement*, 92. Also see Joan Simon, “From charity school to workhouse in the 1720s: The SPCK and Mr Marriott's solution” *History of Education* 115–16, 123–25, DOI: [10.1080/0046760880170201](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760880170201); Rosemary O’Day, *Education and Society 1500–1800: The Social Foundations of Education in Early Modern Britain* (London: Longman, 1982), 252–55.

lower classes at all was increasingly questioned; the very idea suddenly appeared both expensive and subversive.³⁸ Commentators such as the anonymous author of *An Inquiry into the Management of the Poor* insisted that it was not education that the propertyless needed, but work, reasoning that teaching them reading and writing only made labour irksome. Many began to look more critically at the idea of equal education, even if they had otherwise shown a humanitarian concern for the poor.³⁹ Efforts increased to provide practical education for children in workhouses, particularly vocational training.⁴⁰ In places such as Stroud or Stockport, local workhouses were joined with Charity schools, and these would often be referred to as “working-charity-schools.”⁴¹ Thereafter, it became commonplace for workhouses to establish a school on their premises, although their focus was firmly placed on labour rather than learning.⁴² In fact, because of that emphasis on the importance of labour, these institutions would increasingly be referred to as “Houses of Industry” in the second half of the eighteenth century.

³⁸ This “soft-heartedness” was to blame for many of the troubles of English society. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Richard Willis told parishioners: “I believe I may venture to say it, that, generally speaking, a great part of the Sins, and most of the Troubles we fall into in the Course of our Lives, come from the want of due Care of breaking our Passions when we were Young.” Richard Willis, *Sermon preach'd in the parish-church of St. Andrew's Holborn*, 10.

³⁹ Anonymous, *An Inquiry into the Management of the Poor, and our usual Polity respecting the Common People* (London, 1767), 16. Eighteenth Century Collections Online,

link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0104472287/ECCO?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=a216cd2d&pg=1.

⁴⁰ Although these interests dated back to the latter part of the seventeenth century: At Clerkenwell in 1686, justices designated fully half of the workhouse “for the Reception and Breeding up of poor Fatherless and Motherless children, left to the Parish care, and for the Instructing them in Religion and Virtue, & making them Capable of getting an honest Livelihood by their Labour.” *An Account of the General Nursery, or Colledge of Infants, set up by the Justices of the Peace of the County of Middlesex, With the Constitutions and Ends thereof* (London, 1686), 1, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A25231.0001.001>. Commentators such as Thomas Firmin were concerned with devising schemes to provide work for London children. Firmin’s scheme drew national attention and helping to inspire the revival of the Corporation of the Poor in 1698. See Firmin, *Some Proposals for the Employing of the Poor*.

⁴¹ When the premises of St. Martin-in-Fields were enlarged in 1772, they incorporated a parish charity school originally endowed by Archbishop Tenison (vicar of the parish from 1680–1692).

⁴² See Westminster City Archive, C876, 15 May 17; C877, 8 February 1743; *Gentleman's Magazine* I, 1743, 1, 59; *Account of Several Workhouses* (1725), 15.

By the 1780s, children were becoming the dominant element in these institutions, and these would again be rebranded to reflect that—this time as “schools of industry,” stressing their transformative role.⁴³ As a “Citizen of the World” assured his readers, these schools still offered a place where children “might be taught to read [and] have the moral principles of the Christian religion instilled into them,” but they placed a special emphasis on ensuring pupils “were bred up to industry, which will cause them more readily to put their hands to the plow, when the time shall arrive in which they must get their own living.”⁴⁴ Because of the training opportunities and placements that were made available, these schools of industry offered the young a better alternative to life in a conventional workhouse, and as many as 21,000 children were counted in these institutions across the country in 1803.

Like the workhouse, and like Charity Schools, Schools of Industry claimed that they might offer a greater benefit to the nation if they were properly supported. Citizen of the World wrote that “Articles not manufactured in this country might be introduced, and by these means the schools might be so conducted as to be yet farther useful.”⁴⁵ But economic difficulties inevitably developed: realistically, children could never generate the profits that had been promised—most could not even produce enough to cover their own support.⁴⁶ That shortfall only increased when economic conditions decreased the demand for the products they formed.

⁴³ See Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, 27; Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe*, 15. Frederick Morton Eden, *The state of the poor; or, an history of the labouring classes in England, from the conquests to the present period* (1799), 2:543–71, 2:684–86 <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/np3adwwu/items>.

⁴⁴ Citizen of the World, *Letter to every housekeeper*, 9.

⁴⁵ Citizen of the World, *Letter to every housekeeper*, 10.

⁴⁶ Anonymous, *Abstract of the Answers and Returns under 43 Geo. 3 Relative to the Expense and Maintenance of the Poor in England*, reprinted in *House of Lords Sessional Papers*, ed. F.W. Torrington (New York, 1972), 1805 Session, volume VI, 715.

When the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act was passed in 1802, mandating that masters and employers provide their apprentices with a basic education in the three Rs, there was a sudden re-appearance of schools promising free or inexpensive general education.⁴⁷ Although Phillipe Ariès argued that this shift indicated the depth of changes in attitudes toward children, other scholars have been more skeptical, suggesting that popular education was driven more by the desire for social control rather than by the spirit of charity; general education benefitted the industrial system by accustoming children to regular hours, the demands of the bell, and a system of rewards and punishment.⁴⁸ And throughout this period this process of socialization would continue for the young poor—into adolescence and beyond—through the practice of apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship

The institution of apprenticeship generally has a negative connotation in modern times, largely because of the representation that has come down to us through nineteenth-century literature. In these books, apprentices were portrayed almost invariably as unhappy orphans, and masters were

⁴⁷ Though very little attention was paid to meeting the requirements of the Act in practice. See Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*. The focus continued to be on basic education, confined in reality to reading, writing, arithmetic, and the catechism. Andrew Bell, one of the founders of the monitorial system of elementary education, wrote, “It is not proposed that the children of the poor be educated in an expensive manner or be taught to write or cypher. Utopian schemes for the universal diffusion of general knowledge would soon realise the fable of the belly and the other members of the body and confound that distinction of ranks and classes of society on which the general welfare hinges ... There is a risk of elevating by an indiscriminate education, the minds of those doomed to the drudgery of daily labour above their conditions and thereby rendering them discontented and unhappy in their lot.” Andrew Bell, *The Madras School: Or, Elements of Tuition* (London, 1808), 292.

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=8nTsZVDIygIC>

⁴⁸ Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 411; Pinchbeck and Hewitt argued, “The institutional development and acceptance of formal education in schools, with the consequent isolation of the child from adult society, was a prerequisite of the emergence of modern sociological and psychological concepts of childhood.” Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 306–07.

depicted as brutal and abusive monsters.⁴⁹ This has also been a dominant motif in English historiography: Dorothy George insisted that apprenticeship in the past had been little more than a means of “setting the poor on work,” and her emphasis on the cruelty and hardships that young people faced set the tone for most of the subsequent writing on the subject.⁵⁰ Historians such as E. M. Leonard, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and E. M. Hampson all suggested that the administration of apprenticeships for children was largely a failure in early modern English social policy, particularly stressing the resulting sense of distance between parents and children in English families.⁵¹ Yet, for lower-class children, it must be emphasized that apprenticeship was perhaps the most important form of instruction available to them in this period; according to Steve Rappaport, they were a bedrock of stability.⁵²

The practice itself can be traced all the way back to the twelfth century, when influential trade guilds could be found throughout Western Europe. Initially, apprenticeship functioned as a means of replacing guild craftsmen on their retirement, but the power of the medieval guilds slowly waned. The passage of the Statute of Artificers in 1563 signified a recognition of the need for a national system of employment regulation and a new approach to the relief of the poor.⁵³

⁴⁹ The best example is perhaps Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist: Or, The Parish Boy's Progress*, second edition (London, 1839).

⁵⁰ George, *London Life*, 224, 225.

⁵¹ E. M. Leonard, *The Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900); Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Poor-Law Policy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910); E. M. Hampson, *The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire, 1597–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934). Roger Thompson later attributed this sense of distance in family relationships in the early modern world to the “ancient tradition of boarding-out school children in other households,” which was “hardly calculated to encourage intimacy between parents and adolescent children,” but had come to form the core of outdoor apprenticeship. Roger Thompson, *Women in Stuart England and America: A Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 1974), 155.

⁵² Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 294–95.

⁵³ Elizabeth I c. 4. Traditional practices of patronage and hospitality largely fell by the wayside, giving way to this formal statutory relief of the poor.

With this legislation, a seven-year term was made mandatory for anyone who wished to take up a trade, and the parish assumed the same means of controlling the status and freedom of “artificers, laborers, servants of husbandry and apprentices” that the guilds had enjoyed.⁵⁴ In 1597/98, the Act for the Relief of the Poor was passed, requiring an overseer be appointed in each parish to restrict entry into trades, to regulate standards of workmanship, and to raise a rate to pay the cost of apprenticeship premiums, which marked a concern specifically with lower-status members of the population.⁵⁵ Importantly, the act also stated that the children of parents not “able to kepe and mauntaine” them were to be apprenticed—whether they willed it or not—until the age of twenty-four for males and twenty-one for females.⁵⁶ In 1601, this statute was re-enacted with very few modifications, and together the two pieces of legislation—often referred to as the “Elizabethan Poor Laws”—constituted the legal basis for all poor relief in England and Wales until 1948.⁵⁷

Since its inception, apprenticeship took several different forms, depending on what sort of occupation apprentices were to be bound to. But its purpose largely remained the same, no matter what shape it took: terms were negotiated and laid down in legally binding indentures, and a master was selected who agreed to take responsibility for the child’s maintenance.

⁵⁴ Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 224.

⁵⁵ 39 Elizabeth I c. 30.

⁵⁶ A fourteen-year maximum term was to be enforced.

⁵⁷ 43 Elizabeth I c. 2. Although in many ways this created a more rigid labour market—tying workers into subordinate positions, controlling their ability to change trades, and restricting their wage rates and profits—the terms of the 1601 Act also emphasized the civil administrative aspects of Poor Law, establishing a poor rate in each parish that was proportionate to the value of the property they occupied, and to local financial need. Entitlement was tied to settlement law, which ultimately defined and protected legal civic status, providing individuals with legal recognition of their membership in a parish, and an undeniable right to the common wealth of that parish. This was further clarified in an Act for the Better Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom, 1662; and again in 1691 and 1697 with 3 William & Mary c. 11 and 8 & 9 William III c. 30., by which a person could establish settlement through “birth, marriage, apprenticeship, regular employment for a period of a year, renting a house worth £10 per annum, paying parochial taxes, or serving as a parish officer.” See Tim Hitchcock, Sharon Howard, and Robert Shoemaker, “Settlement”, *London Lives, 1690–1800* (https://www.londonlives.org/static/Settlement.jsp#fnr1_5).

Apprentices could do little to control their situation during the process—they were expected to live as part of the family of their new master, under his authority, in a strange environment far from their own home for the entirety of their indenture.⁵⁸ The oldest arrangements of this kind were likely regular “trade” apprenticeships—private craft apprenticeships, open only to the relatives of established tradesmen, usually on the same social plane.⁵⁹ Even in these apprenticeships, the choices of most mothers and fathers were more practical in nature, reflecting concerns with the prospects for the long-term security of the occupation concerned, or with the reputation that it held in contemporary society.⁶⁰ But they could also vary wildly in quality, contingent on the particular trade concerned, the control that livery companies might exercise over apprenticeships, the individual master or mistress the child happened to be bound to, or the size of the premium the family was able to pay. Most parents paid £10 or £15 to place their children, but they received no guarantees about the quality of instruction, or even that the master would be able to stay in business for the duration of the agreement.⁶¹ Poorer families might also make these kinds of arrangements—often binding their children to local tradesmen, neighbours, or relatives, possibly for a nominal fee—but economics determined what was realistically available to them.⁶²

⁵⁸ See K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 228–319.

⁵⁹ Placements were sometimes sought out in the wider community by the children’s parents.

⁶⁰ Contemporary authors such as Mary Collyer and Daniel Defoe did write about the importance of selecting work placements that made children happy. See Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain*, 65–66.

⁶¹ Wealthy parents shelled out as much as £600 to place their children with eminent master. Although, even under these circumstances the relationship was still not necessarily congenial. Those entering medicine or the professions tended to have different career prospects and experiences than those in humbler occupations, but their placements operated in much the same way.

⁶² The fees for these apprenticeships were often only £5 to £8. See Payne, “Children of the Poor in London”, 179; Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 114.

The demographic transformations of the eighteenth century had a profound effect on the practice of apprenticeship. People migrated in increasing numbers to urban centres to find work—London’s population increased by as much as 500 percent, reaching a million people by 1801.⁶³ The numbers of children who survived infancy also grew—as many as a third of paupers in the second half of the eighteenth century were aged sixteen or below. These factors caused the population to balloon, straining the Poor Law system.⁶⁴ In attempt to cope, parochial provision was increasingly institutionalized in workhouses; parishes made relief dependant on the binding out of poor children, and aid would be withheld if requirements were not fulfilled.⁶⁵ As a consequence, unscrupulous Poor Law authorities used apprenticeship as a means of “disposing” of children who they feared might become a drain on the rates. Disabled children, bastard children, children from large families—anyone thought likely to become a burden on the ratepayers—were increasingly apprenticed by the parish.⁶⁶ Importantly, parish authorities who bound children out were keen to do so in parishes other than their own in order to relieve their community of the financial burden.⁶⁷ Even in the nineteenth century, Robert Blincoe’s memoirs

⁶³ From the late-1760s, local populations were also drained by large-scale transatlantic migration. See Helen Berry, *Orphans of Empire: The Fate of London’s Foundlings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 166.

⁶⁴ See Michael W. Flinn, *British Population Growth, 1750–1850* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 12–13; Michael Rose, *The English Poor Law 1780–1930* (Newton Abbot, Devon: David & Charles, 1971), 178.

⁶⁵ Alyssa Levene referred to the construction of “a network of entitlements and shifting burdens.” Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 42. Tim Wales, perhaps more generously, characterized the apprenticeships that resulted as a “means of transferring children from families which could not support them to families who could.” Tim Wales, “Poverty, Poor Relief and the Life-cycle: Some Evidence from Seventeenth-Century Norfolk”, in Richard M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-cycle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 376; House of Commons Papers, *Abstract of Answers and Returns Under Act for Taking Account of Population of Great Britain* (1801), 9.

⁶⁶ See Alysa Levene, “Parish Apprenticeship and the Old Poor Law in London”, *Economic History Review* 63:4 (2010), 918.

⁶⁷ In 1738, it was noted that “A most unhappy practice prevails in most places, to apprentice poor children, no matter to what master, provided he lives out of the parish, if the child serves the first forty days we are rid of him for ever.” Thomas Andrews, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Miseries of the Poor of England; ... By the author of, The dissuasive from party and religious animosities* (London, 1738), 43, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0104689233/ECCO?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-

recorded the jubilation of parish authorities, “Happy, no doubt, in the thought of transferring the burthen of the future support of fourscore young paupers to other parishes.”⁶⁸

With the passage of time, these kinds of arrangements would increasingly vary. The ages at which young people could begin apprenticeships dropped precipitously; although it had been required that apprentices be between ten and eighteen years old, legislation in 1698 reduced that allowable age to seven.⁶⁹ Some historians have suggested that this has been overemphasized, and they argue that the physical size of children tended to prescribe the ages at which any apprenticeship could realistically begin—younger children, after all, were likely to be a liability in any occupations requiring physical strength because those children would have difficulty completing even the most routine tasks. But in many of the placements arranged by the parish, authorities tended to make arrangements in less-skilled, more labour-intensive occupations—such as those at the textile factories—where there was a preference for younger workers who were believed to acquire the required skills more easily than adults.⁷⁰ Perhaps in recognition that this was an issue, it became mandatory for authorities to record children’s ages in parish apprenticeship indentures from 1708 onwards.⁷¹ The extreme youth of some pauper apprentices

[ECCO&xid=81d587de&pg=1](#). This means of transferring the settlement of paupers was fully provided by the act of 1691.

⁶⁸ Brown, *Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, 15.

⁶⁹ The Parish Apprentices Act of 1698, 9 & 10 Will 111 c. 14.

⁷⁰ Scholars also suggest that placements would not be made in most positions until children were mature enough to handle the requirements of the trade: milliners, mantua-makers, hairdressers, and other more skilled trades tended to prefer more sophisticated apprentices for their shops, so their terms often began in the middle or later period of the child’s teenage years. See Steve Hindle and Ruth Wallis Herndon, “Recreating Proper Families in England and North America: Pauper Apprenticeship in Transatlantic Context”, in Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray, *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 31; Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 3, 14–15; Heywood, *History of Childhood*, 125–26. Textile factories preferred to employ children as young as six or seven because they were assumed to be better able to adapt to new production methods.

⁷¹ Significantly, this was not consistently done before the end of the eighteenth century.

can be seen in abstracts of poor children in London collected by the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks at the end of the century (table 3.1; 3.2).⁷²

Table 3.1: Apprenticeships across Parishes, 1789

	Age when received in workhouse			Bound		
	under 2	under 8	under 14	under 12	under 14	Total
16 parishes without the walls	2	27	107	27	119	136
23 parishes within Middlesex and Surrey	12	55	245	22	239	312
10 Westminster parishes	33	123	470	169	457	626
Total for all parishes	47	205	822	218	815	1074

Source: Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks, *An Abstract of the Annual Registers of the Parish Poor (London, 1789)*.

Table 3.2: Apprenticeships across Parishes, 1798

	Age when received in workhouse			Bound		
	under 2	under 8	under 14	under 12	under 14	total
16 parishes without the walls	0	26	83	35	74	109
23 parishes within Middlesex and Surrey	7	39	218	114	150	264
10 Westminster parishes	14	31	121	75	91	166
Total for all parishes	21	96	422	224	315	539

Source: Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks, *An Abstract of the Annual Registers of the Parish Poor, from the Birth Until Apprenticed Out ... from the first day of January 1798, to the thirty-first day of December inclusive (London: Anne Rivington, 1799)*.

⁷² 2 & 3 Anne c. 6. The figures in the Abstracts for 1789 and 1798 show a conspicuously higher rate of early apprenticeships in Westminster than elsewhere. Although these figures might suggest an imperative to put girls into service quickly, Westminster was also notorious for outsourcing workhouse children to northern factories.

It is true that commentators like Hanway had argued for the benefits of early labour; but Hanway had also specified that

it should be considered how to make labor as pleasant, or to speak more to the heart, as little irksome as possible, and with a tender regard to the measure of a young person's strength of body or mind, [with] a judicious transition from the book to the loom, the spade, the hoe, the knitting-needle, etc.⁷³

Yet there were plenty of overseers who bound children out at tender ages without much discernible consideration of the arrangement at all. As early as 1732, an account of London workhouses noted that, “to save Expence, [overseers] are apt to ruin Children, by putting them out as early as they can, to any sorry Masters that will take them.”⁷⁴ In trades such as chimney sweeping, it has been argued that masters favoured young children precisely for their small size, which helped them to avoid being stifled, burned, or stuck in a chimney in the course of doing the job. In fact, throughout the industrial era the young were attractive to employers because their small hands could better operate the machinery of the factories, and—more importantly, perhaps—because they could be paid less than adults.⁷⁵

But apprentices placed by the parish could also be bound to a master for extremely long periods of time. If they were bound to the age of twenty-four (according to the requirements of the Statute of Artificers), the terms of children who were placed while they were still very young could be extremely protracted. Many decried what they saw as the “absurd tyrannical custom” of these long terms: Hanway argued that

⁷³ Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 87.

⁷⁴ *Account of Several Workhouses*, ix. It was not exactly a new stance: an early handbook for overseers advised that youth be apprenticed as soon as possible, “for as a twigge will best bend when it is greene, so children are fittest to be bound when they are young, otherwise by reason of their idle and base educations, they will hardly hold service: but as they have wavering and straying mindes, so they will have wandering and unstaidd bodies, which will sooner be disposed to vagrance than activitie, to idlenesse than to worke.” Anonymous, *An Ease for Overseers of the Poore* (London, 1601), <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A21081.0001.001>.

⁷⁵ Getting stuck in a chimney has a surprisingly long history: see Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 14–15.

times are altered from Queen Elizabeth's days; such young persons as these are not supposed to be placed out in employments of great trust, or great ingenuity. Such occupations may repay the servitude till twenty-four-and such apprenticeships ... [are] a species of slavery.⁷⁶

Hanway campaigned against the continued binding of apprentices by the parish for these durations, eventually succeeding in getting a clause inserted in the Act of 1767 for “the better regulation of the Parish Poor Children,” reducing apprenticeship terms to a maximum of seven years and limiting their upper range to the age of twenty-one.⁷⁷

In spite of these issues, apprenticeships did hold the promise of providing children with a measure of stability, securing their future, keeping them in employment, and limiting competition in certain trades by regulating the requirements of practicing them.⁷⁸ A good apprenticeship even made it possible for some people to rise in status, from gentry to trade, or from craft to profession.⁷⁹ But in an effort to maintain the social hierarchy, it needs to be emphasized that parish authorities continued the practice of apprenticeship long after private arrangements had begun to decline. Part of the reason for this lies in the potential of the institution when it came to fortifying the moral fibre of England. These arrangements could

⁷⁶ Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 109. See Patrick Wallis, referring to Adam Smith’s comments on English apprenticeship compared to its continental counterpart. Patrick Wallis, “Apprenticeship and Training in Premodern England”, *Journal of Economic History* 68:3 (2008): 832–61. Accessed May 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40056439>.

⁷⁷ Dorothy George suggested that these lengthy indentures had been established to rein in unruly older apprentices who had been able to fulfill the tasks of their work before the term of binding was over and had grown impatient to strike out on their own. Longer terms would also have been useful to parish authorities as a means of enforcing labour discipline and decreasing the burden on parish resources. See George, *London Life*, 240.

⁷⁸ This helped to protect wages and decreased overstocking in many trades, as well as providing welfare provisions for members and their dependents. Alysa Levene found a slightly raised proportion of 12- and 13-year-olds in her study of the St. Marylebone workhouse, which likely reflects children entering expressly to secure apprenticeships. Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 112.

⁷⁹ Realistically, these arrangements were often made from necessity rather than social ambition. In fact, rather than providing evidence of social mobility, it has been suggested that apprenticeships could sometimes indicate reduced family prosperity. See Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 2, 79–80.

foster habits of industry and discipline in poor children; more importantly, however, they could also keep them from turning to roguery and idleness, degenerating into a criminal subculture.⁸⁰

The Master

In all these arrangements, the qualities of a master could vary greatly. It should be said that some were decidedly not eager to take on apprentices; if their apprentice turned to vice or crime, after all, the blame largely fell on them. It was taken for granted that most children would be little more than an expense in the early stages of their apprenticeship because they needed constant supervision and were prone to ruin work during training. Some overseers thus offered a premium to masters to motivate them to take on parish children as apprentices.⁸¹

But they also imposed few requirements in order to be a master—likely to decrease the number of would-be masters who wanted to take apprentices but might be disqualified or dissuaded from doing so—and the problems this caused were well known. As early as 1700, it was said that

apprentices put out by a parish are frequently placed with poor, ill-natur'd or unskilful masters, who either force them from them by a bad maintenance and severity, before their times are out, or when they are out, send them from them but bunglers in their trade, or masters of such a one as will turn to no account.⁸²

⁸⁰ Hindle and Wallis Herndon, “Recreating Proper Families”, 70.

⁸¹ It was still cheaper to do so than to maintain the children in the workhouse. The premium paid by the parish was anywhere between £3 and £20 in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it has been suggested that the fee they paid would have been less than the average maintenance costs for a single year. See Tomkins, *Experience of Urban Poverty*, 186; Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700–1930* (London: Palgrave, 2002), 16; Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1926), 193. Overseers were empowered by a 1696 act to levy a penalty of £10 on ratepayers who refused to take a parish child as an apprentice, this was predictably unpopular: in practice, apprentices taken on reluctantly were often overworked or mistreated, and so many masters preferred to pay a fine rather than take on an unwanted apprentice that these fines became a regular and dependable source of revenue. 8 & 9 William c.30. Halifax raised £100 to £150 a year in this way. See Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 86.

⁸² *Some Thoughts Concerning the Maintenance of the Poor* (London, 1700), 12.
https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/U0100391730/MOME?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-MOME&xid=13a47ca2&pg=13.

There was rarely any inquiry into the suitability of masters before children were bound to them, nor was there usually any follow-up conducted during the term.⁸³ Joseph Collyer expressed the belief that “the grossest errors were frequently committed” in selecting masters, arguing that “for want of sufficient care in this particular, the unhappy youth is inevitably ruined.”⁸⁴

But there was a set of expectations of masters in wider society. Many contemporaries emphasized the “paternal” nature of the relationship that was expected, arguing that masters were to become the guardians of their apprentices, *in loco parentis*.⁸⁵ At the same time, there was no universal standard of provision that masters were required to adhere to. Although some responsibilities were laid out in the apprenticeship indenture—the expectation of providing “proper” food, as well as special clothing for holidays and at the end of the apprentice’s term of work—plenty of examples can be found where the master fell far short of these standards. There

⁸³ This remained true at the end of the century. As Colquhoun lamented: “Another cause of the increase of crimes, may be traced to the bad and immoral education of Apprentices to Mechanical employments. The force of such an example on young minds is obvious. —No sooner does an apprentice advance toward the last year of his time than he thinks it incumbent upon him to follow the example of his master, by learning to smoke. —This accomplishment acquired (according to his conception), he is a fit associate for those who frequent Public-houses. He resorts at first to those of a lower class, to avoid his master or his relations.—There he meets with depraved company; while he conceives he is following only the example of those whose manners and habits he has been taught, by example, to imitate, he is insensibly ensnared.—Having arrived at the age of puberty, and meeting profligate females in those haunts of idleness, his passions become inflamed.—The force of evil example overpowers him.—He too becomes depraved.—Money must be procured to administer to the new wants which are generated by depravity.—Aided by the facilities held out by Old Iron Shops, he pilfers from his master to supply those wants, or associates himself with Thieves, whose acquaintance he made in progress of his seduction.” Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (1800 edition), 314.

⁸⁴ Joseph Collyer, *The parent's and guardian's directory, and the youth's guide, in the choice of a profession or trade. Containing I. An Essay on the Education of the Tradesman and Mechanic. II. The Qualifications necessary for those designed for the Three Learned Professions. III. An Account of the several Trades and Mechanic Arts, digested in alphabetical Order: In which the Businesses omitted by other Authors are here inserted; the Qualifications necessary for each Trade are explained; the Sums given with Apprentices; the Wages of Journeymen; and the Sums required to set up Masters, are exhibited. IV. Advice to an Apprentice on his Behaviour while subject to his Master* (London, 1761), vi, Eighteenth Century Collections Online https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0117483294/ECCO?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=fda6a8a2&pg=6.

⁸⁵ Defoe insisted that the master “was a parent to the boy tho’ not a father,” and that he had “the duty of taking care of him, both soul and body.” Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor* (London, 1720), 209, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004844748.0001.001>. See Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 2–3.

were clear issues with both provisions and accommodations in the case of Sarah Wise (1729), who had been bound to Samuel Elwick of St. James Clerkenwell “to learn the art and mystery of a hair-twister.” Wise complained that during the preceding five years she had been expected to sleep in “a very small flock bed” with five others, “some at the foot and some at the head.” Her master “had only given her one stuff gown and one bays petticoat, and had not provided her with enough to eat so that she has had to beg bread from her neighbours.”⁸⁶

One common expectation was that masters would keep their apprentices off poor relief.

They were required to swear to

provide for the said Apprentice, that he be not any way a Charge to the said Parish, or Parishioners of the same; but of and from all Charge shall and will save the said Parish and Parishioners harmless and indemnified during the said Term.⁸⁷

It was expected that masters would raise their apprentices to become productive members of the community: in parish apprenticeships this often meant little more than pledging to keep children busy—in practice, some masters did not have enough work for their apprentices to honour that pledge.⁸⁸ Some misused apprentices as cheap labour without providing any semblance of training; some, fearing that their apprentices might grow to become trade rivals, neglected to teach them anything on which they could build their future.⁸⁹ Many of the more unscrupulous

⁸⁶ In this case, since Elwick was already confined in Newgate gaol for six months on unrelated charges, Wise was left destitute and was “turned into the wide world.” Discharged (February 1729/30, Calendar). Cited in George, *London Life*, Appendix IV: Apprenticeship Cases from the Middlesex Sessions Record, 419.

⁸⁷ William Toone, *A Practical Guide to the Duty and Authority of Overseers of the Poor with Full and Plain Directions to Them in the Execution of Their Office* (London, 1815), 70, The Making of the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/U0103306994/MOME?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-MOME&xid=1212e2ed&pg=78.

⁸⁸ Dorothy George argued that in these arrangements it was seldom pretended “that any industrial training was given or any future livelihood secured,” and that the institution became little more than the “legal sanction of child labour.” George, *London Life*, 224, 225.

⁸⁹ Certain trades were notorious for these abuses, with masters taking fees for apprentices that they knew full well that they could not support.

would simply abscond or end up on parish relief themselves once the money was spent.⁹⁰ One contemporary author commented that

the greatest part of those who now take poor apprentices are the most indigent and dishonest, in a word, the very dregs of the poor of England, by whom it is the fate of many a poor child, not only to be half-starved and sometimes bred up in no trade, but to be forced to thief and steal for his master, and so is brought up for the gallows into the bargain.⁹¹

Perhaps in recognition of this, failing to provide for an apprentice became an indictable offence. Law reporter William Salkeld recorded that the indictment in the case *R. v. Gould* stated that the defendant “*vi & armis* refused to provide for” the apprentice “put out ... to [him] pursuant to the statute.” Salkeld argued,

Since we allow the justices power to put out apprentices, we must allow an indictment for disobedience, either in case of not receiving, turning off, or not providing for such apprentice, as the law requires.⁹²

William Blackstone similarly emphasized the duties of parents and masters to provide for children’s “maintenance, their protection, and their education,” concluding that “the duty to educate cannot be seen in isolation from the duty to protect.”⁹³

Yet many apparently clear-cut cases of neglect throughout the century did not result in the discharge of apprentices or in any significant punishment of the masters. One of the most notorious of these was the case of Martin Browne, a clothier from Holbeck Lodge, Leeds. Browne had requested as many as fifty girls of the age of seven from the Foundling Hospital to work in his woolen textile factory at Ackworth in 1764, and he had promised to construct a new building for the purpose—117 feet long by 26 feet wide. He demanded high payments from the

⁹⁰ See Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 217.

⁹¹ Andrews, *Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Miseries of the Poor*, 43.

⁹² *R. v. Gould* (1704), 1 Salk. 381, 91 ER 332.

⁹³ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* Volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765–1770), 440.

London governors of the charity, receiving as much as £2000 in apprenticeship fees from parliament until news reached the capital that twenty-four of his apprentices had died of “putrid Fever,” twenty children were in a “perilous condition,” and over thirty more had been waylaid by overwork and starvation. In the face of the resulting scandal, Browne was summoned to a magistrate’s court in Leeds to account for these shortcomings but he insisted there had been nothing wrong with the provisions he had arranged. Incredibly, authorities found in Browne’s favour; despite these horrifying revelations, they ruled that the children should remain under their indentures.⁹⁴

But a master’s neglect could also shade into more clear-cut cases of physical abuse, and this seems to have been particularly true when children were bound out by the parish. It has been suggested that “biosocial risk factors” made these children especially vulnerable, whether they were poor, orphaned, or abandoned—they grew up surrounded by a culture of violence and routinely received cruel treatment.⁹⁵ Such children often lacked friends of any sort, and this made them particularly appealing to unscrupulous masters. Richard Morgan was one such pauper child, bound to an abusive master more than once in 1717. Apprenticed to Thomas Barker, a shoemaker in St. Giles, he was “evilily treated” by his master before he was released from his indentures and re-bound to Michael Beadle, another shoemaker of the same parish. This master,

⁹⁴ See Beatrice Scott, “Ackworth Hospital, 1757–1773”, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 61 (1989), 163–6, https://archive.org/stream/YAJ0611989/YAJ0611989_djvu.txt.

⁹⁵ Or all three. See Jill Korbin, “Child Abuse and Neglect: The Cultural Context” in Mary Edna Helfer, Ruth D. Kempe and Richard D. Krugman (eds.), *The Battered Child* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). See J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth Century England: The Shadow of our Refinement* (London: Routledge, 2004), 65–66.

too, “ill-used him,” but Morgan was freed again when Beadle was “arrested for debt and carried to Wood Street Compter, where he still remains unable to provide for his apprentice.”⁹⁶

Accounts suggest that this kind of abuse was widespread. The physical discipline of dependants had been commonplace for some time—likely since at least the Reformation, when the Catholic Church’s belief that baptism could free children from the burden of original sin gave way to the sterner Protestant belief that they could be saved by faith alone.⁹⁷ By 1733, commentators such as Samuel Johnson were pointing out the “dangerous” and “detestable” cruelties that were thus habitually “exercised in private families, under the venerable sanction of parental authority.”⁹⁸ But there has been some debate among scholars about the point at which that authority became cruelty in the eyes of eighteenth-century law.⁹⁹ In the case of apprentices and servants, immoderate violence was thought to be illogical, if not illegal, since there was little to be gained in treating a child so cruelly that they became incapable of work.¹⁰⁰ Dianne Payne has even suggested that abuse was much rarer than historiography might lead us to believe and

⁹⁶ Cited in George, *London Life*, 416. In 1738, the *Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Miseries of the Poor* argued matter-of-factly that “the master may be a tiger in cruelty, he may beat, abuse, strip naked, starve or do what he will to the poor innocent lad, few people take much notice, and the officers who put him out the least of anybody. For they rest satisfied with the merit of having shifted him off to a neighbouring parish for three or four pounds and the duty they owe to every poor child in the parish is no further laid to heart.” Andrews, *Enquiry into the Causes of the Encrease and Miseries of the Poor*, 43.

⁹⁷ Evil was presumed to be present even in legitimate newborns, and this was thought to cause the children’s bad behaviour. It was expected that Christian parents would respond to their offspring’s disobedience with correction and corporal punishment, and this continued in Puritan families after the Reformation. See Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 111; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 208–9; Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 3–4.

⁹⁸ Samuel Johnson, “The Cruelty of Parental Tyranny” *Gentleman’s Magazine; or Monthly Intelligencer*: No. XXVII, April 1733, <https://www.johnsonessays.com/the-rambler/no-148-the-cruelty-of-parental-tyranny/>.

⁹⁹ Some argued that the bounds of “reasonable” correction were limited by the monetary investment made in children. See Korbin, “Child Abuse and Neglect”, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Jane Humphries concluded that masters limited themselves to a kind of “casual brutality” employed mainly to “compensate for organizational failings” and “to maintain levels of concentration after terribly long hours.” Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, 246.

warns against focusing on it too strongly lest we lose sight of the bigger picture of how apprenticeship functioned.¹⁰¹

The fact is, surviving sources provide a disturbing number of instances where masters exceeded reasonable bounds, or where apprentices were seriously injured by their masters' actions. No shortage of cases can be found in court records, newspapers, pamphlets, or broadsheets, where the line between discipline and abuse was crossed.¹⁰² And these were likely a fraction of the actual occurrences of abuse, because of the broad cultural tolerance for violence in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society: physical conflict would have been thought to be an unexceptional experience—a routine part of social relationships.¹⁰³ Violence was an accepted element in the higher levels of power relations, most conspicuously through the “legitimate” judicial forms employed by the state in maintaining order.¹⁰⁴ Because of the diffusion of power in England, the responsibilities of punishment were widely dispersed, making employers responsible for disciplining their employees, husbands responsible for disciplining their wives, and parents and others with “lawful control or charge” responsible for disciplining their children, pupils, or apprentices.¹⁰⁵ Parents, teachers, and masters across the country were expected to

¹⁰¹ Payne argues that historiography has concentrated too narrowly on sources which focus on apprentices who broke the law or were victims, such as the Old Bailey sessions papers, and argues that too much attention has been directed toward the experiences of London's parish apprentices, using them to characterize the experiences of poor as a whole. See Payne, “Children of the Poor in London”, 172.

¹⁰² See Susan Dwyer Amussen, “‘Being Stirred to Much Unquietness’: Violence and Domestic Violence in Early Modern England”, *Journal of Women's History* 6:2 (1994), 76.

¹⁰³ See Smith, “Expanding the Compass”, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Historians have argued that the various corporal and capital penalties that came to comprise England's “Bloody Code” confirmed the legitimacy of violence for ordinary people, and this only encouraged its use as a means of expressing authority, maintaining discipline, or solving disagreements. See Susan Dwyer Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline and Power: The Social Meaning of Violence in Early Modern England”, *Journal of British Studies* 34 (1995), 1–34.

¹⁰⁵ Susan Dwyer Amussen argued that the diffusion of authority in this period promoted a degree of analogical thinking, which likened the family to a “little common-wealth” or “a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned.” See Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

employ physical correction not just for the good of their household, but because the insubordination of children had the potential to endanger the greater political order. Strict obedience was expected of children of all classes, therefore—even if it had to be maintained by physical force.

Abuse and the Limits of Lawful Correction

John Beattie showed that, although many instances of violent crimes can be found in the records of local authorities, others were never reported “because they were not thought to be illegal at all.”¹⁰⁶ In this case, most English people were convinced that fathers held an absolute authority over their family, grounded in his begetting of children; this was akin to that of the Roman *paterfamilias* and extended the power of life and death over wives, children, servants, and slaves.¹⁰⁷ The biblical notion that “he who spareth the rod hateth his son” was deeply embedded in many families, and whipping and flogging were commonplace methods for instilling morality in children.¹⁰⁸ As Richard Welton preached in a sermon early in the eighteenth century,

The Wise Man has advis'd us in another place, *not to withhold Correction from a Child*; and then he tells, us that *he shall not obey*: And the Son of *Syrach* has observ'd the Negligence of an Early Discipline to be of an Evil Consequence upon many accounts; which he has most excellently represented in the 30th of *Ecclus.* ver. 8. *An Horse*, says he, *not broken becometh headstrong; and a child left to himself will be wilful.* And he advises a little after; *Bow down his Neck whilst he is Young, leas't he wax stubborn, and be disobedient, and bring Sorrow to thy Heart*: So true is that of the Preacher in my text; *Foolishness is bound in the Heart of a Child: But the Rod of Correction shall drive it from him.*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Beattie argued, “Most confrontations in which physical force or intimidation was used in the resolution of conflicts did not give rise to legal actions ... such matters would have been regarded as private, not something that should normally engage the attention of the authorities.” J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660–1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 75–76.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen J. Pfohl, “The ‘Discovery’ of Child Abuse”, *Social Problems* 24:3 (1977), 310–11.

¹⁰⁸ Proverbs 13:24.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Welton, *The necessity and advantage of an early education. In a sermon preach'd in the parishchurch of St. Mary White-Chappel, on Sunday the 25th of November, 1705. Upon The Account of the Poor Children belonging to the Free School in the said Parish* (London, 1706), 2. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0122804609/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=7378c5bc&pg=1. Accessed 6 Dec. 2022.

In most trades, apprentices who spoiled work, were unruly, or were disobedient were similarly subject to physical discipline.¹¹⁰ Court proceedings do not suggest that there were any crafts that were particularly cruel, but it is clear from the records that survive that pauper apprentices were at a much higher risk of abuse than those from more prosperous families.¹¹¹ This should hardly be surprising: in many apprenticeship agreements the only real alternative to physical punishment seems to have been a reduction in wages—yet many paupers were not paid for their work in the first place. Parish apprentices were at the bottom of the employment ladder, bound to poorer, less-educated masters, who often treated apprentices the way they had been treated themselves. That said, some masters were criticized for not being strict enough. Before his execution in 1684, John Gower told the Ordinary of Newgate that his tendency to “mispend the Sabbath-days, which was the first Step to Ruine” was entirely the fault of “the Indulgence of his Master to whom he was Apprentice.”¹¹² William Shelton, hanged in 1739, similarly lamented that his “Master being in a bad State of Health, was not able to give me such Correction as was absolutely requisite for young Sparks in my Lax way of Living.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ J. H. Plumb thus wrote that “harsh” or “fierce parental discipline” was young people’s “common lot,” even while he described the eighteenth century as a “new world for children.” Plumb, “New World of Children”, 65. J. Carter Wood similarly argued that children who “grew up amidst a culture of violence” probably received cruel treatment as a matter of routine. Wood, 65–66.

¹¹¹ The extent and frequency of discipline was clearly status related. In more prosperous occupations, apprentices came with a substantial premium and there were incentives to treat them well; in less thriving trades, apprentices might be treated much more severely. See Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 227.

¹¹² Ordinary of Newgate, *Account*, 23 May 1684.

<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/images.jsp?doc=OA168405230004>. Also see the pauper biography of John Gower: <https://www.londonlives.org/static/GowerJohnExecuted1684.jsp>.

¹¹³ Ordinary of Newgate, *Account*, 9 October 1732, 14.

<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?name=OA17321009>. When Defoe was working as a journalist he put similar words into the mouth of Jack Sheppard, writing, “I believe if less Liberty had been allow’d me then, I should scarce have had so much Sorrow and Confinement after. My Master and Mistress with their Children were strict Observers of the Sabbath, but ‘tis too well known in the Neighbourhood that I had too great a Loose given to my evil Inclinations, and spent the Lord’s Day as I thought convenient.” Daniel Defoe, *A Narrative of All the Robberies*,

Although this suggests there were expectations about the *minimum* level of firmness a master might display, the *maximum* was another matter altogether—the limits of physical correction were not usually specified in apprenticeship indentures of the eighteenth century. But as literary critic Monica Flegel argued, instances of violence against children and dependents were rarely understood as criminal acts throughout this period. Like many other forms of violent interpersonal crime, the physical abuse of children was unlikely to give rise to legal action; young people were simply unlikely to be willing to seek help from authorities.¹¹⁴ In the cases where they were, the records show that abusive parents, guardians, and masters were only ever held legally liable in cases of the most serious nature. The mistreatment of apprentices was thus more likely to be regarded as a violation of the initial contract, rather than as an instance of criminal assault. Until at least the last quarter of the eighteenth century, penalties against abusive masters were usually limited to the loss of the apprentice's service and of their premium.

According to Matthew Hale, in England, wives, servants, apprentices, and children were all lawfully subject to physical correction, even if its administration caused their death. His *Pleas of the Crown*—originally written in the seventeenth century but first published in 1736—stated, “If a schoolmaster corrects his scholar, or a master his servant, or a parent his child, and by struggling or otherwise the child, or scholar, or servant dies, this is only per infortunum.”¹¹⁵ Hale

Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard, third edition (London, 1724),
<https://archive.org/details/narrativeofallro00shep/page/8/mode/2up>.

¹¹⁴ Flegel suggested that the issue was not that contemporaries lacked an understanding that children could experience cruelty, or even that allegations of cruelty were not believed by authorities: such treatment was just more likely to be conceptualized as a labour issue, as an education issue, or as a health issue, than as an issue of human rights. See Monica Flegel, *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England: Literature, Representation and the NSPCC* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 2, 4. Although some authorized masters to discipline their charges “saving only life and limb.” See Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 211.

¹¹⁵ Matthew Hale, *The History of the Pleas of the Crown* (London, 1736), 1: 473; Old Bailey Proceedings, T1736O610-32, James Durant <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t17360610-32&div=t17360610-32>.

clarified, of course, that “this is to be understood, when it happens only upon *moderate* correction.”¹¹⁶

The notion of “moderation” would be held up as a caveat to the right of correction throughout the following century. Richard Welton made this distinction in a sermon on the limits of reasonable discipline in 1705:

*By the Rod of Correction is to be understood, not an immoderate Chastisement inflicted, as some distinguish, with a blind and imprudent Rage, without that Moderation and Discretion which the Tenderness of those Years requires: But it is that Modest Discipline which gently does Inform, and put into the Mind good Principle and Instruction... by nipping them in the Bud, and gently restraining the looser Passions in our tender Years, there is a fair prospect, by the Grace of God, that Foolishness is not so bound up in the corrupted Heart, but by this means vicious Nature may be check'd into a better Disposition.*¹¹⁷

Where exactly the threshold of “moderation” lay, remained a matter of interpretation. The death of a child or an apprentice was sometimes taken seriously by the courts, but it could just as often go completely unpunished, not least because of the various distinctions between excusable and inexcusable forms of homicide in this period.¹¹⁸

William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69), reasoned that *all* homicide is malicious, and of course amounts to murder, *unless* where justified by the command or permission of the law; excused on a principle of accident or self-preservation; or alleviated into manslaughter.¹¹⁹

Parental discipline was thus considered to be theoretically a lawful act, and offenders often similarly pleaded that they were simply exercising their paternal authority and administering due

Offenders who plead that they were only administering due correction in this way were often acquitted, as in 1736, when a ribbon-weaver named James Durant was acquitted for the murder of his apprentice—“a very little boy” of thirteen or fourteen—whom he had brutally beaten with a mopstick. In 1748, Elizabeth Dickens was similarly acquitted for the murder of her apprentice by beating and ill treatment, even though evidence was given that she had previously sworn to kill her. Cited in George, *London Life*, 231.

¹¹⁶ Hale, *History of the Pleas of the Crown*, 1:472–74.

¹¹⁷ Welton, *Necessity and advantage of an early education*, 2–3.

¹¹⁸ Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England*, 246.

¹¹⁹ Blackstone. *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 201, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=Wn7PPtzK86kC&lpg>. Emphasis added.

correction to their apprentices or servants. Yet Blackstone made it clear that he understood parental correction to be a “limited power for the child’s benefit and education.” He thought that a parent required sufficient power “to keep the child in order and obedience,” but insisted that they could only “lawfully correct the child, being under age, *in a reasonable manner*; [provided that] this is for the benefit of his education.”¹²⁰ Many commentators argued that household authority had definite limits and was grounded in a common sense of humanity. To this end, Samuel Johnson commented that the ancient Romans had only “allowed every man the supreme judicature in his own house, and put the lives of his offspring into his hands” because they had “imagined... that no father could be cruel to his child.”¹²¹ Hanway similarly argued that the notion of power over dependents was naturally limited, because “the laws of humanity are prior to all *political institutions* and no *good law* can be founded in *cruelty*, and the destruction of the species.” He maintained that the authority of a parent or a master was based on the presumption “that he is a *man*, not a *monster*.”¹²²

The fact is the “laws of humanity” could be extraordinarily subjective in practice. Court records suggest that random or excessive violence by the head of the household was tolerated less often as the century wore on, but the boundaries of “acceptable” discipline and punishment were poorly defined, which left a lot of room for abuse to occur. The law’s lack of clarity caused

¹²⁰ Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 542, [https://en.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Page: William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* \(3rd ed, 1768, vol_I\). djvu/468](https://en.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:William_Blackstone,_Commentaries_on_the_Laws_of_England_(3rd_ed,_1768,_vol_I).djvu/468).

¹²¹ Samuel Johnson, *Gentleman’s Magazine; or Monthly Intelligencer* No. XXVII, April 1733.

<http://www.johnsonessays.com/the-rambler/no-148-the-cruelty-of-parental-tyranny/>

¹²² Jonas Hanway, “Letter to a Governor of the Hospital” (London, 1759), 12, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=NH1bAAAAQAAJ&pg=RA1-PA1&lpg=RA1-PA1&dq=Jonas+Hanway,+”Letter+to+a+Governor+of+the+Hospital”&source=bl&ots=bOj-W7-Mgi&sig=ACfU3U3EgpBAyH0QQtOs9csmrFlteeVQ4g&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiSqt-P2cJyAhUSB50JHZGED9sQ6AF6BAgCEAM#v=onepage&q=that%20he%20is%20a%20man%2C%20not%20a%20monster&f=false>. Emphasis in original.

continued problems in trying cases of abuse: for many offenders, pleading that they were administering due correction was enough to secure their acquittal. But for others, the line between correction and abuse increasingly depended on “proof of malice.” It was suggested that this might be measured by degree, “where a parent or master corrects a child in a savage and barbarous manner”—meaning the child died through obviously harsh and excessive treatment rather than by misfortune or accident. In turn, intent was often determined by the instrument used for the act: most commentators agreed that the use of an implement “likely to cause death” was clear evidence of malice.¹²³ Hale cited a case tried at Norwich assizes in 1670 to this end, writing, “If the correction be with an unfit instrument (as with a bar of iron, or a sword, or a great cudgel, or too outrageous) then it is murder.”¹²⁴ This principle had been applied in the case *Rex v. Grey*—originally tried by Chief Justice Wilde at the Old Bailey Sessions on October 10, 1666—when a blacksmith named John Grey was indicted for the murder of his servant, William Golden, who had failed to mend “certain stamps... belonging to his trade” and was fatally struck with a bar of iron in consequence.¹²⁵ As it happens, Grey had threatened his servant “that if he would not serve him he should serve in Bridewell”; when Golden replied that “he had as good serve in Bridewell,” he sent Grey into a rage, whereby Grey struck the boy dead “without any other provocation.” Significantly, it was ruled that “if the provocation be by words or gestures

¹²³ Simon Greenleaf, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, volume 3 (Boston, 1899 edition), 143, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/A_Treatise_on_the_Law_of_Evidence/iRU-AAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1. Michael Foster, *A Report of Some Proceedings on the Commission of Oyer and Terminer and Goal Delivery for the Trial of the Rebels in the Year 1746 in the County of Surry, and of other Crown Cases. To Which are Added Discourses upon a few Branches of the Crown Law* (London, 1762), 262; Hale, *History of the Pleas of the Crown*, 1:474; John Kelyng, *Kelyng's Crown Cases* (London, 1792), 64.

¹²⁴ “The master struck a child, that was his apprentice, with a great staff, of which it died.” Kelyng, 64, 133. 84 ER 1084; Hale, *The History of the Pleas of the Crown*, 1:473–74.

¹²⁵ The jury found a special verdict because they could not determine whether this case was murder; John Kelyng brought the case to the other justices of the King’s Bench, however, as well as to Lord Bridgeman, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and all were of the opinion that this was an open-and-shut case. Cited in Greenleaf, 143.

only, and the stroke be with a lethal weapon, or in a manner likely to kill,” it was evidence of malice.¹²⁶

This ruling on provocation served as a guide in many subsequent legal cases, but masters who killed their servants through what was seen as “proper correction” with a “reasonable” instrument continued to be convicted of a lesser, clergyable offence, rather than murder.¹²⁷ Similarly, in the case of a death caused by punishment “with a cudgel or other thing *not* likely to kill, though improper for the purpose of correction,” it was usually judged to be manslaughter instead of murder. Thus in the case *Rex. v. Turner*, a master killed his apprentice by hitting him with one of the clogs the apprentice had neglected to clean: the act was held to be manslaughter “because the master could not, from the size of the instrument he had made use of, have had any intention to take away the boy’s life.”¹²⁸ In *Rex. v. Wiggs*, when an apprentice let some sheep escape, his master fatally struck him with a stake from the ground in response: although the master’s response was clearly inappropriate, the apprentice’s death was held to be manslaughter because the result of the master’s action was arguably unforeseeable.¹²⁹

There were plenty of cases that were less clear-cut. A special verdict was found in the case of *Rex. v. Hazel* when a girl of ten was struck dead by a stool thrown at her by her stepmother, Sarah Hazel. Hazel had employed her stepdaughter “to reel some yarn.” When the

¹²⁶ See Greenleaf, 143. John Comyns later cited this same case to argue that the law presumes malice whenever a man is provoked “only by indecent words: as, if a master kill his apprentice that answers him saucily.” John Comyns and Anthony Hammond, *A Digest of the Laws of England* (London, 1825 edition), 3:603, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/_/R2YyAAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

¹²⁷ Such as manslaughter. See Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 80–81.

¹²⁸ Foster, 262.; *R. v. Turner* (1666), an Old Bailey case cited by Lord Holt and recorded in *Rex v. Keate*, Skinner 557, 90 ER 667; Comberbach 407, 90 ER 557; Holt, K.B. 481, 90 ER 1165; 1 Lord Raymond 138, 91 ER 989; and 1 Comyns 13, 92 ER 934. Also see Edward Hyde East, *A Treatise of Pleas of the Crown* (London, 1803), 261, https://books.google.ca/books/about/A_Treatise_of_the_Pleas_of_the_Crown.html?id=8HoDAAAQAAJ&redir_esc=y.

¹²⁹ *Rex. v. Wiggs* (1785), 168 ER 287.

child botched the job Hazel threw the stool, which “struck her [stepdaughter] on the right side of the head, on the temple, and caused her death soon afterwards.”¹³⁰ Because of the nature of the instrument involved, the case was considered to be unusual: a stool was obviously large and heavy enough to be fatal, but it seemed unlikely that Hazel could have intended for that result when she threw it. According to Sir John Leach, who reported on the case, the law made this matter so complex that the judges never delivered an opinion at all.

The discussion in these treatises helped to eventually refine the judicial concept of “cruelty,” which emerged as the point in physical punishment at which “moderate” or “reasonable” correction became assault or battery, although English law continued to hold that such judgements “must in all cases depend upon the circumstances of the case.”¹³¹ Opinions on acceptable levels of correction continued to be published: Blackstone’s notion that correction should only be conducted “in a reasonable manner” was extended explicitly to master and servant law by “A Gentleman of the Inner Temple” in 1767, who suggested that a master was only permitted to correct and punish his servant “in a reasonable Manner for abusive Language, Neglect of Duty or other Misbehaviour, *so it be done with Moderation.*”¹³² The discipline used to enforce industriousness could vary in intensity, particularly when it came to the gender, or to the social status of the apprentices concerned.¹³³

¹³⁰ *Rex. v. Hazel* (1785), 168 ER 287.

¹³¹ Llewellyn Archer Atherley-Jones, Hugh Hale Leigh Bellot, “Cruelty to Children and Young Persons”, in *The Law of Children and Young Persons* (London: Butterworth, 1909), 83, https://books.google.ca/books/about/Law_of_Children_and_Young_Persons_in_Rel.html?id=0cpEzQEACAAJ&redir_esc=y.

¹³² Blackstone, 1:422; A Gentleman of the Inner Temple, *Laws Concerning Master and Servant* (London, 1767), 126, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/xtahpk35>. Emphasis added.

¹³³ “The parallel was with other household members living under the rule of a patriarchal head, including wives and other servants, not just apprentices.” Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 205.

The court cases above thus only represent a fraction of the violent treatment young people received throughout the period: overseers rarely intervened in any situation that they thought might result in their parish having to resume responsibility for the children. Only the most extreme cases—a master who lost his “reason,” who gained pleasure from administering punishment, or who intentionally brought about his apprentice’s death—led to the cancellation of indentures and the punishment of masters.¹³⁴

But sensational cases of this kind also appeared in the pages of the newspaper press, and these incidents took discussions on acceptable correction from the realm of legal theory and extended them to the general public.¹³⁵ A handful of these disputes became high-profile criminal cases, and these ultimately raised questions about the limits of lawful physical correction for children and apprentices.

Compulsion, Governmentality, and Agency

In apprenticeship arrangements, local authorities enjoyed considerable power over the poor since at least the passage of the apprenticeship clauses of the Statute of Artificers in 1563. Those clauses enabled justices to compel the binding of the offspring of paupers, vagrants, or those “overburdened with children” to “manage” the demographics of the parish. In fact, the original legislation stated that anyone under the age of twenty-one “refusing to be an apprentice and to serve in husbandry or any other kind of art, mystery or science” might be imprisoned until they agreed to do so. In 1597 and 1601, the Acts for the Relief of the Poor extended that control,

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660–1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹³⁵ The debate surrounding the case of Elizabeth Brownrigg likely helped to change the conduct of parents and masters by making discipline a public rather than private concern.

giving authorities the power to bind out any pauper children below fourteen that they saw “convenient.”¹³⁶ This was still thought to be necessary later in the seventeenth century, when Matthew Hale wrote that

The want of a due Provision for Education and Relief of the Poor in a way of Industry, is that which fills the Gaols with Malefactors, and fills the Kingdom with idle and unprofitable Persons, that consume the Stock of the kingdom without improving it, and that will daily increase even to a Desolation in time: And this Error in the first Concoction is never remediable but by gibbets and whipping.¹³⁷

It was accepted that children who failed to follow an order into an apprenticeship should be sent to a house of correction or to a workhouse, and relief could be withheld altogether until they complied. Coercive practices like these were regularly employed through to the nineteenth century. As an anonymous commentator wrote in 1814:

However ill the practice of a trade may agree with the health, the ability, or the inclination of an apprentice: whether his mind is directed for further study of another, by a riper understanding, which would render him more competent to excel in it; or whether, by the loss of a limb he is disabled from pursuing the first two which is placed; by that and that alone he must abide: he is, in the one case, as irretrievably fixed in that trade, as if he belonged to one of the Castes of India; in the other he has no alternative; he must starve!¹³⁸

Allison and Adrian James pondered whether the officially sanctioned physical discipline and compulsion of children in the eighteenth century might have been part of a “process of governmentality.”¹³⁹ When he defined the term, Michel Foucault was referring more to non-violent surveillance and social mapping than to physical correction, but it is possible that the levels of tolerance in governmentality of the English were such that violence was never denied as an option. It was nonetheless clear that philanthropists and authorities of government in England

¹³⁶ 5 Elizabeth I. This required the consent of two justices.

¹³⁷ Hale, *Discourse Touching Provision for the Poor*.

¹³⁸ Anonymous, *The Origin, Object and Operation of the Apprentice Laws* (1814), https://www.google.ca/books/edition/The_Origin_Object_and_Operation_of_the_A/uM96MwEACAAJ?hl=en

¹³⁹ James and James, 36–37.

were also increasingly seeking “to map and co-ordinate human resources for the purposes of social engineering” in response to the ongoing hostilities with France. These measures can be viewed as part of a host of new strategies adopted by the British state for managing its resources and augmenting its competitive capacity in response to the crises provoked by the gin craze, demobilization, and the uncertainties that followed war.¹⁴⁰ These measures, significantly, were principally targeted toward the lower classes: they aimed to stimulate the reproductive capacity of the nation, yes, but they also sought to keep the poor at work, promoting what was seen as suitable habits of industry and virtue.¹⁴¹ John Brewer pointed out that although these intents were not openly espoused by politicians of the era, “the growth in state activity ... was ... a prominent (and worrying) feature of the English polity after 1688.”¹⁴² It is clear that prevailing anxieties about idle children and related concerns with “moulding” the population helped advocates to propose and support labour training and placement schemes throughout the period: projects were put forward that had the express purpose of disciplining and moralizing the poor.¹⁴³

Many of these, significantly, involved the institution of apprenticeship: contemporaries often described indentures as “Yokes of Servitude.” Some historians have fixed on these statements as evidence of the coercive nature of the practice. Dorothy George painted a picture of apprenticeship that still dominates most accounts: vulnerable, exploited children, bound to

¹⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality”, in James Faubion (ed.), *Power* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 201–22.

¹⁴¹ See Nicholas Rogers, *Mayhem: Post-War Crime and Violence in Britain, 1748–53* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 216.

¹⁴² Although Nick Rogers argued that “mid-eighteenth-century contemporaries lacked the infrastructural capacity and necessary expertise” to actualize these kinds of broad changes. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688–1783* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 224; Rogers, *Mayhem*, 216.

¹⁴³ Alyssa Levene argued that this helped in “cementing [children’s] connection with profit and productivity”, and by these means, it was believed that they could be raised in ways that developed habits of industry, discipline, and morality. Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 7. Also see Innes, “Prisons for the poor”, 241.

disagreeable trades, often subject to neglect or abuse.¹⁴⁴ Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt similarly sketched a picture of an institution that developed as a preventative measure during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, and which subsequently concerned itself with inculcating a sense of moral probity and self-reliance in the young.¹⁴⁵ The historical records support their suggestions that the institution of apprenticeship ultimately offered parish authorities a means of “reshaping” poor households—tackling the economic problems that faced impoverished families, certainly, but also ensuring that young people were raised in environments that conformed to the approved ideals of suitability. Of course, a substantial number of poor households did not reflect the ideal of the nuclear family that was emerging among the English middle class—a high proportion of illegitimate children ended up in the workhouse, and this can be seen in the abstracts of poor children collected by the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks in 1789 and 1798 (table 3.3; 3.4). This was particularly the case in the central City parishes, which might reflect the vigilance of settled bourgeois and artisanal parishes in dealing with the irregular births of servants or especially vulnerable families.¹⁴⁶

Table 3.3: Illegitimate Workhouse Entries across Parishes, 1789

97 parishes within the walls	33/126	26%
16 parishes without the walls	259/1608	16%

¹⁴⁴ *London Magazine*, 21 (1752), 220–23; Dunlop and Denman, *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour*, 248–60; George, *London Life*, 224, 225. However, see Paul Slack, *Poverty and policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988), 192; Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 74–79.

¹⁴⁵ “...since the vagrant normally had no trade, his child must be trained in one so that he might be kept from poverty and vagabondage.” Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 224.

¹⁴⁶ Illegitimacy ratios in workhouses were high compared to proportions found in other studies of London parishes over time. Abstract of parish poor entered and registered for select London parishes for year 1789. See Nicholas Rogers, “Carnal Knowledge: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century Westminster”, *Journal of Social History* 23 (1989): 355–75; Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Vol. 1: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Also see Tim Hitchcock, “Redefining sex in eighteenth-century England”, *History Workshop Journal*, 41 (1996) 72–90; Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: a history of the first sexual revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

23 parishes within Middlesex and Surrey	343/2811	12%
10 Westminster parishes	348/2577	13.5%
Total	983/7122	13.8%

Source: Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks, *An Abstract of the Annual Registers of the Parish Poor* (London, 1789).

Table 3.4: Illegitimate Workhouse Entries across Parishes, 1798

97 parishes within the walls	28/106	26.4%
16 parishes without the walls	223/1393	16%
23 parishes within Middlesex and Surrey	413/3383	12%
10 Westminster parishes	242/3303	17.3%
Total	906/8185	11%

Source: Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks, *An Abstract of the Annual Registers of the Parish Poor, from the Birth Until Apprenticed Out ... from the first day of January 1798, to the thirty-first day of December inclusive* (London: Anne Rivington, 1799).

Binding children out allowed the state to control exactly what a “proper” household would look like: eighteenth-century authorities reshuffled pauper families, considering their own choices of masters as more suitable guardians than children’s biological parents.¹⁴⁷ Children, importantly, were also recognized to have a concrete value in relation to their future potential: they thus became attractive as objects of assistance, not just because of what they represented, but for what they promised to become.¹⁴⁸ Contemporaries thus came to view children as a national resource that had to be protected: lifting the young poor out of poverty and putting them on the path to independence in this way had become an investment in the human capital of

¹⁴⁷ Masters acted as the agents of local officials because they were thought to be better able to impose the desired kind of discipline, helping to whip the children of the poor into shape and preparing them for a “useful” adulthood. Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray, “‘A Proper and Instructive Education’: Raising Children in Pauper Apprenticeship” in *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2009), 7, 12.

¹⁴⁸ Children were the group thought to be the most likely to respond to what Martin Wiener termed the emerging “discourse of character.” See Wiener, 1–91. Also see Leon Radzinowicz *A History of English Criminal Law* (London, 1948–86), volume 3, 141–207; volume 4, 1–104. See *London Magazine*, 21 (1752), 220–23; Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 10.

Britain. But attempting to keep poor children employed and off the streets represented an effort on the part of local authorities to control it.¹⁴⁹

Despite these efforts to control poor children, it is important to note that young people were not entirely without power or voice in the transition to apprenticeship. Negotiating their placements may have been a far more flexible part of the apprenticeship process than English historiography has often allowed, with a more complex interplay of power between parents, masters, overseers, and apprentices. Lynn Hollen Lees has pointed out that the adult poor exercised choice in deciding whether to apply for poor relief, and it seems reasonable to assume that their children might also have been able to manipulate the parochial system to their advantage.¹⁵⁰ Many children were able to pursue their own strategies for survival: although they were subject to the authority of adults, it is clear that they too had some degree of agency. This is nowhere more evident than in the unique power dynamic presented by parish apprenticeship. Some children were able to use the bureaucratic mechanisms of inspections by local officials to bring attention to themselves or to the neglect, cruelty, or abuse they were suffering. It has been suggested that apprentices and servants found a relatively sympathetic audience among magistrates and other authorities, and some recent studies of apprenticeship have focused on legal documents as an illustration of the routes that many took to end their indentures. As of 1747, apprentices were able to complain to magistrates in the event of abuse, as long as the premium paid for their training was less than £5, and this could lead to the cancellation of their indentures if their complaint was upheld. In the interests of covering a larger proportion of the

¹⁴⁹ See King, "Rise of Juvenile Delinquency", 158; Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*; Alys Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 10; Alys Levene, "Parish Apprenticeship and the Old Poor Law", 919.

¹⁵⁰ Lees, 37–38.

apprentices who had been bound out, further legislation in 1760 increased the upper limit for this manner of redress to £10.¹⁵¹ The issue is—although apprentices from other classes may have had the resources and the knowledge to take advantage of the law—these measures were simply unlikely to have figured into the survival strategies of pauper children, who lacked the financial wherewithal, the education, the friends, or the advocates to help present their case in that venue.¹⁵² Moreover, in a patriarchal and hierarchical society like eighteenth-century England, these children realistically had little power: in fact, they were among the least powerful members of the community, “belonging” first to their parents and then to their masters. As orphans, bastards, or abandoned children, many came from tenuous family situations; others had parents that were ill, drunken, or abusive. Some were members of very large families that were unable to afford the cost of provision; others were members of desperate single-parent families or were entirely “friendless,” which left them especially vulnerable to compulsion. All these children were placed into new, unfamiliar situations, and consideration was rarely given to their

¹⁵¹ “Although the master could keep the premium paid with them, which was a gift to unscrupulous masters seeking to be rid of an apprentice on spurious grounds.” See Peter King, “The Summary Courts and Social Relations in Eighteenth-Century England”, *Past and Present* 183:1 (2004): 142, 148; Douglas Hay and Paul Craven (eds.), *Masters, Servants and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill and London, 2004), 64, 65, 71, 77, 92–94, 197; Wallis, “Labour, Law and Training”, Working Papers, London School of Economics Research Online (2011), <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/41172/1/WP154.pdf>; Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 213; Jane Humphries, “English Apprenticeship: A Neglected Factor in the First Industrial Revolution”, in Paul A. David and Mark Thomas (eds.), *The Economic Future in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁵² The problem was so well recognized that in 1747 legislation was passed (20 Geo. 2. c. 19) with the intention of addressing this problem, allowing apprentices to complain to local justices “concerning any Misusage, Refusal of necessary Provision, Cruelty or Ill-Treatment.” Even still, lower-class children remained unlikely plaintiffs. See Thomas Walter Williams, *The Farmer's Lawyer: Containing the Whole Law, in Regard to Agricultural Possessions, Properties and Pursuits* (London, 1819). <https://books.google.ca/books?id=-19jAAAACAAJ>. Also see King, “Summary Courts and Social Relations”, 142, 148; Patrick Wallis, “Labour, Law and Training in Early Modern London: Apprenticeship and the City’s Institutions”, *Economic History working papers* 154/11. Department of Economic History, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK, 2011.

individual inclinations or characters in putting them there. Despite the convictions of officials, these situations were often little better than the ones that children left behind.¹⁵³

Education for the young poor was still quite restricted in this period, and this meant that the choices available to them in life afterwards would also have been limited. But surviving evidence suggests that poor children were occasionally able to speak up on their own behalf. In London, appeals on issues regarding the relationships between masters and apprentices were made to the City Chamberlain, and then to the Lord Mayor's Court, where Patrick Wallis has argued that apprentices secured "near automatic exits from their indentures," as well as "a share of their premium, reflecting faults and time served." He suggested that between 3 and 8 percent of apprentices were able to receive court discharges in this way, and that contract dissolution was made deliberately easy in London to reduce the risks of apprenticeship for masters and to facilitate the City's rapid expansion.¹⁵⁴ But it should be emphasized that this freedom did *not* reflect the experience of those that were bound out by the parish. This is perhaps best illustrated by the memoirs of Robert Blincoe—one of the few examples of working-class biography available for this period—in which Blincoe talked about resolving to abscond from his apprenticeship in Lowden, near Nottingham, and begging his way to London,

¹⁵³ Perry Anderson cautioned against relying on experience alone to assess the agency of the working class because such experiences are themselves mediated by the very structures that define class relations. In this case, even the choice to accept poor relief or to enter the workhouse for a period—usually a voluntary decision for financially-challenged adults—was not freely made by children, who tended to require help as a consequence of their parents' circumstances rather than their own, or as a result of the compulsion of officials to conform to a particular model of childhood. See Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism*, chapter 2 (16–58) for more about the very real limitations on individual agency, especially in comparison to E. P. Thompson's critique of functional determinism. By contrast, some scholars have suggested that ideas about "governmentality" have tended to neglect individual power and agency: see Simon Gunn, "From Hegemony to Governmentality: Changing Conceptions of Power in Social History", *Journal of Social History* 39:3 (2006), 705–20; Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 226; Wallis Herndon and Murray, 14.

¹⁵⁴ Wallis, "Labour, law and training", 3; Brown, *Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, 52–55.

to lay his case before the overseers and churchwardens of Saint Pancras, [to] not only claim redress of injuries, but the fulfilment of the grand promises that had been made to him.¹⁵⁵

Although he dreamed of his escape, Blincoe was not successful in his attempts to flee and never managed to take his story to anyone in a position of authority. From his descriptions alone, it seems unlikely that many other children bound outside the capital would have an easier time making complaints. It seemed the chances of apprentices had of receiving redress decreased the further away they were bound by the registering authority.

Even if they were unable to take advantage of the legal protections that were available to better-off children, it is clear that poor children were not necessarily just passive recipients of relief. Even in the workhouse, children exercised choice, deciding whether they would cooperate with parish authorities; young people might see parents or other adults refusing to work, arguing with officials about what they viewed as their rights. These children might express their own opinions, make their own choices, or otherwise defy the system in which they found themselves. The remainder of this chapter explores some of the ways in which institutional support figured into the survival strategies adopted by the young poor in this spirit—principally through the admissions and discharge records of workhouses in greater London parishes—documents that can help to illuminate the choices poor children in London made in the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Brown, *Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, 23.

¹⁵⁶ Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–99. A transcription of the records was made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003 and has been made available online. See Peter Higginbotham, “The Workhouse”, <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Chelsea/Chelsea1743.shtml>. Information was also consulted in tables provided by Nick Rogers. St. Martin-in-the-Fields information was drawn from St. Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Admission and Discharge Registers, P74/LUK/110, March 1743–July 1769, and P74/LUK/111, January 1782–December 1801, also consulted in the St. Martin-in-the-Fields Pauper Biographies Project, St-Martin-in-the-Fields Workhouse Register, 1725–1819, *London Lives*, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div0Type=smdswhrFile&decade=174>, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div0Type=sldswhrFile&decade=175>, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div0Type=sldswhrFile&decade=176>.

Pauper Apprenticeship and the Records of the Workhouse

We can get a clearer picture on the operation of the institution of apprenticeship by examining some of the workhouse records we looked at in the previous chapter in greater detail. The register of admissions and discharges for St. Luke Chelsea only survives for the periods 1743 to 1769, and 1782 to 1799: in total, 4352 total entries survive over these time spans. Of these, 1412 can be identified as the records of inmates of sixteen or under—an appropriate age range for apprenticeship in this period.¹⁵⁷ By aggregating names in these registers, it is suggested that we can make more confident judgements about the variety of ways that the average child used these institutions, but this method admittedly has some of the same limitations as prosopographical studies since recurring names might represent multiple individuals. Like older users of the workhouse, it appears that many children entered and left multiple times. In some cases, this was obviously not by choice: they were rejected by their masters as unsuitable and sent back to the workhouse from whence they came. Ten of the St. Luke Chelsea entries thus record masters' comments that the children "would not doo," while two more indicated that the children that had been sent to them were "not fit to be bound." But there are also indications that, at times, the poor children concerned did the rejecting themselves, ensuring that they were returned to the workhouse because they "did not like" their placements.

In fact, many used the phrase "on liking"—an expression used throughout the eighteenth century in English literature, suggesting that something was on trial or subject to approval.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799.

¹⁵⁸ When Polly secretly marries the highwayman Captain Macheath in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, Peachum asks her, "Are you really bound wife to him, or are you only upon liking?" John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (London, 1728). Act I, Scene 8.

Charles Dickens defined it in *Oliver Twist; or, the Parish Boy's Progress* (initially published in serial from 1837 to 1839) as a kind of probationary period during which,

if the master finds, upon a short trial, that he can get enough work out of a boy without putting too much food into him, he shall have him for a term of years, to do what he likes with.¹⁵⁹

This description suggests that liking was a probationary period that was applied to parish apprenticeships for the benefit of reluctant masters: Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt described liking as a provisional period of six weeks “to ensure the suitability of the [apprenticeship] arrangement.”¹⁶⁰ But it has been suggested that the practice also provided an opportunity for parish apprentices to exercise a veto on the circumstances in which they found themselves—either by objecting to, or by making themselves objectionable to, an unacceptable master.¹⁶¹

One example of this can be seen in the records pertaining to Amelia Wingate, who was born in St. Luke Chelsea workhouse on December 28, 1783. Although Wingate is recorded as being taken out by her mother May 30, 1784, she returned November 25, 1784; she remained in the institution for nine years—until June 7, 1793—when she was sent out on trial for the first time “in the five fields.”¹⁶² Wingate returned to the workhouse just twenty days later, however, on June 27, 1794, saying that she “did not like” her place. She left the workhouse again on September 12 to live in Westminster, but she returned “out of place” just four days later. She left

¹⁵⁹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 26. Images of the serial publication in *Bentley's Miscellany* (1837–39) can be found at <https://omeka.lehigh.edu/exhibits/show/dickens/reviews/bentleys>. The story first appeared as a three-volume book in 1838: Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist; or, the Parish Boy's Progress* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838).

¹⁶⁰ Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 194.

¹⁶¹ Alysa Levene, “Children, Childhood and the Workhouse: St. Marylebone, 1769–1781”, *London Journal* 33:1 (March 2008): 41–59.

¹⁶² Until it was developed in the early 19th century, the Central London residential area now known as Belgravia, which incorporated parts of the City of Westminster as well as the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, was referred to as “the Five Fields.” At that time, it was a series of fields used for grazing, but it was also a notorious criminal haunt.

yet again to a Mr. Corner, on Tufton Street in Westminster—but records show that she was brought back to the workhouse by the Committee on November 18 of that year. She was sent on liking a fourth time to a place on Jarman Street in Westminster, only to be returned once more twelve days later “for being Idol & Lascy.” She was finally apprenticed to William Douglas & Co., Cotton Spinners in Lancaster on January 31, 1795, and the parish paid a £2 fee.¹⁶³

Similarly, Ann Piper, an illegitimate child, entered St. Luke’s on February 25, 1745, at the age of eleven. Piper was sent out to a placement on April 6 of that year, but she was returned to the workhouse just four days later “by order of the Justice of the Peace.” By September 1746, she had been bound out two more times, returning five years later “deserted and friendless.” Piper finally disappears from the registers after she was “passed away to St. Margaret’s Westminster,” where she had acquired a settlement under her last apprenticeship.¹⁶⁴

Brothers Edward and Thomas Eden first entered the workhouse at St. Luke Chelsea on May 7, 1788, after being passed from St. Botolph Aldgate Parish with their father, Thomas, who was out of work; their mother, Agnas, who was pregnant; and their sister, Hannah. The whole family would be repeat users of the institution over the next few years, but young Thomas was sent to a merchant in Bishopsgate on July 25, 1791, then to a hairdresser in St. Pancras on August 25, 1792, to whom he was formally bound the following month with an apprenticeship

¹⁶³ Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799.

¹⁶⁴ Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799. To try to prevent this, some masters were given only half the premium up front to take an apprentice, with the promise of receiving the other half two years later if the child was treated well. But how common this kind of arrangement was, is difficult to say: it seems to have been common in apprenticeships arranged by guilds and parishes in London, although Katrina Honeyman found evidence of it in other places in England, such as Cheshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Birmingham. Honeyman found it was also common among factory proprietors toward the end of the century. See Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 38, 45, 177, 218, 223, 226.

fee of £10.¹⁶⁵ His brother Edward was later recorded as being “taken Out by Mr Hutchens to go to Sea,” on July 2, 1794. He too returned on August 21, “not likeing the Sea,” before he was eventually bound to another master on January 31, 1795.¹⁶⁶

Not all children were given so many chances, of course: the records for Mary Philips show that, while she first entered the St. Luke Chelsea workhouse on March 13, 1744, at the age of eight, she spent more than a year in the workhouse before she was first sent out “upon liking” on June 14, 1745. She was “returned by order of committee” on June 29, only to receive another permanent placement on July 29 of that year.

Overall, discharge from the workhouse for apprenticeship or service was indicated in 559 entries in the St. Luke Chelsea records, and 275 of those explicitly state that the child was sent “on liking.” Of those, 111 were listed as returning to the workhouse, usually within the first forty days, after which they would have been entitled to settlement in the parish of their placement.¹⁶⁷ The workhouse at St. Martin-in-the-Fields was much larger, yet surviving records yield only 172 entries that say they were discharged for apprenticeship or service; just 99 of those say that the children were sent on liking.¹⁶⁸ This all said, data from the records of other parishes in London—and from elsewhere in England—would be useful in determining more definitively how common the practice of liking really was.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ He was bound to John Burell, at no. 16 Hamilton Place near Bagnigge Wells, 18 September 1792. Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799.

¹⁶⁶ Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799.

¹⁶⁷ Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799. In most circumstances, there is very little detail given about the circumstances under which the children returned: the register usually only records the date, sometimes with a note indicating that the child had returned from being on liking or had absconded.

¹⁶⁸ The proportion of these entries that mention a period of liking is higher: 49.19 percent for the records from St. Luke Chelsea; 57.56 percent for St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

¹⁶⁹ It is worth noting that trial periods and successive apprenticeships seem to have also been the practice with the philanthropic organizations of the capital, and this is touched on in later chapters.

Apprentice Behaviour and the Decline of Apprenticeship

To a certain degree, bad behaviour on the part of apprentice children was expected, especially in the case of boys: there was already a long tradition of drunken disobedience, violence, and mob behaviour associated with male rites of passage in London.¹⁷⁰ But sometimes pauper apprentices neglected their duties so much so that their masters became desperate to get rid of them: many masters thus sought the formal assistance of the Quarter Sessions, but others simply returned their apprentices to the parish before the end of the period of liking.¹⁷¹ Twenty-two of the children in the St. Luke Chelsea workhouse records were returned for explicitly bad behaviour. Eight more were rejected for being idle or lazy.¹⁷²

Some of these children seem to have had difficulty submitting to authority or may have had serious behavioural issues: Sarah Smith was sent on liking as an apprentice or as a servant sixteen times between 1791 and 1794, each time re-appearing in the parish register with comments about how she was a “bad girl,” or how she was “sausey.” In fact, she never ended up with a successful placement, and she had to rely on the workhouse ten more times in later years. As an adult, she would be treated for venereal disease at the Lock Hospital and at St. Thomas Hospital, and she would eventually be brought up on charges of theft at the Old Bailey, serving

¹⁷⁰ Since they had no parental figure, pauper and charity apprentices who banded together, or associated with older men who were poor role models, were thought to be particularly prone to being led astray. See Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Paul Griffiths, “Masterless Young People in Norwich, 1560–1645”, in Steve Hindle, Adam Fox, and Paul Griffiths (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London: Springer, 1996); Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹⁷¹ See images of Thomas Idle in Hogarth’s “Industry and Idleness” at <https://hogarth.digital.utsc.utoronto.ca/islandora/object/hogarth%3Aindustryidleness>. Also see Payne, “Children of the Poor in London”, 170.

¹⁷² Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, LMA, X/15/37, 1743–1799.

six months in the house of correction.¹⁷³ By contrast, thirteen-year-old Richard Woodford was returned in 1789 from his placement with Mr. Bedster by the waterside as “a bad boy”; yet there were no such complaints from his subsequent master, Mr. Smith at the King’s Head & Eight Bells, suggesting that Woodford’s behaviour there was entirely different. For some children, therefore, idleness and bad behaviour seem to have been selective tools, applied judiciously to reject a particular placement. Helen Berry found that this could be the case with Foundling Hospital apprentices who were summoned to account for alleged bad behaviour before the Governors; it is possible that many of the children that were recorded as being uncooperative with new masters in the documents examined here may have indeed similarly been trying to make their dissatisfaction with the match known to others.¹⁷⁴

The window of opportunity offered by the practice of liking should not be over-emphasized, of course: it does not seem to have been adopted by all parishes and institutions, and even where it was used, it could be an extremely small period of time. Facing these odds, some apprentices chose to make their feelings known by absconding and abandoning their places altogether: of the 1042 distinct names in the St. Luke Chelsea records, thirty-one ran away from their placements.¹⁷⁵ Some were found and dragged back to the workhouse; others returned there on their own. The records suggest that it was relatively easy to run away, at least for boys, because there were plenty of opportunities for them to find employment. Although magistrates

¹⁷³ See relevant records on London Lives, https://www.londonlives.org/search.jsp?toYear=1801&form=persNames&fromYear=1791&_persNames_surname=smith&toMonth=99&_persNames_given=Sarah&fromMonth=00&start=0.

¹⁷⁴ See Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 184.

¹⁷⁵ In this period, absconding was considered to be a very serious offence: some masters offered financial rewards for the return of runaways, and any apprentices who left their places without permission were subject to pursuit and punishment, often landing in the house of correction. See Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 201.

were empowered to enforce the return of apprentices who attempted to break their indentures in this way, it is worth emphasizing that most of these children were not sent back to their master—instead they received new placements, and sometimes more than one.¹⁷⁶ As Helen Berry has suggested, an increasing number of young people were testing the abilities of authorities to enforce the terms of their indenture by the end of the eighteenth century, and runaways do often seem to have been successful in “voting with their feet” to convey their discontent, forcing the parish officers to enquire into their circumstances or find another place for them.¹⁷⁷

By the late eighteenth century, patterns of employment were changing. As many historians have suggested, the broader system of apprenticeship was in decline, and the power of the guilds was declining. As growing industrialization brought new opportunities for paid work, unpaid apprenticeships seemed far less appealing to young people: children had become a newly attractive prospect to merchant-manufacturers who needed workers to undertake arduous, repetitive jobs that, thanks to new technologies, did not necessarily require the strength of a man.¹⁷⁸ With the increasing number of young people in society, the age of child workers was falling, and they began to assume a greater proportion of the national labour force. Many factory owners were keen to capitalize on a new and cheap labour force from the towns—especially the textile mills in the North, who engaged in “batch” employment of children—but the more

¹⁷⁶ Yet in the register for St. Martin-in-Fields only one entry explicitly says the child ran away: 13-year-old Dorothy O’Hara. Another 33 entries said the pauper “absented” themselves, but it is not clear if they absconded or simply left the house voluntarily.

¹⁷⁷ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 201; This seems to have been the case even with masters in distant parishes, although Honeyman argues that “it is possible that apprentices whose birth parish was at a distance were less likely to abscond.” Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 95. Also see Blincoe’s memoir: Brown, *Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, 23.

¹⁷⁸ See Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776) Book 1, ch. 1, “On the Division of Labour”, <https://geolib.com/smith.adam/won1-01.html>. It would be interesting to see how the availability of waged work affected rates of absconding apprentices.

attractive wage costs of child workers ultimately came to displace many adult men from their positions, and households came to depend more on the contributions of children to the family income.¹⁷⁹ In consequence, thousands of children were taken long distances from their homes to be subjected to long hours of industrial labour.

In spite of these issues, parish authorities continued to bind children to apprenticeships; these arrangements even increased in frequency. Between 1760 and 1811, the number of London children that were apprenticed by the parish doubled, with some parishes reportedly binding over 90 percent of pauper apprentices beyond their boundaries, and this indicated the degree to which pauper apprenticeship had superseded the formal arrangements of craft and livery companies.¹⁸⁰ Although the conditions of labour for these children have been the subject of much historical debate—Katrina Honeyman has argued that their placements were vital in imparting the skills necessary to adapt to work in an increasingly industrial setting—profoundly negative images of “cartloads” of young children being transported to distant factories continue to dominate most historical accounts.¹⁸¹ But it should be stressed that, with the growth of an industrial workforce, pauper apprenticeship became more explicitly tied to national productivity. As late as 1834, it was commented that

¹⁷⁹ During the first decade of the century over 2,000 pauper apprentices—most below the age of eleven—were sent from the capital to work in textile mills in the North, three-quarters of them going into the cotton industry. Pamela Horn, *Children's Work and Welfare, 1780–1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 18–34; Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, table 7.2; Katrina Honeyman, “Compulsion, Compassion and Consent: Parish Apprenticeship in Early-Nineteenth Century England”, in Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (eds.), *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750–1914* (Basingstoke: Ashgate, 2013).

¹⁸⁰ Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain*, 40.

¹⁸¹ Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries similarly argued that child labour played a crucial role in the creation of England as a modern industrial society, although they stress that the history of children’s work is “under-recorded, inconsistently measured, and buried in the family economy.” Sarah Horell and Jane Humphries, “Child Labour and British Industrialization”, in Michael Lavalette (ed.), *A Thing of the Past? Child Labour in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 76.

The practice in some towns, pursued systematically is to bind the parish apprentices into out-townships... When I enquired of the assistant overseers ... how the apprentices turned out after they were bound, his answer was, “We have nothing to do with them afterwards.”¹⁸²

Even after the Poor Law reforms that year, children continued to be bound out by their parish and charitable institutions.

Conclusions

There was a discernible shift in the treatment of children—both within the family and with regard to apprentices. Some seem to have adopted gentler perspectives as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century: in a sermon in 1704, Richard Willis told his parishioners

I do not mean by all this, to encourage a sheepish Temper in Children, tho' I think that is better than the contrary Extreme; much less would I encourage Tyranny and Severity toward them, if they can be governed any other way, as I am satisfied they generally may be, if those who have the Government of them will but first learn to govern themselves, and be contented to take the Pains which is necessary to govern Children without Severity, and not be for taking the shortest way with them; Tenderness is what is due to their tender Years, especially from Parents, who should love, and be beloved again; they should therefore watch over them, observe their Ways and their Tempers, make them easie where they can, and where they cannot, endeavour to inform them sensible that the thing was not fit for them, but still to keep up their Authority, and let them see that they must be governed. Children have Sense enough to apprehend things sooner than we are apt to imagine, if the matter be but rightly and calmly laid before them; and they love to be so governed, and indeed it's fit that reasonable Creatures should be so Governed, and this will use them to the way in which they ought afterwards to govern themselves, and is the likeliest Method to have lasting and durable Effects upon them; when their own Reason joins in the matter as well as the Reason of the Parents or Masters.¹⁸³

Willis was making an argument for the use of the carrot rather than the stick in governing children, raising the corollary of whether education would make children and young workers

¹⁸² Anonymous, *Extracts from the Information Received by His Majesty's Commissioners, as to the Administration and Operation of the Poor-laws* (London, 1833), 159.

https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Extracts_from_the_Information_Received_b/_ZA7AAAACAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0

¹⁸³ Richard Willis, *A sermon preach'd in the parish-church of St. Andrew's Holborn, June 8. 1704.* (London, 1704), 12–13. Eighteenth Century Collections Online,

link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0122380005/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=43ab2eb4&pg=1. Accessed 6 Dec. 2022.

more tractable. But people in the eighteenth century seem to have vacillated on whether more democratic education was a good idea. Education became increasingly class-specific, and “practical” training was increasingly advocated for the poor. The most obvious example of this can be seen in the immense growth of the institution of apprenticeship: though it may have begun as a means of addressing vagrancy and unemployment in Elizabethan England, by the eighteenth century it had unmistakably developed into a form of social engineering. Even as the institution declined in its private forms, pauper apprenticeship was relied on more and more heavily by parish authorities to manage the burden of poor relief. Out of a sense of self-preservation, poor families increasingly played into this system, sending their children to be apprenticed at progressively younger ages.

Apprenticeship had moral dimensions: Jane Humphries argued that it “saved the children of the poor from social exclusion and, by providing them with basic maintenance and some general training, enabled them to become productive adults.”¹⁸⁴ The institution may even have enabled a degree of social mobility. But while these placements were an attractive benefit of poor relief to many impoverished families, in the hands of the overseers of the poor, apprenticeship increasingly became a means of offloading potentially troublesome and expensive youth to outside parishes. As placements became more industrial in nature by the final decades of the century, there were considerable changes in the experience of childhood for poor children: any insurance offered by the practice of “liking” would have been extremely limited in factory placements, which increasingly took children far from home to industrial centres in the North. Even the “freedoms” industrial wages might have brought to the lives of many labouring

¹⁸⁴ Humphries, “English Apprenticeship”, 74.

children paled in comparison to the material deprivations they potentially faced: the physical hardships children in this position could suffer cannot be emphasized enough. There is evidence of the stunted growth, bone deterioration, rickets, and traces of inherited degenerative diseases associated with children's labour and poor medical care, as well as other problems that came with intergenerational poverty.¹⁸⁵ Some of the changes in health and mortality that the young poor experienced in this period will be explored in the next chapter, which considers some of the structural checks pauper children would have had on their agency, particularly through the effects of parish nursing. But it will also consider the attention drawn to their plights through the efforts of philanthropists such as Hanway, and some of the improvements that this publicity eventually brought about in their lives.

¹⁸⁵ See Newman and Gowland, "Dedicated Followers of Fashion?" 217–29.

Chapter Four – Health and the Nation

The Enlightenment is perhaps the best-known movement in eighteenth-century history; among the various insights that resulted, impacting the lives of children, was the notion of man's ultimate malleability and future work potential. Children acquired a distinctive value for contemporaries, who became concerned with the ultimate role of youth in processes of improvement and social reform. The notion that childhood was a period of innocence, preliminary to the sins of adulthood, emerged from this discourse, providing rich inspiration to the Romantics in the nineteenth century. But with regard to the poor, this discourse was much more practical—it focused on the “raw material” children represented to England, and on the “waste” that many saw in the high rates of mortality throughout the period. This raw material, it was argued, could be built up to augment the nation's strength, both at home and abroad, and it could also be “shaped”: this set the stage for the introduction of ideas of moral probity and self-reliance to the education of the young.

The Population History of Britain

At the end of the seventeenth century, mortality rates across Britain were staggeringly high: the average life expectancy was only thirty-two years for men and 33.7 for women, and this declined further in times of war, famine, or natural disaster. Although the life expectancy increased to 45.8 years for men and 48.2 years for women in the early eighteenth century, a demographic crisis in 1727 all but wiped out that gain—a population of close to 5.5 million in 1727 had only

increased by about 150,000 by 1745.¹ The most vulnerable people throughout this period were, unsurprisingly, the youngest—at that time, half of all children died before reaching the age of majority. But significantly, mortality rates also varied by both region and class: the poorer, more densely populated areas thus had a much higher risk of death. In fact, in mid-eighteenth-century London, the Bills of Mortality suggested that deaths were exceeding births.² The toll death exacted convinced many contemporaries that the numbers of Britons were decreasing: in the face of war and colonial conquest, the spectre of depopulation would become a major source of anxiety. These fears were compounded by the belief that the practice of enclosure was causing a shortfall in the food supply.³

Despite the convictions of contemporaries, population numbers were rising dramatically by the middle of the eighteenth century. Each generation was growing larger than the one before it—the population of England and Wales increased by almost fifty percent between the Glorious Revolution and the end of the American War; Great Britain as a whole increased from an

¹ See Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 333, 335, 650–51, and appendix 3. In 1741–2, the Bills of Mortality reported that 74.5 percent of children christened died below the age of five. As Dorothy George points out that “this proportion steadily decreased” at the end of the century, so that from 1790 to 1809 it was only 41.3 percent. George, *London Life*, 39.

² Despite this dire situation, the overall population of the metropolis continued to increase, to the point that some contemporaries feared that it was draining population from other areas. As John Nickolls commented at mid-century, “London has grown, and continues still to grow, out of compass, at the expence of, and to the sensible diminution of the other towns and boroughs, at the expence in short of the class of labourers.” John Nickolls, *Remarks on the Advantages and Disadvantages of France and of Great-Britain with Respect to Commerce and to other Means of Encreasing the Wealth and Power of a State* (London, 1755). Thomas Birch similarly wrote: “London will not feel any want of recruits till there are no people in the country.” Thomas Birch, *A Collection of the Yearly Bills of Mortality, from 1657 to 1758 Inclusive* (London, 1759). See George, *London Life*, 22; John Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770–Present* (London: Academic Press, 1974), 10.

³ It has been shown that enclosures had positive effects: even though the number of farms decreased the food supply of villages improved. See Leander Heldring, James A. Robinson, Sebastian Vollmer, “The Economic Effects of the English Parliamentary Enclosures”, (2022), https://bfi.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/BFI_WP_2022-30.pdf.

estimated 7,250,000 in 1751 to 16,539,000 by 1831.⁴ Demographic anxiety would not be allayed until a decrease in the fluctuations caused by famine and disease was marked after the first census in 1801. But it is also worth emphasizing that industrialization and urbanization kept the number of deaths high: cities were notoriously unhealthy places, known to harbour plagues and diseases, but many areas that had had a predominantly rural agrarian economy transitioned to an industrial one, and this affected their population dynamics.⁵ A large proportion of the population was also relocating to established urban centres—migrating in search of work—so the number of inhabitants in cities and towns nonetheless increased from around fifteen percent of the population in 1750 to as much as sixty percent just a century later.⁶ London expanded from this movement of people by as much as 500 percent, almost doubling its estimated population of 674,000 in 1700 to 1,274,000 by 1820. By 1831, the population of the capital is thought to have reached as much as 1.7 million.⁷

The only reason these figures can be charted at all is because of the increased desire of contemporaries to pry into the state of society: social investigation and the counting of the

⁴ This rapid population growth has been attributed to several causes, including changes in fertility rates, changes in mortality rates, the improvement of healthcare, emigration, and migration. See Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 333, 335; Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 387.

⁵ David Levine, “The Demographic Implications of Rural Industrialization: A Family Reconstitution Study of Shepshed, Leicestershire, 1600–1851”, *Social History* 1:2 (1976), 177–96, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284617>.

⁶ In England, the status of cities was not traditionally determined by population size, but on the presence of a diocesan cathedral in the settlement. This precedent was established under Henry VIII, when dioceses were founded in six English towns and each given city status by letters patent. This was officially a requirement until the end of the nineteenth century, when grants began to be awarded to communities on a variety of criteria, beginning with Birmingham, which successfully petitioned for city status on the basis of population size in 1889. The distinction between urban and rural settlements might therefore be drawn less by population size or density than by the employment of the majority in non-agricultural pursuits. See John Beckett, *City status in the British Isles, 1830–2002* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); M. Law, “The Growth of Urban Population in England and Wales, 1801–1911”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41 (1967): 125–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/621331>.

⁷ V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770–1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 17.

population had become far greater concerns for a number of contemporaries.⁸ The study of these kinds of statistics had begun in the seventeenth century—William Petty, John Graunt, Charles Davenant, Gregory King, Josiah Child, and other writers had pioneered the economic theory underlying “Political Arithmetic,” assigning a concrete, quantifiable value to the labour of the people: They believed that “the ordinary Rules of Arithmetick” could explain “the perplexed and intricate ways of the world.”⁹ Importantly, they argued that the labour of the poor was being squandered by contemporary society—since the wealth of the nation was considered to be dependent on its success in foreign export trade and the import of important staples, profit essentially hinged on the effective management of human resources to develop greater competing power.

This necessitated a more purposeful, systematic direction of the labour of the people. From the perspective of these commentators, poverty was little more than a problem of unemployment—the labour of the poor was vital, and it could be more effectively mobilized by simply providing them with work.¹⁰ William Petyt claimed that “sufficient stores of treasure” could not “otherwise be got than by the industry of the people,” arguing that “the poplacy I intend and which can only be serviceable to manufacture, are those exuberant numbers which cannot find employment in husbandry, or otherwise but in trade.”¹¹ Petyt talked about the

⁸ “To prize out of the corridors of power information about activities within them.” Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 224.

⁹ William Petty, *Political Arithmetick, or a Discourse Concerning the Extent and Value of Lands, People, Buildings* (London, 1690).

¹⁰ Leading to proposals for the establishment of workhouses and houses of correction as centres of manufacture. See Innes, “Prisons for the poor”, 42–122.

¹¹ William Petyt, *Britannia Languens* (London, 1680), 153. At the close of the century Pollexfen similarly wrote that “the employment and good management of our people must be the way to get riches.” Pollexfen and Pollexfen, 43. Josiah Tucker later asked, “If labor is the true riches, and money only the sign or tally, is not that country wealthiest which has the most labor? And hath not that country the most labor which hath the most people to create mutual employment for each other? Was a country thinly inhabited ever rich? Was a populous country ever poor?” Josiah Tucker, *Important Queries* (London, 1751), 19.

potential burden of the poor, but maintained that they were nonetheless something of a neglected national resource: they were “the chiefest, most fundamental and precious commodity, out of which may be derived all sorts of manufactures, navigation, riches, conquests and solid dominion.”¹²

Over the next century, the number of publications concerned with maintaining or increasing the population exploded. David Hume, for example, argued that the size of a state’s population “implies important consequences and commonly determines the preference of their whole police, their manners, and the constitution of their government.” In fact, he concluded that “in the stock of labor consists all real riches and power.”¹³ Many contemporaries came to believe that, if the health and size of the economy was connected to the health and size of the population, national regulation should naturally be concerned with the maintenance of a large populace: a number of public hospitals were thus established—run by elected governors but supported by public subscription—including the Public Infirmary at Petty Lane in 1719 (which later became the Westminster Hospital), Guy’s Hospital in 1723, St. George’s Hospital in 1734, the London Hospital in 1740, and the Middlesex Hospital in 1745. Separate wards were initially designated in these institutions for gynaecology and midwifery, but anxieties about reproducing the populace eventually demanded the establishment of unconnected institutions for women lying-in.¹⁴ In addition, a number of institutions were established that specialized in particular diseases: London alone saw the establishment of at least 66 such hospitals by 1860, including two

¹² Petyt, *Britannia Languens*, 238.

¹³ David Hume, *Political Discourses*, second edition (1752), 60.

¹⁴ A group of governors of the Middlesex Hospital, concerned about its neglect of reproduction, seceded to establish the British Lying-in Hospital in 1749. The City of London Lying-in Hospital followed in 1750, then the General Lying-in Hospital (which later became Queen Charlotte’s Hospital) in 1752, the Royal Maternity Hospital in 1757, and the Westminster Lying-in Hospital in 1765.

smallpox hospitals in 1746 and St. Luke's Hospital for lunatics in 1751. The Lock Hospital and the Magdalen Hospital for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes similarly opened in 1746 and 1758 respectively to help address concerns about the effects of venereal disease on women's childbearing capacity.

These hospitals were by no means meant to act as refuges for "sturdy beggars"; they were promoted as institutions to preserve lives and to care for the sick and injured among the poor—to return them to work, thereby saving both the value of the individual worker's labour and the cost of the poor relief that would be needed by their family. Importantly, they also promised religious reformation and the amelioration of manners, and this made them a popular choice for voluntary contributions of support among the middling sort.¹⁵ Efforts were also made to reduce the costs of motherhood by delivering children at their parents' homes: according to physician John Coakley Lettsom, "near 5000 women are delivered annually in their own houses whereby not only many infants, but likewise many women are saved."¹⁶ A similar idea lay behind the establishment of the dispensary movement in 1769, which provided the poor with a centre to obtain medical advice and free medicine, and this helped to subvert many prevalent stereotypes about the depravity and improvidence of the poor.¹⁷

It was increasingly believed by this time, as Hanway wrote, that "the true foundation of riches and power is the number of working poor, [and] every rational proposal for augmentation of them merits our regard." Their labour was urgently needed: he noted,

¹⁵ Unfortunately, these hospitals also came to rely on these donations for funding in the absence of state support.

¹⁶ John Coakley Lettsom, *Medical Memoirs of the General Dispensary in London: For Part of the Years 1773 and 1774* (London, 1774).

¹⁷ See George, *London Life*, 62.

considering our extensive commerce; the smallness of this island compared with His Majesty's dominions abroad; and the formidable neighbour who is ever meditating our limitations [France], we had need to promote population by all rational and pious means.¹⁸

British commentators were thus increasingly concerned with the health of the youngest members of society, and this culminated in William Pitt's unsuccessful 1796 proposal to reform the Poor Laws and institute family allowances and schools of industry, as well as Jeremy Bentham's 1798 plan for a national system of houses of industry, which made explicit provision for children.¹⁹ Both intimately linked the training of the young poor to the growth in national stock: but the inconsistency of support for these schemes indicates that consensus over the treatment of young people was still lacking.

Breastfeeding, Nursing, and "Proper" Modes of Childcare

In the eighteenth century, pediatrics emerged as a speciality in medicine, and a number of guides on childrearing appeared: many of these manuals advised mothers to follow "natural" modes of childcare.²⁰ Some of the methods they advocated were hardly new: documents as far back as the sixteenth century can be found extolling the virtues of mother's milk for babies. *The Byrth of Mankynd* (1540) said,

It shall be best, if the mother give her child suck herself, for the mother's milk is more convenient and agreeable to the infant than any other woman's – and more doth it nourish it, for because that in the mother's belly it was wont to the same and fed with it and therefore also it doth more desirously covet the same as that with the which it is best acquainted.²¹

¹⁸ Jonas Hanway, *A Candid Historical Account of the Hospital for the Reception of Exposed and Deserted Young Children* (1759), 10–11, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=LRJeAAAACAAJ>.

¹⁹ See Jeremy Bentham, "Outline of a Work Entitled Pauper Management Improved." (1798) <http://pombo.free.fr/bentham1798.pdf>

²⁰ The cost of pediatric care initially limited it to the wealthier classes, but there was a less direct impact on the lives of the poor. See Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986); Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England", *Bulletin of the History of Sexuality* 2:2 (1991), 204–34.

²¹ Eucharius Rösslin, *The Byrth of Mankynde* (1545).

Through the early modern period, European infants tended to be fed on their mother's milk until their front teeth came in, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, they were usually weaned at about eighteen months of age.²² In England, William Cadogan advised that this should occur after their first year, but even shorter times were recorded anecdotally—London apothecary James Nelson wrote that it was “the present fashion . . . to let children suck only three or four months”—but it has been argued that women in lower social groups tended to breastfeed their children for longer, if only because breastmilk was so much less expensive than purchased food.²³

Among commentators in the medical profession, there was an ongoing dispute about the benefits of breastfeeding versus bottle feeding: it was held that breastfeeding stimulated the affection of the mother for the infant, which increased the infant's sense of attachment, security, and confidence in return. But more significantly, perhaps, before the discovery of pasteurization infants fed by bottle had a mortality rate that was more than twice that of those sent to a wetnurse.²⁴ Higher on the social scale, where children's earliest years might be spent away from their parents in the company of nurses from lower classes, the emergence of these ideas caused

²² At which time they began to receive “breadcrusts and milk,” with parents “gradually introducing other foods such as butter, [and] capons in small quantities.” DeMause, *History of Childhood*, 244. It should be noted that the time at which infants were weaned could vary.

²³ “Let this Method be observed about a *Twelvemonth*, when, and not before, they may be weaned; not all at once, but by insensible Degrees; that they may neither feel, nor fret at the want of the Breast.” William Cadogan, *An Essay upon Nursing and the Management of Children from their Birth to Three Years of Age* (London, 1750), 21. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004786232.0001.000/>. These ages of weaning children have generally been upheld by the family reconstitution studies of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure: <https://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/>; James Nelson, *An Essay on the Government of Children, under Three General Heads* (London, 1763), 54, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59551/59551-h/59551-h.htm>.

²⁴ In the nineteenth century it was suggested that pauper parents and other poor adults “contaminated” children in the same way. “Profligate or distressed parents may educate their children ill; but when those under the charge of Public Institutions are suffered to become depraved in their progress to maturity, it is a dreadful reproach on the Police of the Country.—And yet what is to be expected from children reared in Workhouses, with the evil examples before them of the multitudes of depraved characters who are constantly admitted into those receptacles? Young minds are generally more susceptible of evil than of good impressions; and hence it is that the rising generation enter upon life with those wicked and dangerous propensities, which are visible to the attentive observer in all the walks of vulgar life in this great Metropolis.” Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*.

considerable anxiety: it was feared they might be thereby “infected” with undesirable character traits. The practice of sending out their children to traditional apprenticeships or to school only seemed to decrease the length of time children spent with their parents, and many began to fear that family ties would suffer.²⁵

With the increasing commercialisation of society in the eighteenth century there was also an increase in the number of people who considered themselves to be “experts” in childcare. The ideas of medical pioneers such as physicians George Armstrong, William Cadogan, and William Buchan, percolated down the social tiers through the work of contemporary schemes and charities: this information was passed down to parish officials, or to factory inspectors, so that a whole other group of individuals had become better versed in matters to do with the health of children. But reflecting the increasing “medicalization” of English society, there was also a proliferation of the number of people who claimed the title of “nurse.” It was alleged that some of these had joined the profession out of purely pecuniary interests—they took charge of too many infants or engaged in outright fraud in order to extract more income.²⁶ By the second half of the century, babies and breastmilk had become hot commodities, and nursing was one of the most prominent female occupations. But some of these contemporary nurse practitioners were notoriously unscrupulous, and this could have fatal consequences for children.²⁷

²⁵ Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 272–73; deMause, *History of Childhood*, 32; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 216.

²⁶ Many of these were more concerned with the availability of work than with the acquisition of the necessary skills. See Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 176.

²⁷ Since nurses received a bonus when their charges died, there was little incentive to ensure they lived. In Italy, wetnurses were ominously referred to as “angel-makers.” See David I. Kertzer and Michael J. White, “Cheating the Angel-Makers: Surviving Infant Abandonment in Nineteenth-Century Italy”, *Continuity and Change* 9:2 (1994), 451–480; Peter Earle estimates that more than 12 percent of London women would have been employed as nurses of some kind. Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650–1750* (London: Methuen, 1994), 116.

In the past, parents from many different cultures had employed some form of nursing, although some scholars have argued that this was evidence that “parental neglect” is a common failing of human nature; poor parents in early modern Britain have been painted with this same brush.²⁸ The boarding out of workhouse children was provided by legislation in a 1536 act, and then in subsequent statutes during Elizabeth's reign, although pauper children were unlikely to have been breastfed before being sent to the parish nurse: as Linda Pollock suggested, it was likely impractical for malnourished mothers to try to breastfeed children when they had little choice but to return to employment shortly after giving birth.²⁹

Recent historiography has sought to redeem the reputation of the parish nurse, arguing that they were “unfairly scapegoated” as the root of problems with the old Poor Law. In this interpretation, nurses were “demonized,” especially in the writing of contemporary philanthropists such as Hanway, who argued that children

were put into the hands of indigent, filthy or decrepit women, three or four to one woman, and sometimes sleeping with them. The allowance to these women being scanty, they are tempted to take part of the bread and milk intended for the poor infants. The child cries for food, and the nurse beats it because it cries.³⁰

These scholars have alleged that negative stereotypes of the parish nurse received “literary legs” in the nineteenth century through the fiction of authors like Charles Dickens, but that nursing “professionalized” in this period so that nurses bore little resemblance to the avaricious drunks

²⁸ DeMause cited sources as diverse as the Bible, the Code of Hammurabi, the Egyptian papyri, and Greek and Roman literature, all touching on this issue. He maintained that Plutarch and Galen vehemently denounced mothers who did not feed their children themselves. See deMause, *History of Childhood*, 34.

²⁹ John Fielding was criticizing the paltry sums given to nurses by the eighteenth century, especially to those of children under two, which he felt “occasions the Loss of an amazing Number of his Majesty's Subjects yearly.” John Fielding, *Extracts from such of the penal laws as particularly relate the peace and order of the Metropolis, etc.* (London, 1768 edition), 415. See Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 175.

³⁰ “Thus with blows, starving and putrid air, with the additions of lice, itch, filthiness, he soon receives his quietus.” Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 42–3.

that dominate many popular stories.³¹ Jeremy Boulton argued that although parish nursing costs were rising in Westminster from the late 1660s, nurses offered increasingly specialized care; Alysa Levene, similarly, found the professionalization of nursing spread by the eighteenth century, so that a large network of paid nursing was made operational.³²

But it needs to be emphasized, that the revelations these scholars have offered about the commercial strategies of nurses do not explain their record on childcare: it may even serve to confirm suspicions about their mercenary behaviour. In spite of the scholarly interest in their redemption, the picture that we have of parish nursing is not very detailed: but there is little doubt that there was more to the negative perception of nurses than the exaggerations of contemporary authors and philanthropists.³³

As far back as 1716, parliamentary reports confirmed that a

great many poor infants and exposed bastard children are inhumanly suffered to die by the barbarity of nurses, who are a sort of people void of commiseration or religion, hir'd by the churchwardens to take off a burthen from the parish at the cheapest and easiest rates they can, and these know the manner of doing it effectually.³⁴

³¹ Tim Hitchcock, "Plebeian Lives and the Making of Modern London, 1690–1800: Demonstration and the Parish Nurse", North American Conference for British Studies, November 2009. Also see "Parish Nurses", *London Lives*, <https://www.londonlives.org/static/ParishNurses.jsp>.

³² Boulton focused on nurses who were concerned with the care of ill, infirm, or lying-in adults. Jeremy Boulton, "Welfare systems and the Parish Nurse in Early Modern London, 1650–1725", *Family & Community History*, 10:2, 137–8, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1179/175138107x234413>. Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 45. Tim Hitchcock characterized nurses as "small scale business women, running what might be characterized as care homes, taking in women from the streets for child birth in very difficult circumstances and achieving a success rate at least as good as that achieved for the same group in places such as workhouses and charitable hospitals." Hitchcock, "Plebeian Lives." Also see "Parish Nurses", *London Lives*, <https://www.londonlives.org/static/ParishNurses.jsp>.

³³ See Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (London, 1843–1844). Hitchcock alleges that "Jonas Hanway was a master of rhetoric and used the example of the death of eighteen out of twenty-three children left in the care of Hannah Poole ... to damn the system of parish nurses more generally," but links that illustrated the neglect of nurses were drawn long before any of Hanway's publications appeared. See Hitchcock, "Plebeian Lives."

³⁴ Quoted by William Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce in Modern Times*, third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 559. In the 1720s, supporters of the first petition promoting the London Foundling Hospital spoke similarly about the "wicked and barbarous parish nurses, who neglected and exploited their charges." Quoted in Hanway, *Candid Historical Account*, 17.

And there were a great many public scandals over the century rooted in the boarding-out system of nursing. Many were centred on the parish's lack of inclination to probe into the backgrounds of nurses they hired, because they were eager to get as many paupers off their books as possible, without administrative delay. As administrator George Burrington wrote in 1757:

I have been informed by a man now living that the officers of one parish in Westminster received money for more than five hundred bastards, and reared but one out of all that number.³⁵

Unsurprisingly, the mortality rate of children who were sent to nurses was high. But parish authorities believed the hazards of the boarding-out system to be inescapable: in fact, the death rate of pauper infants only reassured officers that the cost of maintenance needed to be small to avoid wasting money. Authorities continued to board out parish children even when they knew they were unlikely to survive: even when they were made aware of problems, they often remained unwilling to intervene.³⁶ For instance, nurse Eleanor Gallimore was tried twice in 1718 for the murder of infants in her care: At the first trial—for the death of ten-month-old Richard Pugh “by not allowing it sufficient Meat, Drink and due Attendance”—it was alleged that Gallimore often left her charges alone for “half a day together,” and that she would “sometimes stay out all night a drinking, and use the children cruelly.” Pugh’s mother testified that she “went to the House” to look for her son, “but Gallimore would not permit her to come in, even though “she heard frequently the Children crying vehemently, and the Door lock'd up and she out of Doors, and no body to look after the Children.” When Pugh died, his mother

³⁵ See Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 177.

³⁶ Although boarding out for parish nursing was briefly discontinued in 1693 because of a scandal involving a parish nurse who was executed at Tyburn for starving four children entrusted to her care to death, “that she might take more in their room,” before long, the system was restored once again. Ordinary of Newgate Prison, “Mary Compton”, *Ordinary's Accounts: Biographies of Executed Convicts*, 23 October 1693, https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?id=OA16931023_n17-1&div=OA169310239310230002.

testified that “she went in and found the child wrapped in a piece of an old rag and laid under the dresser.” It seemed obvious that Gallimore was negligent, but the evidence proved insufficient for a conviction based on the standards of the time: she was acquitted.³⁷

Just seven months later, Gallimore found herself back in court—this time for the death of Thomas Shaw, who had been beaten severely “on the Head, breast, Belly and Back” with a mop stick. It was alleged that she had “beat it ... unmercifully, threw it down and stamp upon it, using it very cruelly.” But because the murder had occurred more than three years earlier, Gallimore’s prosecutors were unable to prove that the beating directly caused the death, and she was acquitted a second time.³⁸ Although it seems disturbing that neither of these proceedings resulted in a conviction, it should be noted that cases like these had already begun to cause public outcry: there appeared to have been a wider shift in perceptions of the appropriateness of violence against children.³⁹ The inadequacy of the boarding-out system of nursing provided the basis for further change, and parish childcare would increasingly take place inside the institution through the remainder of the century.

Workhouse Nursing

Nursing within the workhouse would prove to be just as problematic.⁴⁰ In practice, nurses within the institutions were often inmates themselves, living in dirty and overcrowded conditions that

³⁷ Old Bailey Proceedings: Accounts of Criminal Trials, 27 February 1718
<https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?id=t17180227-41-defend215&div=t17180227-41>

³⁸ Old Bailey Proceedings: Accounts of Criminal Trials, 10 Sept. 1718
<https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?id=t17180910-76-defend371&div=t17180910-76>

³⁹ See Korbin, “Child Abuse and Neglect”, 32–33; Flegel, *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children*, 2, 4.

⁴⁰ Just a few years later, the authorities of the parish of St. Giles-in-the-Fields stated that children hitherto kept at parish nurses would no longer be “starv'd or misus'd by them, as is so much complain'd of.” Instead, pauper children “will be duly taken Care of, and be bred up to labour and Industry, Vertue and Religion, and thereby the infinite Mischiefs proceeding from Idleness and want of Employment, will be prevented.” *The case of the parish of St.*

were unsuitable and unhealthy locations for young children.⁴¹ To add to this, workhouse infants tended to be fed on animal milk, which often had disastrous results: When Hanway collected statistics on the life expectancy of parish children in institutions within the Bills of Mortality from 1757 to 1765, he found that 169 out of 415 children below the age of three died at the workhouse in St. Giles; 158 out of 312 children of the same age died at the workhouse in St. Martin-in-the-Fields; 137 out of 288 children died at the workhouse in the parish of St. George's, Hanover Square; and all 55 died in the workhouse at St. Luke's. In the workhouse shared by the parishes of St. Andrew Holborn above the Bars and St. George the Martyr between 1749 and 1756, Hanway recorded 222 infant deaths out of a total population of 284. Based on these statistics, he estimated the mortality rate of infants in the fourteen London workhouses he visited to be as much as 88 percent. Even in “the best regulated parishes,” he wrote, less than 47 percent of infants survived.⁴²

Table 4.1: Workhouse Mortality in Children Under Three, 1750–1755

Workhouse	Inmates Below the Age of 3	Number Deceased	Mortality Rate (%)
St. Giles-in-the-Fields	415	169	40.7
St. Martin-in-the-Fields	312	158	50.6
St. George, Hanover Square	288	137	47.6
St. Luke Chelsea	55	55	100

Giles's in the Fields, as to their poor, and a work-house designed to be built for employing them (London, 1725). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0106540526/ECCO?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=ba0db278&pg=2. Also see *Case of the Parish of St. James Westminster, as to Their Poor, and a Work-house Designed to be Built for Employing Them* (London, 1730), 3. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0101960615/ECCO?u=yorku_main&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=c7f96518&pg=3

⁴¹ Alysa Levene pointed out the irony that they were ever put forward as an answer to the problems of the nursing system, especially considering the later emphasis on children's removal to domiciliary care outside the metropolis. Although some London parishes adopted this system for nursing, there are others that thought it better to continue to place children out to nurse. Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 49.

⁴² Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 6. Hanway's unflattering picture of parish childcare was the result of first-hand investigations carried out in the late 1750s and 1760s. See George, *London Life*, 58.

St. Andrew Holborn above the Bars / St. George the Martyr	284	222	78.2
Totals	1354	741	54.7

Source: Jonas Hanway, *An Earnest Appeal for Mercy to the Children of the Poor* (London, 1766), 68.

Hanway published some of the statistics he unearthed during this period in a series of newspaper articles and pamphlets, with the aim of building a case for the total reform of parish nursing. “Parish Officers,” he argued,

may amuse themselves till Dooms-day, but to attempt to nourish an Infant in a Workhouse, where a Number of Adults are congregated, or where a Number of Nurses are assembled in one Room, and consequently the Air becomes putrid, be these nurses ever such proper Persons, I will pronounce, from the most intimate Knowledge of the Subject, is but a small remove from Slaughter, for the Child must die.⁴³

This work culminated in the publication of a book—*An Earnest Appeal for Mercy to the Children of the Poor* (1766)—which amalgamated the data he had collected on children born or received into the workhouse in London parishes, concluding that a large proportion of them died before their first birthday.⁴⁴ Hanway found that twelve of the nineteen children below the age of three years admitted to the workhouse at St. George's, Middlesex in 1765 died in less than fifty days; four more died within nine months. Unsurprisingly, he concluded: “workhouses, are in general slaughter houses to infants.”⁴⁵

But Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker have questioned Hanway’s motives in presenting the statistics of the parish system of nursing in this way—particularly his statements

⁴³ Jonas Hanway, *Serious Considerations on the Salutary Design of the Act of Parliament for a Regular, Uniform Register of the Parish-poor in All the Parishes Within the Bills of Mortality* (London, 1762), 10.

⁴⁴ Hanway wrote, “1000 to 1200 children were dying every year in the Bills of Mortality under the noses of parish officers; “not that they ordered them to be *killed*; but that they *did not order* such means to be used, as are necessary to keep them *alive*.” Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 8.

⁴⁵ He found three more young children were removed from the workhouse for other reasons. The equivalent figure for Westminster parishes was as much as 90 percent. Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 66.

about the children of St. Clement Danes and their nurse, Hannah Poole.⁴⁶ According to Hanway, twenty-three children had boarded with Poole in 1764–65 at the rate of 2s per week per child. Of these, two children were discharged to their parents, eighteen died, and three lived out the year. Twenty-three more children were placed in her care in January 1766, five of whom were discharged and eighteen died. Hanway concluded from these figures that Poole was “certainly not qualified for a nurse to keep children alive.”⁴⁷ Yet Hitchcock and Shoemaker suggested that his figures were disingenuous and provocative and had been intended to convince Parliament to employ the Foundling Hospital for parish children.⁴⁸ They alleged that Hanway was being deliberately deceptive by hyperbolizing Hannah Poole as “an angel of death”: in fact, she was “providing care for a uniquely vulnerable group of babies” that were already unlikely to survive.⁴⁹ These figures, they argued, were “part of an essentially misleading rhetorical device” where Hanway unfairly placed the mortality rates of infants with a higher risk of death against those of older children with a much higher rate of survival—these mortality rates only appeared

⁴⁶ Hanway wrote that Poole’s story “strikes me with more horror and indignation than any thing I have yet met withal, either in this or any other laborious enquiry of the kind.” Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 137. Alys Levene also criticized the figures Hanway collected: “In one fell swoop, Hanway damned indifferent workhouse officers, neglectful workhouse nurses and the children’s mothers too.” Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 46.

⁴⁷ More dramatically, Hanway continued: “though she seems to understand the art of lulling infants to their everlasting rest.” Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 138–39.

⁴⁸ Hanway was involved with the Foundling Hospital at this point (addressed further in the following chapter). He sharply contrasted its authorities with the officers of the parish, arguing that “the former have ever sought with the most religious care to preserve live, the latter to save money.” Hanway, *Candid Historical Account*, 85.

⁴⁹ Hitchcock and Shoemaker also criticized Hanway for lauding one Whitechapel nurse, Nurse Howe, while he decried Poole’s efforts, writing, “But surely Mrs. Poole . . . was not cast in the same mold, or composed of the same atoms, as Mrs. Howe.” Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 147. See Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 292. Alys Levene also wrote that “other parish sources suggest that Mrs. Poole was caring for particularly vulnerable children and that Hanway’s characterisation was somewhat unfair.” Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 50.

as high as they did because Hanway contrasted them with those of the Foundling Hospital, which had already imposed strict health requirements when determining acceptance.⁵⁰

However, the Foundling Hospital's requirement that infants be of a certain age before being placed with a nurse hardly seems unreasonable, especially considering they had been prompted by their own high mortality rates. In spite of Hitchcock and Shoemaker's insistence that the level of mortality Hanway presented was to be expected, Poole was not operating a hospice: these rates would simply not have been acceptable to the Foundling Hospital's governors, who had already adopted a strict rule that disqualified any nurse who had had two of her charges die.⁵¹ Although Hanway's figures were certainly outrageous, as Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt noted, his numbers "were *intended* to shock, with the avowed object of shaming particular parishes and of encouraging a beneficial rivalry between workhouses in this particular aspect of their work."⁵²

⁵⁰ This was recognized by Hanway himself. He wrote: "It is true those were of 2 to 4 years of age; and these I am now about to speak of, are three of 1 and 2 years old, four new-born, and the remainder of 13 days to 7 months old." Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 147. The mortality rate of the Foundling Hospital was likely helped by of a combination of the institution's comparative wealth and support, its ability to recruit women from a wide geographical area, its ability to institute regular inspections, and its ability to pay reliable wages, including, importantly, a premium if a child survived up to a year. Children were removed from problematic nurses, moreover. But it should be recognized that these guidelines were adopted precisely because of the problems with high infant mortality rates, not simply to attract donations, as Hitchcock and Shoemaker suggest. Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City 1690–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 258. See Alysa Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741–1800: 'Left to the Mercy of the World'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁵¹ Parish documents show that parish children were removed from a nurse occasionally as well: 76 children out of a total of 503 in the nursing records for St. Martin-in-the-Fields had at least one change of nurse. This change of nurse was not necessarily because of issues with care: it was sometimes a result of the retirement or illness of a nurse, or of the child's temporary return to its parents or the workhouse. See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 80.

⁵² Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 181–82. Emphasis added. It is worth noting that the same year saw the conviction of the Elizabeth Brownrigg for the murder of Mary Clifford: the horrors of her story made allegations that nurses might act in their own interest—even at the price of infant lives—much more believable. See Patty Seleski, "A Mistress, A Mother and A Murderess Too: Elizabeth Brownrigg and the Social Construction of the Eighteenth Century Mistress" in Katherine Kitredge (ed.), *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 81; Kristina Straub, "The Tortured Apprentice: Sexual Monstrosity and the Suffering of Poor Children in the Brownrigg Murder Case" in Laura

Hanway's Acts

The interest generated by Hanway's statistics helped to secure the passage of the *Act for the keeping regular, uniform and annual Registers, of all Parish Poor Infants under a certain Age* (1762) and the *Act for the Better Regulation of the Parish Poor Children* (1767) in the British parliament, which mandated a new set of practices for the care of London's pauper children.⁵³

This legislation aimed at "preserving the lives" of children by "keeping regular, uniform and annual registers, of all parish poor infants under four years of age, within the bills of mortality"; it also advocated domiciliary foster care and the provision of a healthier environment than London, requiring that infants be nursed in the countryside, at least three miles from the capital.⁵⁴

In 1778, a parliamentary enquiry looking at the impact of the act reported that it had "produced very salutary effects in the preservation of the lives of great numbers of the Infant Parish Poor," yet it had also been shown that compliance with the legislation was spotty at best.⁵⁵ Contemporary minute books suggested that some parishes did resolve to make regular inspections of both country nurses and the children that were sent to them, yet a parliamentary enquiry highlighted the failure of many others to appoint Guardians, make inspections, or to keep adequate records. As a result of the inspections that did take place, some children were

Rosenthal and Mita Choudhary (eds.), *Monstrous Dreams of Reason* (London: Associated Universities Presses, 2002), 66–81.

⁵³ 2 George III c. 22 and 7 George III c.39. See *London Lives*, <https://www.londonlives.org/static/RI.jsp>.

⁵⁴ No authority was placed in charge of supervising the observance of the 1767 act, and parishes within the City of London, Middlesex, and Surrey were excluded from the Act because they were thought to have few child paupers. See Jonas Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor to be Appointed by the Act of the Last Session of Parliament* (London, 1767), <https://books.google.ca/books?id=7gNgAAAACAAJ>; Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 10; *London Lives*, <https://www.londonlives.org/static/ParliamentaryReform.jsp#Registration1767>.

⁵⁵ "Report from the Committee on the State of the Parish Poor Children &c Reported by Owen Salisbury Brereton Esquire, 1 May 1778 (PP 1778). Quoted in Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 70.

transferred to new nurses, but the fact remains that many were suffered to continue in their positions regardless of their outcomes simply because nurses were in high demand.

There were even more glaring failures of the legislation: removing parish nursing of parish children to the countryside only encouraged developments such as the evolution of baby farms and contract workhouses on the outskirts of London, where conditions would become especially bleak.⁵⁶ In spite of this, Hanway stayed positive about the achievements of the acts: “It is from the conveying infants into the country,” he suggested, “that we must hope for the restoration of humanity.”⁵⁷

In Hanway’s own appraisals, he saw some improvements in parish accountability, which suggested that the measures were saving 1500 poor infants annually. He also wrote about the possibilities that were unlocked by the legislation: “To have attempted much in the compulsive strain after so many years of relaxation of discipline might have failed,” he concluded, expressing the hope that the example of parishes that chose to adhere to the act would encourage others to do likewise in the future.⁵⁸ By forcing parish officers to be accountable for the children in their charge, Hanway’s Acts had a wider significance: they brought about a shift in the expectations of parish childcare, and pauper infants came to be viewed more broadly as worthy objects of aid. After Hanway’s intervention, parishes endeavoured to prevent the death of pauper children by default, instead of accepting that it was inevitable.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 70, 74.

⁵⁷ Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 30.

⁵⁸ To a degree, he was correct: the information in the registers proved indispensable in further campaigns for the protection of infants, drawing greater attention to the problem of child mortality in the capital. Hanway himself continued to push for further reform, including the lengthening of the distance from London that children must be sent, and he was convinced that the evidence generated by even an inconsistent observation of the act would lead to greater concern on the part of parliament. See Hanway, *Letters*, volume 1, 110. James Stephen Taylor, *Jonas Hanway, Founder of the Marine Society* (London: Scolar Press, 1985), 115.

⁵⁹ Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, 8, 14.

Conclusions

In 1784, the ongoing issues with parish nursing prompted William Buchan to propose that poor mothers be paid to nurse their own children.⁶⁰ His scheme was not ultimately adopted, but it provides evidence that these conversations continued to occupy commentators, even years after the appearance of Hanway's Acts. Parishes were beginning to set up their own establishments for the young poor, indicating that they had adopted a more specialized response to the particular needs of poor children.⁶¹ By the middle of the century, Children were becoming firmly established as deserving of aid. William Sharp preached in 1755 that

Children of all others seem the best entitled to our Benevolence and Favour. They come into the World, Naturalists have observ'd, the most helpless of all Creatures, and remain so for some considerable Time in it, wholly dependent on the Aid of others. As they get forward into Life fresh Difficulties present themselves, and the World lies in wait with a Variety of Temptations, too unequal to their little Strength and Experience. With the best Seasonings and Preparations of Instruction much ado they have to maintain the Conflict against the Sollicitations of outward Objects, and the importunate Demands of their own Passions, which press with Violence upon them, and are impatient for Controul. For Reason lies as yet in a manner dormant, or at best in an infirm and feeble State, unqualified to dispute its Title, and much less in a Condition to obtain the Mastery. So that while Others become Objects of our Compassion by meer Accident, and too often by their own sad Misconduct, Children are so by the very Condition of their Nature; and the good Author of Nature in kind Relief, as it should seem, of their Favour; has, by a Principle of Compassion implanted in our Constitution, contriv'd to balance their Imbecillities with the Strength of Others, and thus enabled them in some sort of conflict with the Difficulties of Life.⁶²

Although these ideas had their genesis in the Poor Laws, they were significantly expanded on when seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commentators attached a numeric value to the lives of the young. In this view, abuse and neglect was increasingly considered to be wasteful as well as

⁶⁰ Valerie Fildes, "Neonatal Feeding Practices and Infant Mortality During the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of Biosocial Science* 12 (1980), 313–24.

⁶¹ Alysa Levene suggested that this reflected "a changed set of feelings about the childhood of the poor specifically, and the need to keep them separate from their inheritance of pauperism in a place where they could be educated and trained." Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 69.

⁶² Sharp argued that "The most unfeeling Wretch upon Earth could never find in his Heart surely to harbour an ill Wish to the Prejudice of little Children." Sharp, *Amiability and advantage*, 7–8, 9.

immoral. Hanway, who contended that children's future labour value made them "so much more valuable than the aged" was perhaps just the most well-known figure to make this connection.⁶³

It cannot be stressed enough that for most commentators the appeal of these measures lay in their potential to moderate the nation's balance sheet—not in eradicating the state of poverty. In an era of global conflict between European powers, it can be hard to differentiate between the imperative to balance the national books and real concerns about the suffering of the poor: anxieties about the nation's reproductive capacity were as much a part of debates about the adequacy of British military manpower as they were in preceding discussions about the gin craze. In either case, the country had a genuine need, and this made the apparent profligacy of the labouring poor seem particularly galling to many of the better-off.

This can perhaps best be seen around the outbreak of the Seven Years War in 1756, when many common citizens came to believe that England lacked the ability to defend itself from its enemies. In response, there was a proliferation of philanthropic schemes that sought to enlarge and strengthen the British populace.⁶⁴ Many of these explicitly claimed that they would preserve the lives of poor children—particularly the orphaned, abandoned, and otherwise vulnerable—in the interest of what Michel Foucault would eventually call "bio-power."⁶⁵

⁶³ Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, v.

⁶⁴ Many contemporaries agreed with Josiah Child's contention that "What-ever tends to the populating of a kingdom, tends to the improvement of it." Child, *New Discourse*, 181. Also see Laurence Braddon, *Particular Answers to the Aloof Material Objections Made to the Proposal Humbly Presented to His Majesty, for Relieving, Reforming and Employing All the Poor of Great Britain* (London, 1722), 10–12. On the international dimensions of the Seven Years War, see Daniel Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754–1763: Britain and France in a Great Power Contest* (London: Longman, 2011); James Stephen Taylor, "Philanthropy and Empire: Jonas Hanway and the Infant Poor of London", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12:3 (1979), 285–305.

⁶⁵ Foucault defined bio-power as a technology which appeared in capitalist states in the late eighteenth century for managing the births, deaths, reproduction, and illnesses of a population and exerting total control over its constituents, to better promote life. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998), 140.

The rise of sentiment also had an impact on the range of schemes that aimed to assist poor children: moralists and philosophers alike became preoccupied with the question of how to raise the next generation—the proliferation of philanthropic organizations over the second half of the eighteenth century indicates how widely held these ideas really were.⁶⁶ As we will see, many of these organizations came to emphasize childhood for the lower classes as a time for the development of a strong work ethic: they argued that encouraging the development of industrious habits in the children of the poor would have wider benefits to the nation.⁶⁷ The next chapter looks at one of the best-known of these institutions—the London Foundling Hospital, which was chartered in 1739 and opened in 1741—and the contributions it made to these kinds of philanthropic endeavours in the eighteenth century.

⁶⁶ In Hanway's words, that "There is something so sacred in the affection of a woman for her own child, at her breast, that a nation of savages would blush at the thought of suffering it to be taken from her, so long as she acts the part of a mother, but to have it torn from her by the hands of violence, whilst the nourishment depends on the breast, is abhorrent to nature, and the very thought raises one's indignation." Hanway, *Candid Historical Account*, 11. See Paul Slack, "Hospitals, Workhouses and the Relief of the Poor in Early Modern London", in Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (eds.), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Protestant Europe, 1500–1700* (London: Routledge, 1997), 243; Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 54–7, 74–97; Sarah Lloyd, *Charity and Poverty in England c.1680–1820: Wild and Visionary Schemes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁶⁷ See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 4, 139. In the nineteenth century, there would be a more sustained move toward institutional nursing.

Chapter Five: The Foundling Hospital

The problems of child abandonment and parental mortality did not appear out of nowhere, even if they had acquired a new sense of urgency in eighteenth-century Britain. They had been significant issues on the continent for some time: although foundling homes had been seeing to the shelter and provision of needy children since the fourteenth century, their operations were generally limited to religious orders in Catholic countries.¹ But over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, foundling homes appeared in cities throughout Europe—Amsterdam, Rome, Paris, Madrid, Lisbon—regardless of their religious affiliation.² At this stage, the English relied on the work of Christ's Hospital in London, which had been founded in 1552 “to take oute of the streates all the fatherless children, and other poor mens children, that were not able to kepe them” and provide them with a “vertuous education and bringing up.”³ And in that decade, Edward VI gifted London the palace of Bridewell, which would be used thereafter as a prison, hospital, and workrooms—in particular, it would serve as a place to provide aid and training to older children that were considered to be “unapt for learning.”⁴

¹ Responsibility for the care of orphans had fallen to bishops as far back as the Middle Ages.

² England was peculiar among the nations of Western Europe for never having had an institution wholly devoted to their care.

³ Quoted in Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 128. Christ's Hospital had not admitted any foundling children since 1676, when it became exclusively a refuge for the legitimate offspring of freemen. A notice was posted near the gates that stated, “No child or children who are dropped in Christ's Hospital can receive any benefit from thence.” Ernest H. Pearce, *Annals of Christ's Hospital* (London: Methuen & Co., 1901), 247.

⁴ “Bridewell” came to refer to all institutions of this sort, designed to provide work for the idle, short periods of imprisonment at hard labour for petty criminals, and training for the young. Although Joanna Innes has pointed out that these houses of correction were punitive institutions, intended for the punishment and reform of minor offenders, vagrants, and the idle, workhouses had a broader social welfare role, offering shelter and work to those unable to support themselves. By contrast, children who were better suited to formal education were supposed to be

In general, English social schemes before the 1680s showed very little concern for children—especially for poor children. William Petty’s proposal to establish a hospital for the care of abandoned and illegitimate children was an exception, although it illustrates the extent to which the abandonment of infants had become a social problem by the seventeenth century.⁵ Decades later, Joseph Addison wrote a letter deploring the fact that England had yet to make any “Provision for Foundlings, or for those Children who for want of such a Provision are exposed to the Barbarity of cruel and unnatural Parents.”⁶ This would remain the case for some time—at least until the tireless campaign of Captain Thomas Coram for the foundation of a home for London’s exposed and deserted young children finally bore fruit toward the middle of the eighteenth century.⁷

Captain Thomas Coram and the Establishment of the Foundling Hospital

Thomas Coram was born in Lyme Regis in west Dorset in 1668, and he was sent to sea by the age of eleven. He was apprenticed to a shipwright in London at sixteen, and he eventually went

placed in grammar schools, “in the hope of preferment to the Universitie; where they may be vertuously educated, & in time become learned and good members in the commonweale.” See Joanna Innes, “Prisons for the Poor: English Bridewells, 1555–1800”, in Francis Snyder and Douglas Hay (eds.), *Labour, Law, and Crime: An Historical Perspective* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987), 42–122; Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 128; Anonymous, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed in Pursuance of an Act of Parliament Made and Passed in the 5th and 6th Years of King William the 4th, C.71* (London, 1837), 348.

⁵ Reportedly, in London alone, as many as 1000 children a year were left to fend for themselves. See Anonymous, *A Scheme for the Foundation of a Royal Hospital and Raising a Revenue of Five or Six-Thousand Pounds a Year, by, and for the Maintenance of a Corporation of Skilful Midwives, and Such Foundlings, or Exposed Children, as Shall be Admitted Therein. Reprinted in Harleian Miscellany, volume IV* (London, 1745), 136–40; see Levene, *Health and Mortality*, 3.

⁶ He argued, “One does not know how to speak on such a Subject without Horror. But what Multitudes of Infants have been made away by those that brought them into the World, and were afterwards either ashamed or unable to provide for them!” Joseph Addison, *The Guardian*, 105 (11 July 1713). Also see [Daniel Defoe], *Augusta Triumphans* (London, 1728), 9–14.

⁷ “Captain” was an honorary title, given to mark his many years of service as a shipwright. James Stephen Taylor, “Thomas Coram (c. 1668–1751)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography?* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6282>.

across the Atlantic Ocean as an agent for English merchants who wished to establish a new shipyard in Boston, Massachusetts. Coram spent ten years in the colonies acting as a shipbuilder and salesman before he returned to the capital, embarking on a new career there as a lobbyist for London charities.⁸ But it was not until he retired in 1720 that he became devoted to the causes of abandoned and deserted infants; this would lead to the eventual establishment of the London Foundling Hospital in Brunswick Square “for the Reception, Maintenance and proper Education of such Cast off Children or Foundlings as may be brought to it.”

It should be emphasized that Coram initially found few like-minded people willing to support his project; in fact, measures were only adopted in England after Anglo-Irish poet Jonathan Swift published his *Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to Their Parents or Country and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick* (1729) and the Dublin Foundling Hospital was launched. Coram’s first petition to the King in Council in 1737 expressed his horror at

the frequent Murders committed on poor Miserable Infant Children at their Birth by their Cruel Parents to hide their Shame and for the Inhumane Custom of exposing New born children to Perish in the Streets or the putting out of such unhappy Foundlings to wicked and barbarous Nurses who under-taking to bring them up for a small and trifling Sum of Money do often suffer them to Starve for want of due Sustenance and Care Or if permitted to live either turn them into the Streets to begg or steal or Hire them out to vicious persons by whom they are trained up in that infamous way of living Whereby Thefts Robberys and Murders do grievously abound.⁹

The Foundling Hospital officially received its Royal charter in 1739, but it was still not able to begin accepting children until 1741. A public advertisement published early in that year invited the first applications:

⁸ Coram initially tried to promote a project to the Board of Trade for settling demobilized sailors and soldiers in the colonies, but he eventually turned his attention to the situation facing children in London.

⁹ Quoted in “The London Foundling Hospital and Thomas Coram, 1737–1937”, *Social Service Review* 11:4 (1937), 715, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30010965>.

On Wednesday 25th of this instant March at eight at night and from that time until the house is full, their house over against the charity school in Hatton Garden will be open for children under the following regulations: that no child exceed in age two months nor shall have the French Pox or disease of like nature; all children to be inspected and the person who brings it to come in at the outer door and not to go away until the child is returned or notice given of its reception. No question asked whatsoever of any person who brings a child, nor shall any servant of the Hospital presume to enquire on pain of being dismissed.¹⁰

Although the numbers that the Foundling Hospital could admit were small at first—no more than 240 infants were taken on annually in its earliest years—demand far exceeded the number of places: a ballot system for admission had to be implemented from 1742.¹¹ Mothers who applied to the Hospital would be asked to explain their situation in an interview, and those who qualified were asked to pick a painted ball at random: white meant their child had been accepted; red meant they were placed on the waiting list; black was an outright rejection.¹² By 1748, the charity had received 1384 children. Hanway—who had become the institution’s chief promoter—boasted that “only 724 ... died in all this time.”¹³

In spite of the positive spin attempted in the Foundling Hospital’s publicity, some contemporaries felt these mortality figures were too high. Protestant suspicion also fuelled

¹⁰ The Hatton Garden location of the Foundling Hospital was temporary. Its permanent home beyond the northern boundary of Holborn in Lamb's Conduit Fields would not be ready until 1742. See Cunningham, *Invention of Childhood*, 103; Janette Bright and Gillian Clark, *An Introduction to the Tokens at the Foundling Hospital Museum* (London: Foundling Museum, 2014), 6.

¹¹ The number of admissions could be less than 100 per year, and sometimes far less: in July 1749, only 20 of 83 applications were successful and resulted in the children being taken in. McClure noted that only 139 children were admitted between 1741 and 1742; from 1742 to 1752, an annual average of 87 were admitted; from 1752 to 1756, an annual average of 69 were admitted. See McClure, Appendix 3, 261.

¹² The ballot system would be in place until 1756, although authorities worried that unsuccessful applicants would just abandon their babies in the street, and parish ratepayers would then be responsible for their maintenance: on 1 April 1742, one disappointed woman abandoned her baby to be taken to the workhouse, but she was apprehended and sent to Bridewell. See McClure, *Coram's Children*, 51; Jenny Bourne Taylor, “‘Received, a Blank Child’: John Brownlow, Charles Dickens, and the London Foundling Hospital—Archives and Fictions”, *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56:3 (2001), 316.

¹³ Although this hardly seems to be an impressive figure—somewhere between 40 and 55 percent of those admitted to the Foundling Hospital died before two years of age—to contemporaries it showed a marked improvement, especially in comparison to the mortality rates of individual parishes. It became clear that Foundling children’s chance of survival increased significantly if they lived past the age of infancy. See Hanway, *Candid Historical Account*, 23.

criticism of the institution, which equated it with foundling homes on the continent that were deemed to be Popish places that brought Church and state too close together. Some suggested that the Foundling Hospital only encouraged sin by providing a shelter for illegitimate children, encouraging parents to shirk their obligations toward their maintenance; it was even suggested that people who disposed of their illegitimate offspring in this way might eventually want to do the same with legitimate children.¹⁴

Other critics of the Foundling Hospital focused on the “exorbitant” cost of the institution. One commentator claimed, “The expense of every child, so put out, is more than £1,500 sterling.”¹⁵ In response, the charity's directors printed magazine announcements that trumpeted the amounts made by the labour of the children, emphasizing this as evidence of the degree to which the Foundling Hospital was self-supporting. In 1753, they went so far as to convert one of their kitchens so “the children might work in public for all passers by to see the virtue and utility of the experiment.”¹⁶ The governors of the Foundling Hospital admitted their project was not cheap—care for potentially crippled and malnourished infants was expensive, after all—but attempts to defray some of these costs by adopting measures such as hand-feeding babies with animal milk were not successful.¹⁷ The Foundling Hospital governors were not disillusioned by

¹⁴ In his private correspondence, Coram wrote that “Many weak persons . . . say such a Foundation will be a promotion of Wickedness.” Quoted in Reginald Hugh Nichols and Francis Aslett Wray, *History of the Foundling Hospital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 21. One contemporary wrote that “the possibility of concealing Shame, or of an easy Provision for a spurious Issue, is an Encouragement to Vice, and a Means of Seduction of innocent Women.” Anonymous, *Some Considerations on the Present Method Used in the Relief and Employment of the Poor* (London, 1759), 8. Also see Anonymous, *Joyful News to Bachelors and Maids: Being a Song, In Praise of the Foundling Hospital, and the London Hospital Aldersgate Street* (London, 1760); David Stansfield, *Candid Remarks on Mr. Hanway's Candid Historical Account of the Foundling Hospital* (London, 1760).

¹⁵ *Gentleman's Magazine* (1759), 55.

¹⁶ John H. Hutchins, *Jonas Hanway, 1712–1776* (London: Slack, 1940), 21.

¹⁷ It quickly became clear that artificial feeding resulted in a much higher rate of mortality: From 1743, children were thus sent to wet-nurses in the countryside until the age of four or five. But this policy, too, had mixed results:

these setbacks: even in later years, they remained convinced that “in process of time, a regular succession of children taken in and put out will render the good effects of this hospital more conspicuous to the publick.”¹⁸

The novelty of the Foundling Hospital lay in its use of the methods of contemporary joint-stock companies to meet the costs of its operations—collecting large subscriptions and working jointly in committees to manage the affairs of the charity. This represented a brand-new approach in the world of philanthropy, but it also made the organization answerable to the public at large: the Foundling Hospital had to continually prove that it was worthy of its support. In order to do so, the institution made some noteworthy innovations: in 1740 painter and engraver William Hogarth—then a governor of the charity himself—procured the work of some of the best-known artists of the period to display at the hospital, including Francis Hayman, Joseph Highmore, and Michael Rysbrack, and directed admission be collected to view it. Composer George Friderick Handel—who was also made a governor—was similarly prevailed on to conduct annual performances of his oratorio *Messiah* to benefit the Hospital, composing “Blessed are they that consider the poor” for it in the 1750s.¹⁹

But the Foundling Hospital also tried to marshal support by emphasizing its role in mobilizing England’s vulnerable youth. Thomas Bernard—yet another governor of the institution—wrote that its goal had become

foundlings were not always welcomed in countryside parishes when they arrived. At one point the secretary of the institution complained that Yorkshire farmers “have in several Places entered into Combinations to give their Milk to the Hogs or throw it away, rather than let our Nurses have it.” Secretary’s Correspondence, Greater London Record Office (1757), quoted in McClure, 105.

¹⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine* (1773), 324.

¹⁹ With the endorsement of such influential contributors, support of the Foundling Hospital increasingly appeared to be a social good. See Taylor, “Received, a Blank Child”, 309; Colley, *Britons*, 59.

to supply the Government plentifully with useful Hands... for the better producing good and faithful Servants from amongst the poor and miserable cast-off Children or Foundlings, now a Pest to the Publick, and a chargeable Nuisance within the Bills of Mortality.²⁰

In these aims, the Foundling Hospital was emblematic of the spirit of mid-eighteenth-century charity, seeking not only to save as many lives as possible, but also promising to transform those they saved into useful citizens of (and for) the Nation.

Class, Gender, and Apprenticeship at the Foundling Hospital

It is important to note that the institution did not project itself as a vehicle of social mobility: it never claimed to elevate the status of the children it saved. It promised a functional education in mathematics, geography, history, and religion to allow children to live industrious lives, but any encouragement was made according to their station, with strictly those apprenticeships for which they were socially destined in mind. Because foundlings were pre-ordained to take up lowly occupations in unskilled or semi-skilled employment—often in basic trades, or in service to the household or to the state—instruction was largely limited to manual work and handicrafts.²¹ In letters, the only schooling foundling children received was basic alphabet rote learning, sufficient to comprehend bible lessons.²² In fact, it was understood that the idea of children being educated “above their station” was intolerable to many contemporaries: even Hanway felt the need to

²⁰ Sir Thomas Bernard, *An Account of The Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children* (London, 1749), 4. See McClure, 8–15; Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 13–60.

²¹ Just by offering these things in the eighteenth century, Claire Marie Rennie suggested that the institution “provided an element of social mobility, of bettering oneself.” Claire Marie Rennie, “The education of children in London’s foundling hospital, c. 1800–1825”, *Childhood in the Past* 11:1 (2018), 8–20 [16], DOI: 10.1080/17585716.2018.1447233.

²² There was a marked improvement in basic literacy: it has been pointed out that by 1800—for boys at least—nearly 100 percent of the Foundling Hospital’s children could sign their names. See McClure, *Coram’s Children*, 221–4. At the time, just 60 percent of semi-skilled tradesmen and 35–40 percent of labourers and servants could do the same.

acknowledge social differences when addressing prosperous middling and upper sorts of people, particularly when he sought their support:

Whilst we exercise these duties of humanity, we shall teach the common people, that due obedience to superiors, in defence of the public good, is the only solid ground on which they can hope to be free or happy!²³

During the 1760s and 1770s, foundling apprenticeships were sought for children at slightly higher ages than in children bound out from the workhouse, and relatively modest premiums were offered to employers—usually £5 per annum—to deter the “wrong” kind of master from seeking to take on an apprentice.²⁴ In these placements too, the Foundling Hospital was essentially reinforcing existing plebeian stereotypes, limiting their scope to occupations that were widely considered to be acceptable for youth of that social level: the aptitude or personal preference of the children concerned mattered far less in this transaction than the needs of employers.²⁵

Class-appropriate education was augmented by gender-specific vocational training: dormitories, play areas, and schoolrooms were all segregated to conform to contemporary notions of “decency.” For girls, this meant instruction was largely limited to lessons in housewifery—cookery, laundry, knitting and spinning, or needlework—in order to make them into useful domestic servants.²⁶ Boys were engaged in more overtly masculine tasks—mending nets, picking hemp rope, woodwork, or gardening—especially after it was resolved that they

²³ Jonas Hanway, *Reasons for the Augmentation of At Least 12,000 Mariners to be Employed in the Merchants-Service and Coasting Trade* (London, 1759), 111, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=oSNEAAAAYAAJ>.

²⁴ See Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 136–9. Using the Foundling Hospital’s Apprenticeship Register (LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001), Berry found that the mean age of apprenticeship was eleven for children admitted in 1756.

²⁵ “...but also upon the networks of local contacts established by the Foundling Hospital Governors.” Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 160–61.

²⁶ “And the bourgeois emphasis upon female chastity was repeated to them often.” Anonymous, *Regulations for Managing the Foundling Hospital* (London, 1796), 50. Quoted in Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 130.

should “be employed in the open Air, and enured to the changes of Weather.”²⁷ Berry found that gender also affected the trades to which the foundlings were eventually bound, and some occupations were seen as exclusively “male domains.”²⁸ In trades such as shoemaking, of 240 foundlings apprenticed, 70 percent were boys; in iron manufacturing, where 230 foundlings were apprenticed, 66 percent were boys.²⁹ This gendered segregation served as a guide for the governors in arranging apprenticeships for the children or seeking suitable employment for them.³⁰

Details of each foundling apprenticeship—including the child’s admission date, the date they were bound out, their masters’ or mistresses’ occupation and parish of residence, the term of their apprenticeship, and the value of their premium—were all entered in a register. Berry used this to trace the fate of 5885 children who survived long enough to be apprenticed for the first time by the Foundling Hospital.³¹ Of these entries, some could not be quantified because they contained incomplete information, but Berry found that out of 5170 usable first apprenticeship records, 1960 children were sent out to work in London and Middlesex, while only seventeen were sent to Wales or Scotland, fifteen to Jersey, and one to Newfoundland. High numbers of

²⁷ Silk manufacture, for example, was deemed “too effeminate for the larger Boys.” See Alys Levene (ed.), *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2006), 20–25.

²⁸ This continued to be the case even after the introduction of new technologies from the 1760s made physical strength less necessary.

²⁹ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 162.

³⁰ The authority of the governors to bind children was enlarged: “That it shall and may be lawful for the said Corporation ... to detain and employ in any Sort of Labour or Manufacture, or in the Sea Service, and all and every such Child or Children by them so maintained and educated or to bind any such child or Children Apprentice or Apprentices to any Person or Persons who shall be willing to take the same or to place them out as Servants, or as Mariners, to any Husbandmen, Master or Captain of a Ship, or other Person whatsoever.” See Anonymous, *An Act for Confirming and Enlarging the Powers Granted by his Majesty to the Governors and Guardians of the Hospital* (London, 1740), <https://books.google.ca/books?id=PmnKzgEACAAJ&dq>. Quoted in Levene, *Narratives of the Poor*, 29.

³¹ “...before many of them disappeared for good from the historical record.” Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 154.

children were also put to work in the north of England: 1895 foundlings were apprenticed in Yorkshire with 707 children employed in agriculture, 793 in manufacture and trade, and 395 in selling, dealing, and other occupations.³²

The General Reception

Although the Foundling Hospital did not suffer from a shortage of support in its early years—it was able to more than double its subscribers and convince a number of peers, gentry, prosperous merchants, and financiers to serve on its governing committees—by 1756, concerns about the mortality of the institution and the nonetheless persistent demand for limited places induced a sense of acute financial need. The Foundling Hospital governors were forced to appeal to Parliament for help, presenting a petition that asked for the institution to be supported by the Government.³³ Although there were clearly already shifts occurring in the dynamic between parish authorities, charitable organizations, and central government, the looming prospect of renewed conflict between Britain and France encouraged Parliament to agree: they voted to grant £100,000 to the Foundling Hospital immediately.³⁴ But importantly, the aid came with strings attached: admissions had to be unrestricted, and the Foundling Hospital would be required to receive “all Children, under a certain Age... who shall be brought to the said Hospital after the

³² Apprenticeship Register, LMA/A/FH/A12/003/[n.f.]; Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 161. “Outside of London, agriculture, livestock, and fisheries formed the largest source of jobs for adolescent boys, accounting for more than a third of the national labour force aged ten to fourteen.” Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 166. Also see Mary B. Rose, “Social Policy and Business: Parish Apprentices and the Early Factory System, 1750–1834”, *Business History* 31:4 (1989), 7–11; Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 99, 103; Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain*, 52.

³³ In the short term, parliamentary support lent the administration a degree of respectability and prestige, which no doubt helped to convince the public of its worthiness. See Anonymous, *The Royal Charter Establishing an Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children* (London, 1746).

³⁴ As Helen Berry has suggested, the Foundling Hospital experiment was only one of new initiatives launched by Westminster administrations in the second half of the eighteenth century in the face of population increase, urbanization, crime, poverty, and the strain they were putting on the parish relief system. See Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 92. Also see Hanway, *Candid Historical Account*, 24.

First Day of June and before the 31st Day of December 1756.”³⁵ Over the next few years the governors instituted an open-door policy, admitting all infants under two months of age. It went from being a primarily London-based operation to an ongoing national concern, with branch hospitals opening in Yorkshire and Shropshire, and additional funding was even given to extend this policy to 1760.

Ultimately, however, the entire experiment would prove to be disastrous: On the very first day the new policy was in effect, 117 children arrived, and 41 more came on the second. Within two weeks, almost 300 infants had been brought to the hospital; after four weeks the number exceeded 425. By Christmas, that number had risen to more than 1675. During the four years of the “General Reception,” from June 1756 to March 1760, a total of 14,934 children were admitted to the Foundling Hospital: the institution was, in short, overwhelmed with more abandoned and orphaned children than it could adequately provide for.³⁶

Hanway noted the governors’ surprise:

It was hardly thought that any more children would be sent ... than such as had usually been exposed in streets and at people's doors ... or died in parish workhouses where their mothers had deserted them.³⁷

But many of these children also came as far afield as the English provinces, sent by parish officers keen to save the expense of their maintenance. An illicit trade developed in transporting infants to the capital, with babies purportedly handed over to waggoners, vagrants, and other “disreputable people” who promised to convey the children to London.³⁸ John Brownlow, who

³⁵ *Universal Magazine*, volume 21 (1757), 16.

³⁶ London Metropolitan Archive, A/FH/A/09/2/1, volume 1, 25 March 1741–28 February 1757, and volume 2, 1 March 1757–30 June 1758. Also see Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, 63; George, *London Life*, 45.

³⁷ Hanway was reportedly appointed as a governor of the hospital the very same day that parliament passed the Act underwriting open admissions. Hanway, *Candid Historical Account*, 24.

³⁸ It was reported that unscrupulous fathers took their children from their mothers and had them sent to the Foundling Hospital, while mothers themselves sometimes sent their children there for employment as nurses.

had himself been one of the institution's foundlings before becoming an employee of the Hospital in adulthood, published his *Memoranda* in 1847, including vivid accounts of children in the countryside being given to traffickers who transported them to London in baskets to dump them at the charity's doors.³⁹ Unsurprisingly, many of these children died along the way.

If they arrived at the institution, however, children had to be accepted—even if they were sick, disabled, or dying. Some desperate or unscrupulous parents thus brought fading children in to the Foundling Hospital, occasionally already stripped of their clothes, to be buried at the institutions' expense.⁴⁰ In this light, it was suggested that any boost to the population that had been promised by the institution's publicity would be negated altogether by the level of mortality it was experiencing: during the General Reception period, it has been estimated that as many as eight out of every ten infants admitted died.⁴¹

Contrary to the allegations of scholars such as Hitchcock and Shoemaker outlined in the previous chapter, one of the Foundling Hospital's most outspoken critics at this time was Hanway himself, who argued the institution had diverged from its original purpose of staunching the nation's loss of blood. In 1760, he wrote,

To provide for deserted innocents is not only becoming the dignity of human nature, but is the greatest of charities: But then to encourage parents to desert their children must be allowed to be the greatest of evils. I am therefore so far from thinking this hospital a moral benefit to society under its present extension, that it appears to me to be quite the reverse.⁴²

³⁹ See John Brownlow, *Memoranda, or, Chronicles of the Foundling Hospital* (London, 1847), 172.

⁴⁰ Yet the demand necessitated further expansion, and provincial branches were established in Ackworth, Westerham, Shrewsbury, Aylesbury, Barnet, and Chester. See Anonymous, *The Rise and Progress of the Foundling Hospital Considered: And the Reasons for Putting a Stop to the General Reception of All Children* (London, 1761), 22–23, 28, 30, 33, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=nH9VQAAACAAJ&dq>.

⁴¹ See Cunningham, *Invention of Childhood*, 104.

⁴² *Gentleman's Magazine* (February 1760), 57. By 1762, he was even more explicit in his criticism: “The Nation had been richer in Inhabitants,” he wrote, “had there been no Foundling Hospital ever thought of.” Hanway, *Serious Considerations*, 22. Hanway also criticized the General Reception because he believed that the institution served a need unique to the capital: “It is in London only” he wrote, “we hear of infants being MURDERED, or exposed to

Other critics seized on the disincentives that this kind of indiscriminate admission gave to future marriages: it was argued that the Foundling Hospital provided a “legal licentious Asylum for every Bastard (of every Whore, and of every Whoremonger) under the Name of a Foundling, even where, not One of them All is a Foundling.”⁴³ Saunders Welch suggested that indiscriminate admission might “not only tend to weaken parental affection ... but it might also tend to increase the general idleness universally complained of by masters in most manufactures.”⁴⁴ A letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* argued similarly that,

although this charity may be productive of the aforementioned good of the preservation of a great number of lives may it not at the same time be looked upon as an encouragement to celibacy by being an open asylum for illegitimates.

Allowing unwed parents to dispose of illicit offspring rather than marry and maintain them could mean that “the community is so far from being increased, that the very foundation of its strength is undermined.”⁴⁵

Helen Berry has written that the sexual morality that prevailed at the time among the English created the widespread conviction that the promiscuousness encouraged by the Foundling Hospital would lead to an increase in “‘French disease’, producing weak and sickly offspring unable to work and defend their country, enfeebled with syphilis and other venereal infections.” Many of the critiques of the time, she argued, were underpinned by “jingoistic

want and misery.” He maintained that he could “by no means acknowledge the FOUNDLING HOSPITAL to be a Local CHARITY, 'tho confined to the bills of mortality. London is but the magazine of the three Kingdoms, and of the world, and it receives every body; like the sun it absorbs all lesser fires; but then it again emits its beams, and invigorates the whole.” Jonas Hanway, *A Journal of Eight Days Journey from Portsmouth to Kingston Upon Thames* (London, 1756); *Gentleman's Magazine* (March 1756), 147. Emphasis in original.

⁴³ Anonymous [Cato?], *The Tendencies of the Foundling Hospital in Its Present Extent Considered* (London, 1760), 13, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=n3tbAAAAQAAJ>. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁴ Saunders Welch, *A Proposal to Render Effectual a Plan to Remove the Nuisance of Common Prostitutes from the Streets of this Metropolis* (London, 1758), 33.

⁴⁵ *Gentleman's Magazine* (Supplement 1759), 622–23.

support for the superiority of Britain in the struggle for European imperial supremacy.”⁴⁶ At the same time, many were incensed by what they considered to be an enormous cost—the number of apprenticeships that governors were expected to arrange, and the premiums that went with them, increased dramatically when the children that were taken in during the General Reception reached adolescence: while the Foundling Hospital had been responsible for arranging between 40 and 100 apprenticeships each year in the early to mid-1760s, that number ballooned to 500 in 1767, nearly 1200 in 1768, and 1430 in 1769.⁴⁷ Brownlow, who would eventually be appointed as the institution’s treasurer, concluded that the Foundling Hospital, “conducted on a plan so wild and chimerical, and so widely differing from its original design, [was]... diseased in its very vitals.”⁴⁸

Although Parliament had spent over £500,000 on the support of the institution over the previous decade-and-a-half, by February 1760 they had become convinced that the experiment should be brought to an end: they withdrew any support for further admissions.⁴⁹ By this time, the hospital had admitted almost 15,000 infants, but only 4400 of those had lived to be apprenticed: over 10,000 children, or 61 percent of those admitted, died in less than four years.⁵⁰ Although Parliament continued to maintain children admitted during the General Reception, they publicly repudiated the experiment, officially declaring (in a spectacular understatement) that

⁴⁶ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 118–19. See also Lisa Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴⁷ McClure, *Coram’s Children*, 132; Scott, “Ackworth Hospital”, 162, 166.

⁴⁸ Brownlow, *Memoranda*, 175–76.

⁴⁹ The sum of £500,000 in 1760 would be equivalent to over £30 million today.

⁵⁰ According to John Brownlow the Foundling Hospital had become “a charnel house for the dead.” John Brownlow, *Memoranda*, 175. But popular opinion had appeared to sour even before the record of the institution’s mortality became clear: although Handel’s charity performance of *Messiah* had raised over £6509 in 1756 it barely managed to net £50 in 1762. See Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, 69; Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 99, 129.

“the lodging and Educating of Foundling Children within Hospitals, has a Tendency to make such Children less fit for laborious and useful Employments.”⁵¹

The 1760s and Beyond

When the Foundling Hospital reverted to a private charity after the General Reception, its financial position became far less sound; it was forced to reorganize the basis of admission, shifting back to a policy of stringent selection and reducing its intake dramatically.⁵² From 1763, admissions were much more restricted, based on a formal statement of children’s individual circumstances: over the entire decade from 1760 to 1770 the Foundling Hospital took in only 387 applicants.⁵³ In these later years, the system documenting admissions became considerably more comprehensive.⁵⁴ The Foundling Hospital ceased taking infants anonymously or by the lottery system: it required a formal petition, recounting the circumstances that led to the application, along with descriptions of the situations and conduct of the petitioners.⁵⁵

It is noteworthy that the occupational profile of the inhabitants of London in this period was dominated by a particularly large female domestic service sector, which meant there was a

⁵¹ Anonymous, “The History of the last Session of Parliament, which began January 10, 1765, being the fourth session of the Twelfth Parliament of Great-Britain”, *London Magazine*, volume 35 (1766).

⁵² See Cunningham, *Invention of Childhood*, 104; McClure, 76–114.

⁵³ D. S. Allin, “The Early Years of the Foundling Hospital, 1739/41–1773.” Quoted in Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 100. The Foundling Hospital’s deaths were reduced to 126, however, or one in four: a mortality rate of only 33 percent. Also see Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 129.

⁵⁴ The archival materials that have survived in these years are consequently substantial. Some studies using this material include John Gillis, “Servants, Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801–1900”, in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan, Judith R. Walkowitz (eds.), *Sex and Class in Women’s History* (London: Routledge, 1983), 114–45; Bernd Weisbrod, “How to Become a Good Foundling in Early Victorian London”, *Social History* 10 (1985), 192–209; Anna Clark, *Women’s Silence, Men’s Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770–1845* (London: Pandora, 1987).

⁵⁵ To reinforce the requirement of a formal petition, the Foundling Hospital posted a note on their door stating, “No children dropt at, or near the gate of this hospital will be taken in.” See Tanya Evans, *Unfortunate Objects: Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 93.

great many single women of childbearing age in the population. Some of these women ended up with employers who were barely surviving themselves. As Helen Berry has written,

In the face of sickness, disability, bankruptcy, or death of an employer, female servants could slip from scraping a living as domestic skivvies or washerwomen into prostitution and crime... their only source of support would be if they could prove that they had lived and worked as a servant for a year or more in a parish, thereby gaining settlement and entitlement to doles of money as “outdoor relief” or, in extreme circumstances of last resort, admission to a workhouse.⁵⁶

This reality is reflected in the petitions examined here, which were often submitted by women who were isolated from family and friends and whose status—often pregnant or single parents— Influenced their experience of poverty.

Petitions to the Foundling Hospital were closely scrutinized at the weekly meetings of the charity and claims were investigated by hospital staff—Jenny Bourne Taylor estimated that only about one in five of these applications was successful.⁵⁷ Thousands of these documents survive from 1768 onward, but they have generally not been properly explored by historians of eighteenth-century England. To be fair, in the 1920s, when Dorothy George wrote *London Life In The Eighteenth Century*, this material was assumed to have been unavailable. Even when the petitions did appear in historical studies, their use was extremely limited at first: Hugh Nichols and Francis Aslett Wray could offer only brief two-page summaries of the petitioners and their circumstances in their *History of the Foundling Hospital* in 1935, and Ruth McClure offered little more in her 1980 book, *Coram's Children*.⁵⁸ While John Gillis ventured a little further in his 1983 book chapter, “Servants, Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London,

⁵⁶ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 207–08.

⁵⁷ London Metropolitan Archives, A/FH/K02/11, 53, 98, 109–10; Taylor, “Received, a Blank Child”, 317–18.

⁵⁸ George, *London Life*; Nichols and Wray, 84–86; McClure, 139–41.

1801–1900,” it should be emphasized that he only did so for the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ Perhaps the most relevant piece of work on these documents, therefore, has been R. B. Outhwaite’s 1999 article, “Objects of Charity,” which considered 217 petitions presented to the Hospital between 1768 and 1772. Outhwaite believed that “few sources are more illuminating of the hazards of life that lay in wait for ordinary people, women especially, in eighteenth-century London than these petitions.”⁶⁰ His study offered unique insights into many of the circumstances—including unplanned pregnancy—that derailed the plans of people in eighteenth-century London. This chapter looks at petitions over roughly the same period, from 1770–1773, reviewing a total of 161 of those petitions to determine how impoverished mothers came to apply to the Foundling Hospital, and to confirm whether they were ultimately successful in having their child admitted, their application was rejected, or they failed in the ballot.⁶¹ It thus looks for some insight into the kinds of vulnerabilities that drove working parents to give up their children in this latter part of the eighteenth century.

Outhwaite found that 77 percent of the petitions that he examined were for illegitimate children, written by or on behalf of unmarried women; this analysis found a slightly higher proportion—nearly 78 percent. Outhwaite also found that six percent of these petitions came from widows, while nine percent came from married women; this study, by contrast, found that only 3 percent of the petitions came from widows, although it also found a further 2 percent of

⁵⁹ Gillis, “Servants, Sexual Relations.” Francoise Barret-Ducrocq, too, sampled them in his exploration of sexual mores and courtship strategies in London, but both historians only did so for the nineteenth century. Francoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1991).

⁶⁰ R. B. Outhwaite, “‘Objects of Charity’: Petitions to the London Foundling Hospital, 1768–72”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32:4 (1999), 497–510; 507.

⁶¹ “Petitions Admitted to Ballot”, London Metropolitan Archives, A/FH/8/1/1/1–3.

wives had been deserted by their husbands, including one man who enlisted as a sailor and left his wife to fend for herself, and one couple who abandoned their child to a nurse. Of these, more than half had been deserted by their husbands and had been left to support their family alone.⁶²

One difficulty discovered in this study in uncovering family situations is that most of the surviving petitions are formulaic in language, with their content largely predetermined by the expectations and rules of the charity and itemized regularly in the daily newspapers: the acceptance of any child thus depended on the adult that petitioned on their behalf telling exactly the story that the governors wanted to hear. The application of Mary Davies included all the right tropes—seduction, broken promises of marriage, a definite economic need caused by the birth of the child, a lack of alternative means of support, and an expression of penitence and a desire to return to honest labour.⁶³ Others conveyed almost identical sentiments, especially in their expressions of contrition: Mary Hewitt’s petition of October 1769 implored the Foundling Hospital to take her child, though it also expressed her “hopes this will be a warning to her never to be seduced any more.”⁶⁴ The petition of Ann Norman in 1773 similarly asserted her “consciousness of this evil transaction, and the perpetual remembrance of it within her own breast will be so far an atonement for the crime as to dispense with the repetition of it.”⁶⁵ The success of many of these petitions thus depended on their adherence to the expectations of

⁶² Outhwaite, “Objects of Charity”, 505.

⁶³ Her petition read, “the suffering she has already undergone will of course render it the last fault.”

⁶⁴ Read 13 October 1769.

⁶⁵ Read 21 July 1773.

middle-class sensibilities: a tale that included seduction and abandonment was increasingly key to admission.⁶⁶

It should be noted that the policy of the Foundling Hospital was altered in January 1770; petitioners were thereafter required to supply the name and address of someone “respectable” that was willing to testify to their good character and to the truth of their application.⁶⁷ The petition of Mary Line gave the information of a baker who was willing to testify to her circumstances. Elizabeth Harrison, similarly, provided that of two hatters, while Ann Williamson offered that of a perukemaker.⁶⁸ The back of Ann Norman’s petition said that Mr. Serjeantson—the distiller she used as a reference—“appears to be a Reputable Tradesman & a Man of Credit, gives the petitioner a good character.”⁶⁹ A number of petitioners thus listed a former employer as a reference: Mary Legus’s prior mistress gave her a positive character reference, saying that she was a good servant who behaved “very well” in her service.⁷⁰ Mary Griffiths’ previous employer—an apothecary—similarly recommended her and suggested that she could get back into service and “preserve her character” if her child was admitted.⁷¹ In the same way, Charlotte Andree, who wrote on behalf of petitioner Mary Brown, said that she would be happy to take

⁶⁶ As Françoise Barret-Ducrocq argued, the petitioners “strove to present themselves in a pathetic light in order to secure material help.” Barret-Ducrocq, 51. In many ways this shift marked changes in prevailing attitudes toward gender and sexuality.

⁶⁷ The maximum age of children that could be admitted was also lowered to two months. See London Metropolitan Archives, A/FH/K02/12, 216.

⁶⁸ Petitions marked 31 October 1770; n.d.; 14 February 1770.

⁶⁹ Read 21 July 1773.

⁷⁰ No. 16849; Read 10 November and admitted to ballot 17 November 1773; 2-month-old female admitted 1 December 1773.

⁷¹ No. 16675; Admitted 5 December 1770.

Brown into service again, because her seduction was no doubt more “her misfortune than her fault, and ... she heartedly resents it.”⁷²

Mr. Bayley, a baker, said that Elizabeth Ayers “behaved well in all respects except this affair of the child” and added that his wife “had some thoughts of taking her again, as she is a very good servant.”⁷³ In a similar way, Elizabeth Cotton’s former mistress said she “behaved well,” but she also made it clear that she only intended to take Cotton on again on the condition “the child is provided for.” In fact, this was a common trope in many of the petitions, as masters and mistresses offered testimonials on their servants’ behalf but attempted to sway the decision of the committee by offering to take the mother back on the condition that the Foundling Hospital take charge of the child.⁷⁴

Some petitioners depended on less mercenary endorsements, hoping the reputations of influential parties would help their application: Mary Gale, who had a child in Québec but was abandoned by the father after her return to London, included the recommendation of a William Fitzherbert, Esquire. Rebecca Cormick likewise provided the information of a Mr. William McGuire, Esquire, to guarantee the truth of her statement.⁷⁵ Hanway himself intervened at times to endorse the applications of certain petitioners, including Mary Smith, a milliner who was forced to quit her job because of “an unfortunate connection with a man who under a promise of marriage seduced her.”⁷⁶ Hanway also interceded in the case of a dying mother whose daughter

⁷² Andree said, “she served us faithfully and well in every respect, is remarkably mild and peaceable in her disposition, and in a word is as good a servant as we desire to have.” Admitted to the ballot 5 September 1772.

⁷³ Dated 8 September 1773; N.d. No 16836 2-month-old son taken in, 6 October 1773.

⁷⁴ No. 16855; Read 17 November 1773; 8-week-old male taken in, 1 December 1773.

⁷⁵ 28 November 1770; Read 14 March 1773.

⁷⁶ He appended her application with “This story I have the utmost reason to believe is true.” Dated 3 December 1771; Read 18 December 1771.

was already far beyond the Foundling Hospital's usual age of admittance at four or five years old. The girl was the child of a soldier, and Hanway believed that the Foundling Hospital would "gain honour and profit" by admitting the girl, because "a soldier's child deserves a peculiar Commiseration."⁷⁷ For these applicants, then, establishing their character depended not just on the petitions themselves, but on the strength of the references that accompanied them.

Similarly, many applications emphasized the respectability of the petitioners themselves. At the same time, some were from particularly modest or impoverished backgrounds: at least 21 percent of the petitions in this study mentioned poverty as the main circumstance driving their submission. A statement emphasizing economic need was a well-publicized prerequisite of aid from the institution: petitions like those of Elizabeth Miller and Ann Hatton thus stressed their "very low circumstances" and "lowest distress."⁷⁸ Expressions of need were considered to be proof of an applicant's deservingness: in Sarah Evans' case in 1770, it was thus noted that her application was "attended with extraordinary Marks of Poverty"; the child on whose behalf she applied, however, died of fever within a week of her petition being read.⁷⁹

In certain cases, the petitioners emphasized their sense of need, mentioning having had to pawn their belongings: Ann Parrott had been out of work for four months; her petition stressed that she had been forced to part with everything she had, and that she "now layeth in a very deplorable situation being a stranger in London and having no friend to assist her."⁸⁰ Similar wording appears in other petitions, suggesting that certain phrases had become rhetorical

⁷⁷ Read 28 July 1773.

⁷⁸ Outhwaite, "Objects of Charity", 502. Elizabeth Miller, read January 1773; Ann Hatton, read July 1773.

⁷⁹ Her application expressed the hope that the Foundling hospital would take what was "likely a stout healthy child," and was dated 12 November 1770. Despite this, the boy died on 19 November 1770.

⁸⁰ 7 February 1773.

shorthand to illustrate the extent of a petitioner's destitution. In 1769, the application of Mary Hewitt noted that she had been forced "to make away with her Cloaths for a support for herself and Babe."⁸¹ Similarly, in 1773 Ann Brown emphasized that she had been obliged to part with "almost all of her wearing apparel;" later that same year, Mary Brown (no relation) stressed that necessity had compelled her to pawn all her clothes and reduced her "to the utmost misery and distress."⁸²

Some of these applicants had multiple children, but they thought their chances were better if they petitioned to have just one taken in by the Foundling Hospital and demonstrated that their own resources would be sufficient to maintain the others. In 1772, Christina Rebens gave birth to twins; her application claimed the situation would "end in her utter ruin unless your honours should extend your charity to her" and take one of the two infants into the care of the charity. She believed it was possible that she could regain a position "with some Lady as her servant," but not with the burden of "two starving children."⁸³ Just a month later, Ann Pluckro, "a poor widow ... Left in great Distress with tow (sic) small children," wrote that she begged "Leve to meake my pettishon to the gentilmen belongin to the Charity of the foundling ospital." She expressed her hope "that the good gentelmen will teak compashon on her and teak the younger it being a Boy about tow months ould," assuring the governors that "she can take care to meke provvishon for the oulder."⁸⁴ Similarly, in 1773 Eley Beek asked that the Foundling

⁸¹ Dated 12 December 1769. Read 13 October 1769.

⁸² Read 18 August 1773; Dated 27 July 1773. Read 28 July, and again 11 August.

⁸³ 10 June 1772.

⁸⁴ Read 24 July 1772.

Hospital “be pleased to Release her of one of her Children,” and she guaranteed that “your Poor Petitioner will ever be bound in Duty to pray.”⁸⁵

Many that wrote petitions insisted that they had only managed to make ends meet with the help of others before they had finally been forced to resort to their application to the Foundling Hospital. In spite of the desperation they invoked, significantly, their petitions did not claim that they had made applications to the parish for assistance—the receipt of poor relief was known to be a bar to the success of petitions. But some applicants emphasized that their situations had been made worse by this inability to seek parish aid. Eleanor Richardson’s 1771 petition noted that she could not go to the parish for help because she was at too great a distance from her place of settlement.⁸⁶

Similarly, some stressed their inability to seek any other aid: In 1772, Dorothy Hodgson’s petition thus mentioned the 300-mile distance from any relatives who might help her to maintain her child.⁸⁷ Conversely, Ann Knight’s petition noted that she had subsisted until that point entirely on the goodwill of friends and neighbours, as did the petition of Sarah Raply in 1773, which acknowledged “the humanity of a few well disposed Christians who assisted me in my Lying inn.”⁸⁸ Other petitioners emphasized the benevolence of former employers: The 1772 application of Mary Weedon detailed the support she had received from two ladies with whom she had lived as a servant.⁸⁹ In that same year, Jane Sant’s petition claimed that she had been “willing to keep myself in Employ until I could no longer hide my shame from my Mistres,

⁸⁵ Read 3 November 1773.

⁸⁶ 29 May 1771.

⁸⁷ Read 1 January 1772.

⁸⁸ 4 August 1773.

⁸⁹ Read 23 December 1772.

which upon being questioned by her, she took compassion on me & assisted me in my Lying-in.” She averred that “if I had not such fortune, I must have inevitably perished.”⁹⁰

In fact, despite what might be expected, many of the documents in the archive showed former employers acting charitably toward their former employees. Some, like the master and mistress of Mary Atkins—who had a baby girl by a fellow servant—subsidized their former servant throughout her lying-in.⁹¹ By contrast, many petitioners found themselves completely shunned by families, friends, and employers because of their situations. The applications of Martha Machay, Mary Smith, and Mary Phillips thus all talk of being obliged to leave their places once their situations were known; in Smith’s case, she had already “spent all the money she had saved by great Industry in Service.”⁹² The petition of Mary Gill said that all of her friends had abandoned her save for the one with whom she lodged; Elizabeth Smith’s petition said that she was obliged to leave her place once visibly pregnant, “subsisting for a considerable time on pledging the few necessarys she was possess’d of” and “on what little wages she saved while in service.”⁹³ Eleanor Richardson went so far as to claim that “her friends in consequence of her imprudent conduct have turned their backs on her and her infant”; Jane Brown, in the same way, described how she had applied to friends and relatives for aid, but “to no purpose.”⁹⁴

Some feared these kinds of consequences and tried to conceal their situations, and their petitions were marked by a particular sense of urgency. Jane Forder had already managed to get another place, but her master did not know “of her having been with child, and she feared that if

⁹⁰ 16 June 1772. Mary Weedon, too, insisted that she would have perished without the benevolence of two ladies with whom she had formerly lived as a servant. Read 23 December 1772.

⁹¹ Read 23 December 1772.

⁹² N.d. Read 31 October 1770; Read 29 July 1772; Read 31 October 1770.

⁹³ Read March 1770; N.d.

⁹⁴ Dated 29 May 1771; Read 1 July 1772, but not admitted to ballot.

he learned of it he would “turn her away & she shd (sic) then be deprived of bread.”⁹⁵ Elizabeth Brooks similarly dreaded that her shame would become public knowledge: she believed it was likely to kill her mother, who was already suffering from a cancer of the eye and could not take care of herself.⁹⁶

Even where there was support, the aid of family and friends could be a double-edged sword: a number of applicants seem to have been unsuccessful in their applications precisely because the governors of the Foundling Hospital thought they were already receiving too much help from others. The petition of Ann Pluckro appears to have been rejected simply because her reference, a Mrs. Thorn of Titchfield St., testified that she had “assisted her with money to supply her children or they must have starved.”⁹⁷ Ann Lorton, similarly, submitted a petition on behalf of an acquaintance who had been left with a child—Lorton had given her 3s 6d a week for the maintenance of the infant; because of Lorton’s ability to spend that much—even though she insisted that it was too much for her to pay—the child was “not regarded as a proper object of charity” and her application was rejected.⁹⁸

Finally, the circumstances of petitioners were occasionally exacerbated because of illness. Eley Beek described herself as “in Greate Distress having had a Bad State of Health and two children been out of Business these six months and has no way to support her self and children.”⁹⁹ In the case of Elizabeth Treadwell, she was unsuccessful in her petition despite the

⁹⁵ Read 27 October 1773.

⁹⁶ Read 30 December 1772.

⁹⁷ Read 24 July 1772.

⁹⁸ N.d.

⁹⁹ Read 3 November 1773 but thought a matter for the parish.

Committee being told: “she lyes very ill & her case is truly pitiable.”¹⁰⁰ Altogether, less than 4 percent of applicants mentioned illness in their petitions, although the extent of that illness could vary significantly: it could have a significant effect on migrant workers, such as those who relocated to London to acquire a place in domestic service but who lacked immunities to the pathogens of the metropolis.¹⁰¹ Sometimes married women expressed that they had been too ill to fulfill domestic responsibilities; others expressed that they had been too ill to work; others were prevented from attending the submission of their petition in person or any subsequent follow-up interview.¹⁰² In 1772, Elizabeth Cooper’s petition was read by the committee even though she was still at Bankside in the parish of St. George Southwark “where she now lays very ill.”¹⁰³ In 1773, similarly, the petition of Elizabeth Wilkinson was acknowledged as “her own enditing (sic) and writing,” but records that she was not well enough to accompany it.¹⁰⁴

In extreme cases, petitioners did not survive their illness. Sarah Grainger, who applied because she was severely impoverished after the death of her soldier husband, had a note affixed to her petition that said, “This child appears to be a real object of charity, having neither father or mother,” which suggests that Grainger did not recover.¹⁰⁵ Ann Williamson, a servant in “deplorable condition,” similarly petitioned to have a boy she gave birth to accepted by the

¹⁰⁰ Read 18 August 1773; Mary Williamson, in the same way, was thought to be close to mental illness with her grief in November of 1773, having paid £5 for a month’s confinement “in hopes she might recover.” Read 3 Nov 1773.

¹⁰¹ See Landers, *Death and the Metropolis*, 123–24; Read 11 August 1773.

¹⁰² See Outhwaite, “Objects of Charity”, 505.

¹⁰³ Submitted 18 November 1772. Read January 1773.

¹⁰⁴ Dated 20 July 1773, although when the petition was read—24 July—she was apparently able to attend. Altogether, 3.1 percent of petitions examined here noted that the applicant had been too ill to attend the meeting with the Committee.

¹⁰⁵ Outhwaite, “Objects of Charity”, 510, n. 32.

charity in February 1770, but she was not expected to come out of the hospital alive: it is not clear if she ever did.¹⁰⁶

Conclusions

From the arrival of the first child at the London Foundling Hospital in 1741 to the close of the eighteenth century, a total of 18,539 infants were taken in. A roughly equal number of boys and girls passed the gates of the institution, but as many as two-thirds of this total would subsequently perish in infancy.¹⁰⁷ The mission of the Foundling Hospital—to end the “wasteful” loss of human life at the core of Britain and to produce productive, upright citizens for the nation—came to reflect the imperial attitudes of Coram and the governors of the Foundling Hospital more closely in the decades after its foundation.

Some of the infants that the Foundling Hospital admitted were already baptised but they were all given a new name, symbolic of their new life.¹⁰⁸ Even though the institution promised, “If any particular marks are left with the child great care will be taken for their preservation,” the fact is that the reclamation of infants proved to be difficult: very few mothers were successful in that regard, particularly because so many of the children died in infancy. Fewer than 200 were reclaimed alive before the mid-1800s.¹⁰⁹

For a time, the Foundling Hospital became a legitimately national institution—during the General Reception, babies arrived from the farthest reaches of the country. The Foundling

¹⁰⁶ Outhwaite, “Objects of Charity”, 505.

¹⁰⁷ Levene, *Childcare, Health, and Mortality*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ The first two infants admitted to the Foundling Hospital were given the names Thomas and Eunice Coram. See Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 49.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Gillian Wagner, *Thomas Coram, Gent., 1668–1751* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 145; Levene, *Childcare, Health, and Mortality*, 18, 33–35; also see Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 237.

Hospital was essentially an experiment in state-subsidized philanthropy, and it had a significant impact on child welfare provision across England, with as much as £30,000 a year being funnelled into the institution by the Westminster parliament between 1756 and 1771.¹¹⁰ But costs effectively spiralled out of control, and contemporaries came to realize the open-door policy that had been imposed on the Foundling Hospital had had serious consequences: of nearly 15,000 infants admitted during the General Reception, over 10,400 died. These mortality rates raised a general outcry: public donations slumped, and Parliamentary funding ceased within the decade.¹¹¹

There would be changes in the rules and regulations of the institution in the latter part of the eighteenth century that would further improve the rates of survival for foundling children.¹¹² By the end of the century, the Foundling Hospital had a mortality rate as low as one in six, although it was never again able to inspire the same level of enthusiasm: in fact, the list of subscribers to the charity in 1799 was less than half of what it had been in 1781.¹¹³ At the turn of the century, the Foundling Hospital was forced to find alternative means of raising funds, leasing out some of the charity's real estate in the Lamb's Conduit Fields area of Bloomsbury.¹¹⁴ As time went on, the Foundling Hospital's compassion toward "fallen" women and illegitimate

¹¹⁰ Although as Helen Berry points out, this contribution was relatively small in comparison "to the £700,000 spent on prison hulks in the Thames in the quarter-century after 1776, or £1 million spent on transportation to Australia between 1787 and 1797." Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 95. Also see Joanna Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), 59–61.

¹¹¹ Although during the French Revolutionary Wars of the 1790s, there were further subsidies to make arrangements for the orphans of servicemen killed in action. See Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 95, 278 Erica Charters, "The Caring Fiscal Military State During the Seven Years War, 1756–63", *Historical Journal* 52:4 (2009), 92–141.

¹¹² Some of these measures—like the system of petitioning—also made it more difficult for needy families to secure care. *Fourth Report of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor* (London, 1801), Appendix VI, 53.

¹¹³ *Fourth Report of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor* (London, 1801), Appendix VI, 53.

¹¹⁴ Allin, "Early Years", 63.

children—just like the Old Poor Law and other social mores seen to be “Georgian”—was increasingly thought to be out of step with new Victorian attitudes and ideas.¹¹⁵

In hindsight, the Foundling Hospital was instrumental in improving the prospects of survival for children in Great Britain, providing a safety net that the poor were not able to access anywhere else or in any other way. Their efforts toward teaching independence and self-sufficiency, providing foundlings with employment, ultimately helped those foundlings to secure settlements, shifting future responsibility for their welfare onto the parish system.¹¹⁶ In many ways, the Foundling Hospital also prefigured modern systems of child fostering, transferring responsibility for these children to the state rather than to kin or neighbours, and this would have enormous consequences for the care of children born into poverty in Britain over the next 250 years.

As much as a third of the children admitted to the Foundling Hospital throughout its existence survived long enough to be apprenticed—which actually represented a higher proportion than could be found in parish workhouses or in similar institutions on the continent.¹¹⁷ The next chapter looks in greater detail at these arrangements, and the impact they had on the children of the institution.

¹¹⁵ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 279.

¹¹⁶ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 232.

¹¹⁷ See Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies*, 170.

Chapter Six: Foundling Hospital Apprenticeships

Historical studies have tended to treat the young people that participated in apprenticeships as a uniform group: most assume a common identity among apprentices—a group who knew their customary entitlements, and who were often prominent at times of political trouble, appearing in the campaigns of John Wilkes, or the Gordon and Caroline Riots, or the various London trade disputes in the 1760s.¹ But these studies have also mainly focused on those bound out via private family arrangements, in spite of the fact that these kinds of apprenticeships were in decline toward the end of the eighteenth century: in an increasingly competitive economic climate, the long period of unpaid training that characterized traditional apprenticeship had become unappealing—even disadvantageous.² It has been shown that waged day labour came to be preferred to traditional live-in, unpaid service in many sectors, although this study has stressed the way that, in spite of this, parish authorities continued to arrange apprenticeships for young paupers—even increasing their use—before the century came to an end. Because pauper apprenticeships were closely tied to settlement entitlements, this older framework that had been

¹ Although Levene points out that “more detailed work on eighteenth-century crowds has uniformly highlighted their participants' waged rather than indigent background, but the perceived threat may have remained. Alys Levene, “Honesty, sobriety and diligence: master–apprentice relations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England”, *Social History* 33:2 (2008):183–200.

187–88. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (English translation, London: Penguin, 1991 reprint), 82; George Rudé, *The Crowd in History, 1730–1848: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England* (revised edn., London, 1981), 195–208 and 214–15; Nick Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); John Brewer, “The Wilkites and the law, 1763–74: a study of radical notions of governance” in John Brewer and John Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1980), 164–65 and 168–71.

² See Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*; Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*. But also see Rose, “Social policy and business”, 5, 32; Steve Hindle, “‘Waste’ Children? Pauper Apprenticeship under the Elizabethan Poor Laws, c. 1598–1697” in Penelope Lane, Neil Raven, and K. D. M. Snell (eds.), *Women, Work and Wages in England, 1600–1850* (Woodbridge, 2004), 15–46.

intended for training was rejuvenated at the parish level: Poor Law authorities largely came to see it as a means of “disposing” of children who were likely to become a drain on the rates.³

By comparison, the governors of charities such as the Foundling Hospital were not subject to the same kind of pressure from ratepayers, yet they too relied on apprenticeship as a means of finally transferring their young charges off their books. Because of the links of philanthropic organizations with high-society patronage and charity, the governors of the charities of the capital claimed to hold a much nobler set of ideals than the average parish official, and this had an impact on the prospects of charity apprentices. It likely also influenced potential masters, creating expectations of behaviour, and encouraging their participation—even where they had been unwilling to take part in arrangements with the parish.

This chapter tries to look in greater detail at the way apprenticeship functioned in the London Foundling Hospital. It argues that the experiences of foundling apprentices were not significantly different than those of children bound out by the parish, largely because of the culture of subservience and gratitude to authority that existed in the eighteenth century: in fact, it contends that contemporary anxieties about youth and the threat they posed ensured that foundling apprentices shared many characteristics with pauper children.⁴ As evidence, it draws on the documents of disputes between masters and apprentices that were sent to the Foundling Hospital from 1769 to 1776—a period which, significantly, followed the experiment with open admissions that characterized the General Reception.

³ It has been suggested that London parishes sent workhouse children to parishes other than their own principally to relieve their community of the financial burden. See Alys Levene, “Parish Apprenticeship and the Old Poor Law in London”, *Economic History Review* 63:4 (2010), 918; Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain*, 40.

⁴ For more on this culture, see Rudé, *Hanoverian London*, 190–201; Brewer, “Wilkites and the law”, 164–65 and 168–71; John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700–1832* (London and New York, 1992); Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 83.

Foundling Apprentices

To begin with, one of the most striking similarities between charity and pauper apprenticeships was the age of the children concerned: Foundling Hospital authorities tended to bind their charges at ages similar to those apprenticed by the parish. Although Helen Berry found that foundling apprentices in the 1760s and 1770s were slightly older when they were first bound than children from the workhouse, she stressed that those who were destined for the factories or the cotton mills were, by contrast, invariably apprenticed at extremely young ages.⁵ The records from 1769 to 1776 suggest that 68 percent of all Foundling Hospital apprentices were 12 or under (see table 6.1), which would have meant their masters would have received them at a particularly “unproductive” age.⁶ Children below this age would likely have found it difficult to adjust to the extended hours of work required by this new family life, and their youth at binding may have increased the likelihood of tension—especially since it was also expected that these contracts were going to last until they reached the age of twenty-one.⁷

Table 6.1: Foundling Hospital Apprentices in Disputes with Masters, 1769–1776

Ages	Boys	Girls
10-year-olds	20	15
11-year-olds	17	17
12-year-olds	6	15
13-year-olds	4	6
17-year-olds	1	0
Total	48	53

Source: LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001.

⁵ Despite this, it should be noted that it has been shown that, in later years, “some children were seventeen before they were recorded as having been apprenticed.” See Claire Marie Rennie, “The Education of Children in London’s Foundling Hospital, c. 1800–1825”, *Childhood in the Past* 11:1 (2018), 17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17585716.2018.144723317>; A/FH/A/12/004/095, Apprenticeship Indentures 1802–1805.

⁶ See LMA/A/FH/A/12/003/001. Berry found that the mean age of apprenticeship in 1756 was only 11. Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 136–39. This study makes particular use of the documents in LMA/A/FH/A12/23/1.

⁷ This would have been considerably longer than the seven years typical of traditional apprenticeships. Levene suggests that, despite the assumptions of previous historians, problems were more likely to arise early on and that harmony tended to increase as the apprentice matured. Levene, “Honesty, sobriety and diligence”, 198.

Dorothy George painted a picture of apprentices as vulnerable, exploited children, bound to disagreeable trades without their consent. As we have seen, pauper apprentices were at the bottom of the employment ladder, with boys usually placed as labourers in unskilled employment and girls in domestic service. George summed up pauper apprenticeships as “the legal sanction of child labour,” but children despatched by the Governors of the Foundling Hospital and its branch institutions were similarly “unfree.”⁸ Like parish apprentices, they had little autonomy to decide what type of employment they would be bound to or their preferred destination, and Foundling Hospital governors had little compunction about sending apprentices far afield.⁹

In the same way, both parish overseers and Foundling Hospital governors reinforced existing plebeian stereotypes through their placements: apprenticeships were only arranged if they were deemed to be acceptable for youth from these lower social levels. This tended to mean that children were placed in the less-skilled and more labour-intensive occupations in “Manufacture,” or “as Servants, or as Mariners, to any Husbandmen, Master or Captain of a Ship.”¹⁰ Where they diverged was that foundlings were offered with only modest premiums—or lacked any premium at all—under the impression that this would deter masters from taking on apprentices simply for financial gain: at the same time, however, we have seen that this was becoming a concern with apprenticeships arranged by the parish.¹¹

⁸ George, *London Life*, 224, 225.

⁹ George, *London Life*, 224, 225. However, see Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 192; Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, 74–79.

¹⁰ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 160–61; Anonymous, *Act for Confirming and Enlarging the powers* (London, 1740), <https://books.google.ca/books?id=PmnKzgEACAAJ&dq>. Quoted in Levene, *Narratives of the Poor*, 29.

¹¹ For example of this, see James Kay-Shuttleworth, quoted in *Report of the Committee of Council on Education (England and Wales)* (1860), 477. https://books.google.ca/books?id=yKpIAQAAMAAJ&dq=%22The+premiums+offered+with+the+children+proved+an+irresistible+temptation+to%22&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

The Foundling Hospital records suggest that 3369 children were apprenticed between July 1767 and June 1771, at a total expense of £14,594-16s—averaging a premium of £4-6-8d per child.¹² Although it is often assumed that the majority of these arrangements would have been made with factory employers in industrial towns and cities—between 1767 and 1771 a significant number (nearly 300 children aged on average between nine and ten years old) were sent out from the Foundling Hospital to be employed in textile industries—the vast majority of placements were more local.¹³ Approximately 19 percent were placed in the neighbouring counties of Kent, Surrey, Middlesex, and Essex, but Alysa Levene found that by the turn of the century most foundling apprentices (almost 68 per cent in total) remained in households in the environs of the London metropolitan area (both inner and extra-mural parishes).¹⁴ In fact, Levene suggests that they were generally less likely to be sent to northern factory employers than children bound by most parishes, even if their range of non-factory employment avenues was comparable.¹⁵ On the other hand, most of these children were exploited as little more than errand boys and skivvies around London, even though they were supposed to be “proper” apprentices, acquiring the requisite training for future independence.

¹² Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 136–9. Until the General Reception, the Foundling Hospital governors were opposed to giving any premium at all however, and they discontinued their use after the death of apprentice Jemima Dixon in 1771. See Levene, “Honesty, sobriety and diligence”, 184–85, 197.

¹³ Rose, “Social policy and business”, 7–11; Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 99, 103. Berry points out that nearly half of all first apprenticeships, “(affecting 1,562 boys and 1,076 girls) were to various kinds of manufacturing and trade. Of these, over a third of the children were set to work in clothing and textile manufacture. Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 169–70.

¹⁴ Levene found that only 6.7% were bound to masters beyond the bounds of Kent, Surrey, Middlesex and Essex by the 1790s, compared with 56% of General Reception-era children. She suggested that “This contraction probably reflects the reduction in numbers, which made it easier to fill requirements locally (the fact that this made supervision easier was probably a further attraction). The hospital also closed its several provincial branches after the General Reception, reducing opportunities for placements in several further-flung locales, including the West Riding of Yorkshire and Shropshire.” Levene, “Honesty, sobriety and diligence”, 190.

¹⁵ See Levene, “Honesty, sobriety and diligence”, 187.

Placements also betrayed a significant gender disparity. Although girls made up about half of the apprentices bound out by the Foundling Hospital, according to Berry's tally of entries in the apprenticeship register, of the 1416 foundlings of both genders employed in "household business," 1275 were girls, and just 141 were boys.¹⁶ Ann Jenkinson was thus "to be employed in the household business" in this way, even though she was apprenticed to "a piece broker and staymaker." Similarly, Hannah Jackson—who had been apprenticed to a watch casemaker—was "to be employed in the household business." And Sarah Middlesex, apprenticed likewise to a merchant, then a butcher, was on both occasions "to be employed in household business."¹⁷

The Master

Foundling Hospital apprentices do not appear to have been given any more choice than children bound by the parish in the kind of placements they would receive; by contrast, masters were

¹⁶ Beyond the Foundling Hospital, it is perhaps significant that domestic service was the single largest occupational grouping for girls until the mid-nineteenth century. Levene found that a little under two thirds of all bindings made on behalf of foundlings entering the hospital after the General Reception were for work in the domestic service sector (60.3 per cent compared with 45.5 per cent of General Reception placements, which had a greater likelihood of being in manufacture). "A further 22.8 per cent of bindings outside the General Reception era were to manufacture, although this was far less likely to be to large-scale units of production like factories than it had been for the earlier admissions period." Levene, "Honesty, sobriety and diligence", 190. Girls also made up a large proportion of pauper apprentices, Levene points out, "but they are rarely captured in records of private bindings and have been relatively little discussed." Also see Ilana Krausman Ben Amos, "Women apprentices in the trades and crafts of early modern Bristol", *Continuity and Change* vi (1991), 227–52; Deborah Simonton, "Apprenticeship: training and gender in eighteenth-century England" in M. Berg (ed.), *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe* (London and New York, 1991), 243–55; Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 165.

¹⁷ Ann Jenkinson, no 16831 received 1 Sept 1773 at the hospital and apprenticed 2 Nov 1785 to William Stelfax of St. Clements Churchyard; Report of the steward, 25 October 1786; Hannah Jackson, Apprentices FH, A/FH/A12/23/1; Sarah Middlesex, 16580 received 17 Aug 1768 and apprenticed to Alexander Southerland of Shuter's Court, St. Bartholemew the less, merchant, to be employed in household business, then assigned to Thomas Calvert of St. John's, Lane St, James Clerkenwell, butcher, on 28 Aug 1782,] to be employed in household business until 21 years of age. Assigned again 9 Feb 1785 to David Coles, Aldersgate St., Cabinet maker, to serve the remainder of her time. It then seems as if Mr. and Mrs. Coles separated, because she was living in St. John's Lane Clerkenwell while the husband lived near Rathbone Place. Mrs. Cole told the committee her husband was willing to turn Sarah over to whomever the committee should approve. There was an attempt to have Mrs. Calvert take Sarah back, but Mrs. Calvert would not do it unless Mrs. Cole provided the girl with a proper set of clothes. Mrs. Cole would not, however, and Sarah refused to go back to Mrs. Cole "where she persists she has been barbarously treated."

allowed to choose apprentices out of six or eight children because it was thought that this would increase the chances of finding a good match.¹⁸ It should be noted that “a very strict inquiry” was supposed to be made as to situation and character of these prospective masters: the “Regulations for managing the hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children,” stipulated,

No girl is apprenticed to an unmarried man, nor to a married man, unless the wife has seen the girl, and has expressed her concurrence in the application. Except in a few very particular cases, the girls are never apprenticed to any family that lets lodgings, not unless there is an established servant regularly engaged in the house.¹⁹

According to these regulations, “due enquiry [was] made into the Character of Masters,” and it was further laid out that children were to be visited frequently during their apprenticeships: “the girls by the matron, and the boys by the schoolmaster.” A General Committee was established to mediate in disputes between the apprentice and their master or mistress.²⁰ By comparison, parish overseers were notoriously lax about verifying the suitability of the match between masters and apprentices, and they were frequently alleged to have allowed children to be assigned to dubious characters.²¹

¹⁸ General Committee minutes, 5 October 1768.

¹⁹ General Committee minutes, 28 November 1753, 10 March 1756.

²⁰ Foundling Hospital, “Regulations for managing the hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children” (London, 1757), 60–61. <https://books.google.ca/books?id=W31bAAAAQAAJ&dq=>

²¹ Although Honeyman argued that, while their efforts were erratic and sometimes ineffective, most parishes tried to assist apprentices; some—such as St. James Piccadilly in London—were quite active in visiting their apprentices. Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, chap. 11. George also argues that St. Giles, St. George Bloomsbury, St. Andrew Holborn, and St. George the Martyr continued to visit children after they were bound out. George, *London Life*, 244–45.

Reassigning Apprentices

In spite of the comparative diligence of the authorities of the Foundling Hospital, there would be regular disputes about apprenticeship agreements throughout the period. Some masters thought they should be able to dispose of their apprentices as they pleased: Joseph Burt, a shoemaker, was summoned before the General Committee in April 1787 for placing his apprentice, Edith Marshall—bound to him in March 1785 at the age of twelve—with someone else. The Foundling Hospital steward told the General Committee, “[Marshall] was too young & ignorant to judge of her dangerous situation herself & ... it was probable she would not complain ‘till she was ruined.” Burt insisted that the governors had shown that they had no intention of taking her back, maintaining that “while she was his apprentice he had a right to place her where he thought proper.” He claimed that “he had had trouble enough with her already and would not be plagued any more about her.”²²

This kind of informal reassignment could happen multiple times, making it extremely hard for the Foundling Hospital to keep track of its apprentices: Charles Bloxham, apprenticed at the age of eleven to John Furman, stationer, was “reassigned” in this way in April 1785 to William Mashiter, a shoemaker. When Mashiter moved in October 1787, he discharged Bloxham again, putting him in the service of a Mr. Preidel

because it was a light easy place consisting of no more in Family than his Master, Mistress, Maid servant & himself & because he exprest a disinclination to the shoemaking business & said he would never attempt to learn it.

²² Re Edith Marshall, No. 16859, received 1 September 1773 and apprenticed 16 March 1785 to Joseph Burt, then of Fleet St., shoemaker but now of Holborn within the Bars, hatter.

Yet Preidel too discharged him: he complained that Bloxham would never obey his commands without grumbling. He said that he “would not amend his ways after several warnings but grew so bad at last he could keep him no longer.”²³

Officially, the Foundling Hospital governors had to give their consent to such transfers: because the apprenticeship agreement was a legal contract, masters were not allowed to summarily dismiss their apprentices or transfer them to another master.²⁴ But this was not the case in practice: in one particular arrangement, Hannah Draper had been apprenticed in “household business” in June 1773 to an ironmonger in Holborn named Edward Burnell. He went bankrupt about a year later and “endeavoured to persuade her to live with a kept mistress.” Draper refused, but fearful she might be compelled to relent, she was forced to leave her place.²⁵ It would be several years, during which Draper went into service for a number of other masters and mistresses, before she “applied to the gentlemen of the committee for relief” and made her story known.²⁶ In a similar case toward the end of that decade, during the existence of the Ackworth branch of the Foundling Hospital, Lucy Turner was bound to John Capes in York, but she parted company with her master when differences arose; unfortunately, having lost her indentures, there was no legal discharge between them. Turner went into a series of different service arrangements, but the Foundling Hospital General Committee only became aware of her

²³ Charles Bloxham, received 16 June 1768; apprenticed 9 Dec 1777.

²⁴ The Foundling Hospital, it should be noted, was also limited: it could only cancel an indenture with a magistrate's consent.

²⁵ Hannah Draper, received in February 1759 and apprenticed in “household business” in June 1773.

²⁶ After her placement with Burnell, Draper took up a place at Mr. Gordon's, taylor and parish clerk at St. Mary Ax in Leadenhall street. Six months later, she left again and entered service with Mr. James at the George tavern, Long Lane Southwark, stayed 8 to 9 months until being engaged as a nursery maid at Mrs. Smith's in Queen Street, Cheapside. After a year, Mrs. Smith intended to find a nurse for her child in the country and she was let go. She was subsequently a servant for 8 months with Mrs. Mills, ironmonger in Newport Street, St. Martin's Lane, and finally for Mrs. Warren in Bow Street, Covent Garden. No 11,536.

situation when she appealed to them for help much later: her story suggests that in practice many masters were able to turn apprentices away without giving proper notice to the trustees.²⁷

Apprentice Behaviour: Discipline and Abuse

In Foundling Hospital disagreements, Alys Levene suggested that bad behaviour from the apprentice seemed to be frequently cited: in fact, in many of these cases, the committee functioned as a higher authority, allowing masters to appeal to them to have their apprentice reprimanded by the institution itself.²⁸ The committee sometimes ordered these children to be imprisoned temporarily in the hospital's "lock-up house" or, more formally, had them sent to houses of correction. Francis Desse, apprenticed in April 1783 to Thomas Haywood in the parish of St. Brides, was thus accused by his master of pilfering and "staying" errands: when the master complained to the committee in July 1786, they decided that Desse "had been rather too well" treated by his master and ordered that Desse be put on bread and water in lieu of being sent to Bridewell.²⁹

But it is worth emphasizing that in these cases the governors did not automatically take the master or the apprentice's side: instead, the committee formed to address these disputes often

²⁷ Letter from Graves & Gray [solicitors?] York 8 Sept 1778.

²⁸ The prevalence of behavioral complaints was followed by the breakdown of the relationship, often caused by a master's own poor financial status, "with business either being too slack to support another member of the household, or failing altogether... In eleven cases a transfer was prompted by the death of the master or mistress, although there were other cases where a widow continued to maintain the apprentice. Other common causes for transfers mid-term were the master moving away, the apprentice being unsuited to the type of work, the work or situation being deemed unsuitable by the hospital, or problems with members of the master's household." Levene, "Honesty, sobriety and diligence", 193.

²⁹ Francis Desse, no. 16797, received in February 1773 and apprenticed in April 1783, A/FH/A12/23/1. As Alys Levene suggested, "this clearly shows that the governors did mete out punishments for relatively minor offences, and that this was sometimes directly presented to apprentices as an alternative to going formally to the courts. It was also probably a more convenient and cheaper alternative for masters." Levene, "Honesty, Sobriety and Diligence", 194.

mediated between the two, defusing situations before they needed to be taken to magistrates' courts. Mary Addison, apprenticed to Joseph Bennett in St. Martin-in-the-Fields in December 1783, was the subject of her mistress's complaint the following May: the committee ordered Addison "into ye Lock up House" as punishment.³⁰ Hannah Jackson—apprenticed to Mr. Bartholemew Need of Clerkenwell in March 1787—was characterized as "being extremely obstinate & not answering to any Questions put to her" when she appeared before the committee that November: Jackson was ordered to "ye lockup house" for four days, "when the master will if required come again."³¹

In other cases, the Foundling Hospital very publicly provided its apprentices with its protection. There is evidence that the bureaucratic mechanisms of inspections could uncover cases of neglect: in 1786, Mrs. Smith thus came to the attention of the Foundling Hospital. Smith ran a pin-making business with a drastic division of labour; she was in the habit of taking girls from the parish to work in the business, strictly heading pins. As occupations went, this was judged to be "very poor employment... a trade anyone can do, as there is no skill in it, and there were always great numbers out of work." Pin-heading often necessitated the girls in the trade work from six a.m. to nine or ten p.m., "at best not being able to earn above 7 or 8 shillings a week." Smith had engaged several apprentices to do the work for her, and on one visit the steward recorded the miserable conditions in which they lived, making note of the incessant

³⁰ Mary Addison, no. 16833, received in September 1773 and apprenticed in December 1783, A/FH/A12/23/1. This seems to have been the Foundling Hospital's own "lock up house," rather than an external punishment.

³¹ Hannah Jackson, no. 16869, FH/A12/23/1. Foundling no. 16804, Memoranda of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices, LMA/A/FH/A12/23/n.d., n.f.; Memoranda of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices, LMA/A/FH/A12/23/(23 April 1785), n.f. After these disputes, many masters were unwilling to welcome these children back. Sophia Lee had to be re-apprenticed by the Foundling Hospital three times—first, as a household servant in Westminster, then to a shopkeeper in Guernsey, and finally to a "Meal Man" in London, who attended the General Committee in person "to complain of her behaviour." Foundling no. 5,938, Memorandums of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices LMA/A/FH/A12/23, n.d., n.f.

labour that dragged them down, which offered little opportunity of “acquiring proper habits & notions of cleanliness.” Moreover, the steward concluded, from “the depravity of Morals generally introduced from the promiscuous mixture of both Men and Women of the lowest class with whom the apprentices necessarily work,” most of the girls end up as prostitutes.³²

There are instances where the Foundling Hospital acted as mediator when the relationship between the parties broke down—even after the term of apprenticeship had elapsed, allowing foundlings to request the return of clothing from their former masters, or to demand testimonials that might allow them to secure another place. Mabel Roper hired herself as servant to Mr. John Simpson, a farmer at Shipton [or Skipton?] in Yorkshire, after her original apprenticeship expired.³³ She had lived in the farmer’s house for seven years, but when a young man “seduced her,” she got pregnant: the man persuaded her to leave with him to Doncaster to have the child. The farmer and his wife knew nothing of Roper’s misfortune—she managed to keep her situation concealed—and she left in the middle of the night when they were asleep. She

walked all night and day and arrived at Leeds the next evening, and after two days’ more on the road arrived at Doncaster where she remained a week in expectation of meeting the young man according to his promise.

But because the man had prevailed on her to leave in secrecy, Roper was able to bring little more than the clothes she was wearing and had to leave the rest behind; she was also forced to forsake her wages for the year to avoid arousing suspicion, which amounted to five guineas loss. As it transpired, the situation did not work out: the young man never arrived, and Roper found herself alone with little money. She had to pawn what little clothing she was able to bring in her bundle

³² LMA, A/FH/A/12/23/1, 11 Oct 1786.

³³ Roper’s original apprenticeship was in November 1769 to John Young, a farmer from Ripon in north Yorkshire. Foundling no. 13,724 in the Apprenticeship Register, LMA/A/FH/ A12/003/[n.f.].

to survive. Since she was near the time of her delivery, she became desperate; not feeling that she could return to Shipton, she set out for London, where she found shelter in a workhouse. Roper wrote to George Whatley, the treasurer of the Foundling, requesting that he contact her former master in Shipton to retrieve a box of clothes she had left at his house when she left his service seven weeks beforehand, as well as her back wages, “due to her Michaelmas last.” Significantly, she also asked for a testimonial outlining her abilities and qualifications as a servant to help her get into service elsewhere in London. Whatley acquiesced, adding a request to his letter that the Simpsons give Roper “such a Character as you think she Deserves, specifying her qualifications, the length of time with you, signed with your name.”³⁴

In another case, Harriet Wilkins fled from her master’s alleged “ill usage” and accepted the protection of Mr. Maintree, a gentleman at Chelsea, until another service could be procured for her. But Maintree informed the Foundling Hospital that Wilkins did not have “decent clothing” and that nobody would take her on again without it: he suggested that the magistrate should be approached to compel her former master to furnish her with decent clothing.³⁵ The committee often seems to have fallen into such a role, acting as a mediator between the parties, preventing further breakdown and preventing the cases escalating to magistrates' courts. To this

³⁴ Roper was apprehensive about her departure and wanted to explain why she had left so abruptly, but “at a loss to form a plausible pretext for her conduct,” she thought it better to leave the explanation open to their conjectures. In fact, she had never informed the farmer and his wife that she was a foundling either—they were under the impression that she was simply an apprentice who had served her time. “Unless the Treasurer deems it necessary,” Roper wrote, “they may be left to their own conjectures nor does it appear requisite they should be acquainted this is a Foundling, she never having told them she was so, her Master and Mistress having always looked upon her as being apprenticed by the Parish to the Man she served her time with, not that she concealed that circumstance from shame or any other motive but as they imagined it to be so, it was of no consequence to undeceive them.” Memorandums of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices, LMA/A/FH/A12/23/[n.d.].

³⁵ Harriet Wilkins. No. 16,952. Apprenticed to Thomas Ratcliffe. 22 July 1790. Memorandums of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices, LMA/A/FH/A12/23/n.d., n.f. Although Berry says in his case “it was Harriet, not her employers, who were proved to be at fault.” Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 186.

end, the committee would occasionally mete out punishments for minor offences, providing a cheaper and more convenient alternative for masters and apprentices to going formally before the courts.

But the fact is, once foundling children left the confines of the Foundling Hospital grounds, they were among the most vulnerable members of Georgian society. Many endured horrific violence—perhaps the most significant aspects of Foundling Hospital apprenticeships were the mechanisms that were developed to allow apprentices to appeal to the committee over the abuse they were suffering.³⁶ Ann Jenkinson, for instance, was apprenticed to be employed in the household business to a “piece broker and staymaker” named William Stelfax in November 1785. But in October 1786, Jenkinson complained to the committee about her treatment by Mr. Stelfax and his wife, and did so again in June 1787, swearing that “her mistress frequently beat her violently with a yard measure” and that she “did so on Saturday last the marks of which remain now to be seen.” Rather than protect Jenkinson, her master “threatened to put her in Bridewell [where he had put her once before].” She decided to leave “her place & [she] came away without his knowledge.” Just eleven days later, on 16 June 1787, the Foundling Hospital committee heard Jenkinson’s complaints and ruled that she should be provided with another master; Stelfax was instructed to pay a fine of five guineas and return her clothes.³⁷ Christian Wilson, similarly, who had been apprenticed by the Foundling Hospital before she had reached the age of ten to be “employed in Mantuamaking and household business,” came forward in

³⁶ As Berry maintained, “Their lives were often no more nor less impoverished and susceptible to illness and misfortune than others destined for the bottom of the social order.” Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 240.

³⁷ Ann Jenkinson, no 16831 received 1 Sept 1773 at the hospital and apprenticed 2 Nov 1785 to William Stelfax of St. Clements Churchyard; Report of the steward, 25 October 1786. Records suggest that Stelfax only paid 2 guineas of his fine, but he sent on her clothing.

1787—then at age eighteen—with revelations “that her Mistress had beat & ill treated her” for trivial reasons. In spite of the time that had elapsed, Wilson was given sanctuary by the Hospital. Allegations needed to be corroborated by a third party to be taken seriously, with evidence of the abuse brought before the matrons or apothecaries of the Foundling Hospital. In this case, they appear to have taken them seriously: the governors summoned “her Master and Mistress to appear at the Committee... to answer the complaints.”³⁸

It is worth noting that some magistrates were sympathetic to foundling apprentices’ complaints: these children were sometimes not only heard, but they were believed by authorities—they were ultimately removed from the situations in question. But while apprentices had the right to take their masters to court over such failures to adhere to the terms of their indentures, some were understandably skeptical that any authority could (or would) help them out of dire situations. Many charity apprentices simply did not know how to go about the legal means of redress that were available to them, or they may have feared the consequences of an unsuccessful suit. Some, likely, did not even know that this was a possibility.³⁹ Such apprentices often took matters into their own hands: in 1805, records show that out of 53 children bound out as apprentices, “26 were doing well,” but “4 have been sent to sea for misconduct; 3 are

³⁸ Ann Jenkinson arrived September 1773, and she apprenticed November 1785 to be employed in the household business. But Jenkinson complained to the committee about her treatment by Mr. Stelfox on 25 October 1786. Foundling no. 16,569, General Correspondence, LMA/A/FH/ A12/23/[1787?], n.f.; see Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 207–08.

³⁹ Although court evidence suggests that masters were more likely to be at fault than their apprentices in cases of dispute, apprentices were far less likely to take their case to the courts. According to Douglas Hay, masters brought as much as 71 per cent of cases to the Chamberlain's Court in 1787. Douglas Hay, “England, 1562–1875: the law and its uses” in Douglas Hay and Paul Craven (eds), *Masters, Servants and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill and London, 2004), 73. Levene suggested that “it was unfortunate that the more serious the mistreatment, the more frightened the apprentice may have been of seeking redress from the master.” Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 196.

complained of for misbehaviour but have promised amendment; 14 have absconded and gone to sea.”⁴⁰

Overall, the Foundling Hospital committee may have represented a more accessible place of recourse for unhappy apprentices than the formal courts of law: in fact, its committee offered them a vital extra tier within the framework of master-servant law.⁴¹ There were limits to this: the committee did not hear complaints about basic material privation or routine physical correction, for instance. Like other apprenticeship arrangements in the period, masters in these cases were considered *in loco parentis* to their charges and were allowed—even expected—to “correct” their apprentices. There were defined limits as to what was allowed—living conditions were expected to be sufficient to keep the apprentice “decently,” and apprentices were to be adequately clothed and fed—but some degree of physical punishment was expected. It was often local communities that determined whether such corrections were unusually harsh.⁴²

In fact, it was sometimes the testimony of neighbours that led to the intervention of the Foundling Hospital: A statement from Andrew Gray—a staymaker who lodged at the house of Alexandra Young in Golden Lane in the county of Middlesex—mentioned an incident where he had overheard Young order her apprentice, Honor Lucas, into the cellar to fetch some sand. Because Lucas did so with what Young called “Sulkey behaviour,” her husband “put himself into a passion and struck her once upon the face with his open hand.” Lucas did not submit to further abuse, however, crying out expressly so that neighbours would be alerted; Gray said that

⁴⁰ <https://coramstory.org.uk/explore/content/article/apprenticeships-and-the-foundling-hospital/>

⁴¹ For examples of these types of cases, see George, *London Life*, 415–23, and Steven R. Smith, “The London apprentices as seventeenth-century adolescents”, *Past and Present* 61: 1 (1973), 152–53.

⁴² This seems to have been based on the standards of acceptability of the day. Foundling Hospital indentures stated only that apprentices were to be provided with “Meat, Drink, Apparel, Washing and Lodging, and all other Necessaries according to the Custom of the City of London.” See Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 204–05.

afterward that he learned of the incident because “she came forward against [Mr. Young] and ... told this Deponant that he struck her several times.”⁴³ Other locals testified in this case, too: one Jane Lord, a servant at a nearby wine vault, told the committee that she “heard Great Cries”; Mary Dennis, wife of a rule maker named John Dennis, said the same thing, learning the next day that it was Mr. Young “beating his apprentice.” Elizabeth Mills, wife of Richard Mills, said that she would frequently see “the Huffing of the Mistress,” presumably exasperated by her treatment of Lucas. Judith Dawnborough, who had lived in the house for nearly ten months, said that she had “frequently seen the Master & Mistress beat the Apprentice with Pewter Pots ... that Victuals have been lock’t up.” This was corroborated by a person who kept a Chandler’s shop nearby, who said that they had seen the girl “picking up Scraps.” Although cases like this confirm that neighbours could (and did) pick up on abuse and transmit information back to the Foundling Hospital, it should also be noted that the majority of these kinds of reports originated from within a twenty-mile radius of the institution—if the placements that had been arranged were further afield, cases of abuse may have been harder to detect.

The General Committee of the Foundling Hospital often required physical proof of the allegations. Since corporal punishment was widely accepted to be limited by “reason” and “moderation,” it was thought that it should leave no lasting physical signs, which included bruises or scars: other red flags for the Foundling Hospital included ragged and inadequate

⁴³ Memorandums of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices, LMA/A/FH/A12/23/[22 July 1775], n.f. Community intervention can also be seen in the case of Honor Barnes, whose neighbour Ann Waterman—a woman who “goes out ironing” for a living—took over the care of Barnes when her master died suddenly. His widow—a seller of “Oysters, Milk and Fruit—turned her over to Waterman, but also pawned Honor’s things and kept the proceeds. Waterman helped her to recover these things, including a petticoat and cloth apron, which might allow her to earn a living and keep herself decently. See Memorandums of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices, LMA/A/FH/A12/23/[inventory taken 18 September 1776] n.f.; Sub-Committee Minutes (28 September 1776).

clothing, unusual uncleanliness, or malnutrition.⁴⁴ But there were some apparently clear-cut cases of neglect or abuse that did not result in the discharge of apprentices or in the punishment of their masters. One of the most notorious of these cases was that of Martin Browne, a clothier from Holbeck Lodge, Leeds. Browne had requested as many as fifty girls from the Foundling Hospital to work in his woolen textile factory at Ackworth in 1764: in fact, he had promised to construct a new building for the purpose—117 feet long by 26 feet wide. For their support, he demanded high payments from the London governors of the charity, receiving as much as £2000 in apprenticeship fees from parliament.⁴⁵ But news eventually reached the capital that twenty-four of his apprentices had died of “putrid Fever,” twenty more children there were in a “perilous condition,” and more than thirty more were injured or waylaid by overwork and starvation. In the ensuing scandal, Browne was summoned to a magistrate’s court in Leeds to account for these shortcomings, but there he insisted there was nothing wrong with the provisions he had arranged. Incredibly, in spite of these horrifying revelations, authorities found in Browne’s favour: they even ruled that the children should remain under their indentures.⁴⁶

Sensationalism and the News

One element that may have influenced the treatment of foundling apprentices was the immense growth of the newspaper press in the second half of the eighteenth century. Though the proportion of the population that had the vote was still extremely small,⁴⁷ there was a growing sense among the rich and powerful that their lives and activities were exposed and subject to

⁴⁴ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 204–05.

⁴⁵ The equivalent value for this sum in pounds today would be £466,694.04.

⁴⁶ See Scott, “Ackworth Hospital”, 163–66.

⁴⁷ Just under 5 percent of the male population was enfranchised by 1800.

popular judgement: a much broader readership, which included people of the lower sorts, had gained access to news. It has been shown that the increased circulation of periodicals in London and across the British Isles helped to create the idea of public opinion.⁴⁸

A few examples that were featured in the contemporary press particularly highlight the kinds of vulnerable positions that Foundling Hospital apprentices sometimes found themselves in. The most notorious case, with little doubt, was that of Fetter Lane midwife Elizabeth Brownrigg and her apprentice, Mary Clifford. Clifford was one of three young girls who had been bound to Brownrigg by the Foundling Hospital as servants; but in August 1767 Brownrigg stood trial alongside her husband and her son at the Old Bailey, accused of Clifford's murder.⁴⁹ This was without a doubt the most vigorously publicized incident of its kind in the period: pamphlets, broadsides, and newspaper articles were all printed, full of lurid details of torture and abuse: in fact, references to the case continued to appear in newspapers long after it had been decided.

In court, horrific acts were described—it was alleged that Brownrigg had strung Clifford up naked from a hook in the ceiling and had beaten her repeatedly, cutting her tongue with scissors, and tearing at her face until she bled from her eyes—but Brownrigg, significantly, insisted that she was only ever administering due correction.⁵⁰ Although newspaper accounts of the case at the time denigrated Brownrigg as a “monstrous” or “merciless tyrant” and an

⁴⁸ See C. John Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (1996); Jeremy Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Bob Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France 1620–1800* (Routledge, 2008).

⁴⁹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 1 July 2022), September 1767, trial of James Brownrigg, Elizabeth his wife James Brownrigg John their son (t17670909-1).

⁵⁰ Seleski, *Mistress, A Mother and A Murderess Too*, 214.

“inhuman tigrress,” Kristina Straub has suggested that these articles were detrimental to the process of reform: she contended that the sensationalism of the story shielded the wider system of pauper and charity apprenticeship from critique.⁵¹ Straub argued that

The political context of debates and concerns over the treatment of foundlings and pauper children constitute[d] a site of cultural anxiety that ‘need[ed]’ a monster like Brownrigg [to serve as] a cultural scapegoat [to] make the problem of suffering children *both visible and bearable*.⁵²

It may be that it was only these more extreme cases—the ones that made it into the courts—that ever came to light in the media. It can also be suggested that the extent of the publicity around trials like these helped to politicize the subject of cruelty toward young people. Public awareness of these abuses increased with the attention attracted by the case—at the same time, it may be that Brownrigg’s trial received so much publicity because it hit newspapers right in the middle of Hanway’s campaign to improve the lot of poor parish children. But it seems very likely that the increased exposure this gave the cause ultimately helped to secure the eventual changes that occurred in the binding and supervision of apprentices.

The Case of Mary Largent

But a much less publicized case of abuse took place in November 1786, when Mary Largent appealed to the General Committee about cruel treatment and “uncommon severity” at the hands of John Warrington Rogers, who had married her mistress, Pricilla Hawkes of Walworth, St. Mary Newington, Surrey, about three years earlier.⁵³

⁵¹ *London Chronicle* 22, 141; *Universal Magazine*, 106.

⁵² Straub, “Tortured Apprentice”, 14. Emphasis added.

⁵³ Mary Largent, no. 16831 received 16 October 1769 and apprenticed 11 April 1781 to Jane Goadby of Plaistow Essex, Tambour worker, reassigned November 1781 to Thomas Mills of Plaistow, tambour worker, and finally to Pricilla Hawker of Walworth St. Mary Newington, Surrey (then St. Margaret Westminster). Apprentices FH, A/FH/A12/23/1. See Levene, “Honesty, sobriety and diligence”, 197.

The Foundling Hospital had originally apprenticed Largent in April 1781 to Jane Goadby of Plaistow Essex, tambour worker, “to be instructed in her business and household work,” but she was reassigned that November to Thomasina Mills of Plaistow. Mills was judged to have mistreated her, burning her feet with a red-hot poker as punishment for taking a piece of bread without leave, and Largent was re-admitted to the Foundling Hospital. She was bound out once more to Hawkes in February 1783 to serve the remainder of her time. Shortly afterwards, however, Hawkes married Rogers, and Largent’s ordeal began.

Largent swore that Rogers

frequently beat her unmercifully for trifling offences with very unjustifiable weapons... once a week at best, but most commonly several times a week, and not seldom two or three times in a day, as if he took a wanton kind of pleasure in exercising his cruelty.

He beat her before her bruises and contusions from the previous beating had healed, striking her with anything that came to hand, “knocking her head with all his strength against the wall,” beating her on the shoulders “and other parts” with a stair broom when she was sweeping. He beat her so frequently “she hardly knew what it was to enjoy the comfort of being free from bruises & bodily pain the whole of three years she lived with him.” He was accused of “uncommon severity,” “inhumanity,” and “cruel treatment,” going so far as to force her head between her knees to stifle her cries “where he kept it by a strong pressure all the time he was beating her.”

The abuse went undiscovered because

after such times he detained her indoors for 3 or 4 days in order that the bruises she had received & the blackness always attending contusions had so far subsided & gone off that they were not so visible.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Largent later listed a few neighbours who could verify the truth of her claim, however. Memoranda of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices, LMA/A/FH/A12/003/[23 November 1786].

This limited any chance of Largent eliciting sympathy or concern from neighbours, and it enabled Rogers to claim Largent had only received legitimate correction. Largent was further isolated when her master and mistress moved the household from Walworth to the Manchester buildings, Cannon Row in Westminster, where Largent was not known to any neighbours.

Rogers would be particularly severe on 17 November 1786: Largent was given a small gold-wire shirt clasp of trifling value as a keepsake from a young neighbour boy who was going to sea, but Rogers decided he wanted it for himself. He asked her what she did with it, and—fearing another beating—Largent told him, but he was not able to find it. He warned her that he would give her until the evening to produce it or else he would thrash her again. Although she frantically looked for the clasp, she was also unable to find it. When Rogers came home that night, between 10:00 and 11:00 p.m., he beat her with a “walking stick of considerable substance”—striking her on the head, back, arms, and sides, threatening to continue to do so until she told him where the buckle was. He beat her so furiously that the walking stick broke, but he simply produced another one of the same dimensions and began to beat her with that until it too broke.

Although Rogers threatened to beat her again, he relented, admitting he was too tired to do so, but he cut off her hair “in a mangling irregular manner” instead. His wife urged him to cut it all off, but he reasoned that it would only grow out evenly again if he did so. According to Largent’s testimony, she was ordered to bed, but her hands and fingers had become so bruised and rigid that she had difficulty taking off her gown, and her body was so swollen that she could not lie down properly. Her skin “was raked off in several places” and it bled: as a result, she said that she got little sleep that night or the next.

Around the same time, her mistress had handed her down some old muslin caps and told her to recycle them into one for herself, rather than supplying her with a new one. Not having the time required to do it, however, Largent asked Mrs. Stuart—a charwoman who occasionally worked in the house—to work them up for her. Stuart sympathised with Largent and had sometimes given her a few pence as pocket money, but it should be noted that Largent’s mistress actively disliked Stuart. When Stuart came to the house the following Tuesday evening, Hawkes confronted her about the caps, and—likely thinking it would protect Largent—Hawkes claimed that she knew nothing of them. Hawkes ominously promised Largent a beating when her husband came home that evening: one so severe that she would be laid up for three months.

Fearing that this would kill her, Largent resolved to run away from the house, even though she did not have anyone on whom she could rely for her escape. On 21 November 1786—recognizing that the street door was in view of the parlour—she slipped out from the kitchen, scaling the iron spikes that surrounded the house and escaping over Westminster bridge. Intending to get as far from her master and mistress as possible, she climbed on the back of a coach travelling the same direction, and it carried her to Clapham. When the coach stopped, the gentleman inside questioned her about her reason for riding on the back of the carriage.

Largent relayed the story of her apprenticeship and abuse. Shocked at what he heard, the gentleman advised her to complain to the governors of the hospital— “a benefit” which, importantly, “she did not know she was entitled to before.” (Largent later confirmed that she was not aware, until she fled the household, that she could appeal to the governors.) It was already

late in the evening, however, and the gentleman gave her two shillings in order to find lodgings to stay in Clapham for the night.⁵⁵

The following day—23 November 1786—Largent went to Walworth, where neighbours knew her and her situation; she related her story to respectable people there and looked for someone familiar with the abuse she had received who would accompany her to the Foundling hospital. Mrs. Jane Lightwood undertook to take her there, corroborating Largent's story of mistreatment, and telling them that she was a "very good apprentice" who had experienced some appalling abuse.

Largent was examined "under her clothing" by the matron, who said "the greatest part of her Body Arms and Head" was still "much fuelled & of a livid colour, tho' 6 days had lapsed" since her last beating. She was also examined afterwards by the apothecary, who said that, judging from her injuries, Largent must have been beaten in an "unparalleled" manner. Largent told the committee she had been indifferently treated with regard to diet, clothing, and other necessities, and that she lived chiefly on what was left by the lodgers, as well as the charity of Mrs. Stuart, "who generally gave her something to eat when she could get to her lodging unknown to her master and mistress." She was badly provided for, and she did not have a second change of clothes except one shift and a few caps. She was obliged to buy shoes for herself with the little money she was given by the lodgers for cleaning their apartments—without this she would have been obliged to go barefoot. She said that the treatment she had received from Rogers had "impaired her faculties"—especially her mind—and that all of this could be corroborated by the neighbours from Walworth.

⁵⁵ The gentleman at whose house the carriage stopped gave her another shilling.

Largent testified that she had had no reason to complain of her mistress's behaviour before the marriage to Rogers; but since that time Hawkes had also beaten her—although not as severely because she was not physically able to do so. The committee judged that this showed that Hawkes had abetted and encouraged her husband's ill treatment of Largent—she was deemed to be not only complicit in her husband's brutality but a participant in the abuse herself. The Foundling Hospital initiated a prosecution of Rogers for the mistreatment, and the case was doubtless strengthened because Largent had listed several respectable neighbours—including a Dr. Cornish—who could speak to the truth of her claim. In spite of this, it must be noted that Rogers—himself a wealthy solicitor and a man of status—eventually prevailed upon the governors to drop their prosecution, insisting that he had merely been following “the Diction of [his] Duty.” He claimed he was hurt by the very allegation, writing that they would never have progressed against him if they had had “the smallest knowledge of [his] General Character.” Rogers said he had hoped for “a different Return for the great incumbrance this Girl has been to me,” who had been bound to him at the “useless and uncommon age of 12, when she could be of no service to anyone, nor to herself,” and he claimed that some time back she had acknowledged her own ill behaviour. What Largent needed, he insisted, was a father's correcting hand to guide her and to curb the temptations in this life, “which called aloud for some severity.” Rogers alleged that he was being “blamed, prosecuted and exposed for a fault which I might under the same alarming Circumstances have inflicted upon a Child of my own,” and he complained of being prosecuted without being heard on the matter.⁵⁶ Given the financial sacrifice he made on

⁵⁶ Rogers wrote the Committee: “The Anxiety I have repeatedly felt on this Occasion is great... Under these Circumstances—Considering the great expences I have been at for 5 Years with so young a Girl—relieve me from the Prosecution without any expence and the same will impress a due sense of Acknowledgement [from] Your most

her behalf “he hoped the gentlemen of the committee would relieve him from the prosecution without expense.”⁵⁷ In this case, it appears that they did.

Conclusions

While Dorothy George’s work has been extremely influential on the scholarship of the apprenticeship arrangements of the lower social orders, it is worth pointing out that she made little distinction between pauper and Foundling apprenticeships. Because of the lengthy indentures that both shared, George suggested that both functioned as a form of social control—as a means of enforcing labour discipline through prolonged terms of servitude.⁵⁸ In both cases, pauper and charity apprentices could be extremely young when they were bound, and they were particularly likely to be sent into less desirable trades. In both cases, too, apprentices were thought to have been particularly vulnerable to poor treatment by masters and mistresses because they were so effectively separated from parents, guardians, and anyone who might have interceded on their behalf. George’s statement that “the poorer, younger, and more friendless the child, the greater of course were the dangers and miseries of apprenticeship,” might be taken as an apt description of either type of placement.⁵⁹

As in pauper apprenticeship, the Foundling Hospital had a policy of preserving existing social relations, seeking out placements that were appropriate to the social backgrounds of the

Obedient Most humble Servant.” Memoranda of Complaints between Masters and Apprentices, LMA/A/FH/A12/003/[28 March 1787], n.f. In this case, significantly, Rogers was also successful in keeping the scandal away from the press.

⁵⁷ 28 March 1787.

⁵⁸ George, *London Life*, 224, 225, 240.

⁵⁹ George, *London Life*, 202, 223, 230, 234, 227. Joan Lane, similarly, described pauper children as “more likely than others to be abandoned by absconding, insolvent Masters, and certainly to suffer physical abuses than the more prosperous children, but parochial authorities failed to protect the most notoriously abused child”; these arguments can just as easily be made when discussing charity apprentices. Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 68.

children's birth parents, usually in unskilled or semi-skilled trades or domestic service. But the fractured family status of foundling children made them especially attractive to potential masters, because their lack of parents or guardians (at least on paper) made them appear particularly malleable. As Helen Berry argued, the masters were uniquely attracted to "the possibility of training and moulding a compliant orphan child into a hardworking young adult to suit their own ends, for business and domestic service, without the possibility of blood relatives or friends of their apprentice intervening."⁶⁰

Charity apprentices were just as mired in the long-standing rhetoric of subservience and gratitude to authority that affected contemporary anxieties about the threat posed by the youth of the period. Alys Levene has suggested that "the evidence from the Foundling Hospital ... refutes the idea that there were widespread problems within master-apprentice relations," arguing that "relations between foundlings and their masters and mistresses were, in the main, ultimately harmonious."⁶¹ But disputes between parties were clearly common enough that the institution formed its own mechanisms to deal with them, with a smaller proportion of cases progressing to the courts: her suggestion, that "approximately half of all children bound out by this institution successfully completed their term," perhaps just verifies that this "intermediary tier of mediation and judgement between the correction of the master and the courts of law" was effective.⁶² The institution's constant reinforcement of the standards of behaviour expected of its charges may also have had an impact on them, increasing tendencies toward moral probity.

⁶⁰ Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 195.

⁶¹ Levene, "Honesty, sobriety and diligence", 200.

⁶² Levene, "Honesty, sobriety and diligence", 199.

What was remarkable about the Foundling Hospital was that they continued to take a systematic interest in their apprentices throughout the course of their term, rather than washing their hands of their charges as soon as they had left the walls of the institution. Over the years they continued to provide advice, medical opinion, and haven for abused apprentices, initiating prosecutions against masters who they thought had overstepped their powers. As in parish apprenticeships, the Foundling Hospital governors hoped these placements would make children self-sufficient, but the governors of the institution continued to provide practical help when foundlings fell upon hard times in adulthood. As Levene wrote, they “could often provide real lifelines to their apprentices and their former charges alike, providing a valuable safety net that was not available to poor people who had no connection with the charity.”⁶³

The governors of the Foundling Hospital may not have been subject to the ratepaying pressures of the parish, but it should be stressed that the institution was founded on the mid-century joint-stock model, relying principally on financial support from subscribers and patrons: they may have claimed to be driven by nobler ideals in their activities, but they were ultimately beholden to the attitudes of wealthy contemporaries. Like pauper apprenticeship then, the placements arranged by the Foundling Hospital offered a means of “reshaping” poor households, ensuring that young people were raised in environments that conformed to the approved ideals of suitability.⁶⁴

In at least one case, the governors of the Foundling Hospital marshalled public funds to provide for the ongoing support of one of their charges, well into adulthood. Publishing a

⁶³ Levene, “Honesty, Sobriety, Diligence”, 200.

⁶⁴ See Wallis Herndon and Murray, 2.

pamphlet entitled *The Case of Mercy Draper*, the Foundling Hospital shared the story of a blind girl who, in 1775, had unusually been encouraged to pursue a musical career. At the age of nineteen, Draper was singing oratorios at Drury Lane under the patronage of a Mr. Stanley, meeting “universal applause” for her performances.⁶⁵ She joined Stanley’s household in 1777, and “was treated with great Tenderness and Affection, until 1782 when she came down with “a Disorder of the Brain, which has terminated in INCURABLE INSANITY.”

At the time, there was no public hospital in existence for her care; until 1784, this responsibility had fallen to the daughter of the Matron of the Foundling Hospital, but this would not be adequate as a long-term solution.⁶⁶ It was briefly decided to send Draper to St. Luke’s Hospital, but this plan was quickly abandoned, and she was sent to a private facility—“William Perfect’s mad house” in Kent—at the cost of £40 per annum, until the benefactors that financially provided for this care died in 1787. She was returned to the Foundling Hospital, although at that point the governors were unsure what to do with her: their intent was to have her admitted to Bethlem Hospital, and an appeal was made to the public to raise money for her treatment.⁶⁷

The Foundling Hospital stressed the deservingness of this “poor forlorn young Woman” in its subsequent publication: “The Number of Persons who resorted to the Chapel of the Hospital to hear her sing” had been a “considerable Benefit to the Charity,” which in return “had extended its Bounty towards her.” Although the Foundling Hospital had saved her “from all the

⁶⁵ Stanley’s repertoire of sacred music made Mercy’s career acceptable to the Governors.

⁶⁶ GCM, 24 Nov 1784, LMA, A/FH/A/03/002/015.

⁶⁷ McClure, *Coram’s Children*, 239. See GCM, 15 Dec 1784, LMA, A/FH/A/03/002/015; GCM, 21 Mar, 1787, LMA, A/FH/A/03/002/015; A/FH/A/06/007/027. There seems to be some inconsistency in historiographical account of her story. McClure wrote that she lived at Dr. Prefect’s establishment until her death in 1818.

Horrors of want, Misery and Vice,” her fortunes had obviously now changed. The pamphlet typified the rhetoric of sentiment of the period, stressing that Draper had become “more helpless than an Infant, more destitute than a forsaken Orphan.” But most significantly, perhaps, her story was timely: it played upon the heightened sensitivity toward insanity among the British public at a time when King George III’s mental and physical health were uncertain.⁶⁸

So, while the governors of the Foundling Hospital may have claimed to be driven by the sentiments of humanity, they were ultimately beholden to the attitudes of contemporaries and the vicissitudes of cultural change. Yet in the same manner as parish apprenticeships, one of the most powerful aspects of the Foundling Hospital’s strategy was its potential for moulding the young poor, ensuring that they were raised to conform to the approved, industrious ideal. The next chapter looks at the similar impact another mid-century institution had on the lives of the young—the Marine Society—including the steps it took to preserve and to mobilize children in the service of the country, in the face of growing fears about juvenile offenders. Although its boys were not apprentices, the charity’s model of assigning the children as servants to officers aboard ship to prepare them for a life at sea operated in much the same way in practice. Importantly, the rhetoric of the Marine Society came to reinforce elite beliefs about both crime and class, and this would have just as significant an effect on the predicaments of children from precarious circumstances.

⁶⁸ See Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 205–06; Ashley Mathisen, “Treating the children of the poor: institutions and the construction of medical authority in eighteenth-century London”, unpublished DPhil thesis (University of Oxford, 2011), 209–10.

Chapter Seven: The Marine Society

By the second half of the eighteenth century, the attitudes of many Britons toward childhood had clearly shifted. Initiatives like the London Foundling Hospital had made it clear that the wellbeing of the young was a considerably more vital concern in society. But the philanthropically minded of mid-century increasingly sought to do more than just preserve young lives: they wanted to make children more useful to the nation. This had already become a part of the agenda of a number of charities, but one contemporary institution perhaps embodied this spirit better than any other: Hanway's nautical venture, the Marine Society.

Although accounts of the Marine Society have formed a part of many previous studies in English historiography, the institution itself has only rarely taken centre stage: In the twentieth century, scholars such as Dorothy George made only brief references to the charity and its efforts “to save boys from a life of vagrancy and crime.”¹ It was not until the publication of Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt's *Children in English Society* (1969)—more specifically concerned with the issues that faced young people in the past—that historical studies began to delve deeper into the operations of the Marine Society and its publicity. Pinchbeck and Hewitt emphasized the institution's impact on “destitute and delinquent” children, but they stressed that

a great deal of [the Marine Society's] very substantial support was prompted by a desire to augment English naval strength during the current war rather than from a humanitarian interest in the delinquency of juveniles.²

Roderick Floud, Kenneth Wachter, and Annabel Gregory similarly highlighted the institution in their study, *Height, Health and History: Nutritional Status in the United Kingdom, 1750–1980*

¹ George, *London Life*, 146.

² Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 113.

(1990), but their principal focus was on the diets and physiques of recruits, and what that information said about the contemporary standard of living.³ Research on the institution was more detailed in Donna Andrew's *Philanthropy and Police* (1989), but it was similarly concerned with the perspective of elite philanthropists and patrons more than with the actual beneficiaries of the institution.⁴ A more complete picture would have to wait for Roland Pietsch's Queen Mary University of London PhD thesis in 2003, "Ships' Boys and Charity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: The London Marine Society (1756–1772)" and a chapter of Dianne Payne's thesis, "Children of the Poor in London 1700–1780," at the University of Hertfordshire in 2008. Pietsch's subsequent book on Marine Society recruits—*The Real Jim Hawkins: Ships' Boys in the Georgian Navy* (2010)—looked further into the experiences of ships' boys that were recruited through the efforts of the institution, including the various factors that attracted young people to the life of a sailor, as well as the ultimate fate of those who went to sea.⁵

One common thread that emerged from many of these historiographical treatments of the Marine Society was that the institution was intended to be much more than a simple naval

³ Roderick Floud, Kenneth Wachter, and Annabel Gregory, *Height, Health and History: Nutritional Status in the United Kingdom, 1750–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Hans-Joachim Voth and Timothy Leunig's paper looked at the dataset assembled by Floud, Wachter, and Gregory to determine what effect smallpox had on their heights, but it was ultimately just as restricted in scope. Hans-Joachim Voth and Timothy Leunig, "Did Smallpox Reduce Height? Stature and the Standard of Living in London, 1770–1873", Department of Economics Working Papers (Oxford: University of Oxford, 1995).

⁴ Andrew, 114. James Stephen Taylor's biography of Jonas Hanway, published around the same time, was equally devoted to a philanthropist, rather than his objects. See James Stephen Taylor, *Jonas Hanway, Founder of the Marine Society* (London: Scholar Press, 1985).

⁵ Roland Pietsch, "Ships' Boys and Charity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: The London Marine Society (1756–1772)." PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2003, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/1703>; Dianne Payne, "Children of the Poor in London, 1700–1780." PhD diss., University of Hertfordshire, 2008. <https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/handle/2299/1844>; Roland Pietsch, *The Real Jim Hawkins: Ships' Boys in the Georgian Navy* (Barnesley: Seaforth Publishing/Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2010). Pietsch concluded that these real-life counterparts of the hero of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* did not really have any better prospects on land.

charity. The motto of the Marine Society was “Charity and Policy United,” after all: it conceived of national society as a single entity, and the suffering of any one part was thought to affect all the others. In this attitude, the Marine Society perhaps embodied the spirit of English philanthropy at the middle of the eighteenth century; many of these new organizations particularly sought to fill gaps they identified in the welfare provisions made for the English people through the Poor Laws. It was thought that central government had failed to address the concerns of the people, and it was up to concerned private individuals to step up to the plate to take responsibility for this themselves.

These charities tended not to limit themselves to traditional parochial boundaries, especially since inter-parish migration was altering the demographics of so many different urban areas. But, significantly, these organizations adopted a number of eighteenth-century fiscal innovations to finance their activities, collecting subscriptions and managing charity affairs jointly in committees.⁶ To attract donations, these organizations courted celebrity endorsements—the actor David Garrick gave benefit performances for the Marine Society, as did the composer George Frideric Handel.⁷ Backers did not necessarily bind themselves to a single cause either, but shared memberships across the range of new philanthropic associations that were springing up across the country: many Marine Society supporters were simultaneously involved in a great number of other voluntary activities, reaping the benefits that this affiliation yielded to their social status.⁸

⁶ For charity in the years before the advent of associated philanthropy, see W. K. Jordan, *The Charities of London, 1480–1660: The Aspirations and the Achievements of the Urban Society* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960). *Real Jim Hawkins*, 37.

⁷ See *Real Jim Hawkins*, 41.

⁸ Most of these supporters, significantly, came from the middling sorts of people.

But the real success of the institution was serendipitous; driven by changes in England's degree of military involvement after 1688. For much of the century to follow, the country frequently found itself at war, and often for significant periods of time. It was engaged in hostilities with the more populous France in the periods 1689–97, 1702–13, 1739–48, 1756–63, 1775–83, and 1793–1815, and it was forced to deploy forces of incrementally greater size to wage each of those wars.⁹ Naturally, as the number of ships in the naval forces increased, more skilled men were needed to crew them. Although there was a period of peace in the middle of the eighteenth century, when conflict resumed in 1756, the need for manpower became even more acute.¹⁰ Informal civic recruitment outside of London and the Downs in the southeast was replaced by naval rendezvous in ports and more active recruitment by the Admiralty, but the demand for warm bodies continued to exceed the supply throughout the eighteenth century.

To many commentators, this was to be expected—naval service was a hard sell.¹¹ Text depictions from this period deplored the conditions at sea. Samuel Johnson wrote

No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail with the chance of being drowned... A man in jail has more room, better food and commonly better company.¹²

⁹ “The civilian administration supporting the military effort burgeoned; taxes and debts increased. Britain acquired a standing army and navy. She became, like her main rivals, a fiscal-military state, one dominated by the task of waging war.” Brewer, 22.

¹⁰ It is estimated that the Royal Navy employed as much as 5 percent of the total male population the course of the Seven Years War. Brewer, 29–30. Also see N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 188, 217, 313, 317, 442, 482.

¹¹ Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 49; Peter King, “War as a Judicial Resource. Press Gangs and Prosecution Rates 1740–1830”, in Landau, *Law, Crime*, 97–116; King, *Crime and Law in England*, 41–42; Stephen Gradish, *The Manning of the British Navy during the Seven Years’ War* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980); Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), 100–19; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World. An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), 168–69; Andrew Harris, “Policing and Public Order in the City of London, 1784–1815”, *London Journal* 28, (2003) 1–20.

¹² James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D. Vol. 2* (1791), 167–68. This has led many historians to conclude that naval service was unpopular. But others, such as N. A. M. Rodger, have argued that this assumption “is palpably incorrect,” maintaining that unskilled volunteers were very common, and that they were vital to naval staffing, particularly during the Seven Years War. Rodger, *Wooden World*, 153–55.

In fact, the very existence of the press gang underlines the purchase that such views had in the eighteenth century. Although the practice of impressment was not endorsed by national legislation, so many statutes existed that specified exemptions to the practice that it certainly appeared to be.¹³ Many Britons appealed to the courts against naval authority, but they often found the admiralty had invested significant resources to defend the legality of the impress. In his report on the case *R. v. Broadfoot* (1743), judge Michael Foster noted that

it is a great mistake in this case, as indeed it would be in any other, to conclude that there is no law, because perhaps there may be no statute that expressly empowereth the Crown to press ... For the rights of the Crown, and the liberties of the subject too, stand principally upon the foot of common-law; though both have been in many cases confirmed, explained, or ascertained by particular statutes.¹⁴

Even without the benefit of an existing statute, the courts held the majority of cases of impressment to be legal because of “state necessity.” As Foster wrote, “The necessity of the case seemeth to intitle the publick to the service of this body of men, whenever the safety of the whole calleth for it.”¹⁵

On occasion, there were popular efforts to resist the press gang. This defiance often came from civil authorities—local justices and constables who had been charged with helping the navy

¹³ Statutes protected apprentices from impressment, as well as individuals with debts of over £20, or whalers during their high season. Nicholas Rogers has argued that “naval impressment was a very contentious issue in the eighteenth century, involving a good deal of give and take among the interested parties about what was legal.” Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 72–75.

¹⁴ Foster, 159. William Blackstone also addressed this issue: “The power of impressing men for the sea service by the king’s commission, has been a matter of some dispute, and submitted to with great reluctance; though it hath very clearly and learnedly been shewn, by sir Michael Foster that the practise of impressing, and granting powers to the admiralty for that purpose, is of very antient date, and hath been uniformly continued by a regular series of precedents to the present time: whence he concludes it to be part of the common law. The difficulty arises from hence, that no statute has expressly declared the power to be in the crown, though many of them very strongly imply it.” Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 407.

¹⁵ Foster, 157. Also see Jonas Hanway, *A Letter from a Member of the Marine Society* (fourth edition, London, 1757), 26; Nicholas Rogers, “Impressment and the Law in Eighteenth-Century Britain” in Landau (ed.), *Law, Crime*, 71–94.

to acquire recruits but who were sometimes obstructive instead, often outright refusing to acknowledge the legality of impressment.¹⁶ City authorities took particular issue with the lack of civil restraint on military action, insisting that the process should be controlled by some official and impartial group that could ensure the eligibility for service of seized individuals. The Lord Mayor of London declared that people taken up by the press gang should be brought before him or another local magistrate before they were transferred aboard ship, or he would consider their impressment to be invalid and illegal.¹⁷ Several newspapers reported that

Orders are given to the City patrol, that if they see any press gang drag any person out of the city without taking them before a magistrate, to... Apprehend the officer and gang that they may be punished.¹⁸

In spite of the legal position of the press gangs, public opinion could be fiercely critical of their activities. One writer commented that he thought it was

a Reproach to the whole Nation to see Families numerous in Children, starving and mourning, the Husband and Father, by whose Labour they liv'd, being dragged from the Loom, or from the Trowel to the Fleet and forc'd to quit the industrious Care of providing for his Family to fight at Sea, where, perhaps, he never was in his life.¹⁹

Resistance to impressment was often bloody—which certainly highlighted the coercive character of the practice—but there was also anxiety about its broader impact on both national and international trade, as competition increased, as well as its effect on the price of labour and manufactured goods. Some feared that England would ultimately suffer from a decline in power,

¹⁶ In 1787, *The Times* reported that “the Lord Mayor has declared his resolution not to back any press warrants.” *The Times*, 29 September 1787.

¹⁷ *The World*, 9 October 1787.

¹⁸ *London Chronicle*, 6–9 October 1787.

¹⁹ A Seaman, *An Infallible Project for the More Effectual Speedy and Easy Manning of the Navy of England without that Intollerable and Unparallel'd Practice of Pressing, Plainly Demonstrated* (London, 1745), 23. Foster agreed that “On one hand, a very useful body of men seem to be put under hardships inconsistent with the temper and genius of a free government.” Foster, 157.

leaving the nation “prey to any enterprising prince, that is in a condition to transport a few thousand men to invade us.”²⁰

Fielding, Hanway, and the Recruitment of Youth for the Sea

While the sentiment of resistance to impressment was increasing, so were anxieties about the reproductive capacity of the English population, touched on in the preceding chapter. It was widely feared that the epidemic of gin-drinking that had gripped the country over the first half of the eighteenth century had seriously impaired England’s potential for demographic growth: philanthropic schemes that promised to boost the economic strength or the military power of the nation thus became particularly popular.²¹ This is not to say that there had not already been institutions with these kinds of aims: the Stepney Society was established in London back in 1674 with the aim of channeling the young toward occupations at sea by providing impoverished boys with maritime apprenticeships.²² Similarly, a number of charity schools established early in the eighteenth century were concerned with imparting seafaring skills to their students; certain specialist schools, such as Christ’s Hospital School and the Royal Hospital School, aimed to do

²⁰ A Seaman, *An Infallible Project*, intro.

²¹ John Fielding later tried to drum up support for the Marine Society by writing, “One of the greatest sources of our riches, is commerce, the support of that commerce, and indeed of everything that is dear to us, is our Navy; the purposes of neither can be answered without a sufficient number of seamen; every method, therefore, ought to be used to encrease, encourage, and cherish these valuable members of society.” John Fielding, *Account of the Receipts and Disbursements*, 6–7. Hanway was essentially rehashing that same credo when he wrote, “as a people whose chief strength is their ships of war, and whose opulence is derived from commerce; to secure the very foundation stone in which our glory is built, we ought to be more careful and industrious in breeding up a race of mariners, as well for the King’s, as the Merchant Service.” Hanway, *Letter from a Member*, 53–54; *Regulations of the Marine Society* (1772, 1775), xx.

²² Also see the Royal Hospital for Seamen at Greenwich, Establishment for admitting, maintaining and educating of poor boys, in the Royal hospital for seamen at Greenwich, and for binding them out apprentices to the sea-service. (London, 1732). Eighteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0106202103/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=26213bcb&pg=1. Accessed 6 Dec. 2022.

likewise for the offspring of deceased or disabled sailors.²³ During the War of the Spanish Succession, an act “for the increase of seamen and better encouragement of navigation and security of the coastal trade” had been passed, empowering local authorities to

bind or put out any boy or boys, who is, are, or shall be of the age of 10 years, or upwards, or who is, are, or shall be chargeable to the respective parish or parishes wherein they inhabit, or who shall beg for alms, to be apprentices to the sea service ... for so long time, and until, such boys shall respectively attain or come to the age of one and twenty years.²⁴

In fact, when Jonas Hanway convened a meeting of the Russia Company at the King's Arms tavern in Cornhill to discuss a formal “Plan of the Marine Society for contributing toward a supply of two or three thousand mariners for the Navy,” his focus was initially on recruiting and outfitting adult landsmen because he thought younger boys were already being targeted by John Fielding’s efforts.²⁵ The entry registers of the organization can nonetheless offer historians a great deal of information about the backgrounds of recruits and their range of ages. Between August 1756 and November 1762 there are 4787 unique entries, and ages were recorded in 3859 cases—the oldest being twenty-eight (see figure 7.1).²⁶

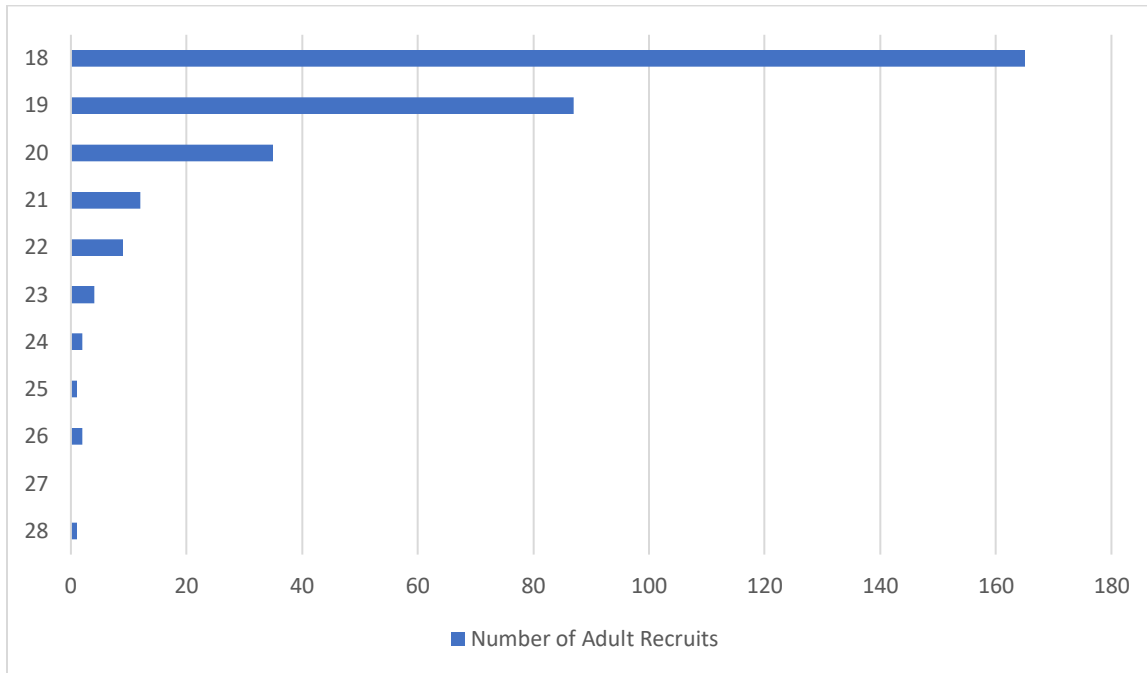
²³ “Although these attracted boys from less desperate backgrounds.” Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 13.

²⁴ The act provided that “no apprentice was to be compelled to enter sea service until he was fully eighteen years old.” 2 & 3 Anne, c. 6. Quoted in Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 108.

²⁵ Hanway had already been named a governor of the London Foundling Hospital, but Fielding had already quite publicly arranged for 300 boys to be found jobs as officers’ servants. See *The Origin, Progress, and Present State of the Marine Society* (London, 1770), 5.

²⁶ See National Maritime Museum [NMM] Entry Book of Boys, MSY/H/2, and Registers of Landsmen Volunteers, MSY/S/1. These were compiled into a single database and deposited in the National Maritime Museum by Roland Pietsch, while Dianne Payne compiled the registers of recruits sent to the Royal Navy from 1770 to 1780. Both generously provided their data for this study.

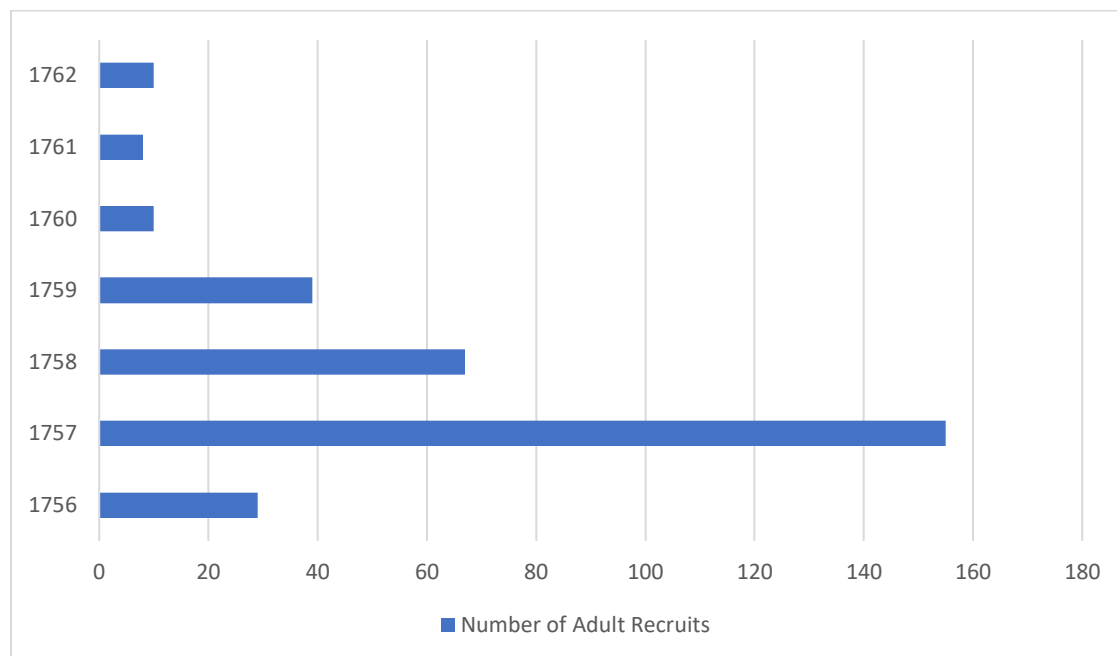
Figure 7.1: Number of Adult Recruits by Age – August 1756 to November 1762



Source: National Maritime Museum Entry Book of Boys and Registers of Landsmen Volunteers, MSY/S/1 and MSY/H/2.

In 1756, there were 29 adult recruits that joined the Marine Society, and there was a spike of 155 mature volunteers the following year. But in 1758 the number had decreased again to 67, and by 1759 it had dwindled to 39. Only 10 men signed up in 1760, 8 in 1761, and 10 in 1762, and this suggests that, although there was a significant number of adult landsmen recruited in 1757 and 1758, the Marine Society changed priorities, ultimately taking on just a small number of adults over the course the war (see figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2: Adult Recruits by Year – August 1756 to November 1762



Source: National Maritime Museum Entry Book of Boys and Registers of Landsmen Volunteers, MSY/S/1 and MSY/H/2.

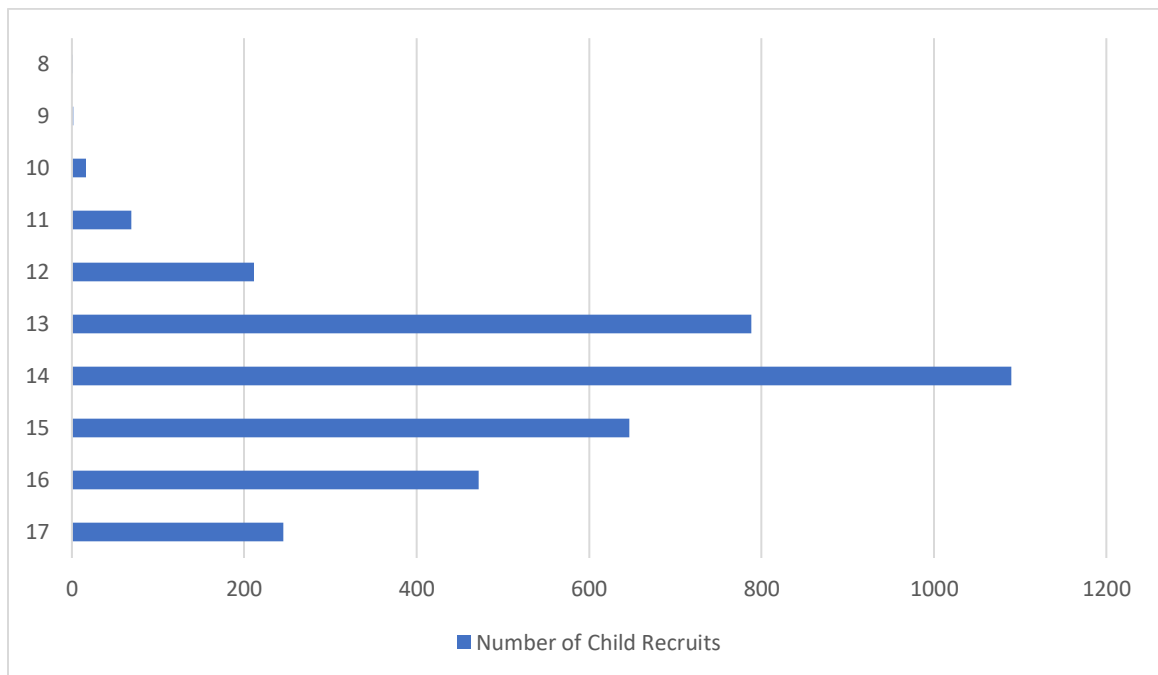
The Marine Society had clearly come to reconsider the recruitment of less recalcitrant boys as officers' servants, "grooming" them for a future life at sea.²⁷ This was not exactly surprising, since adult recruits often absconded with their kit before they could be sent aboard ship, but the Marine Society had also come to believe that younger boys made superior naval recruits because it took less time to accustom them to a sailor's life: grown men often lacked the robustness that this called for, if only because it differed so much from the comparatively comfortable life they had become accustomed to ashore.²⁸ In earlier conflicts, there had been no alternative to the recruitment of these men—even though the majority were clearly inexperienced sailors—but the Marine Society promised that in future it planned to raise the young to become

²⁷ See *General Evening Post*, 29 May 1756.

²⁸ Hanway and Fielding argued about who was the originator of the idea of recruiting boys: Hanway claimed to have come up with the idea in Lisbon in 1739–40, with a scheme for the clothing of stranded British seamen and boys. The truth is unknown, however. See Pietsch, "Ships' Boys and Charity", 36.

sailors for the empire, thereby overcoming all of the recruitment problems of the Navy. To quote Hanway, they would effectively “*breed up* a race of mariners.”²⁹ Hanway argued that it was self-evident “that those who are bred to the sea from the earliest part of life, ... become the ablest mariners”: if boys were accustomed to the roughness of the elements by “being inured to hardships,” they could be “rendered the more active and intrepid, but ... also bear long voyages, winter cruizes, and change of climate.”³⁰ They could even be desensitized to the horrors they faced in naval warfare, preparing them far better for military service by adulthood. To this end, 3555 boys below the age of seventeen could be found in the registers—over 92 percent of all the entries with ages recorded—the youngest recruit being eight years of age (see figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3: Number of Child Recruits – August 1756 to November 1762



²⁹ After all, most would have found themselves unemployed in peacetime if they had no other skills. Hanway, *Letter from a Member*, 16–17. Emphasis in original.

³⁰ Hanway, *Reasons for an Augmentation*, 92. As Roland Pietsch pointed out, it was perhaps only in boyhood that recruits possessed the “naivety and adventurousness” needed to “throw themselves into what was the most dangerous profession of the time.” Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 189.

Source: National Maritime Museum Entry Book of Boys and Registers of Landsmen Volunteers, MSY/S/1 and MSY/H/2.

These records show that 164 children joined the Marine Society in 1756, 920 in 1757, 850 in 1758, 642 in 1759, 428 in 1760, 267 in 1761, and 270 in 1762, which suggests that the recruitment of boys peaked in 1757 and 1758 (see figure 7.4).

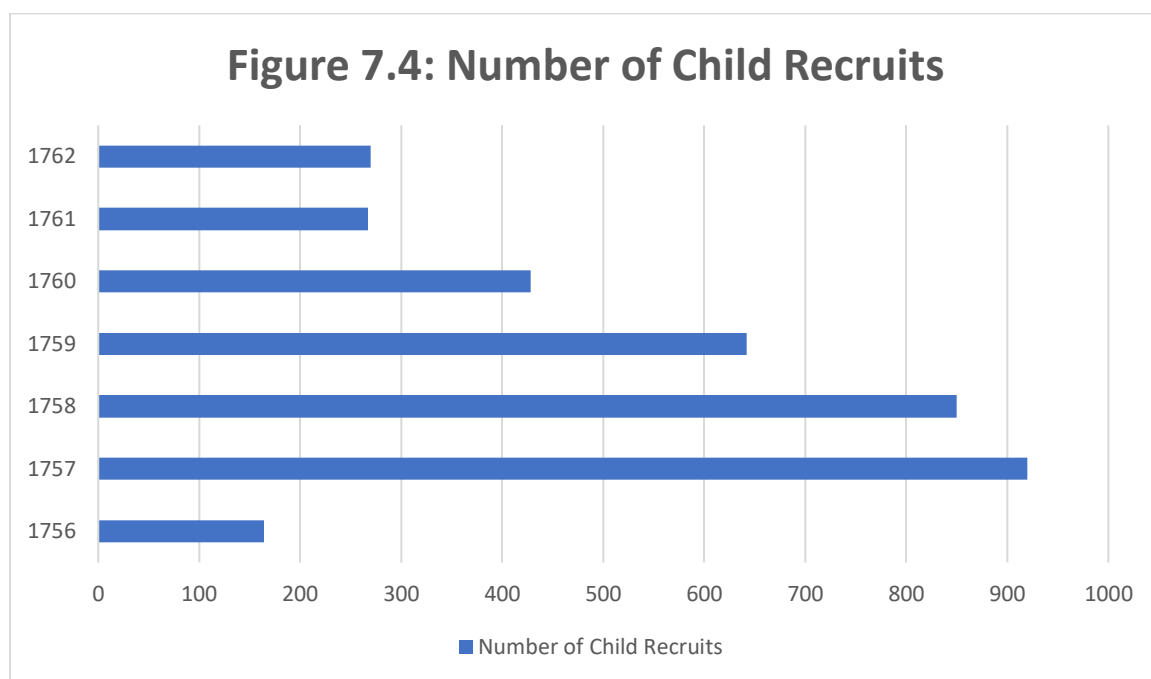
After the focus of the Marine Society shifted to the recruitment of children, Hanway insisted that this was a perfectly logical change: parental love, after all, was “implanted in the human Breast” by “the wise Author of Nature,” so children were uniquely worthy of protection.³¹ He maintained that this instinct was common to all species, although it should be pointed out that the institution focused on just a subset of that group, if only because Hanway believed it would otherwise require years of maintenance before younger children would be of any use as sailors—and there was no real guarantee that they would grow hardy enough for life at sea. The Marine Society thus decided to concentrate on the sponsoring of adolescent or teenage children who had already reached an age where they could go straight into the Navy. Importantly, this would allow the charity to sidestep some of the criticisms that plagued institutions like the London Foundling Hospital—that their efforts were “encouraging” poor parents to abandon their children to avoid having to maintain them through their most helpless periods.³²

Although the minimum age for an officer’s servant in the Navy was officially thirteen—which meant that ships boys tended to be thirteen or fourteen years old on average when they

³¹ Jonas Hanway, *Serious Considerations on the Salutary Design of the Act of Parliament for a Regular, Uniform Register of the Parish Poor* (1762), 43.

³² See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 142; Berry, *Orphans of Empire*, 98.

enlisted—the Navy wanted them to be older so they could quickly qualify as ordinary seamen.³³ But Roland Pietsch found that only a fifth of the boys clothed by the Society had reached fifteen, likely because boys at more advanced ages were already too involved with other occupations to even consider a nautical career.³⁴ In fact, pauper boys were often aged far below the preferred threshold: the laws that made maritime apprenticeships compulsory for them allowed for the binding of any children above the age of ten: Richard East was ten when he was taken into the Navy; more than that, he was still only 3ft 11in in height.³⁵



Source: National Maritime Museum Entry Book of Boys and Registers of Landsmen Volunteers, MSY/S/1 and MSY/H/2.

³³ Officers’ sons (and seamen, in practice) could be as young as eleven, and boys who had a relative with good onboard connections were sometimes accepted underage. Those aged eighteen to twenty usually able to enlist directly as paid landsmen. See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 7, 61, 62.

³⁴ “There was certainly a temptation for the boys to pretend to be older, at the top end to be accepted as a paid landsman, at the bottom end to be accepted as a servant rather than being rejected for being too young. The boys’ real age would have been hard to prove. Many ... were not even sure about their real age; instead they could only give a guess.” Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 61.

³⁵ Acts 2 & 3 Anne, c.6 s.I (1703). Pietsch wrote, “With no evidence of a relative on board, one wonders how well someone like Richard integrated on ship.” Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 61.

Morality, Criminality, Poverty, and Youth

At the time, contemporary discourse was increasingly preoccupied with the subject of urban morality; discussions were becoming intertwined with developing ideals of class and emerging debates on criminality as eighteenth-century people—particularly those among the increasingly affluent middling sort—became concerned with the mores, beliefs, and social arrangements that governed society.³⁶ Mid-century parliamentary legislation came to reflect these anxieties, as measures were adopted to reduce the number of potential diversions for the poor, with the express aim of curbing criminality. Contemporaries were particularly incensed by activities that seemed to flout the conventions of social status.

As the number of newspapers published in England exploded, crime began to take up an inordinate amount of space in the columns of the press.³⁷ Some publications—such as the *Whitehall Evening Post*, James Ralph’s *Remembrancer*, or Henry Fielding’s *Covent-Garden Journal*—developed sections entirely dedicated to stories about robberies, often making explicit links between the rate of crime in the city and the perceived levels of idleness of the lower orders.³⁸ There was a particular growth in these stories of the expression of fears about youth

³⁶ Eighteenth-century people referred to this as “police.” As Donna Andrew wrote, “The notion of police came to include all those items of importance to the national welfare not completely or adequately handled by public officials.” See Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 6.

³⁷ Saunders Welch, *Observations on the Office of Constable* (London, 1754), 26–28. In the 1720s, there were 24 provincial newspapers and 12 London newspapers in England, but by 1753 the total number of copies sold annually in Britain amounted to 7,411,757. In 1760 it had risen to 9,464,790, and to 11,300,980 by 1767. In fact, by 1776 there were 53 newspapers published in London alone. By the middle of the nineteenth century there were 28,000 copies of morning papers and 12,000 copies of evening papers in circulation in the capital. These are thought to have been even more widely read because they might change hands multiple times. Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society* (Harlow: Pearson, 1999), 256.

³⁸ It is unclear whether the increased presence of crime in the media represented an actual growth in its frequency or if it simply reflected the shifting interests of newspaper readers. Instead, it has been suggested that the metropolitan press might have only become obsessed with the sensational reporting of offences because they lacked a major war to sell papers after 1748. See Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, 289.

lawlessness, and the children of the poor often found themselves at the heart of this anxiety. More and more, contemporary commentary included critiques of the pleasure activities of “unruly” youth, their perceived disregard for the Sabbath, or their lack of education.³⁹

These concerns were not exactly new, of course: disparaging comments about the excesses of youth were evident as far back as 1560, although children did not really become a collective focus of the anxiety of society until the seventeenth century, with the first appearance of the term “young offender” in print in Thomas Dangerfield’s *Don Tomazo* (1680).⁴⁰ The word “juvenile,” too, first appeared in English in the seventeenth century, although it came from the much older Latin word “*iuvenilis*,” meaning “young person.”⁴¹ “Delinquency” came from the Latin word “*delinquentum*,” meaning “to fail; to be wanting, to fall short; to do wrong, to transgress, or to offend,” and although it appeared in print throughout the seventeenth century, it was first used in a legal context in Sir Edward Coke’s *Institutes of the Lawes of England*

³⁹ See Margaret May, “Innocence and Experience: The Evolution of the Concept of Juvenile Delinquency in the Mid-Nineteenth Century”, *Victorian Studies* 17:1 (1973), 14–15; Peter King and Joan Noel, “The Origins of ‘The Problem of Juvenile Delinquency’: The Growth of Juvenile Prosecutions in London in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries”, *Criminal Justice History*, xiv (1993), 17; King, “Rise of Juvenile Delinquency”, 157.

⁴⁰ Thomas Dangerfield, *Don Tomazo, or, The Juvenile Rambles of Thomas Dangerfield* (1680), sig. B. “Of a sudden Innocence becomes criminal, before it knows what a crime is, and young offenders incur the displeasure of the Law, ere they hardly understand what the Law forbids.” For seventeenth-century concerns, see Steven R. Smith, “The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents”, *Past and Present* 61 (1973), 149–61; Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France”, *Past and Present* 50 (1971), 41–75; Anne Yarbrough, “Apprentices as Adolescents in Sixteenth Century Bristol”, *Journal of Social History* 13:1 (1979), 67–81.

⁴¹ “Juvenile”, *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/juvenile>. Definitions over the next century varied from “youthful, sprightly, brisk” in Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 24th edition (London, 1782) to “Young, youthful” in Thomas Sheridan, *A Complete Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd edition (London, 1789) and in Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 8th edition. (London, 1792). By the nineteenth century, most people asked by parliamentary committees to define what they meant by the term did not indicate people beyond the age of nineteen, although authors who wished to emphasize the extent of the problem often stretched their own definitions to include anyone under the age of twenty-one. In the 1828 Select Committee on Criminal Commitments and Convictions, for example, groupings of 0–14, 0–17 and 0–20 were used. *Parliamentary Papers*, 1828, vi, 470, 480, 486.

(1651).⁴² Although the dominant patriarchal theory of the early modern world had made the obedience of children the foundation of the political order—English theorists such as Robert Filmer had reinforced this notion that the “subordination of children is the fountain of all regal authority, by the ordination of God himself”—unruliness within the household was thought to represent a much wider threat.⁴³ Changes began to be seen in the composition of the home and the family in the eighteenth century, with “living in” apprentices and domestic servants becoming less common and young people, conversely, beginning to stay with their parents for longer periods, to live away from the principal household with relatives, or to rent separate lodgings altogether.⁴⁴ In fact, as we have seen, the institution of apprenticeship was declining in many industries; although it continued to be practiced as a means of training for the poor (see chapters 3 and 6), it was ceasing to be a common life-cycle experience for those who were better-off. Young people were visibly becoming a much more significant proportion of the

⁴² “Delinquency”, *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/delinquent>; Coke wrote, “From these Delinquencies proceed greater crimes.” Edward Coke, *Institutes of the Lawes of England* (1651), iv 1:209. Significantly, the combination of two older words into “juvenile delinquency” did not occur in print until 1816, with the *Report of the Committee for Investigating the Causes of the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis*, an interview of nearly 800 delinquent children that represented the first public investigation into the causes of youth crime. Likewise, the term “juvenile delinquent” did not appear as a noun until the following year in pages of *The Observer*, where that committee sought information “as to the number of juvenile delinquents who are annually committed to the different prisons in the metropolis.” *Report of the Committee for Investigating the Causes of the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis* (1816). *The Making of Modern Law: Legal Treatises, 1800–1926*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/F0104376761/MOML?u=yorku_law&sid=bookmark-MOML&pg=1. Accessed 12 June 2023; *The Observer*, 14 September 1817, 1/3.

⁴³ Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1949), 57. It was written in 1640, but it was not published until 1680. Paul Griffiths argued that concern about youth in this earlier period “encompassed behaviour regarded as antisocial because it complicated the progress to adulthood, including irreverence, immorality, domestic disorders or even the ‘seditious’ implications of conviviality and play,” and that accounts that “present the experiences of Georgian or Victorian youth as entirely distinctive” are problematic. They have more to do, Griffiths suggested, with what was seen as a connection between rebellious youth and property offences. Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, 126, 129..

⁴⁴ Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511896002; Michael Anderson, “The Emergence of the Modern Life-cycle in Britain”, *Social History* 10 (1985), 69–87; Richard Wall, “The Age at Leaving Home”, *Journal of Family History* 3 (1978), 181–202.

population: by 1670, people below the age of fourteen made up as much as 29 percent of the English population, and that percentage only increased through the eighteenth century.⁴⁵

As a consequence of this growing profile, the young increasingly featured in depictions of deviance and lawbreaking in the eighteenth century. In a hymn he wrote in 1715, Isaac Watts described a child saying,

In Works of Labour or of Skill
I would be busy too:
For Satan finds some Mischief still
For idle Hands to do.⁴⁶

Comments about slothfulness and degeneration were even more prevalent throughout the gin craze of the 1730s, and many British writers would offer their readers suggestions to keep children productively occupied, even if they believed young people's industriousness had to be enforced. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1738, a letter from "Clemens Dunbar" said,

If Hospitals were erected for the Education of the Poor, and so constituted as to receive the Children of all who are unable to learn themselves any trade, and if Parents who are able were obliged by law... to add some Handicrafts to their other education, we should soon see that this Method would more effectually reform and prevent crimes of all kinds than all the Sanguinary Laws that can be devised.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Using estimates from The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, R. D. Lee and R. S. Schofield argued that the fertility rate of England increased dramatically at the end of the eighteenth century, which combined with a decline in the rate of mortality and resulted in a significant change in the age structure of society. R. D. Lee and R. S. Schofield, "British Population in the Eighteenth Century", in Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey (eds.), *The Economic History of Britain since 1700: Volume 1, 1700–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 17–35, especially figures 2.2–4. They argued that "the number of children grew more rapidly than the number of workers," (29) and it has been suggested that employers became increasingly dependent on children for labour in the early phases of industrialization. See Martin Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1700–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 275–76; Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, 132.

⁴⁶ See Fielding, *Inquiry*; William Hogarth's "Gin Lane" (1751), and "Four Stages of Cruelty" (1751). Isaac Watts, *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (London, 1715), 39. In *Moll Flanders*, Daniel Defoe wrote, "The young offender was spar'd, having obtain'd a Reprieve." Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (1722), 213.

⁴⁷ *The Gentleman's Magazine, and Historical Chronicle*, volume 8, January 1738, 14–15.

At the same time, negative opinions about the virtue of the poor were increasingly widely held. On behalf of the committee struck to address the issues surrounding the crime wave, Sir Richard Lloyd told parliament that lawlessness was simply ingrained in the poor because it had roots in the “habit of idleness, *in which the lower People have been bred from their youth.*”⁴⁸ Magistrate Saunders Welch, too, commented that “debauchery, excesses and immoralities” had become “the bane of the youth of both sexes, and a great cause of robberies.”⁴⁹ Joanna Innes has argued that these attitudes caused an increasingly hostile reaction to any kind of proposed public provision in the eighteenth century—it is true that even commentators like Hanway would eventually lament that the

habit of such profuse indulgence of the labouring part of our youth, must necessarily injure their morals, and accelerate the progress of our national misfortunes.⁵⁰

The family life of the poor was thus judged to be morally lacking; criminality was attributed in a similar way to the deficient guidance of inadequate masters. Welch suggested that this could be improved by simply providing for the better supervision and education of pauper children. As justice of the peace for the county of Middlesex, Sir John Fielding was already attuned to these anxieties: he pursued several schemes that promised to improve the conditions of the London poor. But he became particularly well known for his aforementioned efforts to “redirect” the friendless children that he encountered as a magistrate.⁵¹ In *An Account of the*

⁴⁸ *Journals of the House of Commons*, 23 April 1751, 190.

https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Journals_of_the_House_of_Commons/TatPAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0, emphasis added. Also see Saunders Welch, *A Letter Upon the Subject of Robberies, Wrote in the Year 1753* (London, 1758), 54.

⁴⁹ Saunders Welch, *Observations on the Office of Constable* (1754), 26–27.

⁵⁰ Innes, *Inferior Politics*, 180. Deborah Valenze identified a similar decline in charitable sentiment, attributing it to both a decline in public confidence with existing mechanisms of relief and a growing fear of the poor as a social threat. Valenze, 61–62, 66–71; Jonas Hanway, *Observations on the Causes of the Dissoluteness which Reigns Among the Lower Classes of the People* (London, 1772), 15.

⁵¹ Including founding The Lambeth Asylum for Female Orphans in 1758.

Origin and Effects of a Police (1758), he maintained that many of the “criminal” youth he encountered in his court

consisted chiefly of boys from 12 to 15 years of Age, either the Children of Thieves or the deserted Offspring of idle and profligate Parents; many of whom, especially Mothers, shamefully subsisted from their Robberies.⁵²

Many of these boys were convicted of property offences, but Fielding believed that their behaviour had been driven by economic necessity—they were in the position they were in because they had been corrupted by irresponsible parents or had been bound to bad masters; in either case, the guardians of these children had failed to provide the maintenance and guidance that children needed, and he averred that he was reluctant to impose the extreme criminal penalties that were called for by the law. In 1754, he wrote to the *Public Advertiser* lamenting the waste of young men he was obliged to sentence to prison terms:

There are at this time in London hundreds of this kind of boy who might be made useful to society if they were collected together before they commenced thieves and placed either in men-of-war or in the Merchant's Service.⁵³

The alternative punishments that were then available—such as transportation to the colonies—seemed equally wasteful, although Fielding agreed that many of these wayward youth could benefit from a basic change of environment. By 1704, legislation had already empowered English magistrates, churchwardens, overseers, mayors, aldermen, and bailiffs to bind idle

⁵² Fielding wrote: “And what was very remarkable, four infant Thieves the oldest of which was but 5 yrs of Age ... which appeared to be Children of different Persons, collected together by one Woman to beg and steal to furnish that Beast with Gin.” John Fielding, *An Account of the Origin and Effects of a Police* (London, 1758), 19–20.

⁵³ Fielding was hardly a stranger to disagreements between master and apprentice, having set up the Universal Register Office in 1749 with his brother Henry and Saunders Welch to deal with some of these very issues. He believed that these kinds of conflicts only provoked the restlessness of youth. See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 54; Quoted in R. Leslie Melville, *The Life and Work of Sir John Fielding* (London: Lincoln Williams, 1934), 3:113. At the same time, Fielding was concerned by the “alternative” punishments advocated by the likes of political economist Joseph Massie, because of the danger of “corrupting” youth presented by mixing young offenders in with the general population. These alternatives included imprisonment or forced labour. See Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 553.

youngsters to ship masters for seven to nine years without pay, and masters in trades on land were allowed to turn their parish-sponsored apprentices over to a maritime apprenticeship throughout the century.⁵⁴ But Fielding believed that relocating boys aboard ship in this way could help to ensure they wound up in a trade they liked, with a willing master, which might have the added benefit of preventing them from falling further into a life of crime.

The opportunity for philanthropic elaboration would knock with the outbreak of the Seven Years War in 1756.⁵⁵ That January, Fielding received a letter from Lord Harry Paulet, Commander of HMS *Barfleur*, asking him to fit out thirty boys as servants to the officers of his ship. The magistrate saw this as a unique opportunity to “cleanse” the city of its errant youth, converting its “Thieves in Embryo into useful sailors.”⁵⁶ He advertised a subscription in London newspapers on behalf of the “numberless ragged and iniquitous, pilfering boys that at this Time shamefully infested the streets of London,” and more than £600 was raised within six months. This allowed for the outfitting of all of the boys of the *Barfleur*, as well as almost four hundred other ships in the British fleet.⁵⁷ By July of that year, the money had been fully allocated, but it had become clear that Fielding had discovered a worthy charitable goal: through the American

⁵⁴ This legislation was narrowly concerned with placing poor boys on merchantmen or other waterborne businesses rather than in the Royal Navy—by this point it had largely fallen into disuse by parish officers. An accompanying vagrancy act swept the streets of older street urchins, beggars, and idle people. Acts 2 & 3. Anne, c.6, s.iv (1703).

⁵⁵ See Hanway, *Reasons for an Augmentation* (London, 1759), 94–96; John Fielding, *An Account of the Receipts and Disbursements Relating to Sir John Fielding’s Plan* (London, 1769); also see Peter Earle, *Sailors* (London: Methuen, 1998), 22–23.

⁵⁶ *Public Advertiser*, 13 March 1756. Fielding had already been complaining publicly that he had to send young offenders to houses of correction, where they would only be further corrupted, while they could be so much more useful as future sailors in the navy. *Public Advertiser*, 16 December 1754. Worse, Fielding claimed that “for want of a seasonable relief, carts full of these unhappy wretches have ended their days in the vigour of their youth, at the dreadful tree.” *Fielding, Account of the Receipts and Disbursements* (1769), 2–5.

⁵⁷ Fielding, *Origin and Effects of a Police*, 20–21; *Public Advertiser*, 29 March 1756, 10 April 1756, 27–28 April 1756, 03 May 1756, 16 June 1756.

Revolutionary War, the French Revolutionary War, and the Napoleonic Wars the demand for Naval manpower would increase exponentially.⁵⁸

Fielding was soon tasked with outfitting thirty more boys for the Captain of HMS *St. George*, and he decided to appeal to the Marine Society for assistance. He found the institution to be of a more analogous mindset than he had initially expected: in fact, Fielding's appeal provided the Society with the opportunity it needed to shift its focus from adult landmen to the recruitment of children. Before long, Fielding was invited to become a full-fledged member of the charity, which was soon regularly seeing to the clothing and training of young boys and sending them aboard ships in Portsmouth.

In doing this, the publicity of the Marine Society promised that these measures would clear potential threats from the streets. As Hanway wrote,

Happy might it be for this Nation' if the Society could be a means to render our highways and our streets more secure; and by a gentle or compulsive means remove the wretched crouds who disturb the peace of civil society. For by thus checking them in the very dawnings of their iniquity, Tyburn might be left a desert.⁵⁹

In this way, the rhetoric of the Marine Society offered a humanitarian, economic, and political benefit to the country: it was “equally humane and political,” and assured Britons that it could help English society as a whole by aiding this one small part of it.⁶⁰ Hanway argued,

whilst the Society are attentive to the important concerns of war, they also endeavour to support the arts of peace, that Agriculture and Manufacturers may not droop or languish for want of proper hands. Therefore they seek for these young recruits among those who are most destitute; whose parents have left them in extreme poverty, or friendless and exposed to those complicated miseries which are most disgraceful to human nature.⁶¹

⁵⁸ J. R. Dancy, “British Naval Manpower during the French Revolutionary Wars, 1793–1802”, PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2012; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 313.

⁵⁹ Jonas Hanway, *Three Letters on the Subject of the Marine Society* (London, 1758), 6. See Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, *The History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750: Volume 5, The Emergence of Penal Policy* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1986), 133–34.

⁶⁰ Jonas Hanway, *An Account of the Marine Society* (6th edition, London, 1759).

⁶¹ Hanway, *Three Letters*, 3–4.

The master–apprentice-like relationship of the Marine Society’s officer-servant model, moreover, offered the potential to “shape” the kind of adult that recruits would become. It would instil a much-needed sense of religion and patriotism into their hearts, and would

teach those, who would have been otherwise totally lost to their country, an occupation on which commerce and naval strength depend: these are objects which constitute the very essence of charity, and include the truest patriotism.⁶²

By these means, it was claimed that the Marine Society would supplement the maritime strength of the country and help “the warrior and the merchant” alike.⁶³

But prejudices about seafaring were deeply rooted in eighteenth-century British society. One guidebook for apprentices—Samuel Richardson’s *Apprentice Vade Mecum* (1734)—had contended that the sea service was the best that could be hoped for with boys who did not follow the book’s suggestions for proper behaviour.⁶⁴ The sailor’s life had similarly played a role in policing the poor: the 1704 acts to promote maritime apprenticeships among parish boys had largely been aimed to properly employ and regulate the lives of young people within Britain’s emerging empire. These apprenticeships were successful—not because they prepared boys for a profession that turned out famously hardy individuals—but because they promised to keep them away from negative influences. They had offered a means to keep them away from the community altogether.⁶⁵

⁶² Hanway, *Three Letters*, 3–4.

⁶³ Hanway, *Serious Considerations*, 79; Jonas Hanway, *A Letter from a Member of the Marine Society* (London, 1757), 27. See Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 8–9, 199.

⁶⁴ See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 18.

⁶⁵ See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 18.

To many public-minded contemporaries, the most important tool for combatting this corruption was religion.⁶⁶ To that end, Hanway also wrote:

To feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked, who are unable to support themselves, are virtues to which the blessings of Heaven are promised... to rescue numbers of these young persons from the jaws of perdition [and] to breed them up to the knowledge of social and religious duties ... If there is a God who governs the world, true policy and true religion must be the same.⁶⁷

Along with Josiah Woodward's *Seaman's Monitor* (1701)—intended as preparation for life at sea—Marine Society recruits received a copy of Edward Synge's *Essay towards making the Knowledge of Religion easy to the Meanest Capacity* (1734), as well as a prayer book and a New Testament: it was hoped that they would be instructed “in the fear of God, ... at the same time [that we] teach their hands to war, and their fingers to fight in the cause of their country, in the cause of real and substantial virtue.”⁶⁸ It was hoped that this breadth of reading would both prepare recruits for their careers at sea and instil a vital sense of morality in the young poor.

Rhetoric, Reality, and the Marine Society

Most historiographical accounts of the Marine Society have not questioned the allegations of contemporaries about criminality in the backgrounds of the institution's young recruits, and they have uncritically accepted the characterization of the objects of the charity as orphans, vagrants, waifs, and strays. In their book, *A History of English Criminal Law and Its Administration from 1750* (1986), Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood referred to Marine Society children as the

⁶⁶ Members of the Russia Company, which would be important in the foundation of the Marine Society—including John Thornton, Robert Nettleton, Charles and Robert Dingley, and Hanway himself—were devoted to the Anglican Church: they thought the tenets of Christianity were perfectly consonant with their economic and political interests. According to Hanway, the Russia Company had raised a fund to build a church in St. Petersburg, among many other devout Christian enterprises. Hanway, *Candid Historical Account*, v.

⁶⁷ Hanway, *Three Letters*, 3–4, 9.

⁶⁸ Hanway, *Three Letters*, 4.

“swarms of begging, pilfering boys” that made up “the ‘black fountain’ of professional crime.”⁶⁹

In doing so, they were referring to the comments of John Fielding in the second half of the eighteenth century:

The very active measures put in execution by the Civil Power, for these late years, to suppress robberies, and other disorders in and near this metropolis, have, from time to time, produced to the view of the magistrates, a number of distressed friendless boys, from eleven to fourteen years of age, and upwards, unprotected by parent or parish, who gain their miserable livelihood by pilfering and stealing; and of these objects there never were more than at present; and though at first they content themselves with picking of pockets, and stealing of trifling things out of shops, their wants being few, and their experiences small, yet as they grow up, their fears lessen, their strength increases with their courage, and their expences, occasioned by women, make them undertake the most daring enterprizes; and from this *black fountain* it is that the late gangs of hous-breakers, street-robbers, and foot-pads, have been supplied; which makes me ardently wish for an immediate establishment of this radical cure.⁷⁰

Fielding boasted that by these means “our Streets were cleared from Swarms of Boys whose Situation made them Thieves from Necessity”; in the same way, following the Seven Years War, Hanway wrote that “at a modest computation” he estimated that the Marine Society had “cleared the land of five hundred thieves and robbers.”⁷¹ Yet some historical studies have emphasized that the institution’s actual impact on the lives of “criminal” youth diminished over time. Pinchbeck and Hewitt pointed out that the Marine Society became “noticeably less interested in helping the vagrant-delinquent boy” as the years progressed “and more ready to assist the honest poor in distress.”⁷² Donna Andrew later argued similarly that the charity was progressively “less enthusiastic about accepting” troubled youth “and was anxious instead to

⁶⁹ Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, *A History of the English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750. Volume 5. The Emergence of Penal Policy* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1986), 134.

⁷⁰ John Fielding, *Account of the Receipts and Disbursements*, v. Also published in *Public Advertiser*, 9 Feb 1769, and subsequently quoted in Dorothy George, *London Life*, 147. Emphasis mine.

⁷¹ Fielding, *Origin and Effects of a Police*, 22; Quoted in Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 38.

⁷² Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 115. Wiley Sanders similarly suggested that the charity was only “interested in reclaiming delinquent boys” during the “first few years of its existence.” Wiley B. Sanders (ed.), *Juvenile Offenders for a Thousand Years: Selected Readings from Anglo-Saxon Times to 1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 54.

train only lads of good character for the sea service.” In fact, “its role in reclaiming delinquent youngsters was ... much diminished,” yet its “ideological campaign” continued, “[tarring] London’s children with the brush of delinquency and [helping] to single out the children of the working poor as in need of reformation.”⁷³

More recently, Dianne Payne followed this line of thinking in her dissertation, “Children of the Poor in London 1700–1780,” which has perhaps been one of the more skeptical works to appear on the rhetoric of the Marine Society.⁷⁴ It is true that the problems caused by a large, youthful population in growing and modernising urban areas in the eighteenth century was causing considerable anxiety among contemporaries: John Fielding’s half-brother, the novelist Henry Fielding, referred to “the vast shoals of shoplifters, pilferers and pickpockets who, being the deserted Children of Porters, Chairmen, and low Mechanics, were obliged to steal for their Subsistence.”⁷⁵ A Marine Society publication in July 1772 painted a similarly ominous picture of London’s youth:

We now lie open to a nursery of thieves, bred up in this metropolis, with the effects of blood and rapine, and the untimely death of many victims to the gallows.⁷⁶

The pamphlet described the majority of Marine Society recruits as being “abominably corrupted” and “hardened in iniquity,” living in the “most wicked company, in the most wicked parts of these kingdoms.”⁷⁷ But it can be difficult to judge whether any truth lay behind these

⁷³ Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 113–14.

⁷⁴ Payne, “Children of the Poor in London”, 136–69. Also see Dianne Payne, “Rhetoric, Reality and the Marine Society” *The London Journal* 30, no. 2 (2005): 66–84. DOI: [10.1179/ldn.2005.30.2.66](https://doi.org/10.1179/ldn.2005.30.2.66).

⁷⁵ *The Gentleman's and London Magazine: Or Monthly Chronologer, 1741–1794*, 186.

⁷⁶ *The Bye-laws and Regulations of the Marine-Society: Incorporated in MDCCLXXII: with the Several Instructions, Forms of Indentures & Other Instruments Used by Them. Also a List of Subscribers, from May 1769 to June 1772. To which is Prefixed, an Historical Account of this Institution, with Remarks on the Usefulness of it* (London, 1772), 42, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=JPJ-CRBlUIC&newbks=>

⁷⁷ *Regulations of the Marine Society* (1772), 12–14.

descriptions: reliable statistical figures that showed the number of juveniles prosecuted for crimes and the ways that they were punished for those crimes were not regularly published before the 1830s.⁷⁸ Payne challenged the accuracy of these “official” accounts of the institution, arguing that many of the Marine Society’s narratives exaggerated issues in the backgrounds of the children under their aegis, often falsely linking the boys with crime. She wrote,

The prejudices of the elite, clearly evident in the rhetoric of eighteenth-century social reform, misrepresented and denigrated the children of the poor in London, a misrepresentation that has been assimilated into the historiography of the capital, giving an inaccurate account of the functioning of charitable institutions aimed at children.⁷⁹

Based on the results of her study, it is clear that caution should be exercised in interpreting claims about the nature of the delinquency of recruits and the way eighteenth-century charities marketed themselves to potential donors.

The Marine Society registers themselves suggest that only a small number of recruits came from the precarious criminal circumstances described in the Marine Society’s promotional material. There were very few children from the capital recorded as homeless in the register: There were 5 entries for St. Giles Workhouse, 2 for St. Martin’s Workhouse, 1 for St. Ann’s Workhouse, and 1 for the London Workhouse, as well as 2 entries for the London Bridewell, 4

⁷⁸ In fact, many of the records needed for quantitative investigations did not exist at all before the second decade of the nineteenth century: they were first amassed through the efforts of Victorian “social observers.” In his 1993 article with Joan Noel, “The Origins of ‘The Problem of Juvenile Delinquency’”, Peter King examined this issue in the records of the Old Bailey—which unfortunately only consistently recorded the ages of those who came before it from 1791 onwards—and concluded that the prosecution of juveniles increased well before the period focused on in most work. King’s own article, “The Rise of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1780–1840”, assembled a fuller picture of juvenile prosecution patterns by including data from different regions of England, tracing the anxieties of the period and their causes, and charting the development of separate penal policies and trial procedures. He questioned connections between the increase in the rate of prosecution of juveniles and an actual rise in the commission of crimes, suggesting that shifting attitudes among police and committing magistrates may have prompted “changes in attitudes towards childhood and towards the disciplining of the poor,” which in turn made people more willing to prosecute young offenders. King and Noel; King, “Rise of Juvenile Delinquency”, 116–66. Also see Shore, *Artful Dodgers*, 28.

⁷⁹ Payne, “Children of the Poor in London”, 4.

for the London Mint, 3 for the Old Bailey, and 1 entry that said, “Born at Sea”—but there was only a single entry in the register that said “no habitation,” and only 2 that said “vagabond.” In addition, 1325 entries included some degree of detail of the father’s trade: only 14 were listed as having “No Occupation.”⁸⁰

Although the Marine Society claimed to be cleaning up the streets of London, it is noteworthy that recruits came from homes all over the country: 2077 names in the database were from the greater London area,⁸¹ but 228 came from English urban locations outside of the capital, and another 548 recruits hailed from English rural locations. Outside of England, there were 116 more recruits from urban Scottish locations, 168 recruits from rural Scottish locations, and another 34 entries from Ireland. In addition, there were 26 recruits classified as “foreign” (see table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Wider Provenance of Recruits

Rural Scotland	Urban Scotland	Ireland	North America	Europe	West Indies	Asia
168	116	34	8	13	2	1

Source: National Maritime Museum Entry Book of Boys and Registers of Landsmen Volunteers, MSY/S/1 and MSY/H/2.

Payne suggested that the Marine Society continued to rely on rhetoric that emphasized the potential threat to law and order of the institution’s recruits in order to justify its continued existence, even though its own registers suggested that recruits came from a range of backgrounds. These kinds of liberties should come as little surprise, she argued, since even in current society charities often “present poignant photographs and carefully selected information

⁸⁰ There were 3 that said “Pensioner, Invalid, Prisoner, Beggar.” There were also 9 entries that listed were the father’s trade as unclassified or unidentified.

⁸¹ Of these, it should be pointed out, 24 said they were uncertain where they came from.

to attract contributions”: in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, competition for charitable donations gave rise to intense rhetoric about the poverty of recruits and their criminal tendencies. This rhetoric, in turn, both reflected and influenced the prejudices of the elite.⁸²

Roland Pietsch has argued that the efforts of the institution were “limited by the patriarchal and authoritarian attitudes of the middle class.”⁸³ In spite of this, it has been suggested that the eighteenth-century Navy was not as striated along the lines of class as English society was on land: the Navy was relatively open to the idea of promotion based on merit, and boys in the Navy’s muster books appear as officer’s servants, regardless of their social backgrounds.⁸⁴ On the other hand, acceptance of the social status quo and their place in the pecking order was instilled in recruits before they even went aboard ship.⁸⁵ They were told,

You are the sons of freemen. Though poor, you are the sons of Britons, who are born to liberty; but remember that true liberty consists in doing well, in defending each other, in obeying your superiors and in fighting for your King and Country to the last drop of your blood.⁸⁶

⁸² This misrepresentation has been absorbed into historiography, she argued, which has thus assembled an inaccurate picture of eighteenth-century charitable institutions and “a limited assessment of the capital’s apprenticeship and criminal justice systems.” Payne, “Children of the Poor in London”, 4.

⁸³ These were, “undermined by the poor laws, apprenticeship laws, the laws against vagabonds and rogues, which all ignored the personal liberty of pauper children.” Pietsch, “Ships’ Boys and Charity”, 186.

⁸⁴ Although the introduction of the tripartite system for boys in 1794 put up more solid barriers to upward mobility. After 1794 “it was predetermined who could become an officer even before the youths were at sea... [However] ...Samantha Cavell suggested that even in the early years of the tripartite system boys from less privileged families were still able to progress. Only once Napoleon was defeated and demobilization began did the Navy’s class barriers become more rigid.” See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 165; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 508; Samantha Cavell, “A Social History of Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the Royal Navy, 1761–1831”, PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2010.

⁸⁵ See Saunders Welch, *Proposal to render effectual a plan, to remove the nuisance of common prostitutes from the streets of this metropolis*. Although it was defeated at the committee stage, Lloyd’s 1751 Bill for the better maintenance and employment of poor children proposed that facilitating the training of orphans, vagrants, bastards, and other marginal children could save them from a criminal future. *London Magazine* 21 (1752), 220–23. Historians, by contrast, have connected the rate of crime with the demobilization of soldiers and sailors at the end of the war: in their studies of Surrey and Staffordshire, John Beattie and Douglas Hay found property crime rose steeply in the aftermath of the war of Austrian Succession. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*; Douglas Hay, *Criminal Cases on the Crown Side of King’s Bench* (Staffordshire: Staffordshire Record Society, 2010).

⁸⁶ Jonas Hanway, *Letters to the Encouragers of Practical Public-Love* (London, 1758), 57.

This idea was also reflected in the limited extent of the education of ship's boys: although we have seen that eighteenth century commentators often feared that too much education could make children rebellious and dissatisfied with their lot, the Marine Society recognized the power of education—particularly religious education—to teach the children of the lower classes virtue and “due subordination.”⁸⁷ In the Navy, chaplains were thus expected to teach the principles of Christianity to all boys, not just young gentlemen—although those destined for an officer's career were also to be instructed in writing, arithmetic, and navigation by an onboard schoolmaster.⁸⁸ For lower-class boys, Fielding wrote that instruction in literacy and numeracy was “injurious to society; as it robs the public of labourers, and the commerce of sailors, by raising the expectations of the poor.”⁸⁹ Most of the education recruits received was practical, therefore, with the expectation that they would learn anything beyond that “on the job,” by taking part in the sailing of the ship.⁹⁰

With all of that said, it is not at all clear to what degree young people were forced to enlist in the Royal Navy. As Roland Pietsch has pointed out, the Navy itself wanted experienced seamen, and unwilling young boys who had never been to sea were emphatically not a legal target for the press gang. Naval ships nonetheless had the reputation of being “floating

⁸⁷ See Victor Neuberg, *Popular Education in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 1971). Hanway wrote this, but notably also wrote “if there is any boy of uncommon genius, it is but justice to the Community to give him fair opportunities of improvement, as it is constantly practiced in such cases by the French.” Hanway, *A Letter from a Member of the Marine Society* (London, 1757, fourth edition), 10.

⁸⁸ In the absence of schoolmasters, others aboard ship were expected to fulfil their duties. All the youths were supposed to receive education “according to such Orders as he shall receive from the Captain, and with regard to their several Capacities, whether in Reading, Writing, or otherwise.” Jonas Hanway, *Two Letters: Letter IV* (London, 1758), 29.

⁸⁹ Fielding, *Account of the Receipts and Disbursements*, 9–10.

⁹⁰ “In peacetime ... the Navy largely profited from the training provided by merchant shipping. In times of war things changed dramatically. A great number of boys enlisted, and the Navy's ships had to sail with a dangerously high ratio of inexperienced landsmen. At the start of the Seven Years War, the Navy finally saw the need to lay down official instructions for training landsmen and boys.” Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 112.

workhouses”: the Poor Laws, the apprenticeship laws, and the vagrancy laws all authorized parish authorities to force boys on parish support into apprenticeships in merchant shipping or in water-related trades.⁹¹ Masters of apprentices bound out by the parish were empowered to turn their charges over into a maritime apprenticeship with the approval of two Justices of the Peace.⁹² Anyone authorities judged to be idle, dissolute, a rogue, a vagabond, or a beggar—regardless of whether they were a man or a boy—could also be sent to the Navy as a corrective sentence: it has been shown that magistrates sometimes waived the punishment of boys convicted of other crimes in their courts on the condition that they enlisted for naval service. But such measures were often undertaken summarily, rather than officially documented, so evidence for historical analysis here is limited (but see next chapter).⁹³ It should be noted that the numbers that enlisted in this way appear to have been small; because of the lack of motivation or delinquency of the boys that they were using as raw material, many of these programs failed.⁹⁴

In this way, disciplinary and charity measures could overlap. As previously mentioned, John Fielding had arranged for some of the boys he encountered in his court to be sent to sea rather than to prison for what he saw as trivial crimes, before the Marine Society was even founded: although he assured the public that all his boys had enlisted voluntarily, his own comments about the boys’ delinquent past suggests they only took this route in order to avoid harsher sentencing.⁹⁵ As Roland Pietsch has pointed out, many of these children likely thought

⁹¹ Although these trades were supposed to be land-based. See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 81.

⁹² Naval servant positions were not actually apprenticeships, but officials no doubt funnelled boys into them and thought that they were acting perfectly lawfully. See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 81–82.

⁹³ “Particularly with regard to the children of the poor we can assume that parish authorities tried to have a say in their choice of occupation.” Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 77–78.

⁹⁴ Bernard, *Account of the Hospital* (1759), xvii.

⁹⁵ *Public Advertiser*, 16 December 1754.

that enlisting as ships' boys was a compulsory order and not a voluntary choice.⁹⁶ When Fielding eventually joined forces with the Marine Society, he continued to see the institution as an alternative to punishment for young offenders, while Hanway increasingly wanted boys who were genuine volunteers. As the Marine Society grew, it became a requirement that the boys helped by the institution explicitly agreed to their placement, and this is usually cited as the reason that the relationship between Fielding and Hanway deteriorated after only two years of co-operation.⁹⁷

As time went by, the Marine Society would become increasingly cautious about the provenance of their recruits: it would eventually avoid accepting boys who could be shown to have only "volunteered" as a result of coercion. As early as 1758, it published an announcement claiming that

it is no ways agreeable to the Nature of the Institution of this Society, to use any means of persuasion contrary to the inclinations of children, the intentions of parents or the consent of masters – Therefore the Society think themselves oblig'd to give notice in this publick manner and to request that no parish officer, parent or master whatsoever, do send to the said Society any Boys but such as are desirous to try their Fortunes at Sea, and that the same be Signified to the Secretary of the Society with the names of the Boys that it may be truly known whether they are capricious and do not know their own minds, or really are not of a turn of mind for such an employment, which requires a brisk & active genius & such boys only can be expected to turn out Intrepid Mariners.⁹⁸

In spite of this change, Marine Society publications continued to style the enterprise as a crime-prevention programme in order to encourage donations. Hanway insisted that "our highways and our streets" were a "breeding ground for the most dangerous criminals," and that the country could benefit from "a gentle or compulsive means [to] remove the wretched crowds who disturb

⁹⁶ Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 82.

⁹⁷ They were not supposed to have signed up to escape an existing master either, but complaints about runaway apprentices continued to reach the governors. See *Public Advertiser*, 10–13 May 1757. Also see Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 42–43; Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 142.

⁹⁸ *The General Evening Post*, 31 December 1758.

the peace of civil society.”⁹⁹ His *Reasons for an Augmentation of at least Twelve Thousand Mariners*, published in 1759, emphasized the possibility of raising additional seamen by picking up vagabonds and informing the Marine Society about them.¹⁰⁰ Even after the Seven Years War, when the Marine Society began to dispatch boys to the merchant navy, Hanway wrote that “persuasion and encouragement will go a great way, and necessity still farther.”¹⁰¹ Even in the later decades of the eighteenth century, in fact, Roland Pietsch found that a small proportion of ship’s boys may not have enlisted entirely of their own volition: one percent of the boys clothed in the 1770s had an explicitly recorded history of delinquency, and another three percent were recorded as having been sent by the Lord Mayor, a magistrate, or other authorities.¹⁰²

Eager to justify their endeavour to supporters, the Marine Society’s authorities often overstated the misery from whence their boys had come: publicity tended to emphasize the charity’s impact on saving pauper children from their troubled existences—feeding and clothing them, providing for their moral education, and teaching them to be virtuous, obedient, and productive citizens.¹⁰³ The Marine Society thus claimed that it was relieving “the miseries of the hungry and naked,” and these declarations helped to drum up support in an age of increasing

⁹⁹ Hanway, *Three Letters*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Hanway, *Reasons for an Augmentation*, 104.

¹⁰¹ Hanway wrote that “neither policy, nor humanity” would allow them boys to end up as vagabonds. Hanway, *Two Letters: Letter IV* (London, 1758), 34.

¹⁰² “And these were surely not all, as such background information was not always recorded in the registers.” Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 78–9. A letter from the Marine Society published in 1758, moreover, insisted that most boys from outside London were sent by parish officials or justices who would only send boys who were a “nuisance.” Hanway, *Three Letters*, 7.

¹⁰³ Although the idea that naval service was a punishment seemed to have entered the contemporary zeitgeist: maritime employment was often used as a threat against troublesome apprentices if they refused to improve their behaviour: the board of the workhouse in Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* threatened to send Oliver to sea if he would not be a good apprentice. See Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London, 1838), 24; McClure, *Coram’s Children*, 126, 150.

sentimentalism. As Pietsch suggested, it was also “a neat way to avoid any possible criticism with regards to how beneficial the sea service really was to the boys.”¹⁰⁴

But in claiming to rescue its recruits from “the gallows” and “untimely death,” helping to “purge the streets of London,” the institution portrayed all of its boys as potential threats to public safety.¹⁰⁵ Hanway’s claim that the “objects of the Society are the removing of those who are Vagrants, Pilferers, or by extreme poverty and ignorance, are pernicious to the community,” essentially tapped into elite fears of the lower classes, presenting the institution as a solution to crime and disorder in England: that kind of rhetoric could backfire, which the Marine Society found out the hard way. Their publicity ultimately damaged the reputation of its recruits and helped to solidify all the negative stereotypes of sailors that land-loving Britons already held.

Worse still, this rhetoric only encouraged more parish officials to try to send the institution its troublesome children, which turned out to be particularly controversial because of prevailing anxieties about plebeian bodies in the cultural climate of eighteenth-century Britain. There was thus increasing disquiet about the poor as potential carriers of epidemic disease, threatening both themselves and the more prosperous members of society with whom they came into contact.¹⁰⁶ Medical authors located the clinical signs of putridity in the blood of the poor, which was described as inherently “impoverished,” “depauperated,” or “idle”—it was argued that this weakened blood made the lower classes particularly vulnerable to infection and disease.

¹⁰⁴ Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 38–9.

¹⁰⁵ Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians*, 61; Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians*, 24; Hanway, *Three Letters*, 7.

¹⁰⁶ Commentators such as Defoe advocated the forcible removal from London of all “beggars, vagabonds or loose people” to their parish of origin; paupers and the “hospital poor” were to be re-settled at least twenty miles from the capital; workhouse children were to be sent thirty miles from the capital; and criminals were to be sent forty miles away, on pain of death should they return. Daniel Defoe, *Due Preparations for the Plague* (1722), 12.

By extension, some writers argued that it was counterproductive and dangerous to bring these diseased people aboard the confines of a ship at sea.¹⁰⁷

Mortality, Demobilization, and the Marine Society

In spite of the Marine Society's rhetoric, most of its recruits seem to have *chosen* to sign up—yet their motivation can be difficult for modern minds to understand. For one thing, the casualty rate of the boys who went to sea in this period was shockingly high: although the risks of mortality were elevated in most walks of life, they ultimately paled in comparison to life at sea. In Roland Pietsch's sample from the Seven Years War, every year between fifteen and twenty-five percent of the ships' boys either died or were lost from the record because they were discharged sick, injured, shipwrecked, or captured.¹⁰⁸ But death tended to come aboard ship unspectacularly throughout the eighteenth century, often in the form of disease: it was only with the increases in knowledge about diet and hygiene toward its end that the rate of mortality from illness decreased.¹⁰⁹

It had to be admitted that the sea service was not a particularly stable career either: in times of peace, the Navy only required an eighth of the number of men it employed during wartime, and there were no guarantees for those who were kept on. Until 1853 there was no such thing as continuous service, and sailors tended to be hired as needed according to season, trade

¹⁰⁷ This endemic decay was attributed to the poor diet and hygiene, intemperance, inferior housing, and moral impropriety that were all unique to the poor. Kevin Siena, *Rotten Bodies: Class and Contagion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 229. Concern with health on board ship can be seen in the work of contemporaries such as surgeon James Lind and physician Gilbert Blane toward the treatment of scurvy.

¹⁰⁸ Pietsch, "Ships' Boys and Charity", 236–40.

¹⁰⁹ Although London was already recognized to be a particularly unhealthy place: children who joined the Marine Society had already left the greatest dangers behind them. Moreover, teens had the lowest death rate of all age groups, based on estimates in Landers, *Death and the Metropolis*, 99–100, 180.

volume, or politics.¹¹⁰ Worse still, the British people were afraid of the return of these men, who were “all accustomed to the use of arms, and many of them to rapine and plunder,” as Adam Smith wrote.¹¹¹ These fears seemed to be reasonable: demobilization did lead to a rise in the level of prosecuted crime.¹¹²

That said, soldiers and sailors alike had the freedom to take up any trade they desired, in any town they wanted, on their retirement from the military: this could be a useful perk at a time when trades and settlements were so heavily restricted. But the reality for many sailors that had gone to sea at an early age was that they did not know anything about any other trades.¹¹³ Maintaining employment in the Navy for that long could also be difficult: demand for manpower was greatly reduced in peacetime, which could come before they had been rated as full seamen, creating a crowded labour market filled with sailors who were better qualified. Although Hanway thus suggested that the Marine Society might arrange apprenticeships in the merchant navy or in waterborne trades so that the youths could continue to build their seafaring experience and be readily available if war broke out again, the Marine Society was surprised that it found very few masters who were eager to take its boys on.¹¹⁴ Roland Pietsch found that, while naval officers agreed to keep 80 bogys as servants for three more years at the end of 1763, out of a total of 295 former Navy servants, the Marine Society was only able to successfully place 29

¹¹⁰ Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 6–7, 170, 172–73.

¹¹¹ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Volume 2* (1776) 56, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/An_Inquiry_Into_the_Nature_and_Causes_of/kOdBAQAAMAAJ.

¹¹² Some historians have argued that these problems were the product of a difficult labour market. See Beattie, *Crime, and the Courts*, 225–34; King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion*, 153–56, 164–66.

¹¹³ As a result of 12 Charles II, c.16 (1660); 12 Anne, c.14 (1712), and 3 George III, c.8 (1762). Related positions, such as naval servant positions, were mainly reserved for the sons of wealthier families. “Although some servants to warrant officers might have picked up a bit of their master’s trade while at sea.” See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 173.

¹¹⁴ Hanway also as well advocated for postwar apprenticeships in related trades such as shipbuilding or sail making. Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 43.

boys in merchant shipping, 15 boys with fishermen, and 9 boys with watermen and lightermen.¹¹⁵ In addition, 71 boys were placed in a “mechanic trade” unrelated to what they had been doing: 17 with manufacturers, 6 in public houses, 1 in agriculture, and 67 more that were just given enough pocket money to return home and find their own work.¹¹⁶ It seemed that, ironically, considering the aims of the charity, many Marine Society boys were being rejected by potential masters simply because they had been at sea: because of the negative stereotypes many Britons held about sailors, previous naval service could serve as a badge of dishonour.¹¹⁷

But the Marine Society had made this problem themselves: they were the ones who had described their efforts as “precautions” undertaken to “prevent numerous mischiefs which will otherwise naturally arise, by many of these boys turning thieves & robbers of the very worst & most dangerous kinds.”¹¹⁸

Conclusions

The Marine Society had initially been formed with the intention of providing two or three thousand landsmen for the Navy at the opening of the Seven Years War; by its end it had recruited and outfitted 5452 men, as well as 4787 boys.¹¹⁹ Overall, the institution’s efforts at that time resulted in about 5 percent of overall recruitment, as well as about 13 percent of the overall outfitting of recruits.¹²⁰ The cost of mobilizing them had been little more than £2 each, even

¹¹⁵ Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 177–78.

¹¹⁶ NMM, MSY/A/2,04/10/1764. See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 177–78.

¹¹⁷ Fielding, *Account of the Origin and Effects of a Police Set on Foot* (London, 1758), 25, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/An_Account_of_the-Origin_and_Effects_of/jtwtMQEACAAJ.

¹¹⁸ NMM, MSY/A/1, 27/04/1759. See Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 38.

¹¹⁹ All were in good health, although only 295 of them could be accounted for when the war was over. There are unfortunately no surviving sources that recorded the number of recruits who continued in the Royal Navy, who died or deserted, or who went their own way. See Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 112–13; Rodger, *Wooden World*, 108, 162.

¹²⁰ Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 53.

though the institution had raised nearly £24,000 for the task from over 1500 subscribers.¹²¹ This success was, to a degree, serendipitous: The Seven Years War represented an unsurprisingly crucial time for recruitment, when the Navy needed fresh manpower to make up for the casualties it had already sustained. But they were still highly valued in 1793, judging by a surviving letter from Admiral Horatio Nelson, who asked for “Twenty Lads from your Society,” and promised that “the greatest care shall be taken of them on board the *Agamemnon*.”¹²² By the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the Marine Society’s total recruitment for the Royal Navy amounted to over 25,000 boys, and a further 40,000 landsmen had been equipped.¹²³ And the numbers continued to rise: by 1905, they had recruited 33,181 boys for the Royal Navy, 3760 for the Indian Navy, and 27,436 for the merchant navy.¹²⁴

Although the Marine Society had grown out of a very real concern with improving the lives of the children that served as its objects, it had a very different relationship with the families who made use of it.¹²⁵ Like the Foundling Hospital, it effectively removed children from their families, although it might be emphasized that the Marine Society did not actually house its recruits: its contact with them was only transitory, before they were outfitted and placed in the sea service. Thus, the ties of recruits with their families were not broken in the same way: it has

¹²¹ Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians*, 23–24.

¹²² “Nelson to the Governors of the Marine Society”, 6 February 1793, in Colin White (ed.), *Nelson: The New Letters* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), 157.

¹²³ Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 33, 45–46.

¹²⁴ Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 45–46.

¹²⁵ Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 141.

been suggested that instead of removing them from their influence, the Marine Society more effectively helped impoverished parents and guardians to make provision for their children.¹²⁶

The success of the institution can ultimately be attributed to its fortuitous alignment with the national interest. Although the Foundling Hospital had been similarly concerned with nation building and the strengthening of the populace, these themes were even more pronounced in the publicity of the Marine Society: as the century progressed, it became a vital means for the Navy to ensure the supply of quality mariners.¹²⁷ Even in times of peace, the Marine Society was able to attract donations because it positioned itself against the social problems of Great Britain. As Hanway wrote:

To feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked, who are unable to support themselves, are virtues to which the blessings of Heaven are promised... [but the Marine Society aims] to rescue numbers of these young persons from the jaws of perdition; to breed them up to the knowledge of social and religious duties; to prevent their being disturbers of the quiet enjoyments of their fellow-subjects; to present them the fairest prospect of everlasting happiness; and at length to teach those, who would have been otherwise totally lost to their country, an occupation on which commerce and naval strength depend: these are objects which constitute the very essence of charity, and include the truest patriotism.¹²⁸

In addition to the *external* threat posed by France, therefore, the Marine Society increasingly positioned itself against the *internal* threats posed by English youth.

The governors of the institution came to portray their enterprise as a crime-prevention program in order to continue to attract donors, even though many recruits clearly did not come

¹²⁶ In the case of “bad” parents, Hanway argued that “the *poor infant* must be protected by the *public*,” but he still insisted, “even under these circumstances, we are to consider how to prevent the parents *cancelling* the bond of *parental* affection, so long as the least prospect remains of their fulfilling the conditions of it, at some time or other.” Hanway, *Candid Historical Account*, 13, 15.

¹²⁷ Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians*, 23; Hanway, *Account of the Marine Society*, 23–24. See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 142.

¹²⁸ Jonas Hanway, *Three Letters on the Subject of the Marine Society* (London, 1758), 3–4.

from the backgrounds featured in the Marine Society's publicity.¹²⁹ The labouring families they came from were often struggling to make ends meet: like other philanthropic organizations of the period, the Marine Society was likely just one element in their survival strategies.¹³⁰ And although the numbers of places the Marine Society had at their disposal were limited by the availability of placements on ships, it is worth noting the poor were able to apply to the charity for assistance with a greater chance of success than at institutions such as the Foundling Hospital.¹³¹

While the Marine Society did anticipate some of the problems recruits would encounter at the end of hostilities and made an effort to secure aid from the public to arrange apprenticeships in both sea-related trades and in land-based occupations, toward the end of the century the spectre of a surplus of idle children began to morph into the threat of juvenile delinquency. This coincided with new theories of population such as those of Thomas Malthus, which ultimately fostered a sense of mistrust about the body of the poor—uncoupling associations of population growth with national prosperity and making the realities of life for poor children seem entirely incompatible with the sentimental ideal of childhood.¹³² By the nineteenth century, young people were taking the blame for a large proportion of crime.¹³³ The next chapter will look at the Philanthropic Society, which was founded to try to cope with it.

¹²⁹ See Dianne Payne, "Rhetoric, Reality and the Marine Society", *The London Journal*, 30:2 (2005), 66–84, DOI: [10.1179/ldn.2005.30.2.66](https://doi.org/10.1179/ldn.2005.30.2.66); Pietsch, *Real Jim Hawkins*, 79.

¹³⁰ Although the ability to place their children there was likely a big help in reducing the burden of family dependency.

¹³¹ Except during the General Reception, of course. See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 142.

¹³² Thomas Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population* (London, 1798). See Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 169.

¹³³ The Marine Society was nonetheless able to rationalise its continued existence; by 1940 it is estimated that they had outfitted and sent to sea about 110,000 boys. See Picard, ch. 10; Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 246.

Chapter Eight: The Philanthropic Society and the “Invention” of Juvenile Delinquency

A particularly prominent charitable venture toward the end of the eighteenth century—especially with regards to the children of the poor—was the London Philanthropic Society, which emerged in 1788 in response to a growing concern among the English public about the criminality of children, and a related need to develop better preventative strategies. The Philanthropic Society has figured into many historiographical accounts of English charity in this period: Dorothy George—whose *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* has appeared time and again throughout this study—highlighted the importance of the institution, but also stressed that its efforts to provide for deserted and vagrant children with criminal associations was a response to the failure of parishes to fulfill their responsibilities under the Poor Laws. Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt’s *Children in English Society* (2 volumes: 1969 and 1973) emphasized the existence of the Philanthropic Society as an illustration of contemporary fears of vulnerable children drifting into crime and the criminal system: Pinchbeck and Hewitt argued that the efforts of the Philanthropic Society to occupy children and protect them from the perils of modern life foreshadowed the emergence of the English Approved School system.¹

Although there were many continuities between the Philanthropic Society and previous organizations, the anxieties that gave rise to it were not quite the same as what came before. An

¹ George, *London Life*; Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*. Julius Carlebach argued that the work of the Philanthropic Society helped to shape contemporary public attitudes toward poverty and child welfare, ultimately influencing the development of child welfare policy and practice in England, and Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood emphasized the importance of the Philanthropic Society in helping to reform the criminal law, providing an after-care asylum for young offenders who had already been sentenced to punishment under the law. Julius Carlebach, *Caring for Children in Trouble* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970); Radzinowicz and Hood, *The Emergence of Penal Policy*, 134–35.

earlier mentality toward children was perhaps typified by Hanway, who has also featured repeatedly in the preceding chapters, from his earlier efforts as a governor of the Foundling Hospital, to his attempts to expose the inadequacies of the system of parish nursing, to his eventual establishment of the Marine Society.² Although recent historians have been critical of Hanway and his work, his conviction that the young were “at once the objects of our love and respect” was driven by a genuine Christian patriotism, and he was optimistic about outcomes for the children he sought to help.³ But Hanway also took all of this further than other exemplars of eighteenth-century sentimentalism. When he collected data on the mortality rates and survival prospects of the infant poor in workhouses located in the Bills of Mortality, he very knowingly drew attention to the high rates of infant mortality under the Poor Law system and the low future life-chances of young people within it. He used the statistics he accumulated to lobby Parliament for the protection of child workers in an effort to effect real change.⁴

Hanway’s determination to illuminate the predicaments of poor children of the capital can perhaps best be seen in his efforts to bring the plight of the “climbing boys” to the attention of the public: he argued that “there are many other occupations which shorten life, but none in

² He was also involved with the Magdalen Asylum's efforts to reform “common prostitutes.” See Mary Peace, “The Magdalen Hospital and the fortunes of whiggish sentimentality in mid-eighteenth-century Britain: ‘well-grounded’ exemplarity vs. ‘romantic’ exceptionality”, *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 48:2 (2007), *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed March 26,

2023). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A170413288/AONE?u=anon~f42ab649&sid=googleScholar&xid=f78411de>.

³ For some of this criticism, see Hitchcock and Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City*, 292, 406; Jonas Hanway, *Advice from Farmer Trueman: To His Daughter Mary, Upon Her Going to Service. In a Series of Discourses, Designed to Promote the Welfare and True Interest of Servants: with Reflexions of No Less Importance to Masters and Mistresses* (1795), 254.

⁴ The Bills of Mortality covered ninety-seven parishes within the walls of the City of London, seventeen extramural parishes, twenty-seven in Middlesex and Surrey, and ten in the City of Westminster; see Hanway, *Advice from a Farmer*, 3:426. Hanway depicted young people as a “heritage, and a gift which come of the Lord ... given ... to increase the prosperity of a nation. They are the seal of the instrument which gives a title under God to its existence.” Jonas Hanway, *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers in London and Westminster; shewing the necessity of putting them under Regulations to prevent Inhumanity to the climbing Boys* (London, 1785), 72–73.

which the helpless infant, in his sacred state of life, is so much violated.”⁵ As a result of Hanway’s efforts, laws related to chimney sweeping were passed in 1767 and 1778. Yet it is worth noting that one of Hanway’s very last publications was far more pessimistic in tone: it focused on the immorality of English society and called for “the establishment of general plans of Police on a permanent basis” to deal with the moral conduct of the people and the regulation of paupers to the benefit of the “national security and happiness.”⁶ He argued that

If the people are not kept in good order, and just apprehension of what they owe to themselves, their God and their country, no event ought to surprise us. For my own part when I consider how lame and deficient our Police is, I wonder things are not in a worse state than they really are.

In fact, it can be argued that this attitude was far more typical of the later eighteenth century, when contemporaries held much more suspicious views of young people. This perspective was perhaps best reflected in the writing of magistrate Patrick Colquhoun, which very conspicuously avoided the pink-tinged sentiment of Hanway’s earlier writing. Although Colquhoun had been born in Dumbarton, Scotland in 1745, he relocated to London in 1789, becoming a Police Magistrate there in 1792; in 1796, he published some of his experiences in that position under the title of *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis, explaining the various*

⁵ Hanway, *Sentimental History*, 44, 73, 88–89. Compared to apprentices in other occupations, chimney sweeps were few—in 1785, Hanway’s estimate was that there were only about 100 master sweeps in all of London, with 200 journeymen, and 550 climbing boys under them—but they seemed to be ubiquitous in the city. Although other apprentices were out of sight in workshops or factories, chimney sweeps were constantly seen and heard in the streets, plying their trade. This growth has been attributed to the change of architectural styles, as coal rather than wood was burned, and flues were narrowed to an opening as small as 8 x 8 inches. Also see Jonas Hanway, *The state of chimney-sweepers and young apprentices shewing the wretched condition of these distressed boys* (London, 1773); Jonas Hanway, *The state of master chimney-sweepers, and their journeymen particularly of the distressed boys, apprentices, who are daily seen in the streets of these cities staggering under a load of misery with a proposal for their relief* (London, 1779). Chimney sweeps appeared in the work of contemporary artists like William Hogarth or of authors of the period such as Charles Dickens or Charles Kingsley, almost always in a profoundly negative light. William Hogarth, *The March to Finchley* (1745). Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist; or, the Parish Boy's Progress* (first published as a serial 1837–39); Charles Kingsley, *The Water Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* (London, 1863).

⁶ Jonas Hanway, *The Defects of Police* (1775), https://books.google.ca/books?id=y_tBAAAAYAAJ.

Crimes and Misdemeanours which at present are felt, as a Pressure on the Community, and suggesting Remedies. Colquhoun's work made a case for the establishment of a proper "preventative" police force which would minimize the "progress of the corruption of Morals ... from the Infant to the Adult."⁷ Colquhoun stressed the ultimately wholesome influence a police force would have on the metropolitan populace, encouraging people to pursue benevolent activities rather than corrupting ones: he argued that a dedicated police would "gradually... lead the criminal, the idle, and the dissolute members of the community into the paths of innocence and industry."⁸ But he also argued that criminality was at the end of a slippery slope: the "habits of idleness being once obtained, labour soon becomes irksome."

In many ways, Colquhoun was as driven by a concern for the plights of the poor as Hanway had been: he promoted a system providing food to the needy through soup kitchens in times of distress, and he was intimately involved in the system of charity schools.⁹ Yet it cannot be emphasized enough that Colquhoun's theory of the "corruption of Morals" essentially blamed the social problems of Britain on the poor, positing that "poverty ... contributes in no small degree to the multiplication of crimes." In fact, he was explicit in saying, "INDIGENCE, in the present state of Society, may be considered as a principal cause of the increase of Crimes," and that the moral deficiency that underlay lawlessness was "peculiar to the lower orders of the Community in this great Metropolis, from infancy to the adult state."¹⁰ All of the offences that

⁷ Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 619.

⁸ Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 561. This work was reprinted annually for the five succeeding years.

⁹ Colquhoun helped to found a school in Orchard Street, Westminster, in 1803. In 1806, he published *A New System of Education for the Labouring People*, followed by his *Treatise on Indigence* two years afterwards. Patrick Colquhoun, *A New System of Education for the Labouring People* (London, 1803); Patrick Colquhoun, *Treatise on Indigence* (London, 1805), <https://a.co/1w3Eda3>.

¹⁰ Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 311.

the law held to be criminal, he contended, “have their origin in the vicious and immoral habits of the people, and in the facilities which the state of manners and society, particularly in vulgar life, afford in generating vicious and bad habits.”¹¹ These habits were “so exceedingly depraved, they are restrained by no principle of morality or religion, (for [the poor] know nothing of either,) and [they] only wait for opportunities, to plunge into every excess and every crime.”

Colquhoun was particularly critical of the poor’s reliance on Poor Relief: he argued that because they were “partly supported” by aid payments, they often resorted “to pilfering pursuits to fill up the chasm.” In general, he wrote,

The System which prevails in the Metropolis, with respect to these unfortunate individuals who are denominated the Casual Poor, will be found on minute inquiry to be none of the least considerable of the causes, which lead to the corruption of morals, and to the multiplication of minor offences in particular.¹²

In fact, Colquhoun claimed that children among the poor were damned before they were “able to lisp a sentence”:

[The child] is carried by its ill-fated mother to the tap-room of an ale-house; in which are assembled multitudes of low company, many of whom have been perhaps reared in the same manner. The vilest and most large proportion of what may be denominated the lowest classes of the people reared in the Metropolis; and the result is, that while many of the adults are lost to the state by premature death, from sottishness and irregularity, not a few of their offspring are never raised to manhood.

Children’s corruption only progressed as they grew older:

The tear of pity is due to the helpless and forlorn offspring of the criminal or indolent, who become objects of compassion, not only as it relates to their immediate subsistence; but much more with respect to their future situations in life. It is in the progress to the adult state, that the infants of parents, broken down by misfortunes, almost unavoidably learn, from the pressure of extreme poverty, to resort to devices which early corrupt their morals, and mar their future success and utility in life.¹³

¹¹ Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 311.

¹² Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 352.

¹³ In general, Colquhoun argued, “the moral principle is totally destroyed among a vast body of the lower ranks of the People; for wherever prodigality, dissipation, or gaming, whether in the Lottery or otherwise, occasions a want

This chapter will show that the preoccupations of the Philanthropic Society were far closer to those of Colquhoun than to those of Hanway. The Philanthropic Society's governors sought to move beyond the aims of mid-century philanthropists and the achievements of prior charitable institutions—they particularly wanted to avoid what they saw as the out-of-control expenditures that plagued earlier ventures such as the Foundling Hospital, because their era had come to view fiscal waste as sinful. Many of the Philanthropic Society's supporters had come to oppose practices that they believed helped in the propagation of a criminal class: in effect, this meant most of the normal conventions of pauper welfare.

Crime and punishment in Eighteenth-Century London

The chapter that follows relies on data reproduced in the unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Muriel Whitten—Whitten made extensive use of the registers of the Philanthropic Society to question the efficacy of the institution's disciplinary and educational models, as well as to examine its administration of the daily routines of girls and boys it admitted between 1788 and 1848.¹⁴ But to illuminate the particular circumstances that led to the establishment of the institution, this chapter also draws on the extensive material reproduced in the digital scholarship of Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker—particularly through *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674–1913* and

of money, every opportunity is sought to purloin public or private property; recourse is then had to all those tricks and devices, by which even children are enticed to steal before they know that it is a crime; and to raise money at the pawnbrokers, or the old iron or rag shops, to supply the unlawful desires of profligate parents ... Servants, Apprentices, Journeymen, and in short all classes of labourers and domestics, are led astray by the temptations to spend money, which occur in this Metropolis; and by the facility afforded through the numerous Receivers of stolen Goods, who administer to their pecuniary wants, on every occasion, when they can furnish them with any article of their ill-gotten plunder.” Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 13.

¹⁴ Doreen M. Whitten, “Protection, Prevention, Reformation: a history of the Philanthropic Society 1788–1848”, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 2001). Also see Malcolm McKinnon Dick, “English Conservatives and Schools for the Poor c.1780–1833: A Study of the Sunday School, School of Industry and the Philanthropic’s School for Vagrant and Criminal Children” (Ph.D. diss., University of Leicester, 1979), 281–83, 292–96.

London Lives, 1690–1800—as well as the work of Simon Devereaux, who has made a vast number of resources available online through his database, *Capital Punishment and Pardon at the Old Bailey, 1730–1837*.¹⁵

At first glance, eighteenth-century English law certainly appeared to have taken a hard stance with regard to crime: the country’s infamous “Bloody Code” had made no less than 200 separate offences punishable by death, and the sheer volume of sentences can easily be seen in aggregate.¹⁶ So long as offenders were above the age of criminal responsibility, youth were considered to be as liable as adults to the penalties provided by the law. Children between the ages of seven and fourteen were *supposed* to be protected from capital sentences by the longstanding presumption of *doli incapax*, but of the 9481 recorded capital convictions at the Old Bailey in London between 1729 and 1837, there were still 591 cases of offenders between the ages of 8 and 16 that were pronounced guilty and sentenced to death.¹⁷ Some of the convicted appear to have been subjected to the full terror of the criminal law: after execution for murder in September 1752, the body of sixteen-year-old Randolph Branch was reportedly dissected by

¹⁵ Hitchcock, Shoemaker, Emsley, Howard and McLaughlin, *et al.*, *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*; Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard, and Jamie McLaughlin, *et al.*, *London Lives, 1690–1800* (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 24 April 2012); *The Digital Panopticon: Tracing London Convicts in Britain and Australia, 1780–1925*, www.digitalpanopticon.org; Simon Devereaux, *Capital Punishment and Pardon at the Old Bailey, 1730–1837*, <https://hcmc.uvic.ca/project/oldbailey/>.

¹⁶ Significantly, most of these capital penalties were for property crimes. Douglas Hay, “Property, Authority and the Criminal Law”, in Douglas Hay et al. (eds.), *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century Society*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1975), 20.

¹⁷ *Doli incapax* is a legal term derived from Latin, meaning “incapable of doing any harm or incapable of committing a crime.” But it was suggested that this protection could be withdrawn: in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1796), William Blackstone referred to the ascribing of capacity to the age of ten in Hale’s *Pleas of the Crown* (1678), citing the case of a ten-year-old named William Yorke who was nonetheless convicted on his own confession for murdering a bedfellow and was deemed to be a proper object for capital punishment because “the sparing this boy merely on account of his tender years might be of dangerous consequence to the public, by propagating a notion that children might commit such atrocious crimes with impunity, it was unanimously agreed by all the judges that he was a proper subject of capital punishment.” Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 23–24.

surgeons;¹⁸ similarly fifteen-year-old John Cox, hanged at the site of his crime for murder in the course of a robbery in December 1786, was also dissected by surgeons after death.¹⁹ And while these might have seemed to be extreme responses to particularly grave crimes, it should be noted that there were also cases when some of these young people were sentenced in this way for property offences: in March 1737, fifteen-year-old David Jenkins was hanged for housebreaking and dissected by surgeons;²⁰ in April 1743, sixteen-year-old William Burnett was hanged and dissected for burglary.²¹

In spite of this, it should be acknowledged that only 40 young offenders were recorded as being executed in this period, and these were overwhelmingly children above the age of fourteen.²² Of the young people whose death sentence seems to have been carried out, 7 were fourteen years old, 14 were fifteen years old, and 18 were sixteen years old. In fact, only a single case appeared where anyone below that threshold was reportedly put to death: thirteen-year-old Dennis Doyle, who was hanged at the end of April 1774 for burglary.²³

¹⁸ See *OBSP* 1751–2, 71–72, 268–71; *Bloody Register* (1764), iv, 25–36; *Select Trials* (1764), ii, 207–17; *Annals of Newgate* (1776), iii, 329–37; Mountague, *Old Bailey Chronicle* (1788), iii, 144–53.

¹⁹ See *The Times*, 19 December 1786; *New and Complete Newgate Calendar* (1795), vi, 96; Knapp and Baldwin, *New Newgate Calendar* (1826), iv, 56–58.

²⁰ See *OBSP* 1736–37, 33.

²¹ See *OBSP* 1742–43, 62. In addition, the body of 16-year-old Jeffery Morat was gibbeted in March 1737 at Shepherd's Bush, near Kensington Gravel after he was found guilty of two counts of burglary and attempted murder, but he was not hanged because he died in Newgate while awaiting execution. See *OBSP* 1736–7, 66–7.

²² B. E. F. Knell, similarly, wrote about 103 cases of children being sentenced between the years 1801 and 1836. “Of these 103” children, he wrote, “not one was executed.” He pointed out, however, “In practically every case the offence was that of theft. None was convicted of murder.” Knell suggested the prevalence of capital punishment in cases involving young offenders may have been similarly overstated for the eighteenth century. B. E. F. Knell “Capital Punishment: Its Administration in Relation to Juvenile Offenders in the Nineteenth Century and its Possible Administration in the Eighteenth”, *British Journal of Criminology* 5:2 (1965), 199. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23634657>.

²³ See *OBSP* (1773–74), 104–05; *Morning Chronicle*, 23 April 1774. It is perhaps significant that 4 of these executed young offenders were dissected and 1 gibbeted, usually for crimes involving murder, although 15-year-old David Jenkins was convicted, hanged, and dissected for housebreaking; 16-year-old Jeffery Morat was indicted for the 3rd time and convicted of 2 counts of burglary and a count of attempted murder, but he died in Newgate at the

“Youth” or “tender age” was often an explicit mitigating factor in magisterial discretion: it was mentioned in the cases of 156 of the 591 young people with capital convictions between 1730 and 1837. Ten-year-old William Skelton was thus convicted for shoplifting in July 1798, but he was recommended for mercy by the jury on account of his youth. The presiding judge, Francis Buller, solicited a pardon for him, arguing that “the Criminality attaches on the Mother, and the Lord Mayor will endeavour to prevent the destruction of the Boy by procuring a Situation for him immediately in the Philanthropic Society.”²⁴ Nine-year-old James Cooper, similarly, was admitted to the Philanthropic Society in 1793 after he was

convicted on February Sessions last for stealing a child's frock – but on account of [his] youth [he was] not punished but sent to the Institution by the recommendation of the Magistrates at Hatton Garden Police Office.²⁵

Likewise, in the case of eight-year-old William Price, there was comment on the unusual “early depravity” of the boy when he appeared at the Police Office in Bow Street, after he

had burglariously broke open a drawer in a gentleman's house – where his mother lived as a servant – and stole therefrom a guinea and some silver after having destroyed some writing of great value.

Price was ultimately deemed to be “too young an object for prosecution,” and the magistrates recommended him to the Philanthropic Society instead.²⁶

end of February 1737 before he could be hanged, and was subsequently gibbeted at Shepherd's Bush, near the Kensington Gravel Pits. See OBSP 1736–37; Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 21 May 2023), February 1737, trial of Jeffery Morat, otherwise Murat (t17370216-20).

²⁴ OBSP 1797–98, 456–7; <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17980704-35>; <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17980704-36>; HO 13/12, 18. Also see Devereaux, *Capital Punishment and Pardon at the Old Bailey, 1730–1837*, https://hcmc.uvic.ca/project/oldbailey/record.php?trial_file=4581. Devereaux notes that Skelton was “pardoned before the end of the sessions, so he never went to a Recorder's Report; his second trial notes that he was sentenced immediately, presumably with a view to removing him from the normal procedural stream from the outset.”

²⁵ Cited in Whitten, 43–49.

²⁶ Cited in Whitten, 43–49.

The Old Bailey Proceedings make it clear that the vast majority of convicted youths' sentences were reduced to transportation—initially to the colonies in North America, but also later to Africa, and then to Australia.²⁷ Out of 591 young people that received capital convictions at the Old Bailey from 1730 to 1837, 476 had their sentence commuted in this way: there was 1 eight-year-old, 5 nine-year-olds, 5 ten-year-olds, 12 eleven-year-olds, 25 twelve-year-olds, 37 thirteen-year-olds, 80 fourteen-year-olds, 108 fifteen-year-olds, and 183 sixteen-year-olds.²⁸ Transportation was used much more often in the upper-age range, particularly towards the end of this period. In February 1814, for instance, eight-year-old John Morris was convicted of burglary along with two other children—nine-year-old Joseph Burrell and nine-year-old Moses Solomon—and they were all sentenced to death, commuted to transportation for life on account of their extreme youth.²⁹ Nine-year-old Charles Elliot, similarly, was convicted of shoplifting in February 1820 and was sentenced to death, although his sentence too was reduced to transportation for life.³⁰

In the latter years of the 1780s, there was something of a crisis in hanging: in 1785 and 1787, London saw more executions than at any time in the last two centuries, driven by high

²⁷ Although, significantly, the 1718 act only allowed for the penal transportation of children aged between fifteen and eighteen, provided they “consented” to go. This scope of this legislation was subsequently enlarged by the Act 6 George I. c. 23, which allowed felons who claimed benefit of clergy to be transported to the American plantations for seven or fourteen years. See Heather Shore, “Transportation, Penal Ideology and the Experience of Juvenile Offenders in England and Australia in the Early Nineteenth Century”, *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 6:2 (2002): 84.

²⁸ See Simon Devereaux, *Capital Punishment and Pardon at the Old Bailey, 1730–1837*, https://web.uvic.ca/~oldbail/search.php?saved_search=44.

²⁹ OBSP 1813–14, 126, <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18140216-22>; HO 13/25, 158–61; HO 13/33, 429–30. Morris does not seem to have ever been transported out of England, however, because records suggest he was freed from the hulks, 3 July 1819: HO 13/34, 18. See https://hcmc.uvic.ca/project/oldbailey/record.php?trial_file=6003.

³⁰ OBSP 1819–20, 161; <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18200217-19>; HO 6/5; HO 13/35, 43–4. See Devereaux, *Capital Punishment and Pardon at the Old Bailey, 1730–1837*, https://hcmc.uvic.ca/project/oldbailey/record.php?trial_file=7093.

levels of reported crime and the dwindling availability of acceptable secondary punishments.³¹

Yet to many critics, this was evidence of the decreasing deterrent effect of the spectacle of the gallows to lawbreakers of all ages. In 1787, for example, it was commented in the *Times*,

The Eighteen convicts ordered for execution on Tuesday next ... This is truly a dreadful national calamity, and calls loudly for the intervention of the legislature, that by their timely exertions a reform in our police may take place, and such disgraceful exhibitions not so often shake the metropolis of the British empire from its propriety.³²

In 1788, the newspaper similarly lamented that

The numbers convicted last session... are a melancholy proof of the inefficacy of our laws, and ought to stimulate our Parliament to an alteration of the system for punishing crimes... [as]... hanging, most certainly, has not sufficient terrors to prevent those crimes for which it is the punishment.³³

And William Vincent was still preaching this same message in 1794:

life is of little value to the outcast—they have no means of supporting life, but by depredation, and they consider depredation as their craft and calling. The magistrate is not a terror to the good, but to the evil; to these however, evil as they are, terror has lost its force.³⁴

As late as 1816, the “Report of the Committee for Investigating the Causes of the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis” commented on “auxiliaries” which

³¹ Peter King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England 1740–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 162–63; Simon Devereaux, “England’s ‘Bloody Code’ in Crisis and Transition: Executions at the Old Bailey, 1760–1837”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 24, no. 2 (2013): 71–113, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1025075ar>. As Douglas Hay wrote: “The semiannual rhythm of the assize circuit was punctuated by months and occasionally years in which the safety of the central and local state took precedence over routine crime. The recurring theme is political crisis, disruption with implications for the stability of the regime. The interruption of transportation to America during and after the revolutionary war (1776–87) constituted something of the kind, in the sense that there was a conjunction of weakness to punish at a period of political crisis. We can understand the higher execution rates that resulted as justified by that sense of crisis, as well as the suspension of transportation, the usual condition of a capital pardon.” Douglas Hay, “Past & Present”, *Past & Present* 95:1 (1982): 117–60 (141), <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/95.1.117>.

³² *The Times* 1/6/1787.

³³ *The Times*, 6/8/1788.

³⁴ William Vincent, *A Sermon, Preached for the Benefit of the Philanthropic Society* (London: Philanthropic Society, 1794), 11.

contributed to the perpetuation of crime, including “The severity of the criminal code; The defective state of the police; [and] The existing system of prison discipline.”³⁵

Yet, at this point, there were still few viable alternatives to capital punishments. Gaols and other places of confinement were notoriously unhealthy places that made the notion of imprisonment unpopular: in fact, gaol fever was so rampant that it made imprisonment as much of a potential death sentence as hanging. As serious a concern, it was thought, was the prison’s potential for moral “contamination”: because of the mixing of inmates—whether they were young or old, persistent lawbreakers or first-time offenders—imprisonment was thought likely to encourage reoffending. Hanway ruminated on the risks of corruption that imprisonment held, commenting on “the consequence of associating prisoners ... in a fraternity of thieves, teaching and learning all the mysteries of rapine and blood; and nourishing a dangerous enemy in our bosom.” Hanway described crime as a disease “which spreads disruption like pestilence and immorality as an epidemical disorder which diffuses its morbid qualities.” After 1772, Hanway began to push for the adoption of the penalty of solitary confinement to avoid creating “schools for villainy” that provided for what he referred to as “evil communication” among prisoners. This, he argued, “corrupts good manners” and in “all circumstances must be productive of evil effects.”³⁶ Penal reformer John Howard, similarly, thought that half the robberies in and about London had been planned in prisons “by that dreadful assemblage of criminals, and the number

³⁵ *Report of the Committee*, 11.

³⁶ Jonas Hanway, *Solitude in imprisonment, with proper profitable labour and a spare diet, the most humane and effectual means of bringing malefactors, who have forfeited their lives, or are subject to transportation, to a right sense of their condition: with proposals for salutary prevention : and how to qualify offenders and criminals for happiness in both worlds, and preserve the people, in the enjoyment of the genuine fruits of liberty, and freedom from violence* (1776), https://books.google.ca/books?id=8VNtvyCNiRYC&redir_esc=y. Also see Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution 1705–1850* (New York: Pantheon 1978), 15.

of idle people who visit them.” As a result, “multitudes of young creatures committed for some trifling offence are totally ruined there.”³⁷ And Patrick Colquhoun commented on “the evil examples exhibited in Prisons,” writing,

If they were novices in villainy before, the education they receive in these seminaries, in the event of their escaping justice, returns them upon society, completely proselyted and instructed in the arts of mischief and depredation.

Although many of these critiques focused on the youth of convicts, it should be noted that children made up only 6 percent of total prison inmates as late as 1816.³⁸ More often, sentences of imprisonment used for young people were limited to the short term; some were whipped publicly instead of facing the gallows, sometimes as a precursor to a sentence in the House of Correction, or—in London—the Bridewell.³⁹ Nine-year-old Nicholas White, for instance, was convicted for housebreaking in May of 1833: he was sentenced to death, but the Recorder reported that he was privately whipped once, and then imprisoned.⁴⁰

³⁷ “I make no scruple to affirm, that if it were the wish and aim of magistrates to effect the destruction, present and future, of young delinquents, they could not devise a more effectual method than to confine them so long in our prisons: those seats and seminaries (as they have been very properly called) of idleness and every vice.” John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (Warrington, 1777), 15 https://books.google.ca/books/about/State_of_the_Prisons_in_England_and_Wale.html?id=4EhNAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y.

³⁸ Many adolescents were processed through Newgate for misdemeanour offences such as vagrancy, disobedience to a master, or minor thefts. Later, young people would often be sentenced to a short stint of imprisonment in Newgate as a precursor to a more prolonged period of imprisonment in a reformatory. The 1816 *Report of the Committee for Investigating the Causes of the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis* argued that long-term incarceration might expose young people to “the temptations of idle hours and corrupt society.”

³⁹ Offenders below the age of sixteen could legally receive up to 25 strokes; for those above that age, up to 50 strokes were allowed. Whipping as a form of punishment was not abandoned until after World War I. See Lorraine Radford, *Rethinking Children, Violence and Safeguarding* (London: Continuum, 2012), 19. Susan Dwyer Amussen has argued that corporal punishment was ubiquitous at this time because it was thought to be essential to maintaining the power of the state. Dwyer Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline and Power”, 6. By the beginning of the twentieth century corporal punishment was seldom used in England, and it was officially abolished for judicial purposes in 1947.

⁴⁰ OBSP 1832–3, 461–62, <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18330516-5>; HO 6/18 (RR list, 19 June 1833). This was subsequently commuted to transportation to Van Diemens Land for seven years. HO 13/62, 396–97.

Although Bridewell was full of young and petty offenders for much of the eighteenth century, it too began to fall into disuse by the nineteenth. In fact, there was not a single committal between 1791 and 1800.⁴¹ Part of its decline in importance paralleled the emerging concerns with long-term imprisonment: there was a long history of unsanitary conditions, inefficiency in its operations, and, especially, overcrowding. When the War of Independence in 1775 suddenly brought transportation to North America to an end, a significant outlet for England's lawbreakers was closed: Bridewell's facilities were not adequate to handle the growing number of convicts, and the prison population more generally began to build up. One measure the government adopted in response to this congestion was the use of old, decommissioned sea vessels known as "hulks" to "temporarily" house prisoners.⁴² Convicts were to be locked up aboard ship by night, but they would be escorted to undertake hard labour by day on the docks,

raising sand, soil, and gravel, and cleansing the River Thames, or any other river, or port, approved by the Privy Council; or in any other works upon the banks or shores of the same, under the direction of superintendents approved of by the Justices, for a term not less than one year, nor more than five.⁴³

The hulks were intended to be a short-term measure to cope with the unusual volume of convicts that were present after the loss of the colonies—Colquhoun wrote that the idea behind their adoption reflected a desire to remove

Convicts, under sentence of death, and reprieved by his Majesty, and also such as are under sentence of Transportation (being free from infectious disorders) to other places of confinement, either inland, or on board of any ship or vessel in the river Thames, or any other navigable river;

⁴¹ See Benjamin Nelson, "Bridewell's Fall: Summary Justice in London, 1730–1800", MA thesis, Iowa State University, 2017. <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/15389>.

⁴² 16 Geo. III.

⁴³ "...except an offender be liable to transportation for 14 years, in which case his punishment may be commuted for 7 years on board the Hulks." Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 303.

and to continue them so confined until transported according to law, or until the expiration of the term of the sentence should otherwise entitle them to their liberty.⁴⁴

But their use continued to be authorized even after transportation re-emerged in its Australian form to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land in the late 1780s.

Young people below the age of fourteen made up only a small proportion of the prisoners confined onboard the hulks. More common were slightly older convicts, such as fifteen-year-old Job Filkin, who was sentenced to death in March 1777 for stealing in a dwelling but whose sentence was commuted to transportation and who was sent to the hulks; or fifteen-year-old Nicholas Ryder, who was sentenced to death in September 1777, but whose sentence likewise was commuted to transportation before he too was sent to the hulks. In the same way, sixteen-year-old Thomas Field was sentenced to death for Burglary in December 1777, but his sentence was commuted and he was also sent to the hulks; sixteen-year-old James Woolley was similarly sentenced to death for stealing in a dwelling in February 1779—and he too was sent to the hulks.⁴⁵

Some of the young people who were sent to these floating prisons did not complete their full sentence but were freed on recommendation of the judge, jury, or prosecutor in their trial. Of the 591 capital convictions of young people at the Old Bailey from 1730 to 1837, 59 received pardons: some of these were at the lower end of the age range when they were convicted (25),

⁴⁴ Transportation was revived by 24 George III, 2, c. 56; “which empowers the Court, before whom a male Felon shall be convicted, to order the prisoner to be transported beyond seas, either within his Majesty's dominions or elsewhere; and his service to be assigned to the contractor who shall undertake such transportation.” Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 305. See Pamela Horn, *Young Offenders: Juvenile Delinquency from 1700 to 2000* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2010), 59.

⁴⁵ Fourteen-year-old John Hosier, however, was sentenced to death for burglary in May 1778 before he was sent to the hulks. See Devereaux, *Capital Punishment and Pardon at the Old Bailey, 1730–1837*, <https://hcmc.uvic.ca/project/oldbailey/index.php>; B. E. F. Knell, “Capital Punishment: Its Administration in Relation to Juvenile Offenders in the Nineteenth Century and its Possible Administration in the Eighteenth”, *The British Journal of Criminology* 5, no. 2 (1965): 198—207. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23634657>.

but still more of these offenders were above the age of fourteen (34): 1 eight-year-old, 1 nine-year-old, 1 ten-year-old, 1 eleven-year-old, 6 twelve-year-olds; 15 thirteen-year-olds, 9 fourteen-year-olds, 8 fifteen-year-olds, 17 sixteen-year-olds. Of the recommendations for release, 23 explicitly cited the “youth” or “tender age” of the convict at the time of the offence. In the case of thirteen-year-old Edward Pickard, convicted of Housebreaking in November 1833, the jury recommended him for mercy because he was the “Dupe of Others” that were also committing the crime; he was released from Millbank prison, in October 1836.⁴⁶ By the same token, thirteen-year-old John Albertson, convicted of burglary in January 1835, and sentenced to twelve-years imprisonment, was freed from Millbank in March of the following year due to “indications of weak intellect connected probably with, or originating from, Epileptic Attacks, to which he is subject.” It was argued, “At this present time, he has symptoms of insanity, complaining that his life is in danger as poison is put in his salt and food.”⁴⁷

Fifteen-year-old John Morris, convicted of participating in the Gordon Riots in July of 1780, was pardoned on the condition that “the African Company should think proper to interest themselves in his behalf in consequence of any favorable circumstances appearing relative to the Prisoner.”⁴⁸ Sixteen-year-old Evan Morgan, similarly, convicted in April 1795 for “Stealing in the Mail,” was one of “twenty-eight prisoners whom the Sheriffs of London think fit for naval service, and indicating alongside each name whether they should be pardoned on condition of service in the navy or in a West Indies regiment.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See OBSP 1832–33, 674; HO 6/18; HO 13/63, 375–77; HO 13/70, 149–50.

⁴⁷ See OBSP 1834–5, 369–71; HO 6/20; HO 13/66, 213–14; HO 13/68, 399–400.

⁴⁸ HO 43/6, 307 (under secretary John King to John Shortbread, 1 April 1795). Also see OBSP 1779–80, 522–4; SP 44//95, 114–15; HO 13/10, 479.

⁴⁹ See HO 13/10, p.250; HO 13/10, 263; HO 13/16, 326; HO 47/19, ff.126–7 (Recorder to HS Portland, 5 Aug 1795).

By 1816, many commentators were advocating a vessel be designated especially for younger convicts.⁵⁰ Three hundred prisoners under the age of fifteen were thus assigned to the *Bellerophon* in 1823, tasked with making clothing for other convicts, and the adult prisoners would all be transferred off the hulk by 1824. But conditions there were notoriously poor: after just two years the *Bellerophon* had to be replaced by a smaller vessel called the *Euryalus*. Conditions on this ship were little better—the *Euryalus* suffered from constant complaints of overcrowding, inadequate diet, monotonous work, harsh discipline, and bullying. In fact, after their investigation of the use of the hulks, the 1835 Select Committee recommended that the *Euryalus* be abandoned as soon as possible.⁵¹

Summary Justice: Prevention and Rehabilitation

Over the same period, there were also significant changes in the administration of justice. Perhaps as a result of the new means of mapping society offered by the censuses; or as a consequence of related arguments about controlling the nation's demography made by contemporaries like Thomas Malthus; or as a side-effect of the rise of evangelicalism, with its increased emphasis on self-discipline; there was a marked increase in preventative strategies, as

⁵⁰ John Howard found just a few boys among the 273 convicts on the *Lion* at Portsmouth in 1788. Perceptions of a “hardened” character or connotations of “criminal connections” among young offenders could turn the court toward a sentence of transportation, however. John Howard, *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe, With Various Papers Relative to the Plague, Together with Further Observations on Some Foreign Prisons and Hospitals, and Additional Remarks on the Present State of Those in Great Britain and Ireland* volume 2 (London, 1791), 217. https://www.google.ca/books/edition/An_Account_of_the_Principal_Lazarettos_i

⁵¹ See Campbell (1993), 12. By that point, juvenile-specific hulks had been in service for twenty years, and around 2,500 boys of fourteen or younger had passed through them, but as Radzinowicz and Hood point out, abandoning this particular hulk did not happen for “another seven years and 2,100 children.” Radzinowicz and Hood, *The Emergence of Penal Policy*, 144. Also see Shore, “Transportation”, 85–86.

opposed to policies focused on the physical punishment of the offender.⁵² Corporal punishments were increasingly seen as problematic, but so too were the available modes of incarceration: because of the concern about bringing young offenders into contact with “criminal culture,” philanthropic enterprises increasingly seemed to offer better options for changing these young offenders for the better. Some punishments were thus adjusted after conviction and sentencing: in May 1794, sixteen-year-old Joseph George was convicted of burglary and sentenced to death, but this was respited on account of both his youth and good character, and he received a pardon on condition of enlisting in the army.⁵³

Many young people who committed crimes never faced a judge or jury at all: in London, those accused of crimes were sometimes brought before the Lord Mayor’s residence or the magistrates’ offices, but authorities there often chose not to commit youths to full trial—instead they imposed a relatively minor “summary” sentence of whipping, a short term of imprisonment in a house of correction, or “redirected” them to military service. Summary convictions also often diverted children to the charitable institutions of the capital—sometimes after conviction, with conditional pardons if they agreed to go willingly, but sometimes before, in order to prevent the offence from progressing to the formal courts at all.⁵⁴ In the Old Bailey cases from 1730 to 1837, eleven boys were sent to the Marine Society; eight more children were sent to the

⁵² See Nick Rogers, “Policing the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London: The Vagrancy Laws and Their Administration”, *Histoire sociale/Social History* 24 (1991): 127–47; Greg T. Smith, “Muffled Voices: Recovering Children’s Voices from England’s Social Margins”, in Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove, and Carla Pascoe Leahy (eds.), *Children’s Voices from the Past: New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

⁵³ OBSP 1793-4; 734–35, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t17940430-108-defend1097&div=t17940430-108>; HO 13/10, 2.

⁵⁴ As Drew Gray has shown, the poor also approached magistrates for advice and to solicit help in securing parish or charitable relief. Drew D. Gray, *Crime, Prosecution and Social Relations: The Summary Courts of the City of London in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Houndsmill, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2009), 152–53, 173.

Philanthropic Society. It was thought that redirection could help to shape the morals of young people by exposing them to experiential learning rather than simply punishing them—they might thereby be imprinted with ideals of probity and self-reliance that would allow them to begin their lives anew. As we have seen, John Fielding made considerable efforts in this regard on behalf of young people who appeared before him as a magistrate, although many other English authorities appear to have used similar expedients to minimize the number of young offenders who were formally indicted in their court.⁵⁵

Whether they had been “brought before a magistrate and discharged for want of legal evidence to produce conviction, although no doubt remained of their actual guilt,” or they were tried and convicted; but by reason of their tender years, or some other mitigating circumstances, are recommended by the Judges of assize, or other Magistrates, before whom such trial took place, as proper objects of this Institution,⁵⁶

the practice of summary justice brought many young offenders to the attention of one eighteenth-century institution in particular: the Philanthropic Society. This was the case with twelve-year-old Daniel Arrogant, and the actions of the magistrates illustrate the lengths that authorities might go to for young offenders. “In the absence of his master in the country,” Arrogant had

forced open a door with a pair of tongs, and with a large spike, the lock of a till in the room, into which he had broken and with having stolen thereout two gold seals, a gold breast pin &c. – and upon the discovery of this offence, he also confessed the having robbed his said master at several times of halfpence – which his master had missed without being able to account for it.

The magistrates committed him to the House of Correction in Cold Bath Fields

⁵⁵ The diaries of contemporary justices suggest that informal punishment or dismissal from service were often employed in lieu of a criminal indictment. See diaries of Oakes, Woodforde, and Holland, for examples. Reports from Committees; Police of the Metropolis (1817), 436. Redirection into the armed forces was most frequently used during the War of the Grand Alliance (1688–1697), the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–13), the War of American Independence (1775–83), and the Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815). Many defendants sentenced to death were pardoned on condition of service, which was regularised by the Mutiny Act of 1705. See Hanway, *Reasons for an Augmentation*, 92. Also see Wiener, 39–45.

⁵⁶ Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views, of the Philanthropic Society* (London, 1799), 6.

instead of fully committing him for trial on account of his tender age, with a view to an application to the Philanthropic Society in his behalf: for which purpose the said magistrates, very humanely, sent him in the care of an Officer with a letter, dated October 2~, expressing a wish that this Society would take him under their care, as it was not the desire of his master to prosecute him – but which must take place if he be not received by the Philanthropic Society.⁵⁷

Recent studies of the age structure of offenders show that, despite the increasing use of summary jurisdiction, young adults were being disproportionately prosecuted for their crimes by the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ According to Peter King, “in London and Surrey... the proportion of offenders under eighteen more than doubled between 1785–93 and 1820–22. The proportion under twenty increased by about three-quarters.”⁵⁹ It remains unclear whether these increases in the numbers of prosecutions—and the related increase in print coverage of juvenile delinquency—actually reflected growing numbers of delinquents or whether they were due to victims’ greater resolve to prosecute youths compared to earlier decades, but the publication of the 1816 “Report of the Committee for Investigating the Causes of the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis” suggested that, by that time, there were “some thousands of boys under seventeen years of age in the metropolis, who are daily engaged in the commission of crime.”⁶⁰ King argues that there was most definitely a discernible shift in

⁵⁷ Quoted in Whitten, 49–50.

⁵⁸ See Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, “Service and the Coming of Age of Young Men in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Continuity and Change* 3 (1988), 41–64; Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*; Peter King, “Rise of Juvenile Delinquency”, 116–66; King and Noel; King, *Crime and Law in England*; May, “Innocence and Experience”, 7–29; Magarey, 11–27; Gillis, *Youth and History*; John Gillis, “The Evolution of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1890–1914”, *Past and Present* 67 (1975): 96–126; Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1983); Shore, *Artful Dodgers*; Peter Rush, “The Government of a Generation: The Subject of Juvenile Delinquency”, *Liverpool Law Review* 14: 1 (1992), 3–43; John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain, 1860–1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986). Figures published in the *Report of the Select Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis* (London: 1818) also suggest a significant increase in juvenile vagrancy in the years between 1815 and 1818. SC Police, with an Additional Report, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix, PP, 1818, viii, 284–92.

⁵⁹ King, “The Rise of Juvenile Delinquency”, 116–66; King, *Crime and Law in England*, 81–82, 104.

⁶⁰ *Report of the Committee*, 10.

attitudes toward punishment, away from public corporal punishments to a more nuanced understanding of crime and the potential for rehabilitation.⁶¹

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the operations of the Philanthropic Society and its efforts toward the reformation of outcast children, which perhaps embodied that shift more than any other contemporary charity. The institution was typical of the period it emerged in, concerned as it claimed to be for public order—it paralleled wider efforts toward penal reform, social mapping and control, as evangelical earnestness about self-discipline increased, and as other organizations such as the Mendicity Society endeavoured to make welfare contingent upon moral probity. The Philanthropic Society promised to contribute to that England: returning young criminals to society as morally upright and industrious workers.

The Founding of the Philanthropic Society

The story of the Philanthropic Society began in 1787, when a group of wealthy businessmen and gentlemen gathered for a meeting in St. Paul’s Coffee-House in London. There they discussed the “fatal depravity” of destitution, prostitution, and crime that ran rampant in the capital; they expressed a shared concern at the increasing

number of homeless children... who only managed to keep alive by begging and dishonesty. Some of these were no older than three or four years; many were homeless, others were trained by their relatives to win what they could by theft. There seemed little ahead of them except execution on the public gallows or a lifetime of imprisonment.⁶²

⁶¹ Although King points out that the increased willingness to press charges may have been prompted by the more conspicuous footprint in the news of juvenile crime. For more possible explanations for why victims may have been more willing to prosecute, see King, “Rise of Juvenile Delinquency”, 151; King, *Crime and Law in England*, 104–08.

⁶² Angela Alabaster, *A History of the Royal Philanthropic Society 1788–1988* (n.d.).

The perfect solution, they thought, might be a “social business” designed to make use of both the compassion of their “feeling hearts” and the scientific rigour of their “reflecting minds,” uniting “the spirit of charity with the principles of trade.” Convinced that England’s burdens could be transformed into assets if the children of the criminal poor were raised to become tradesmen and servants, they resolved to form a “Society for the Prevention of Vice and Misery among the Poor.”⁶³ The result was the Philanthropic Society for the Prevention of Crimes, the Promotion of Industry, and the Reform of the Infant Criminal Poor of Both Sexes; it first met under its new name at Robert Young’s house on 5 September 1788. What these businessmen had in mind was the creation of an “Asylum not a Prison”: it would concern itself with crime, yes, but it would also serve as a guide for wayward youth through moral and occupational instruction.⁶⁴ In December of that year, the Philanthropic Society ran a notice in *The Times*, announcing their intention to provide care for a “class of children which it seeks and selects from out of the most vile and infamous parts in the metropolis.” They promised that their scheme would undermine the criminal actions that obstruct “the sources of national wealth, infringe personal safety, and render property insecure.” To this end, they solicited public support.⁶⁵

It is significant that this institution emerged from a climate marked by growing public concern over the failure of existing legal measures to stem a perceived rising tide of crime. The year 1787 had seen a considerable spike in the number of executions but a corresponding

⁶³ *The First Report of the Philanthropic Society instituted in London, September 1788, for the Prevention of Crimes* (1789), 23.

⁶⁴ *Abstracts: 5th September 1788–16th January 1792*. Quoted in Whitten 18–19. “It was the first English institution to cater exclusively to youths from criminal backgrounds.” Also see Megan Clare Webber, “Ground Honest in the Reform Mill: The Theory and Experience of Reformation in the Philanthropic Society and Refuge for the Destitute, c.1788–1830”, (MA thesis, University of Guelph, 2012), 2.

⁶⁵ By controlling and training children with some skills which would earn them a living, they argued, an improvement in their obedience to authority would naturally follow. *The Times*, 16 December 1788.

increase of criticism about the efficacy of the spectacle of the scaffold as a deterrent. Anxieties were stewing among the English about the erosion of the relationship of authority and deference, already seen in the destruction of private property and prisons that had occurred in London during the Gordon Riots of 1780. Significantly, 1787 saw the resumption of transportation on a large scale—now to Australia, where it would continue until 1868.⁶⁶

At the same time, the nation was straining under a rapidly expanding populace, but it was also experiencing a series of further economic difficulties: There were trade blockades during wartime in the 1780s and poor harvests in the 1790s, which contributed to food shortages.⁶⁷ Many livelihoods were jeopardized by the development of enclosures and the related loss of common rights; others were threatened by the decline of cottage industry and the rise of factory competition.⁶⁸ Trade relations with North America had been disrupted by the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783, and the country had been left with 130,000 demobilized servicemen. This large body of unemployed men overwhelmed the labour market, with the result that there was a marked rise in the rates of property crime.⁶⁹ The early publications of the

⁶⁶ See Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 560–618; Hay, “Hanging and the English Judges: The Judicial Politics of Retention and Abolition”, in David Garland, Randall McGowen, and Paul Merantz (eds.), *America's Death Penalty: Between Past and Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 129–165; Simon Devereaux, “England’s ‘Bloody Code’ in Crisis and Transition: Executions at the Old Bailey, 1760–1837”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada* 24:2 (2013): 71–113. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1025075ar>.

⁶⁷ The price of wheat increased more than 70 percent between 1791 and 1795. Frank O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth-Century: British Political and Social History, 1688–1832* (London: Arnold, 1997), 267; Roger Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England 1793–1801* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988).

⁶⁸ Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 14.

⁶⁹ Beattie, *Crime, and the Courts*, 225–34; King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion*, 153–56, 164–66. “The number of offenders at the Old Bailey from 1783 to 1786 was almost 40 percent higher than in the previous three years.” At the same time, there was an escalation in the numbers executed in London—82% higher than the previous five years. Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain*, 87.

Philanthropic Society expressed the fears of many contemporaries that this had all created a distinct, growing criminal underclass in England:

They are a class which belongs to no rank of civil community; they are excommunicates in police, extra social, extra civil, extra legal; they are links which have fallen off the chain of society and, which, going to decay, injure and obstruct the whole machine.⁷⁰

These fears were only stoked by the appearance of subversive literature such as Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) and the emergence of reform-minded clubs like the London Corresponding Society. The potential consequences of this "sedition," seemed to be clearly on display in the developing revolution in France.

There were also concerns about the rising costs of poor relief, as the innovations of the agrarian and industrial "revolutions" displaced people from occupations in the countryside and increased the numbers of the urban, dependant poor.⁷¹ These mounting costs suggested that, far from addressing the root causes of pauperism, poor relief only encouraged it: although this aid may have relieved poverty temporarily, it was increasingly believed that guaranteeing subsistence to the able-bodied only removed any incentive for industry in the long term. Paupers were thus rendered idle, which was thought to represent the first step down in the descent into crime.⁷² With the population of London coming close to doubling between 1700 and 1820, a growing proportion of the poor seemed to be children: these young people were increasingly present in "unprecedented numbers."⁷³

⁷⁰ *Plan and Particulars Respecting the First Establishment of the Philanthropic Society...* (London: Philanthropic Society, 1792), 24.

⁷¹ The cost of parish relief increased dramatically in the second half of the eighteenth century. Annual expenditure "[rose] from an average of £689,971 for the three years ending in 1750 to £1,912,241 for the period 1783 to 1785." By 1803, this latter figure had more than doubled to reach £4,077,891. Green, *Pauper Capital*, 26–27.

⁷² The disobedience and the likelihood of criminal futures were particularly worrying when, as Leon Radzinowicz wrote "the danger of a French invasion seemed imminent." Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law* (London, 1948–86), volume 4, 107.

⁷³ Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, 20; Walvin, 17.

The Philanthropic Society and Continuing Critiques of Poor Relief and Charity

These developments were serendipitous for the emergence of the Philanthropic Society, which was explicitly conceived as much as a crime-prevention enterprise as a charitable organization. In its estimation, the Poor Laws had had little positive effect throughout the eighteenth century: in fact, the publicity of the Philanthropic Society argued that the “great defect” of poor relief had been “the want of discrimination between merit and demerit, amounting virtually to the discontinuance of honest industry.” By accommodating anyone who could claim a settlement, they had effectively eliminated any “necessity of providing against the love of ease inherent in all men” and encouraged “the evil dispositions prevalent in too many.”

Equally, the Philanthropic Society condemned the work of many previous charities, which it maintained had bestowed aid “without proper discrimination”: they were “annually employed in the support and consequently the reward of idleness.” Lacking proper direction, it argued, “the springs of the wealth of the nation will no longer flow.”⁷⁴ Although “great sums are annually expended in the country for the service of the Poor,” it pointed out that “much want and misery still exist,” to the extent that while

the necessary severity of the laws and the frequency of punishment are subjects of general regret, vices and crimes continue to prevail and even increase to an alarming degree.⁷⁵

The persistence of these evils confirmed the “necessity of trying measures altogether of a different kind.”⁷⁶ To that end, the Philanthropic Society designed their enterprise “to unite the spirit of charity with the principles of trade by erecting a Temple to Philanthropy on the

⁷⁴ Charity, when “divested of any views of return,” was a “current from the purses of the rich to the miseries of the poor.” *First Report*, 3.

⁷⁵ *Appeal* (1790). Quoted in Whitten, 19–20.

⁷⁶ *Appeal* (1790).

foundations of Virtuous Industry”: their approach would be “scientific”—benefactors’ hearts, full of sympathy for their charges, would be regulated by the rationality of their heads.⁷⁷ Resources would not be wasted indiscriminately, and instead every facet of the institution’s operations would be regulated to secure the best results: objects would be carefully selected for deservingness; rewards and punishments would be systematically handed out; there would be regular hours for work, prayer, and play; and finances would be as well-managed as they were in the commercial world.

At first, the focus of the institution was on “the reception of the infant offspring of *convicted felons*,” who needed to be saved from “evil counsel and example.”⁷⁸

for although such children may not have begun as yet it is to be feared, the pernicious sentiments, and principles imbibed from those parents, and their wretched connexions, will act so forcibly on their youthful minds, as to render them more susceptible to temptations than the children of parents of an opposite description.⁷⁹

Many children arrived at the institution following the arrest, imprisonment, transportation, or execution of their parents: the son of David Humphries was recorded as being admitted while his father was awaiting transportation for stealing a bag of feathers.⁸⁰ Yet soon the Philanthropic Society began to claim that its’ objects were those who had just started down the road of criminality—“who have already commenced their criminal course by the commission of *petty thefts*, or *fraudulent practices*.” Many had been sent to the institution by magistrates and judges

⁷⁷ *First Report*. Michael J. D. Roberts, “Head versus Heart? Voluntary Associations and Charity Organization in England, c. 1700–1850”, in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: From the 1690s to 1850* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 66–86.

⁷⁸ “The Philanthropic Society... aims at the prevention of crimes, by removing out of the way of, those children whose destruction, without their assistance, would be inevitable.” Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 5.

⁷⁹ Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 5–6.

⁸⁰ Old Bailey trial of David Humphries, June 4, 1794 (<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t17940604-11>).

after arrest or conviction: at the age of ten, Charles Crawley had already been tried twice for theft before he was admitted into the Philanthropic Society.⁸¹

To many contemporaries, taking “the children of vagrants and such who are in the paths of vice and infamy” in the “Augean stable of filth, disease and iniquity which disgraces the Metropolis” and training them up to “virtue and usefulness in life” made good financial sense:

in their present state [they] are below the zero point in the scale of estimation; which not only have, already, no positive value, but which on the contrary have a positive *disvalue*; if it may be so expressed, in the balance of which the evil prevails over the good.⁸²

More than that, it was argued that this would have a positive effect on the rest of society:

when the influence of moral education was experienced on the very lowest and worst description of people; when there should be change, by this means, so as to produce the best characteristics; when from the children of vagrants there should be formed a superior class of mechanics and servants; honest, industrious, affectionate, faithful, examples to others, and preferred before them, it would be impossible but that every order in society would be eager to wipe away the disgrace of being left behind in the race of virtue by those whom they had been accustomed to hold in contempt.

Attitudes toward the young poor were paralleled by the later passage of the infamous “sus” law, which extended the vagrant acts to “suspected persons” and allowed constables to pick up culprits they thought to be “on the verge of crime,” instead of requiring them to have reasonable suspicion of actual law-breaking. Colquhoun particularly stressed the need for “a systematic superintending policy calculated to check and prevent the growth and progress of vicious habits and other irregularities incident to civil society.”⁸³ Although the “sus” law had

⁸¹ As Philanthropic steward Thomas Russell stated in 1817, the girls in the Philanthropic were “with few exceptions, all the children of convicts.” As the institution did not have the facilities to segregate criminal from non-criminal girls and thus prevent inmate-to-inmate corruption (as it did for the boys), the Philanthropic tended to limit admissions of criminal girls. *Police of the Metropolis* (1817), 443; Old Bailey trial of Charles Crawley, October 26, 1791 (17911026-27); Old Bailey trial of Charles Crawley, May 23, 1792 (17920523-61).

⁸² *The Second Report and Address of the Philanthropic Society ...containing remarks upon Education and some account of the methods adopted in the Reform for cultivating virtuous dispositions and habits in the wards of the Society* (1789), 29. Emphasis in original.

⁸³ Colquhoun, *Indigence*, 82. Cited in Rogers, “Policing the Poor”, 145.

been instituted in 1802 as a temporary measure, it was re-enacted in 1811 and 1815, and it became a permanent measure in 1824.⁸⁴ With this, as Rogers wrote, “the social boundaries of vagrancy were extended beyond the act of vagrancy itself; they began to include forms of deviance in anticipation of begging. The preventative paradigm, in other words, moved hesitatingly beyond the offender to the ‘delinquent’.”⁸⁵ Referring to the arguments of Michel Foucault, he argued that the effect of the “preventative” principle was to establish “the ‘criminal’ as existing before the crime and even outside it.”⁸⁶ A similar phenomenon was happening with the children of “the most degenerate class of poor.”

If these children could be lifted up “to a degree of superior utility,” a “magnificent, striking and commanding” model could be offered to “attract the eye of the nation.”⁸⁷ The focus of the rhetoric of the Philanthropic Society was not so much on the plights of the children it sought to help; rather, it emphasized the effect it would have on the maintenance of order and the prevention of the future ills of the nation, rescuing and reforming those who, if left in their existing circumstances, presented a risk to it.⁸⁸ These were children

in the nurseries of vice and iniquity [and the intent was] to train up these embryo robbers and nuisances, to useful purposes in life; and thus to draw riches and strength to the state even from sources of impoverishment and decay

⁸⁴ 42 Geo. III c. 76, clause 18; 51 Geo III c 119, cl. 18; 54 Geo III c. 37, cl. 18; 5 Geo. IV c. 83, cl. 7. The “sus” laws remained active until the 1980s, provoking particular controversy by their disproportionate use in Black and minority ethnic communities to authorize stop-and-search activities, facilitating police harassment and victimization. It was eventually replaced by the Criminal Attempts Act (1981 c. 47).

⁸⁵ Rogers, “Policing the Poor”, 145.

⁸⁶ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, Pantheon, 1977), 252. Cited in Rogers, “*Policing the Poor*”, 145.

⁸⁷ *Second Report*.

⁸⁸ For an exploration of the ambivalence in responses to children who are perceived both as “victims” and “threats,” see Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England, 1872–1989* (London: Routledge, 1994).

By these means, the “sum of happiness [would be] augmented beyond what has been hitherto known in any former period of mankind.”⁸⁹

Although earlier charitable institutions like the Foundling Hospital and the Marine Society had aimed to increase the English population, augmenting the stock of labourers to spur the economy and increase the number of military men available to defend her shores, they were ultimately criticized by many contemporaries because their large scale had made these charities notoriously expensive—the Foundling Hospital had been particularly condemned for staggering costs and shockingly high mortality rates during the General Reception.⁹⁰ By comparison, the governors of the Philanthropic Society tried to keep the scale of their operation small. Until 1792, in fact, they maintained a de-centralised model of aid, maintaining children in the houses of craftsmen in the village of Hackney. A publication in 1797 claimed, “The whole number of children of both sexes that have been received by the Society amount to 314, and the number now in the Reform is 134.”⁹¹ But that year they established a new institution at St. George's Fields in Southwark, opening segregated male and female “Reforms” in 1802.⁹²

The very notion that a large population was beneficial to the country was being reassessed—Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and Thomas Malthus' *Essay on Population* (1798) suggested that unproductive lives encumbered industrious citizens with the

⁸⁹ *Second Report*.

⁹⁰ Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 155–62, 157–58. Mid-century charities of had hundreds of beneficiaries under their care at a time—the Foundling Hospital even had an art gallery; Alys Levene, “The Estimation of Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741–99”, *Population Studies* 59, no.1 (2005); Alys Levene, *Childcare, Health, and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741–1800: “Left to the Mercy of the World”* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁹¹ Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 7.

⁹² A chapel was also built in 1805, and the Philanthropic Society was incorporated by 46 Geo. III c.144 Parliament in 1806. It remained there until the decision to establish a Reformatory Farm School at Redhill in 1848. See Surrey History Centre, Philanthropic Society, 1788 Characters of the Boys Admitted into the Reform, 2271/10/1.

cost of their upkeep. So although the publicity of the Philanthropic Society continued to emphasize the potential of the charity to encourage productivity and self-sufficiency among the people, it emphatically did not express the aim of preserving lives, advocating for an approach to philanthropy “founded rather on principles of police than on charity.”⁹³ The Philanthropic Society expected their strategy would nonetheless be endorsed by “every friend to order and public good who sees with concern the daily outrages and indecencies of those who are abandoned to profligacy and vice.”⁹⁴

Philanthropic Society Admissions

A sense of how the Philanthropic Society followed these aims can be gleaned from the records of the institution itself. Again, figures from the Admissions Registers and Description Books are reproduced in Doreen Muriel Whitten’s unpublished thesis from the London School of Economics in 2001.⁹⁵ As Whitten wrote, these documents

note the social background of the children and contain observations on their character. They also outline the trades children were put to, whether they were apprenticed, when they were rewarded or punished and who recommended them to the Society. Importantly, these sources often provide a glimpse of how the laws of the day played around them.⁹⁶

Initially, admissions to the Philanthropic Society were limited to “infants ... not exceeding five or six years old.” But soon, children of nine or ten were considered too, because members “felt it a duty not to consign such to ruin, without affording them a chance of salvation”: by 1789, the target group had changed to children between eight and fourteen years of age, when it was

⁹³ *First Report*, 23.

⁹⁴ *Appeal* (1790). Quoted in Whitten, 19.

⁹⁵ Whitten, “Protection, Prevention, Reformation.”

⁹⁶ Whitten, “Protection, Prevention, Reformation”, 41.

believed the first steps toward crime were taken.⁹⁷ This span was chosen because it allowed for the admission of children “capable of immediately engaging in useful labours”: the governors believed in the “plastic power of education” through which “virtue and industry... can be manufactured and the stock increased at pleasure.”⁹⁸ And the age span considered would be adjusted one more time, capping the upper limit at twelve years, because the institution noted limited success in the reforming of children who entered the society in their teen years: most objects entered the institution between the ages of eight and eleven.⁹⁹ It was hoped that they would then remain for several years, until girls reached the age of sixteen or seventeen and boys reached the age of twenty-one.¹⁰⁰ The following examples give some idea of the range of children that the Philanthropic Society deemed to be proper objects, worthy of admission:¹⁰¹

Table 8.1: Example admissions to the Philanthropic Society

Name	Age	Year Admitted	Description
John Cole	7	1789	“An orphan found in the streets almost starved and knows not to which parish he belongs.”
William Cotton	8	1789	“Father and mother are beggars and being Americans can claim no relief from any parish.”
Thomas Hurst	13	1789	“Has no father, knows not where his mother is. In summer worked in the brick-fields - in winter, maintained himself by

⁹⁷ There were additional benefits to older objects. They did not require nursing out, as was necessary with infants. Moreover, older children were more productive workers; their labour could therefore contribute more to offsetting the running costs of the institution. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 186; *First Report*, 27.

⁹⁸ In fact, they argued, “the mischiefs many had feared from the evil habits of the children of so ripe an age must have contracted in bad company, and a vagrant life, were found within the power of seasonable correction and good government to prevent.” *First Report*, 27.

⁹⁹ *Reports from Committees; Police of the Metropolis*, Vol. 7 (1817), 442.

¹⁰⁰ *Reports from Committees; Police of the Metropolis*, Vol. 7 (1817), 445.

¹⁰¹ *An Address to the Public from the Philanthropic Society* (1790), 17–19, republished in Doreen M. Whitten, “Protection, Prevention, Reformation: a history of the Philanthropic Society 1788–1848”, unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, 2001), 43–46. See also the entries quoted in Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 420.

			begging. Had not slept on a bed for near two years.”
John Major	13	1790	“A vagrant in the streets; lived in St. Giles’ – recommended by the Revd. Mr Southgate.”
Mary Crawley	15	1790	“Cruelly treated almost starved, and turned into the Streets by a Brutal Father in law who consumed his earnings in drunkenness, this girl was exposed to every danger of seduction and ruin – but for the timely succour of this Society.”
George Bucknell	13	1792	“Father and mother are both dead; were taken from wandering about St. George's Market, sleeping in carts and in a complete state of vagrancy.”
James Bucknell	12	1792	“Father and mother are both dead; were taken from wandering about St. George's Market, sleeping in carts and in a complete state of vagrancy.”
Richard Shepperd	14	1793	“A wanderer without any regular employment subsisting by begging & sleeping in the streets, when unable to provide two pence to pay for a night's lodgings was committed to Bridewell for stealing a Horsecloth.”
William James Perry	14	1792	“Taken up as a vagrant and committed to Clerkenwell Bridewell and when received into this Reform was in the utmost state of wretchedness having been four and twenty days in confinement and sleeping only on boards without any covering.”
Edmund Moon	–	1793	“Born at Witley in the County of Surry – very much neglected by his father who is a bricklayer. This boy has been guilty of diverse acts of pilfering

			and threatening the lives of children younger than himself to obtain their victuals and was, on the 10th April confined in a solitary cell for one month.”
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Source: Doreen M. Whitten, “Protection, Prevention, Reformation: a history of the Philanthropic Society 1788–1848”, unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, 2001), 43–45.

Philanthropic Society Education

Like many of the charities that emerged in the eighteenth century, the Philanthropic Society stressed the importance of education to its efforts. It held classes in reading and writing, if only to allow children to read the Bible and repeat the catechism, in the same manner that limited the provision of education at contemporary Schools of Industry.¹⁰² From the outset, the Philanthropic Society insisted that it sought to place children only in positions that were appropriate to their station as labourers to avoid breeding discontent. But there was a debate emerging on whether it was safe to have the Bible read without the guidance of authorized interpretation—teaching the children of the poor to write acquired potentially seditious overtones in the aftermath of the French Revolution.¹⁰³

But the Philanthropic Society showed an ongoing concern with what it saw as “the want of moral and religious instruction” in indigent families; it argued that “the wretched objects are not only subjected to the temptations attendant upon poverty, but want dispositions and abilities to gain an honest livelihood.”¹⁰⁴ The children thus regularly attended church, and the institution

¹⁰² It reflected, nonetheless, the educational requirements laid out in Robert Peel's Act for the Preservation of the Health and Morals of Apprentices (1802).

¹⁰³ Even Sunday Schools were feared to have the potential of sowing seeds of insubordination and discontent in trying to impart literary skills outside of the regulation of the Established Church. See Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, 245.

¹⁰⁴ Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 3.

also held a weekly “School of Morals” that promoted the virtues of honesty, piety, obedience, or gratefulness.¹⁰⁵ A system was established in line with Beccaria’s principles of certainty and proportionality—misconduct would be recorded by a “Regulator” in the charity’s “Black Book” of faults and merits, and punishments were meted out that included reprimands, loss of privileges, or threats of expulsion; conversely, good conduct was rewarded with “tickets” that could be exchanged for toys, food, clothing, or pocket money.¹⁰⁶ It was hoped that the children would eventually develop “positive virtues, in the place of vices rejected, by such strong, vigorous, and systematic education” and that rewards would eventually become unnecessary as the children regulated themselves in accordance with the scriptures.¹⁰⁷

Like parish workhouses and private charities of the preceding decades, the provision of labour in the education of children of the lower classes was important to the members of the Philanthropic Society: industry was given a particularly privileged place in its educational aims. It sought to instill self-sufficiency in its charges, arguing that “no good is done to humanity or the state [if] honest men [were] turned out of bread”; if children were taught to provide for themselves once discharged, they would never have the financial need that drove so many others to steal or engage in prostitution. The institution thus set out to employ the children “in the produce of such things as they would consume,” such as shoes and clothing.¹⁰⁸ For boys, these occupations included “The trades of a Printer, Shoemaker, Taylor, Ropemaker and Twinespinner, and Stocking-weaver”; girls were to be “educated as menial servants,” and they

¹⁰⁵ See McKinnon Dick, “English Conservatives and Schools for the Poor”, 281–82.

¹⁰⁶ *First Report*.

¹⁰⁷ *Second Report*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ *Address* (1792).

would have “abundant employment in washing the linen, making their own cloathing, shirts for the boys, &c.”¹⁰⁹

Just as the Foundling Hospital and other schemes that sought to “mobilize” the children of the poor had done, the governors of the Philanthropic Society sought to redirect youth “in the most useful and necessary channels” to “useful” trades, in the interest of “national prosperity” or “the public welfare.”¹¹⁰ The Philanthropic Society was convinced that it could make a difference in this way:

Regular instruction and constant practice will of *necessity* make a thief, as it will a shoemaker, according as one part or the other is pursued. To prevent the one course of instruction, and to give the other, are, therefore, the means of preventing the increase of thieves, and promoting that of useful labourers.¹¹¹

Where the Philanthropic Society diverged from earlier charitable models was that its objects would be formally apprenticed to masters and mistresses inside the institution. In making these kinds of arrangements within its walls, the Philanthropic Society went further than previous institutions in protecting its objects from the perceived contaminations of the Metropolis.

The work of the Philanthropic Society began in that vein in October of 1788 with the placement of ten-year-old George Lefoy, who had lived with his parents— “very abandoned characters”—in “a notorious resort of thieves in Goldsmiths Alley, St. Giles.” Records suggest that Lefoy was first placed in the care of a nurse and then removed to the Philanthropic Society’s matron that December, where he was “employed knitting.” There he stayed until April of the

¹⁰⁹ These trades were not all taught at the same time: the choice of the governors was based on demand and the potential of profitability. Although boys were apprenticed as bricklayers while buildings were under construction at St. George’s Fields, this was discontinued, and the trade was replaced with printing once the buildings were completed. By contrast, shoemaking, tailoring, carpentry, and printing were far more constant trades in the Philanthropic Society. Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 6; *Address to the Public* (1791), 10; Whitten, 63.

¹¹⁰ Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 8.

¹¹¹ Philanthropic Society, *A Report containing a List of subscribers to the 15th January 1790* (London, 1790), 4.

following year, when he was finally sent to a shoemaker, to whom he was apprenticed in May 1791.¹¹² In subsequent years, the institution provided a respite, even for property offences that were decided at the Old Bailey: Eleven-year-old Mary Mander was admitted to the institution in 1797, after being “tried and convicted at the Old Bailey ... for shoplifting,” she “received a sentence of death but afterwards obtained His Majesty's Pardon on condition of her being received into this Institution.”¹¹³ Thirteen-year-old George Cornelius Sharpless was likewise admitted in 1798, after “[having] the sentence of death passed upon him July 13th 1796 at the Assizes at Nottingham for felony.” Sharpless “was afterwards ordered to be transported for life and put aboard the ‘Hillsborough’ for New South Wales” but was “at length pardoned by his Majesty on condition of his being received into the Philanthropic Reform.”¹¹⁴ Ten-year-old William Skelton and twelve-year-old Edward Roome, too, were convicted for shoplifting in July 1798 and July 1799 respectively, although they were also subsequently redirected to the care of the Philanthropic Society. In July of the next year, fourteen-year-old Mary Beckwith was similarly convicted of shoplifting and redirected to the Philanthropic Society, and in February 1801, twelve-year-old Hugh Tally was convicted of burglary and redirected to the Philanthropic Society. Ten-year-old John Weskett and eleven-year-old Thomas Burrell were both convicted of shoplifting in April 1801, but, in the same way, they were redirected to the Philanthropic Society.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Surrey History Centre, Philanthropic Society, 1788 Characters of the Boys Admitted into the Reform, 2271/10/1.

¹¹³ Cited in Whitten, 43–49.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Whitten, 43–49.

¹¹⁵ As the nineteenth century progressed, the institution performed a similar role as an alternative punishment: in January 1807, 10-year-old Mary Crawley was convicted of shoplifting, but she was still redirected to the Philanthropic Society, and the following January 13-year-old Charles Brown was convicted of stealing from a dwelling, and he too was redirected to the Philanthropic Society. Simon Devereaux, *Capital Punishment and Pardon at the Old Bailey, 1730–1837*, https://web.uvic.ca/~oldbail/search.php?saved_search=41.

Downturns in the trades chosen for the children could occasionally lead the Philanthropic Society to change their apprenticeship strategy, placing children out with masters that had been carefully vetted for moral probity: this was particularly attempted when placing girls in service, but it proved to be a difficult task. As the report on the state of the Female Reform in 1796 stated:

the difficulty of disposing of these girls is considerable – a menial domestic servitude is almost the only situation to be looked for, it has been found for several of them; very minute enquiries into the character of the parties with whom the girls have been placed having in every instance been made – the Committee has not always been successful – the girls have disliked their places, or their conduct has not been approved of by their masters or mistresses.¹¹⁶

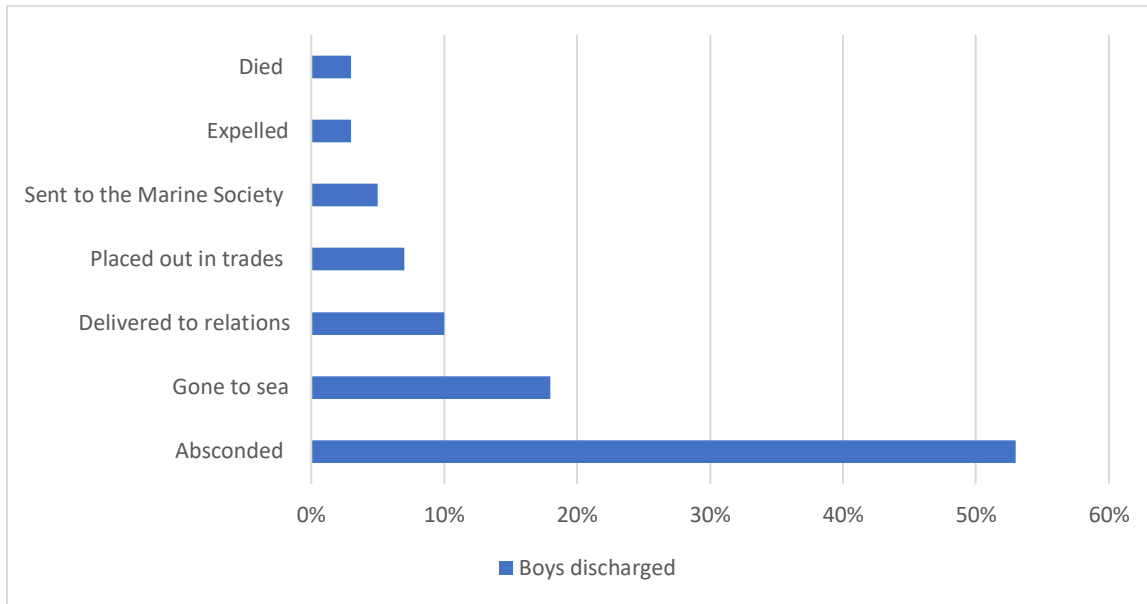
This continued to be a factor when objects that were deemed to be sufficiently reformed at the end of their apprenticeship left in search of employment: the Philanthropic Society hoped they had helped to mould them into stable characters with the ability to earn money without “taking to vicious courses from necessity.”¹¹⁷ But records indicate that only a minority of the charity’s objects proceeded from the institution into employment: between 1788 and 1795, just 7 percent of the males and 35 percent of the females entered the occupations in which they had been trained.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Whitten, 58.

¹¹⁷ Philanthropic Society, *A Report containing a List of subscribers to the 15th January 1790* (London, 1790), 4.

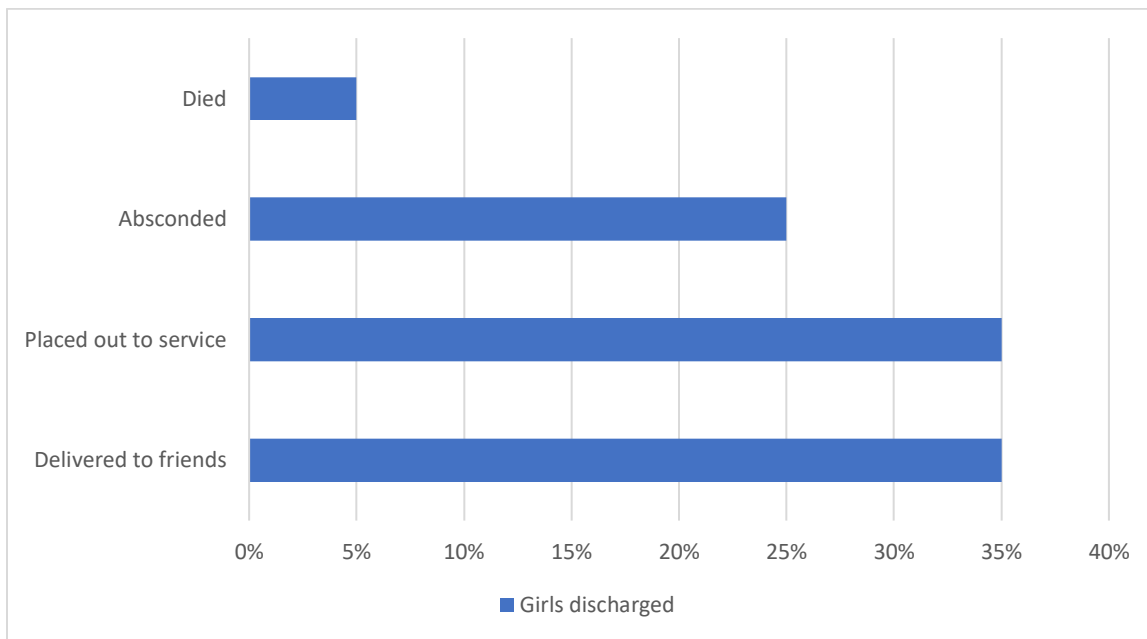
¹¹⁸ Figures reproduced in Whitten, 78–79.

Figure 8.1: Leaving the Philanthropic Society, 1788–1795 (Boys discharged)



Source: Doreen M. Whitten, “Protection, Prevention, Reformation: a history of the Philanthropic Society 1788–1848,” unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, 2001), 74.

Figure 8.2: Leaving the Philanthropic Society, 1788–1795 (Girls discharged)



Source: Doreen M. Whitten, “Protection, Prevention, Reformation: a history of the Philanthropic Society 1788–1848,” unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, 2001), 74.

This failing, it was suggested, was partly due to the institutions' own strict selection criteria, which severely limited the pool of potential employers, as well as the large numbers of children who were expelled, were discharged, or who absconded before they could be offered employment. Pinchbeck and Hewitt noted that between 1789 and 1796, 51 of 176 boys admitted by the Philanthropic Society had run away, indicating "the difficulty experienced by the voluntary institutions in holding on to their charges without legal powers."¹¹⁹ As the investigation of the 1840s later discovered, the Philanthropic Society's apprenticeships were also deemed to be of lesser quality than those available outside the walls of the institution: while a master in those arrangements traditionally trained just one or two apprentices at a time—and their labour augmented the master's income enough that apprentices often continued to work for their master, even after the completion of their initial period of binding—in the Philanthropic Society apprenticeships, masters might be responsible for as many as thirty apprentices at once, which severely limited the amount of instruction, supervision, and discipline they could realistically administer.¹²⁰ Masters at the institution were paid salaries, moreover, so they lacked the motivation to encourage their apprentices to generate revenue: they simply did not have "the same interest in teaching and disciplining the Apprentices as other Masters out of doors" had.¹²¹

But the more serious problem was that the Philanthropic Society over-emphasized the effect it would have on clearing the streets of danger in exactly the same way that the Marine Society had done. Its publicity argued,

¹¹⁹ Of these, notably, 31 had been over 13 years of age. Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 427.

¹²⁰ There were 4 masters for 100 boys in the institution in 1793, for example. *The Times*, April 23, 1793. See Dick, 196–97.

¹²¹ *Report of the Committee* (1840). The 1840 report also noted that many Philanthropic Society apprentices lacked the personal networks to secure permanent employment and were thus unable to transition from the sheltered and supervised environment of the institution to the streets of London of the capital. See Dick, 297.

Among the objects received under the Society's protection, are several who have been taken from prisons; several who have been rescued from the retreats of villany, and the haunts of prostitution."¹²²

In fact, the language of the Philanthropic Society was even more inflammatory than that of the Marine Society, arguing that its

immediate object is to protect our persons from assault and murder, and our property from depredation; that our wealth may not endanger our lives, our repose be interrupted by thieves, nor our dwellings exposed to the desperate designs of midnight incendiaries.¹²³

This rhetoric may have had the effect of limiting the future prospects of the children—making masters less willing to employ them because of their “criminal histories.”¹²⁴ In this environment, it is worth stressing, it had become increasingly vital to make children appear profitable, because their very survival represented a potential drain on the economy; the growth of Malthusianism and political economy and the related decline of the paternalism of mid-century separated long-standing associations of population growth with national prosperity. As demobilization in 1782 and 1815 led to renewed crime waves and pushed crime to the forefront of the agenda, these ideas also helped to provoke a widespread sense of mistrust about—even a fear of—the body of the poor.

In 1789, the Philanthropic Society tried to deny that its publications had singled out the poor as a particularly deprived section of the community, but its emphasis that they were “compelled to seek their bread by illegal and injurious practice” only served to underline the correlation it drew between crime and poverty. Even toward the end of the eighteenth century, it declared,

¹²² Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 17.

¹²³ Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 8.

¹²⁴ See *Police of the Metropolis* (1817), 445, 453; *Selection of Reports* (1819), 156.

There are few reflecting minds, or feeling hearts, but must have frequently lamented the fatal depravity which pervades the lower classes of the people, especially in the more populous parts of this kingdom; and there are few who have not, at one time or another, trembled for their own safety in consequence of this depravity.¹²⁵

Conclusions

Although, as we have seen, the English people had been expressing anxieties about abandoned children and street urchins for some time, a convergence of circumstances may have contributed to the perception that juvenile crime had become rife. Mid-century writers had been convinced that the population was declining, but toward the end of the century there was an increasing recognition that it was, in fact, *growing*: greater numbers of children were surviving to adulthood, with the result that English society was at its youngest by 1826.¹²⁶ At the same time, after the close of Anglo-French hostilities in 1783, many men who had been in the armed forces returned home to work—children from around the country who had stepped in to fill their positions were displaced and rendered idle overnight; others had been separated from their families by parish or charity authorities and were transferred en masse outside London for work. An inquiry into the state of parish apprentices bound out into the country eventually drove parliament to pass the Parish Apprentices Act of 1816—this affected all children of parishes within forty miles of London, forbidding the binding of children more than forty miles away.¹²⁷

It was significant that the Philanthropic Society emerged in this decade. The publicity of the institution contended that this idleness was evidence of England's descent into vice: this

¹²⁵ Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 3.

¹²⁶ Wrigley and Schofield wrote that infants made up 15.5% of the English population and children made up 24.1%, which meant that 39.6% of the population was under 15. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 217.

¹²⁷ See George, *London Life*, 238–39.

depravity had its roots in “the baneful examples of parents, whose crimes have subjected them to banishment, or an ignominious death.” As a result, “the condition of [their] children is truly pitiable, and demands the benevolence of the Christian, the interference of the statesman, and the exertions of the patriot.”¹²⁸ It was obvious to supporters of the institution that “corruption must inevitably be propagated from race to race, so long as children were brought up in the society and example of their parents,” so it aimed to “breed out” the criminal underclass by removing its youngest members from the older “who would corrupt them.” Thus separated from disreputable influences, the Philanthropic Society’s charges would then be provided with moral and occupational instruction, impressing “a contrary impression of their minds, virtuous dispositions, and industrious habits” to enable them to join respectable society and “find ... the means of an honest employment and livelihood.”¹²⁹ Parents were allowed to visit the institution only on certain days, and only with a valid ticket of leave from the committee; in fact, if it were necessary, the governors of the Philanthropic Society claimed that, *in loco parentis*, they could completely replace parents who were unable or unfit to provide for their children. Its publicity claimed it was quite willing to “employ the sword of justice to sever [the] cords of parental authority” and prosecute criminal parents.¹³⁰

The development of the Philanthropic Society as a separate category of punishment—either as part of the changes in prosecution that saw a swing toward summary justice, or as a kind of after-care asylum for young offenders who had already been sentenced to punishment under the law—made it clear that the young offender had emerged as an entirely distinct

¹²⁸ Philanthropic Society, *Account of the nature and views*, 3.

¹²⁹ *First Report*.

¹³⁰ Webber, 77. Although there is no evidence to suggest that the Philanthropic Society needed to prosecute parents to secure a child; there were already more petitioners than the institution could accept. *First Report*, 31.

category of criminal: child lawbreakers had their own unique motivations, and they required their own unique solutions.¹³¹ Older strategies of corporal punishment and public humiliation lost their appeal; solutions began to appear that adopted a more reformatory approach. There was a growing belief that imprisonment should be used as a means of rehabilitating offenders rather than simply punishing them.

This was only further refined in the decade to follow, as the renewal of hostilities with France in 1793 brought on economic crisis, food shortages, and inflationary prices that made the lives of the poor even more difficult. Despite the appearance of proposed legislation such as William Pitt's failed Bill for the Better Support and Maintenance of the Poor (1797), continued efforts to improve the condition of the poor were ultimately unsuccessful.¹³² With sales of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) rising across England, followed by the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1794 and 1798, the emergence of the Treason and Seditious Practices Act (1794), and of the Corresponding Societies Act (1799), this was a turbulent time. But Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principles of Population* (1798) captured the tone of the period: it called for the complete cessation of poor relief on the grounds that it encouraged the poor to have children they could not afford to support.

After the close of the war with Napoleonic France in 1815, funnelling young offenders into the armed forces ceased to be a viable option; without the ability to transfer troubled children from the streets of London, it is not surprising that anxieties about the threat of juvenile

¹³¹ See Radzinowicz and Hood, *History of English Criminal Law and its Administration*.

¹³² See *An Authentic Copy of the Bill for the Better Support and Maintenance of the Poor, Presented to the House of Commons by the Right Honourable William Pitt, with the Amendments Made in the Committee* (London, 1797). Eighteenth Century Collections Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0106046730/ECCO?u=st46245&sid=primo&xid=3adc3d80&pg=1.

delinquency acquired a particular sense of urgency. It is significant that a short time later, Parkhurst Juvenile Prison—a former military hospital and children’s asylum on the Isle of Wight that was converted into a prison for male youths in 1838—used the Philanthropic Society’s facilities at Redhill as a destination for boys who were sentenced to transportation following their incarceration but whom the colonies were no longer anxious to take.¹³³ A primary aspect of the work of the reformatory in the nineteenth century would be the transfer of youths at the end of their terms into an environment where they were thought to be less likely to re-offend. This “Farm School” was eventually considered to be one of the most prestigious reformatory schools in England, largely because of the government support it enjoyed.

But the ultimate success of the Philanthropic Society in this period must be balanced against the numbers of children who continued to glut the records of juvenile convictions through to the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Despite their best efforts, the Philanthropic Society overestimated the degree to which they could change the lives of juvenile delinquents: over one-third of all children failed to meet expectations that they would refrain from criminal activity, which suggested that the governors either misunderstood—or misrepresented—the factors which led to rates of reoffending.¹³⁴ The occupational training that Philanthropic Society children received proved to be insufficient in many cases to secure long-term employment; their moral education failed to stop them from relapsing into crime.

¹³³ Parkhurst promised instruction in morality and religion, as well as training in occupations such as tailoring, shoemaking, ropemaking, carpentry, and agricultural labour. For more on Parkhurst, see Carlebach, 25–46, Sean Mcconville, *A History of English Prison Administration* (London: Routledge, 1981), 204–10; Radzinowicz and Hood, 148–55; Shore, *Artful Dodgers*, 29–30.

¹³⁴ See Webber, 103.

While the Philanthropic Society sought to avoid the wasteful expenditure of earlier institutions such as the Foundling Hospital, it could be accused of defining a problem it was not really prepared to pay for. Its efforts to reform juvenile delinquents proved to be a mixed bag, with some successes, but with many, many failures. While it made a significant contribution to reducing crime through prevention in its early years, ultimately the image of childhood conjured by the Philanthropic Society was completely at odds with that which had been earlier espoused by Locke or Rousseau, or that which continued to be evoked by the Romantics through the nineteenth century.

Conclusion: Shadows of Childhood

The popularity of childhood as an area of historical inquiry unquestionably increased in the 1960s with the publication of Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood*. In characterizing childhood as a special phase of the life cycle that needed historical reclamation, Ariès's work laid the basis for future historiographical arguments that childhood was a socially constructed phenomenon: he contended that the very concept of childhood that we recognize today—a transitional state between infancy and adulthood—was entirely invented by modern liberal ideas. But a great deal of the work that has been done in this field in the years since has been tainted by the idealist and teleological assumptions about childhood that dominated his model, assumptions which have themselves been accepted uncritically from the writings of Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Significantly, these ideas have continued to privilege the perspectives of the middle class, leaving the experiences of the bulk of the population in obscurity.

For most people in Britain, the experience of childhood was shaped by an authoritarian Tudor code—one which saw the bodies of children as a resource, particularly as Britain became an increasingly important international power in a global economy shaped by war and uneven demographic growth driven by the migration of people to urban centres like London in search of employment. There were consequent efforts to link humanitarian ideals to state imperatives, but these had mixed results—it was difficult to reconcile state initiatives with local ones, or to offset unsanitary living conditions and high infant mortality with the potential bio-power offered by

future generations. It proved difficult to rescue children from the exploitative environments that their families endured. Humanitarian attitudes were often limited in their scope and implementation and did not ultimately challenge the structures of capitalist expansion or address the systemic inequalities prevalent in society: those that were successful were those that were supportive of those traditional structures.

There was a significant decline in levels of child mortality, and with the resulting rise in population, children became a significantly larger presence among the poor. These children provided a cheap source of labour during wartime, but records suggest that they were eventually displaced from these same jobs during times of peace in favour of adult males returning from the front. The visibility of idle young people on city streets—many driven to crime by want—was suddenly a prominent part of contemporary culture, and one which tended to be portrayed overwhelmingly negatively. Poor children as a group were increasingly depicted as a threat to English society, leading to the emergence of the notion of “the juvenile delinquent.”

Despite this prominence, this thesis has argued that the idea of childhood that emerged in this period was sorely incomplete. The fact is, most children in the eighteenth century lacked the literacy to record their thoughts about their world in any of the ways that would be recognized by the methodologies of traditional historical studies. There is thus a scarcity of direct accounts from the children that might illuminate their stories, and unfortunately—unlike the participants in the oral histories that formed the basis of Paul Thompson’s book on Edwardian society—the people of this earlier period are long gone, unable to answer any questions.¹ This makes it fundamentally difficult to recover the authentic voices and experiences of children: historical

¹ Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975).

sources that survive are limited in what they can tell us because of the sensationalism that characterized their depiction in the press.² But also, because it is often adults that speak for, as well as about, children in these sources: we rarely hear the voices of young people themselves. This is doubly the case with children from fragmented families and marginalized groups in contemporary English society—the poor, the abandoned, the criminalized—who seem to have left few historical traces other than those where they interacted with authority, as paupers, vagrants, and potential criminals.

This study has thus contended that more attention must be paid to social disparities in order to gain a proper understanding of the distinct experiences of all children. It has become clear that many of these experiences can only be grasped obliquely, through glimpses of evidence that appear in the records of the institutions of the state and contemporary discourses of public inquiry. The lives of pauper children can be charted by interpreting quantitative resources such as the workhouse admissions and discharge accounts of the parish, the records of pauper apprenticeship, as well as national schemes like parish nursing or the Foundling Hospital, and more London-centric charitable organizations such as the Marine Society or the Philanthropic Society, which all played a role in the survival strategies of poor families. The records of these institutions have very particular things to say about contemporary views of poverty in England, but, importantly, they also show us the arcs drawn by contemporaneous concerns about the health, wealth, and security of England. A sense of children's agency emerges from these sources: some children were recorded as refusing to abide by the prescribed paths designed for them. They defied authority; they broke the law—their very means of survival on the streets

² See the accounts of Elizabeth Brownrigg's apprentice, Mary Clifford, for example, discussed in chapter three.

offended public safety and orthodoxies. Above all, they successfully appealed to “fair play” in imperfect work or apprenticeship arrangements, and they negotiated their own paths within the governmentality of the workhouse.

But this study has also made it clear that fully exploring the experiences of the young in this period may not be possible: the paradox is that, although children were the most visible group demographically, many lived a shadowy, heavily mediated life in the historical record. Although the “new digital history” of London has provided some new ways to capture the vulnerabilities and life-chances of the poor—there have been attempts to “fictionalize” pauper biographies, re-assembling lives through the serial linkage of records—it does not ultimately provide much opportunity to recover the experiences of those who were least articulate.³ In many cases, therefore, all we are left with is an incomplete record, documenting the problems and predicaments poor children faced as they grew up. Ultimately, little of this changes dramatically until the late nineteenth century when working-class autobiographies became more common, along with the publication of the first oral histories, the circulation of photographic evidence, the development of new forms of journalism, and the introduction of compulsory education made it possible to flesh out children’s lives.⁴ By shining a light on the experiences of the children of the poor in this period, this study has thus opened up as many questions as it has answered: it will be up to other scholars to sort them out.

³ See Jeremy Boulton and Leonard Schwarz, *The Lives of the Poor in the West End of London, 1725–1824* (2004–07) <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/pauperlives/>; Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *London Lives, 1690–1800* (2012) www.londonlives.org.

⁴ Some working-class autobiographies do nonetheless begin to emerge in the late 18th century. See John Burnett, David Mayall and David Vincent (eds.), *Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Biography, Volume 1: 1790–1900* (1984); David Vincent, “Working-class autobiography in the nineteenth century”, in Adam Smyth (ed.), *A History of English Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 165–78; David Mayall, *Burnett archive of working-class autobiographies, 1790–1945*. Brunel University London Special Collections.

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