

**CHILD LABOUR IN AN INDUSTRIAL TOWN:
A STUDY OF CHILD WORKERS IN BIRMINGHAM,
1750 to 1880**

by

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Abstract

There has been extensive historical research into child labour in industries such as textiles and coal mining, but there has been little focus on children employed in Birmingham industries such as pin making and button making. This thesis illuminates the extent and nature of child labour in Birmingham and the significant contribution made by child workers to industrialisation between 1750 and 1880. It draws attention to the importance of children's earnings for family incomes and suggests that some families migrated to the town in search of paid employment for their children as well as adults. The attitudes of employers, Poor Law officials, parents and children towards early work are explored, finding that child workers were regarded as an integral part of the Birmingham economy.

This thesis provides a case study of child labour and child workers in an industrial town. It uses a wide range of primary sources to highlight the experiences of thousands of child workers who were not bound as apprentices to employers, but engaged on a daily or weekly basis. It challenges the view that the employment of children in manufacturing was a relatively short-lived phenomenon during the early stages of industrialisation, arguing that child workers were widely employed in Birmingham's factories and workshops until the 1870s. It highlights the strategies adopted by labouring families to provide their children with access to basic schooling, and identifies the specific threats to children's health from industrial employment. Finally, this thesis argues that nineteenth-century migration schemes which sent poor children to work on Canadian farms represented an international dimension to the history of child labour.

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Abbreviations

BAH	Birmingham Archives & Heritage
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
SCRO	Staffordshire County Record Office
TNA	The National Archives
VCH	Victoria County History
WCRO	Warwickshire County Record Office
WoCRO	Worcestershire County Record Office

Chapter 1

Introduction

My first job came when I was only a little over six years of age; it was turning a wheel for a rope and twine spinner at Rob's Rope Walk, Duddeston Mill Road, Vauxhall, Birmingham. I received 2s 6d per week, and worked from six in the morning until six at night, with a half-hour for breakfast and one hour for dinner.¹

Will Thorne was extremely young when he began work in 1863, joining thousands of other child workers below the age of 14 in Birmingham's factories and workshops. If he had arrived at the gates of a cotton mill in search of work, six-year-old Thorne would have been refused employment because he was too young, but legal restrictions on child labour in 1863 did not apply to all sectors of the economy. Beginning with the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act of 1802, nineteenth-century child labour legislation was aimed at regulating and limiting the employment of children in textile mills and coal mines. However, the Factory Acts were not extended to child workers in other industries until the late 1860s, despite the large numbers employed in manufacturing apart from textiles.² It was only in 1867 that legislation prohibited the employment of any child below the age of eight years, and restricted children below 13 years to half-time work. Existing studies of child labour have examined the experiences of child workers in employment sectors such as agriculture, mining and textiles, yet surprisingly little research has been concentrated on child labour in non-textile industrial towns that had quite different patterns of economic activity and organisation.³ This thesis explores child labour in Birmingham between 1750

¹ Will Thorne, *My Life's Battles* (London: Whitefriars Press, 1925), 15.

² Peter Kirby, *Child labour in Britain, 1750-1870* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 94.

³ Joyce Burnette, 'Child day-labourers in agriculture: evidence from farm accounts, 1740-1850', *Economic History Review* 65, no. 3 (2012): 1077-1099; Hugh Cunningham, 'The employment and unemployment of children in England, c1680-1851', *Past and Present* 126 (1990): 115-50; Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994); Eric Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: Working Class Children in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

and 1880, focusing on the economic contributions of child workers under the age of 14 and their experiences of a childhood dominated by work. The terms child worker and child labour are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. It offers insights into the relationship between child workers and their families, highlighting the extent to which children's education and health could be damaged for the economic benefit of the family as well as the employers. It enhances our current knowledge of childhood and child labour by illuminating this previously unexamined aspect of industrialisation in Birmingham, arguing that child labour was not a short-lived stage of the early industrial revolution, but an integral part of Birmingham industry until at least the 1870s.

The historiography of child labour has been extended over the past three decades to include the significance of child workers' contribution to industrialisation and the relative importance of children's earnings to the family economy.⁴ More recently, attention has turned towards the themes of child workers' health, diversity of employment and agency amongst child workers.⁵ These studies have informed the key questions explored in this thesis. Firstly, what was the nature and extent of child labour in Birmingham and what changes took place in the levels of child labour between 1750 and 1880? Secondly, how important were children's earnings to the family economy? Thirdly, was there an increase in the intensity of children's work and what was the impact of early work on children's education, health and life-chances? Finally, how far did attitudes to child labour and childhood change over time, and is there any evidence of children's agency as participants in historical change? This chapter continues with a discussion of the

⁴ Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'The exploitation of little children: Child labour and the family economy in the Industrial Revolution', *Explorations in Economic History* 32 (1995), 485-516; Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵ Peter Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health in Britain, 1780-1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013); Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman, ed., *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England. Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

historiography, followed by a section on methodology and sources, then an outline of the chapters in the thesis.

Literature Review

A number of studies throw light on the different ways to approach the study of child labour. Research into the employment of children in agriculture and industry during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has explored important changes in the agrarian labour market linked to enclosure and large-scale farming. The transition from farm service towards day-labour has been a particular focus for discussion. The seasonal and part-time nature of agricultural work for children contrasted sharply with new industrial and non-seasonal employment opportunities in rapidly expanding industrial towns such as Birmingham. A second area of research has focused on parish apprenticeship and the operation of the Poor Law, including the practice of sending batches of children from London to textile mills in the north-west, although the majority of parish apprentices were sent to work locally in more traditional industries. These studies raise a number of issues: the distance children were sent from home; their age when starting work; and the extent to which Overseers of the Poor maintained links with their parish children.

A third group of studies have considered child employment in relation to the contribution children could make to the family economy. These have explored the relative importance of children's earnings when compared to other family members, especially women's earnings. They have also looked at the extent to which families were prepared to migrate from rural to industrial areas, which offered the prospect of work opportunities for whole families. This raises the question of whether the rapid expansion of Birmingham during this period may have been due in part to inward migration driven by the availability of work for children as well as adults. Finally, researchers have also looked at the impact of the urban environment and early employment on the growth and health of children.

These have highlighted regional differences in the heights of children and the incidence of chronic childhood diseases. They indicate questions which need to be addressed about the health and life-expectancy of Birmingham children, and how well they fared in comparison with children in neighbouring rural areas.

The study of child labour in England tends to be dominated by the impact of industrialisation, but as Peter Laslett highlighted in *The World We Have Lost*, the centuries before industrialisation did not represent a golden age of equality and tolerance for most people.⁶ Approximately a third of households in early-modern England contained servants, including children who were housed, clothed and fed within the household in exchange for unpaid work. A further third of households had older children who were living away from home: children from poor rural families were expected to leave home from the age of ten to live and work as farm servants until they were old enough to marry and set up their own household. Younger children still living at home earned small amounts for bird-scaring or watching sheep. When not working on the land, the entire family would be occupied with the sorting, carding and spinning of wool.⁷ Most children lived in rural or semi-rural districts in the mid-eighteenth century, working at bird-scaring, picking stones or weeding and planting crops, and many continued in this rural way of life until later in the nineteenth century. Boys were commonly employed in agriculture, as illustrated in contemporary accounts included in John Burnett's collection of working-class autobiographies.⁸ Roger Langdon began work as a farmer's boy in 1833 at the age of eight: 'For the princely sum of one shilling a week I had to mind sheep and pull up turnips in all winds and weathers, starting at six o'clock in the morning...'⁹

⁶ Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London: Methuen, 1971).

⁷ Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, 16-17.

⁸ John Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁹ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 46.

The greatest demand for agricultural child-workers was in the pastoral areas of the west and north-west of England, whereas enclosure and technological changes in agriculture in the arable areas of east and south-east England favoured adult workers.¹⁰ The traditional practice of employing live-in farm servants decreased in the eighteenth century as farms grew in size, and farmers increasingly turned to employing day-labourers. Peter Kirby has argued that these structural changes in the agricultural labour market were crucial in releasing workers to seek employment in the industrial centres.¹¹ Manufacturing districts attracted labourers because they offered secure work for women and children as well as men. Evidence from working-class autobiographies shows that men who moved with their families into factory districts were able to find employment for the whole family, thus providing a comfortable joint income.¹² An autobiography written by a Mrs Burrows recalled she had left her Lincolnshire school at the age of eight in 1858, to work in an agricultural gang of 40 to 50 child-workers working 14-hour days. 'We were followed all day long by an old man carrying a whip...' Mrs Burrows added that after four years without respite, the family moved to Leeds where she was put to work in a factory which: '....felt like Heaven'.¹³ Firsthand accounts of child labour such as these suggest there is a need, as identified by Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson, for a fuller understanding of children's employment in different economic sectors and geographical regions of the country.¹⁴

A number of studies have looked at the employment of children as agricultural day-labourers and as outworkers in the rural industries of pillow lace-making and straw plaiting. Helen Speechley's study of female and child day labourers in Somerset from 1685 to 1870 used a range of sources such as farm records, school log books,

¹⁰ Kirby, *Child labour*, 56.

¹¹ Kirby, *Child labour*, 61.

¹² Emma Griffin, *A Short History of the British Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 83-84.

¹³ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 47.

¹⁴ Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson, 'Rehabilitating the industrial revolution', *Economic History Review* 95 (1992), 38.

parliamentary reports and census records.¹⁵ She argued that women and children have traditionally been grouped together as agricultural workers, where child workers have been given even less recognition than women. The study found women's and children's agricultural work differed in terms of the number of days worked and the types of tasks undertaken.¹⁶ Children worked within family groups at child-specific tasks appropriate to their age and strength. Younger children were employed at bird-scaring, catching vermin or minding sheep, and boys of nine or ten at cow-herding and ploughing. Bird-scaring was an important but time-consuming task, earning children 2d per day to drive birds away from crops from 6am to dusk.¹⁷ Children worked in groups on farms, often working alongside their parents, at weeding, stone-picking and picking potatoes and fruit according to seasonal demands. Nearly all children worked during the hay and corn harvests over the summer months.¹⁸

The part-time and seasonal nature of children's employment in the agricultural regions was in contrast to the full-time and regular nature of employment available in industrial towns such as Birmingham. To some extent, Speechley's study challenges the assertion by Hugh Cunningham that children in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made only minor economic contributions to their families because there was little work available.¹⁹ The study found children's agricultural earnings could make a substantial difference to the family, contributing around 20% of the family wage.²⁰ Children in Somerset also found work in domestic service, mining and rural industries. For example, in parts of Somerset girls were extensively employed in silk mills and glove-making, whereas boys were employed in mining, brick-making and stone-breaking from the age of

¹⁵ Helen Speechley, 'Female and child agricultural day labourers in Somerset, 1685-1870' (Ph.D., University of Exeter, 1999), 19 – 48.

¹⁶ Speechley, 'Female and child labourers', 10.

¹⁷ Speechley, 'Female and child labourers', 171.

¹⁸ Speechley, 'Female and child labourers', 175.

¹⁹ Cunningham, 'The employment and unemployment of children', 123.

²⁰ Speechley, 'Female and child labourers', 183.

nine onwards.²¹ Speechley found little difference in the wages of boys and girls employed as agricultural day-labourers, but older girls were employed at tasks such as dairying and older boys at more physically demanding tasks such as ploughing.²² A similar study by Joyce Burnette, utilised farm accounts from 62 English farms between 1740 and 1850. This study found child agricultural labour increased from 1740 until the early years of the nineteenth century and then declined, although girls were rarely employed as day-labourers.²³ Girls were frequently occupied with domestic duties and child-minding, but were also employed in domestic industries such as spinning, lace making and embroidery. Furthermore, it was widely believed that a girl's employment and marriage prospects were harmed by agricultural labour, especially field-work.²⁴

Keith Snell revealed that the problem of seasonal unemployment in agriculture became more acute after enclosure, finding that levels of unemployment amongst adult agricultural workers remained flat before enclosure, whereas afterwards there was acute unemployment from October to March.²⁵ The main period of enclosure in Warwickshire was from 1760 to 1790, a factor which may have been significant in encouraging rural families to migrate to nearby Birmingham in search of industrial employment. Warwickshire was included in a nationwide survey of rural parishes by the Poor Law Commission in 1832. Evidence from the subsequent Poor Law Report has been analysed by Nicola Verdon to provide a regional analysis of women's and children's prospective employment and earnings.²⁶ This analysis confirms the regional patterns of domestic industries: lace-making and straw-plaiting in south midlands counties; gloving and silk-throwing in the south-west; and lace-making in the east midlands counties. East

²¹ Speechley, 'Female and child labourers', 156.

²² Speechley, 'Female and child labourers', 185-186.

²³ Burnette, 'Child day-labourers', 1080.

²⁴ Burnette, 'Child day-labourers', 1087-1090.

²⁵ Keith Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 144.

²⁶ Nicola Verdon, 'The rural labour market in the early nineteenth century: women's and children's employment, family income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *Economic History Review* 55, no. 2 (2002).

Anglia had little domestic industry following the loss of domestic spinning. Replies from the parishes indicated a broad availability of agricultural work for women and children, but these were less likely to exist in areas where other work was available.²⁷ Women in rural Warwickshire could contribute 15% of the family income, and children 5%. In the nearby counties of Worcestershire and Staffordshire women could also contribute 15% to the family income, but children had the opportunity to contribute 30%, making a total of 45% of family income in these counties. These results suggest that in certain local areas child workers' earnings were more important than women's earnings. The domestic metal industries found in Worcestershire and Staffordshire, such as nail-making, screw-making and needle-making, provided high-wage employment opportunities for children. Verdon's study thus reinforced the significance of rural children's non-agricultural earnings to family incomes.²⁸

Peter Kirby identified the important role of workshop-based industries in absorbing migrant labour as structural changes occurred in the agricultural labour market. Workshop production was relatively flexible as employers relied on the use of hand tools rather than capital-intensive machinery, and could lay-off workers when trade was depressed.²⁹ Even in textiles, domestic production within small units remained important: more than half the employees in the silk industry in 1851 were employed in small firms of less than 20 employees. Boys and girls were employed in a wide variety of domestic workshop occupations, ranging from hose and stocking manufacture to gloving, printing and soap-boiling. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, regional specialisation developed based on established rural domestic industries, such as woollen textiles in the West Riding of Yorkshire.³⁰ Joseph Terry began work in 1823 at the age of seven in a Yorkshire woollen mill, later recalling the experience in his autobiography:

²⁷ Verdon, 'The rural labour market', 304-308.

²⁸ Verdon, 'The rural labour market', 319.

²⁹ Kirby, *Child Labour*, 61.

³⁰ Pat Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution* (Sevenoaks: Edward Arnold, 1992), 118.

....some part of my time was spent Setting Cards, or inserting the Card Teeth into leaves and Garters as they were called to fit on the Scribbling Machines for Scribbling Wool etc. This was a most wearisome and dreary task.....great numbers of children and young and grown-up families got their bread by this poor and unhealthy means; the very best hands never exceeding one shilling per day, and great numbers suffered much in their health from this, worse than slavish employment.³¹

In the metal-working industries, boys and men were employed in the production of machines and machine-parts, whereas girls and women workers were found in the less-skilled work of chain-making, nail-making and pin-making.³² Metal industries in Birmingham became specialised during the eighteenth century in brass-wares, jewellery-making, buttons, buckles, toys and the gun-trade. Intermediate technologies, particularly the introduction of the stamp, press, draw-bench and lathe, encouraged small firms to meet the growing demand for a variety of goods. Pat Hudson and Eric Hopkins have argued that the increased division of labour and specialisation of Birmingham's metal trades in the late eighteenth century involved the expansion of female and child labour.³³ Young girls were employed to hand-paint buttons and buckles and in the manufacture of covered buttons and gilt jewellery. Skilled workmen employed in the metal industries took on child assistants. The current lack of detailed information about the children employed in Birmingham workshops and their experience of child labour suggests this is a topic which should be explored to enhance our existing knowledge.

A second group of studies into child labour has focused attention on parish apprenticeship. Keith Snell's account of the apprenticeship system has highlighted farm service and formal apprenticeship as the traditional institutions in which young people boarded with employers in exchange for service.³⁴ Legal apprenticeship was a method of earning settlement in a parish and provided access to employment, so it was clearly in the

³¹ Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure*, 57-58.

³² Kirby, *Child labour*, 63-64.

³³ Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution*, 122-125; Eric Hopkins, *Birmingham, The First Manufacturing Town in the World 1760-1840* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1989), 102-103.

³⁴ Keith Snell, 'The apprenticeship system in British history: the fragmentation of a cultural institution', *History of Education* 25, no.4 (1996): 308.

interests of families for their children to be apprenticed locally. In some parishes, masters were forced to take on local parish apprentices and were fined if they failed to do so.³⁵ Parish apprenticeship is often associated with employment in the early textile mills, but a number of studies have shown that parish children were apprenticed in a wide range of occupations. Joan Lane's study of Warwickshire found parish children were bound to agricultural labour in husbandry and housewifery, plus occupations such as ribbon-weaver, horn-comb maker, brick-maker, silk-weaver, hatter, tailor and mason. Less often, children were apprenticed as hairdressers, carpenters, joiners, bakers, butchers, milliners and mantua-makers.³⁶ Lane argued that as industrialisation progressed parish apprenticeship became restricted to a smaller number of trades which attracted lower premiums. Pauperised trades included unhealthy occupations such as hat-making and brick-making or poorly paid occupations in cotton, lace and framework knitting.³⁷

Alysa Levene's study of parish apprenticeship in London found a majority of children from the sample of 3,285 apprentices were placed in traditional manufacturing trades in London, although almost a quarter were bound to cotton and silk manufacturers in the midlands and north of England.³⁸ Overall, 60% apprentices from London parishes were bound to the manufacturing sector between 1760 and 1780, rising to 85% by 1800. London was dominated by small-scale manufacturers and craft production, indicating that parish apprenticeship remained greater in the traditional manufacturing sector, such as weaving or shoe-making than in the factory sector.³⁹ A study of parish apprentices in the Devon parish of Colyton by Pamela Sharpe found the demand for apprentices came from dairy farms and family-based workshop production in spinning and lace-making.⁴⁰ By the

³⁵ Snell, 'Apprenticeship system', 312.

³⁶ Joan Lane, *Apprenticeship in England 1600-1914* (London: UCL Press, 1996), 83.

³⁷ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, 83.

³⁸ Alysa Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship and the Old Poor Law in London', *Economic History Review* 63, no. 4 (2010): 929-930.

³⁹ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 929.

⁴⁰ Pamela Sharpe, 'Poor children as apprentices in Colyton, 1598-1830', *Continuity and Change* 6, no.2 (1991): 253-270.

late eighteenth century these workshop industries were in decline and arable farming had become more important. Sharpe concluded that the boundaries between apprenticeship and farm service had become indistinct by the early nineteenth century, citing examples of apprentices who had made their own decisions to change masters or who had returned to live with their families.⁴¹

Parish apprentices in textile factories had a different experience from those apprenticed locally in London or Devon. Children apprenticed at the Emscote cotton mill in Warwickshire worked 12 to 13 hours per day in the late eighteenth century and had to attend constantly to the machinery. Lane found that factory employment was regarded as highly suitable for children, but they were not employed at the end of the apprenticeship term as they were replaced by younger workers.⁴² Levene's study has argued that younger children were perceived as more valuable in large-scale enterprises where skill was less important. In the case of London apprentices, those sent to distant cotton mills averaged 11 years old, at least one year younger than children placed in traditional trades near London. Parish officials developed relationships with particular cotton mill owners and sent repeated batches of children to the same factories. For example, the parish of St Clement Danes sent 290 apprentices to northern cotton mills, mainly in Lancashire, but also as far away as Glasgow.⁴³ Levene also suggested that factory apprentices were as likely to succeed as those in traditional trades, provided their training prepared them for future employment.⁴⁴ The issue of whether factory apprenticeships provided training for future employment was addressed by Katrina Honeyman, who argued that few parish apprentices in traditional occupations were taught a profitable trade.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Sharpe, 'Poor children', 266.

⁴² Joan Lane, 'Apprenticeship in Warwickshire, 1700-1834' (Ph.D., University of Birmingham, 1977), 190-194.

⁴³ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 936.

⁴⁴ Levene, 'Parish apprenticeship', 939.

⁴⁵ Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), 129.

On the other hand, although factory apprentices had no traditional trade skills, they had years of experience of factory work and so were more likely to find factory employment at the end of their term.⁴⁶ Katrina Honeyman also highlighted the point that parish apprentices were amongst the first workers to experience the rigid discipline of factory work.⁴⁷ This thesis explores differing forms of children's employment in Birmingham, including parish apprenticeships and non-apprenticed child labour in various occupations and work environments. A comparison of the experiences of Birmingham children with those from elsewhere illuminates and adds to the existing literature on child labour. E.P. Thompson famously referred to the 'exploitation of little children' as one of the most shameful aspects of British industrialisation.⁴⁸ However, the experiences of non-apprenticed children employed in manufacturing workshops or factories, such as pin-making, have been largely neglected. Honeyman suggested that parish apprentices 'were used, in ways that free children could not have been, to experiment in factory practices.'⁴⁹ Further investigation sheds light on how far this statement extended to other workplaces, and whether non-apprenticed children in Birmingham experienced the same kind of treatment as child workers in cotton mills.

A third approach to the study of child labour highlights the economic contribution made by child workers to the family economy. Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries used working-class household budgets to estimate the numbers of children employed during the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, together with changes in conditions of employment and increased intensity of work.⁵⁰ Their study examined 903 household budgets between 1787 and 1872, revealing a boom in child labour during the early nineteenth century until 1840 followed by a decline. The children of factory workers were those most likely to be child workers: 47% were employed up to 1816 and 70% after

⁴⁶ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 149.

⁴⁷ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 175.

⁴⁸ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), 331.

⁴⁹ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 176.

⁵⁰ Horrell and Humphries, 'Exploitation of little children', 486.

1840. In contrast, only 17% of agricultural workers' children were employed in the earlier period and just 4% after 1840. Amongst outworkers, 37% of outworkers' children were employed before 1840, declining to 28% afterwards. The highest proportion of child workers between 1787 and 1816 were involved in outwork, including handloom weaving, gloving, stocking-making and nail-making. By the middle period (1817 to 1839), almost 50% of the working children were employed in factories and 27% in outwork. From 1840 onwards child factory workers had dropped to 36% and outworkers to 19%, but more children were employed in agriculture, mining and trades.⁵¹

Horrell and Humphries concluded that legislation reduced children's factory employment after 1840, but they suggest it did not change the attitudes of families because child labour was expected in the early nineteenth century.⁵² A second investigation into household budgets by Horrell and Humphries looked at a sample of 1,350 budgets for the period 1787 to 1865 across a range of occupations.⁵³ This study found annual family incomes for factory workers were consistently higher than incomes for agricultural or outworkers families.⁵⁴ A further study by Jane Humphries revealed that for all working-class budgets, the earnings of children were significant and always greater than women's earnings.⁵⁵ Children from factory families contributed a greater proportion of family incomes (25% to 40%), whereas children from agricultural families contributed the least. One of the aims of this thesis is to establish whether or not children from Birmingham families during this period were expected to find paid employment, as these studies suggest. A further aim is to consider the impact of children's earnings to family incomes and whether these contributed to increased living standards.

⁵¹ Horrell and Humphries, 'Exploitation of little children', 493.

⁵² Horrell and Humphries, 'Exploitation of little children', 511.

⁵³ Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'Old Questions, New Data, and Alternative Perspectives: Families' Living Standards in the Industrial Revolution', *The Journal of Economic History* 52, no.4 (1992): 851-852.

⁵⁴ Horrell and Humphries, 'Old Questions', 855-859.

⁵⁵ Jane Humphries, 'Household economy', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, ed. R. Floud and P. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 259.

A fourth strand in the literature on child labour includes a number of studies concerned with standards of living and issues related to the impact of early work on children's health, education and general well-being. Economic historians have identified the need for a regional approach and a clearer picture of the employment of children by various sectors of the economy as part of the debate about the improvement or decline in living standards of workers in this period.⁵⁶ Hans-Joachim Voth has shown that wages rose by only 4% in the 60 years from 1760 to 1820, and by 23.9% in the period 1760 to 1850. He argued that gains in real wages were very modest up to 1830, and were probably achieved by longer hours and more intensive labour. Only after 1850 did real wages move ahead of prices, thus raising workers living standards.⁵⁷ The term 'the industrious revolution' was coined by Jan de Vries to describe the changes in the level of demand and supply for goods which occurred at this time.⁵⁸

De Vries has argued that from the mid-seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century there was increased demand for consumer goods offered in the marketplace by households and families, accompanied by a fall in the purchasing power of wages. Families responded by increasing the amount of labour undertaken by household members and through an intensification of work. This increase in labour resulted in a neglect of education and literacy amongst children.⁵⁹ Voth's analysis found the intensity of work increased from 2,576 hours per year in 1760 to 3,185 hours in 1850, representing an increase in the average working week from 50 hours to more than 60 hours per week, with the longest recorded hours of 65 to 70 hours per week in the cotton mills.⁶⁰ As noted above, children working at the Emscote Mill in Warwick worked 12 to 13 hours per day, at

⁵⁶ Kirby, *Child Labour*; Hudson, *Industrial Revolution*; Horrell and Humphries, 'The exploitation of little children'.

⁵⁷ Hans-Joachim Voth, 'Living standards and the urban environment', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, ed. R. Floud and P. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 293.

⁵⁸ Jan de Vries, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution', *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no.2 (1994): 255.

⁵⁹ de Vries, 'Industrial Revolution', 260-261.

⁶⁰ Voth, 'Living standards', 276.

least 70 hours per week, and were compared unfavourably with Birmingham factory children, who worked 10 hour days, or 55 hours per week.⁶¹ In contrast to these studies and the views of E.P Thompson, Eric Hopkins has argued there was no increase in working hours in Birmingham because small-scale industries had fewer overhead costs.⁶² Whilst recognising that ten hours was the 'official' length of the working day in Birmingham, this thesis argues that in practice child workers were frequently required by their employers to work for much longer hours, even at very young ages.

The impact of early work and an industrial environment on health and life-expectancy is another theme in the literature. Hand-loom weaving in Lancashire was concentrated in the traditional textile villages, but during the 1820s the earnings of factory children rose, encouraging families to re-locate to factory towns so that children could work in the factories, whilst adults remained at the loom.⁶³ John C. Brown's study aimed to consider how much compensation weavers required for the poorer quality of life in the factory towns, concluding that when earnings were adjusted to account for high rents and poor sanitation in the urban areas, growth in living standards was cut by 10% for factory workers and negligible for handloom workers.⁶⁴ Life expectancy varied widely by region, with a national average of 41.7 years in 1841, but the average in Manchester was 25.3 years, compared with 45.1 years in rural Surrey.⁶⁵ Historians have also used height as a measure of health in childhood, investigating the causes of short-stature amongst mining children, the relative incidence of chronic childhood diseases and regional differences in nutritional intake.⁶⁶ This group of studies raises important questions about the cost of

⁶¹ Lane, 'Apprenticeship in Warwickshire', 194.

⁶² E.P. Thomson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present* 38 (1967), 56-97; Eric Hopkins, 'Working Hours and Conditions during the Industrial Revolution: A Re-appraisal', *The Economic History Review* 35 (1982): 55-57.

⁶³ John C Brown, 'The Condition of England and the Standard of Living: Cotton Textiles in the Northwest, 1806-1850', *The Journal of Economic History* 50, no.3 (1990): 599.

⁶⁴ Brown, 'Condition of England', 613-614.

⁶⁵ Voth, 'Living standards', 283.

⁶⁶ Peter Kirby, 'Causes of Short Stature among Coal-Mining Children', *The Economic History Review* 48, no.4 (1995); Pamela Sharpe, 'Explaining the short stature of the poor: chronic childhood disease and growth in nineteenth-century England', *The Economic History Review* 65,

industrialisation for the health of child workers and subsequent life expectancy. Nigel Goose has argued that a local and regional perspective on child employment is essential in order to understand ‘the varieties of childhood’ in the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ His study of child workers in Hertfordshire found childhood experiences varied from parish to parish, not simply in terms of whether children worked or not, but in terms of the impact of work on children’s education, and the evidence from marriage registers that areas with high levels of child labour also had the lowest levels of literacy. In addition, the same areas were found to have high death rates from lung diseases, especially pulmonary tuberculosis or consumption, associated with overcrowded and unhealthy living and working conditions.⁶⁸

The themes and approaches in the literature of child labour suggest a number of ways in which the history of child workers in Birmingham might be explored. Firstly, studies into child employment in agriculture and rural industries by Speechley, Burnette and Verdon found children’s earnings were important to their families and the impact of enclosure may have encouraged the migration of families to industrial towns, for example Birmingham, that could offer work for women and children as well as men. Secondly, studies of parish apprenticeship by Honeyman and Levene suggest parish apprenticeships were important in supplying child workers to local craftsmen and women as well as the new manufacturing industries. Were child workers in Birmingham up to 1834 largely provided by Overseers of the Poor from rural districts surrounding the town? Thirdly, research by Horrell and Humphries has emphasized the significance of children’s earnings to the family economy, reflecting the issues found amongst agricultural child workers. This raises further questions relevant to child labour in Birmingham, such as

no.4 (2012); Sara Horrell and Deborah Oxley, ‘Bringing home the bacon? Regional nutrition, stature and gender in the industrial revolution’, *The Economic History Review* 65, no.4 (2012).

⁶⁷ Nigel Goose, ‘Employment Prospects in Nineteenth-Century Hertfordshire in Perspective: Varieties of Childhood?’, in *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England*, ed. Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 159-160.

⁶⁸ Goose, ‘Employment Prospects’, 166-167.

how much could children in Birmingham industries earn and at what age could they begin work? Fourthly, studies by historians such as Voth, de Vries and Goose have suggested there was an intensification of work between 1760 and 1850 that severely impacted the life-chances of working children in terms of educational attainment, levels of literacy, health and life-expectancy. These provide additional important avenues of research for a study of child labour in Birmingham. To conclude, this thesis adopts a distinctive approach to an urban study of child labour by drawing together a number of strands and themes from existing studies to frame a new history of child labour in Birmingham. This approach is further developed in the section on methodology.

Attitudes towards childhood and children

One of the issues facing historians is to identify the changes in attitudes towards children and concepts of childhood over time. During the eighteenth century new thinking emerged about the concept of childhood and how children should be raised and educated as future citizens. The Enlightenment philosopher John Locke set out his ideas for educating children based on scientific principles and rational thought. His *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690, suggested that humans were born with a mind that was a *tabula rasa* or 'blank slate' that could be moulded by careful attention to education.⁶⁹ This was followed in 1693 by *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which provided a detailed explanation of his educational theories.⁷⁰ Locke emphasised the importance of good physical health, self-denial and rational thinking, advising parents to focus on their child's aptitudes and interests so that they could enjoy learning and develop critical-thinking skills. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* was clearly aimed at parents from the elite and middling classes who wished to raise their sons as gentlemen, good citizens and potential leaders in society. In contrast, Locke's

⁶⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1690); Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), 61.

⁷⁰ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London, 1693).

ideas about children of the labouring classes were focused on training them for work so that they could become useful members of society rather than a burden on the parish. He suggested that each parish should establish a school of industry that would train all poor children from the age of three upwards, providing an income for the parish and instilling habits of industry at the earliest age.⁷¹ Locke thus identified education and training for poor children as a way of dealing with the growing problem of poverty and avoiding dependency on the Poor Law. These were ideas that might appeal to political leaders, manufacturers at the forefront of industrial expansion, and those responsible for administering the Poor Law as increasing numbers of poor children placed greater financial demands on rate payers. William Pitt, for example, made a speech in 1796 that emphasised the value of work by young children employed in manufacturing industries.⁷² At the same time, social reformers such as Jonas Hanway campaigned for improvements in the treatment of pauper children in London workhouses and highlighted the plight of children exploited by chimney sweeps.⁷³

Locke's emphasis on moulding a child's character through a rigorous academic education was challenged in the mid-eighteenth century by the ideas of the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose treatise *Emile ou De L'Education* was published in English in 1763.⁷⁴ Rousseau believed that children were innately good and innocent, and should be allowed the freedom to learn through experiencing the natural world, rather than educated from books. According to Rousseau, a child's natural goodness should be preserved by encouraging them to learn through play and an exploration of nature, and parents should protect a child from corrupting influences by largely removing them from the adult sphere until they reached adolescence. In

⁷¹ John Locke, *An Essay on the Poor Law* (London, 1697); Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 138; Alysa Levene, *The Childhood of the Poor: Welfare in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

⁷² Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 4.

⁷³ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 138-139.

⁷⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, ou De L'Education* (Geneva, 1762); Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 4.

Rousseau's example of an ideal childhood, the boy Emile was allowed to learn from nature without any formal learning or imposition of moral rules, thus offering an entirely new outlook on child-rearing practices.⁷⁵ Alongside these prominent philosophies, cultural historians have identified a 'cult of maternity' which began early in the eighteenth century, raising the perceived value of motherhood and placing the mother at the centre of child welfare.⁷⁶ Joanne Bailey has argued that by the late eighteenth century children 'were imagined as the culmination of married love' and were portrayed in newspaper and journal articles and illustrations as bringing joy and happiness to parents of all social classes.⁷⁷ Advice to parents on child-rearing and education emphasised the importance of raising happy children within a moral Christian family, because 'a happy child was a virtuous child'.⁷⁸ Whereas middle-class parents were expected to educate their children to become independent gentlemen and accomplished gentlewomen, the advice to lower-class families was to teach their children the virtues of industriousness, cleanliness and basic religious values. The image of the rural labouring family embodied the ideal qualities of family contentment: they were hard-working, modest and uncomplaining. In the early 1790s 'cottage-door' images were circulated to urban dwellers in the form of 'cottage' songs that extolled the virtues of domestic happiness amongst rural labouring families.⁷⁹

Rousseau's concept of a childhood in which emotions and freedom of expression were inspired by the natural world not only influenced the child-rearing practices of middle-class parents but also the philosophy, art and literature of the Romantic Movement that emerged in the late-eighteenth century.⁸⁰ The movement known as Romanticism included the artist Sir Joshua Reynolds and poets such as William Blake, William

⁷⁵ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 67.

⁷⁶ Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5-7.

⁷⁷ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 23-25.

⁷⁸ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 75.

⁷⁹ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 116.

⁸⁰ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 73; Levene, *Childhood of the Poor*, 173-174.

Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Reynolds' popular 1788 painting *The Age of Innocence* embodied the idealised notion of an innocent and carefree childhood by portraying a simply dressed small child seated beneath a tree in an idyllic rural setting.⁸¹ In poetry children became the symbols of truth and beauty as the romantic poets denounced social deprivation amongst the poor and exploitation of child workers. Blake's illustrated poems '*Songs of Innocence and Experience*', published in 1794, contrasted the innocent world of childhood with the harsh adult world in which child workers were exploited and their innocence destroyed. Blake championed the cause of climbing boys through the story of a poor young boy sold by his parents to a chimney-sweep, and Coleridge drew attention to children working in the cotton factories, describing them as white-slaves.⁸² Despite attempts to highlight the plight of the poorest and most exploited children, and the growing idealisation of childhood amongst the middle-class, the general acceptance that early work for children of the lower classes was both customary and inevitable remained unchanged. Instead, debates centred on the type of work suitable for poor children, as reformers like Sarah Trimmer campaigned for them to be trained in traditional craft skills rather than work in the new factory industries. It was not until later in the nineteenth century that it became clear there was a sharp divide between the middle-class notion of an innocent and care-free childhood and the actual experiences of child workers.

Campaigns in the early decades of the nineteenth century sought to reduce hours and improve conditions for child workers, rather than bring about the abolition of child labour. Even prominent supporters of the Ten Hours Movement, such as Lord Shaftesbury, were not opposed to child labour in principle, but were concerned that children should only work part-time hours so that they were not deprived of the

⁸¹ Joshua Reynolds, *The Age of Innocence*, oil on canvas (London: Tate Britain, 1788).

⁸² Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 139-140.

opportunity for schooling.⁸³ Over the course of the nineteenth century legislation was introduced that gradually restricted children from certain occupations, such as underground working in mines or cleaning textile machinery in motion. The romantic view of childhood became linked to campaigns in the 1830s and 1840s that aimed to reduce child labour; for example, the 1842 report into children employed in mining and textile factories inspired Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem '*The Cry of the Children*' which highlighted the conditions endured by children in mines and factories.⁸⁴ However, changes in employment legislation for children emerged slowly and school attendance for all children up to the age of 13 only became compulsory under the Education Act of 1880. The extent to which changing ideologies about childhood filtered through society and impacted on the reality of child workers' lives in Birmingham is one of the issues explored in this thesis.

Methodology and sources

This thesis takes a thematic approach to the study of child labour through a case study of Birmingham, examining the extent and nature of child labour, the experiences of child workers, and changes in attitudes towards children and child labour. Shining a spotlight on child labour allows insights into the attitudes of ordinary families towards everyday events, enhancing our understanding of their relationships, experiences and perceptions, not only of child labour, but of the poor law, parenting, schooling, illness and family finances. John Tosh has suggested that the ultimate aim of historical research is to 'recapture human life in all its variety', in other words 'to write total history', but this is problematic unless reduced to a very local level.⁸⁵ Following this type of approach, this thesis explores one dimension of industrialisation in a single town – that of child labour – as a way of illuminating the numerous facets of working families' lives during a period of

⁸³ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 142.

⁸⁴ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 143.

⁸⁵ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 138-140.

historical transition. Viewed through the lens of child labour, this particular approach uses a small canvas to paint a much bigger picture. In the case of education, for example, a focus on child labour reveals attitudes towards the type and length of schooling that working families deemed appropriate for their children. It highlights that parents were anxious for their children to learn basic skills in reading and possibly arithmetic, but only until they reached working age. Birmingham children usually began work at around the age of eight, although many child workers continued their schooling on Sundays or at evening schools. Parents and children thus adopted strategies for education that did not interfere with the ability to earn a living.

Small incidents involving child workers can also indicate the wider economic and social circumstances of families and their attitudes to parenting. In one case, a mother carried her child to work at a Birmingham pin manufactory each day because the child, at just four years old, was too young to walk the two miles to work.⁸⁶ This raises questions about the circumstances and motives of the family. Was the mother uncaring and interested only in the money her child could earn? Or was the family in dire straits and in desperate need of the child's small weekly wage? Alternatively, was it possible the mother regarded the pin factory as a safe place to leave her child while she worked nearby? These details help to paint a larger picture of the lives of working families living in Birmingham over the period, shedding light on the diversity of childhood experiences. Goose's case study of child labour in nineteenth-century Hertfordshire found that local and regional variations in child employment resulted in significantly different experiences of childhood.⁸⁷ His research utilised the 1851 census and other sources to analyse child employment at the parish level, exploring its impact on education, literacy, demography and the economy. This study of child labour in Birmingham follows a similar approach, using a variety of national and local primary sources.

⁸⁶ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 326.

⁸⁷ Goose, 'Employment Prospects', 160.

The testimony of children and children's agency

One problem encountered in a study that focuses on the lives of working children is the lack of direct evidence in the form of the child's voice. Children's experiences are often relayed through adults, as in the case of evidence given by child workers to the Children's Employment Commissions in the nineteenth century. Honeyman has emphasised that when child workers were questioned by officials, they were likely to meet expectations: for example, by expressing satisfaction with conditions of work because that was what the questioner wanted to hear, and for fear of reprisals if they answered differently.⁸⁸ Other difficulties involved cultural differences in language, understanding and attitudes between middle-class inspectors and manual workers, which undoubtedly created barriers and affected their responses to queries. In addition, young child workers were likely to be nervous and apprehensive when questioned about educational standards and working conditions by these unfamiliar visitors.

Despite these barriers to communication, the evidence given by child workers to the Commissions has been utilised in this study since it provides useful insights into the experiences of working children in Birmingham in the absence of alternate sources such as letters, diaries or school essays. These accounts also show some evidence of children's agency. For example, one young boy had chosen to go to work rather than attend school, even though his mother was willing to pay the school fees for him, and had apparently allowed him to make his own decision. On the other hand, there are numerous examples of children who had no choice other than to finish school at an early age because of their family's economic situation. Many of these children expressed a desire to continue their education, with some having made a decision to attend evening classes or Sunday school on top of their work commitments.

⁸⁸ Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 201.

Birmingham was chosen for this study because it emerged in the mid-eighteenth century as the commercial and industrial centre for the West Midlands region, experiencing sustained population growth and industrial expansion, yet child labour as an aspect of Birmingham's history has been surprisingly neglected. A wide range of sources have been used in this research, including local poor law records, parliamentary papers and census reports, local business and institutional records, newspaper reports, autobiographies and memoirs. The first main source was the parish apprenticeship records for the county of Warwickshire and the neighbouring counties of Worcestershire and Staffordshire. This source was chosen to establish whether Birmingham industries took advantage of the availability of cheap child labour in the form of pauper apprenticeship under the old poor law, in a similar way to the cotton industry. It also raises questions about whether parish overseers were willing to place pauper children at a distance from their home parish, the type of occupations deemed suitable, and the links they maintained with apprenticed children.⁸⁹ In view of the amount of data, three parishes were selected from each of the three counties, providing a sample size of 2,028 apprenticeship indentures of pauper children from nine parishes. One limitation of using apprenticeship records is the problem of incomplete or missing data, which may lead to a reliance on parishes where records have survived.⁹⁰ In this study, parishes were chosen based on their geographical location within 20 miles of Birmingham, the survival of parish apprenticeship records, and for diversity in economic activity, ranging from agricultural parishes such as Knowle in Warwickshire to the industrial parish of Wednesbury in Staffordshire.

The second core source was the minute books of the Birmingham Guardians of the Poor. These provided details about the establishment and operation of a separate workhouse for children, the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor, opened in 1797 to

⁸⁹ Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 11.

⁹⁰ Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*, 56.

provide residential accommodation and industrial employment for pauper children. The minute books contained information about why the guardians decided to provide a separate institution for children, some distance away from the adults in the main workhouse, and how their attitudes to child labour and the provision of schooling for pauper children changed during the early decades of the nineteenth century. A difficulty with this type of source is the lack of information about the children or their families, and incomplete or missing records. In this instance, admission registers and books detailing the day-to-day running of the infant asylum have not survived. The source thus presents only the official viewpoint recorded at meetings of the Board of Guardians. Despite this, the minutes include considerable information about the institution and the attitudes of guardians towards child labour, providing insights into their attempts to minimise poor law expenditure and maximise income from children's work.

A third major source was the parliamentary papers and reports produced by the Factories Inquiry Commission of 1833 and the Children's Employment Commissions of 1843 and 1862.⁹¹ Inspectors for these commissions visited industrial premises in Birmingham over a period of more than three decades, during which time they interviewed employers, adult workers and supervisors, and child workers of varying ages and occupations. The reports of the commissions provide extensive information about the number of establishments and types of manufacturing industry in Birmingham, the working conditions and numbers of adults and children employed. A case study approach has been used, identifying the pin industry as a major employer of child labour in the 1830s and the button industry in the 1860s. The extensive investigations by the Children's Employment Commissions offer many insights into the lives of child workers in Birmingham, especially children's experiences of early work and its impact on education and health. Evidence regarding the education and health of child workers has been supported by local records and Birmingham newspaper reports.

⁹¹ Kirby, *Child Labour*, 13.

A further set of sources for this study was information on average earnings in Birmingham industries drawn from a variety of records. The business records of Ralph Heaton & Sons provided important data on the weekly earnings for skilled and unskilled male workers, women workers and children working in a family-run metal business which began with 22 employees in 1842, expanding to more than 200 employees by 1861. This was supplemented by data from other sources detailing average earnings in Birmingham compared to those in towns such as Manchester or Liverpool, and with earnings in other economic sectors such as agriculture. These were used to address the question of how much children could earn and what did they contribute to family incomes. Taken together, the sources indicated how far Birmingham workers were able to support their families, or whether they relied on the additional earnings of children to supplement family incomes. One weakness of this source is that it provides statistical information about average earnings, with little insight into the background of the individuals and families concerned. For example, Kirby has noted that children's earnings were frequently included with those of parents or other family members.⁹²

As an alternative perspective, first-hand accounts of child workers' experiences are offered in autobiographies written by George Jacob Holyoake and Will Thorne. These two men both came from working-class Birmingham families, and both were successful in adult life, but they had very different experiences of childhood. Autobiographies by working-class authors usually include an account of the author's childhood experiences, providing valuable insights into family life, schooling and children's work. This type of source has been successfully utilised by historians; however, one of the drawbacks of autobiographies is that they tend to be written by men who became successful in life, representing only a minority of child workers, with few examples by working-class women.⁹³ A further drawback is that autobiographies written in later life may encounter

⁹² Kirby, *Child Labour*, 16.

⁹³ Humphries, Goose, 'Employment Prospects', 159.

problems in accurately recalling certain facts, dates or events. The author may also gloss over certain events they do not wish to dwell on, whilst focusing on those they wish to highlight. Nevertheless, one of the advantages of utilising the two autobiographies in this study is to shine a light on the different experiences of child labour described by Thorne and Holyoake.

Records of the Middlemore Emigration Homes in Birmingham were another major source. In contrast to documents relating to the infant asylum, the Middlemore Homes records provide details of children admitted into the home and subsequently migrated to Canada. These include information about the circumstances of children's family lives before entering the home, together with some details of their early experiences after arriving in Canada. In particular, the experiences of six children have been explored, covering their lives before, during and after emigration to Canada. However, as with other institutional records, the information on children's backgrounds and future experiences are often limited and some children may be missing altogether from the files.⁹⁴ These records offer insights into the perception of the problem of so-called 'gutter children' or 'street arabs' in 1870s Birmingham, and also into attitudes towards child labour as part of the solution for disposing of children from the poorest families. It provides a unique approach to the study of childhood and child workers by adding an international perspective to a local study.

To summarise, this thesis explores a number of key themes to shed light on the experience of child labour and changes in attitudes to child labour over time. The approach of focusing on a single industrial town offers a model for conducting a research study into the lives of child workers and their families. By combining evidence from a wide range of primary sources, greater insights can be obtained into the motivation and

⁹⁴ Roy Parker, *Uprooted* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2010), 278.

circumstances of families whose children began work at an early age, despite the regrettable lack of the child's voice in the surviving material. Similarly, the availability of local records on aspects of education, health and life-expectancy add further depth to the overall picture. Finally, the inclusion of records relating to children from nineteenth-century Birmingham sent as migrants to work in Canada adds a new dimension to the history of child labour in England.

Structure of the thesis

Seven core chapters in this thesis explore the extent and nature of child labour in Birmingham. Chapter 2 is concerned with parish apprenticeship and therefore covers the period up to 1834. The themes explored in Chapters 3 to 7 cover the period from 1750 to 1880, whereas Chapter 8 on child migration focuses on the 1870s and 1880s. Chapter 2 examines the supply of child workers from a selection of parishes in the counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire. This adopts a regional approach to the study of child labour and examines the attitudes of parish overseers under the old Poor Law. Chapter 3 explores the treatment of pauper children in the Birmingham workhouse and considers the changes in attitudes of Guardians of the Poor towards child labour in response to changes in legislation. Chapter 4 discusses whether there was an increase in demand for child workers at particular points during this period and whether there was any intensification in the pace of work. Chapter 5 analyses the contribution of child workers to the family economy, considering the costs and benefits of early work and the notion of 'habits of industry' within working families. Chapter 6 discusses the opportunities for schooling available to children from the lower classes, raising the issue of middle-class perceptions of education as a means of social control.

Chapter 7 assesses the impact of work on the health of children in terms of exposure to accidental injuries, chronic ill-health and ill-treatment in the workplace.

Chapter 8 adds an international dimension to the research by considering the treatment of children admitted to the Middlemore Emigration Homes in Birmingham during the 1870s and sent to work as agricultural labourers and farm servants in Canada. Finally, chapter 9 draws together the main themes of the study, discussing the ways in which the research findings enhance our knowledge of the importance of child labour for industrialisation in Birmingham and the experience of being a child worker.

Chapter 2

Parish apprentices and the old Poor Law

Introduction

Tender mother dry your tears
hear is no cause for Greef or fears
our brother is gon tho for the best
whe hop is soule is gon to rest¹

This verse in memory of William Brittain of Knowle in Warwickshire was pencilled onto the back of his parish apprenticeship certificate, drawing attention to early death as a frequent experience for poor families. Brittain was bound by the parish in 1806 to Abraham Lee, a Birmingham carpenter and joiner, and it appears that he died during his apprenticeship although no further details were recorded. The literature on child labour has frequently focused on parish apprentices as a major source of child workers in cotton mills and coal mines during industrialisation, but research has highlighted that parish apprentices were bound in various traditional crafts and trades such as tailoring or cordwaining, often remaining in or close to their home parish.² This chapter examines and evaluates the supply of parish apprentices to Birmingham from a sample of parishes in the counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Birmingham was a growing industrial town that attracted migrants from the surrounding counties and further afield in search of employment. Birmingham's traditional metal industries were based around mostly small and medium-sized enterprises and the town enjoyed a reputation for attracting well-paid workers who were adaptable and innovative. The research in this chapter tests an assumption that the town of Birmingham was drawing in parish apprentices from the surrounding rural areas to meet the demand for child workers in its expanding manufacturing industries. In fact, the data does not

¹ Warwickshire County Record Office (henceforth WCRO), DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeship Certificates, Knowle

² Honeyman, *Child Workers*; Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship'.

support this assumption, as shown by the examples of apprenticeship bindings that follow. One explanation may be that Birmingham industries, whether large-scale manufactories or small-scale workshops, relied on the labour of skilled workman rather than on large numbers of unskilled child workers as found in the textile industries.

Formal apprenticeship began in England with the Statute of Artificers in 1563 which stated that a seven-year apprenticeship was required for entry into crafts and trades. The intention of the act was to control the training and freedom of young people until the age of 21, placing them in the household of a master who was legally obliged to provide food, shelter and clothing whilst teaching the 'arts and mysteries' of his (or her) trade.³ A written indenture of apprenticeship was essential, both for private agreements between the master and the parents, and for parish apprenticeships binding children of the poor. One of the most significant differences between private and parish apprenticeships was the age of starting work: for private apprentices the typical age of binding was 14 years, whereas pauper apprentices were often bound from the age of seven years upwards, which reflects the pressure on parish officials to control the poor rate. Under the terms of the act, householders with a minimum of 'half a ploughland in tillage' were obliged to take in apprentices until at least 21 or 24 years old.⁴ A pauper child apprenticed in husbandry or housewifery might thus have an unwilling master; or the child might be placed in a trade with poor future employment prospects, such as nail-making, silk ribbon weaving or stocking-making. Alys Levene points out that setting children to work was a pragmatic response to poverty by parish officials. Apprenticeship was perceived as a way of raising children and their families out of destitution and reliance on the poor rate. It provided both a future for the child and reduced future possible dependency on the parish.⁵

³ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*.

⁴ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*.

⁵ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 918.

Evidence for this study has been gathered from the apprenticeship indentures of 2,028 pauper children in a sample of nine parishes. These were selected for their proximity within 20 miles of Birmingham, diversity of economic background, and survival of complete sets of parish apprenticeship certificates. The Warwickshire parishes of Coleshill, Knowle and Tanworth-in-Arden lie to the east and south-east of Birmingham; the Worcestershire parishes of Northfield, Alvechurch and Bromsgrove to the south-west of Birmingham; and the Staffordshire parishes of Harborne, Tamworth and Wednesbury to the north and north-west. The main research questions addressed by this chapter include: firstly, where were pauper children from these three counties most likely to be apprenticed in terms of geographical location and how far were they sent from their home parish? Secondly, did the supply of parish apprentices increase or decrease over the period, especially those children who were sent to Birmingham? Thirdly, how did the types of occupations for parish apprentices change over time and did they reflect the expansion of Birmingham industries? Fourthly, what were the characteristics of parish apprenticeship in terms of gender and age of starting work? Finally, what were the attitudes of parish overseers of the poor towards pauper children and child labour?

Parish apprenticeship in rural and industrial parishes

The Warwickshire parishes of Coleshill, Knowle and Tanworth-in-Arden were rural villages in the north of the county, less than 15 miles from Birmingham. Residents in these Warwickshire parishes followed traditional rural occupations such as husbandman, yeoman, farmer, taylor, sawyer, sadler and maltster.⁶ The three Worcestershire parishes included in the study were also located in the north of the county: the parish of Northfield, only six miles from Birmingham, was a rural parish populated by farmers. However, many of them combined farming with other part-time occupations. For example, in 1802 William

⁶ WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Apprenticeships, Coleshill; DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships Knowle; DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

Hinton of Northfield was a farmer and blacksmith; Job Connup was a farmer and miller; George Fellows a farmer and nailor; William Brown a farmer and innkeeper.⁷ The village of Alvechurch, situated 11 miles south of Birmingham, was another rural parish with agriculture and rural occupations such as blacksmithing predominating.⁸ The third Worcestershire parish of Bromsgrove, approximately 16 miles south-west of Birmingham, followed the pattern of a rural economy based largely on agriculture, but supplemented by the traditional north Worcestershire industries of nailing and needle-making.⁹ In Staffordshire, a slightly different pattern emerges. The parish of Harborne, only three miles from Birmingham, was inhabited by a mixture of farmers and nailors; Wednesbury, situated eight miles north- west of Birmingham, was an industrial parish dominated by metal industries such as gun-lock filing and awl blade making. Finally, the parish of Tamworth, 16 miles to the north of Birmingham and the ancient capital of Mercia, was a small market town serving local coal mining and textile villages in Staffordshire and across the county border in Warwickshire.¹⁰

Table 2.1 Comparison of destinations – three Warwickshire Parishes, 1750-1835¹¹

	Home Parish	Birmingham & Aston	Other in Warks, Worcs, Staffs	Other counties	Total no. of apprentices	% to Birmingham
Coleshill	24	80	100	12	216	37%
Knowle	9	35	40	1	85	41%
Tanworth in Arden	231	69	78	2	380	18%
Totals	264	184	218	15	681	27%

⁷ Birmingham Archives & Heritage (henceforth BAH), EP14/157, Parish Apprenticeships, Northfield.

⁸ Worcestershire County Record Office (henceforth WoCRO) 5498/9, Parish Apprenticeships, Alvechurch.

⁹ WoCRO, 9135/38-41, Parish Apprenticeships, Bromsgrove.

¹⁰ Staffordshire County Record Office, (henceforth SCRO), D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury; SCRO, D3773/5/1059-1251, Parish Apprenticeships, Tamworth.

¹¹ WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Parish Apprenticeships, Coleshill; DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships Knowle; DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

There were a total of 681 parish apprentices from the three Warwickshire parishes during the period, as shown in Table 2.1 above. The overseers of Coleshill and Knowle parishes bound almost 40% of their parish apprentices to masters in Birmingham, whereas less than 20% of Tanworth in Arden bindings were made in Birmingham. In contrast to the two other Warwickshire parishes, Tanworth in Arden apprenticed more than 50% of its 380 pauper children within the home parish, almost all of these bound in husbandry or housewifery to a husbandman or yeoman of the parish.¹² A further 78 children were apprenticed to other parishes in Warwickshire, Worcestershire or Staffordshire. A batch of nine children were apprenticed to various silk-weavers in Coventry in 1757 and a further six children in 1758, suggesting an upsurge in the Coventry silk ribbon trade in the late 1750s. Tanworth in Arden sent no further batches of children to Coventry after this date as most children remained in the home parish until the early nineteenth century.

From 1802 onwards, Tanworth in Arden began to apprentice its pauper children to a variety of occupations in Birmingham and parishes such as Redditch and Beoley in Worcestershire, and Darlaston in Staffordshire. Only two children were apprenticed further afield, and these seem to have had family connections: Richard Leedom was apprenticed in 1764 to Christopher Leedom, a husbandman in Hinckley, Leicestershire; and in 1806 Philip Leeson was apprenticed at 10 years old to Edmond Tibbotts, a tailor in Gloucester.¹³ The parish children of Coleshill and Knowle also remained almost exclusively within the west midlands counties. Approximately 40% of these children were apprenticed in Birmingham and a further 40% to parishes such as Wolverhampton, Bilston and Walsall in Staffordshire, or Alcester, Solihull and Coventry in Warwickshire. The children from Coleshill apprenticed beyond the west midlands counties were typically

¹² WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

¹³ WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

bound to framework knitters in neighbouring Leicestershire.¹⁴ These findings, therefore, support the views of both Alysa Levene and Katrina Honeyman that parish apprentices were bound in local areas when opportunities were available.¹⁵

Pauper children from the sample Worcestershire parishes were highly unlikely to find themselves apprenticed to Birmingham masters. From the 898 apprenticeship bindings, only 25 children were bound in Birmingham, less than 3% of the total. The parish of Alvechurch apprenticed 193 children during the period: of these, 170 remained in their home parish, 19 children were sent to other west midlands parishes and five children to Birmingham. The five Birmingham apprentices included 11 year old Joseph Webb and his nine year old sister, Sarah, who were bound to their step-father Edward Dukes, a locksmith. The apprenticeship certificates state that their mother, Mary Webb, was a widow 'now lawfully married to Edward Dukes'. The Alvechurch overseers paid a sum of £4-15-6d to Edward Dukes towards clothing for the two apprentices.¹⁶ The parish of Bromsgrove apprenticed 535 pauper children over the period, of which only five children or less than 1% of bindings were in Birmingham. Approximately 80% of the Bromsgrove children remained in the parish of Bromsgrove; typically apprenticed in husbandry or housewifery, with a smaller number engaged in nailing and needle-making. Those children sent outside the parish were bound in similar industries in Belbroughton, Redditch, Halesowen or Dudley in Worcestershire and Rowley Regis or Sedgley in Staffordshire.¹⁷ This suggests that overseers in Bromsgrove actively sought out or maintained links with men engaged in the nailing or needle-making industries in other parishes.

¹⁴ WCRO, DRB0100/107-109I, Parish Apprenticeships, Coleshill; DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

¹⁵ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 927-931; Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 78.

¹⁶ WoCRO 5498/9, Parish Apprenticeships, Alvechurch.

¹⁷ WoCRO, 9135/38-41, Parish Apprenticeships, Bromsgrove.

Table 2.2 Comparison of destinations – three Worcestershire Parishes, 1750-1835¹⁸

	Home Parish	Birmingham & Aston	Other in Warks, Worcs, Staffs	Other counties	Total no. of apprentices	% to Birmingham
Northfield	111	15	44	0	170	8.8%
Alvechurch	170	5	19	0	194	2.5%
Bromsgrove	459	5	70	0	535	0.9%
Totals	740	25	133	0	898	2.7%

The Worcestershire parish of Northfield was located just six miles from Birmingham, but fewer than 10% of the 170 Northfield parish apprentices were placed in the town, whereas approximately 25% were bound to masters elsewhere in the west midlands counties. A majority of children were apprenticed to local farmers in the parish of Northfield; children also found themselves bound to masters in Halesowen or Dudley in Worcestershire and Harborne, Walsall or Tipton in Staffordshire.¹⁹ In common with the Worcestershire parishes of Bromsgrove and Alvechurch, overseers of the poor in Northfield seem to have maintained strong links with industrial parishes in south Staffordshire, rather than with the town of Birmingham. This pattern may have resulted from a belief by the overseers that children should be placed in agriculture or in trades traditionally followed in their home parish. On the other hand, it may be the case that overseers were unable to secure suitable placements for parish apprentices in Birmingham industries.

If parish children from Worcestershire were frequently bound to masters in Staffordshire, were Staffordshire parishes placing their children in Worcestershire? From the three sample Staffordshire parishes of Harborne, Tamworth and Wednesbury, only 29 children or 6.5% of the total were found bindings in Birmingham over the entire period. On the other hand, 249 of the 449 children apprenticed were placed in other parishes in

¹⁸ BAH, EP14/157, Parish Apprenticeships, Northfield; WoCRO 5498/9, Parish Apprenticeships, Alvechurch; WoCRO, 9135/38-41, Parish Apprenticeships, Bromsgrove.

¹⁹ BAH, EP14/157, Parish Apprenticeships, Northfield.

Warwickshire, Worcestershire or Staffordshire. Children from Harborne, a distance of three miles outside Birmingham, were more likely to be despatched to Wolverhampton or Wednesbury than to Birmingham or Worcestershire. Similarly, the 224 children apprenticed by the parish of Wednesbury had an equal chance of staying in their home parish or finding themselves in the neighbouring south Staffordshire industrial villages such as Tipton, Willenhall, Darlaston or Bilston.²⁰ Pauper children from Wednesbury do not appear to have been apprenticed to masters in Worcestershire, possibly because there were greater opportunities for placements in Staffordshire. Two sisters, Sarah and Elizabeth Mumford, from Wednesbury were apprenticed as ribbon weavers in Nuneaton, Warwickshire in 1795. In the same year, six girls were bound to Peels, Yates & Co. cotton mill in Manchester. The youngest girl, Ann Ackwood, was nine years old, Elizabeth Whitehouse was the eldest at 14; the other girls were Eleanor Spittle aged 12, Martha Turner aged 11, Sarah Wood aged 10, and Elizabeth Greaves aged 10. Apprenticing children to distant cotton mills did not prove a popular choice for the parish of Wednesbury. Only two further children were apprenticed to mills, both sent to Joseph Peel's mill in Fazeley, Staffordshire.²¹

Table 2.3 Comparison of destinations – three Staffordshire Parishes, 1750-1835²²

	Home Parish	Birmingham & Aston	Other in Warks, Worcs, Staffs	Other counties	Total no. of apprentices	% to Birmingham
Harborne	11	12	29	2	54	22.2%
Tamworth	37	13	107	14	171	7.6%
Wednesbury	101	4	113	6	224	1.8%
Totals	149	29	249	22	449	6.5%

Children from the Staffordshire parish of Tamworth were located some 16 miles from the town of Birmingham, but close to Peel's cotton mill at Fazeley. Five Tamworth

²⁰ SCRO, D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury.

²¹ SCRO, D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury.

²² BAH, EP/61/7/8, Parish Apprenticeships, Harborne; SCRO, D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury; D3773/5/1059-1251, Parish Apprenticeships, Tamworth.

girls were apprenticed to Peel's mill in 1797 and a further four girls were sent to Peel's calico mill in Lichfield in 1800. Other children were bound to ribbon weavers in Leicestershire and north Warwickshire and framework knitters in Leicestershire. Apart from children who remained in Tamworth, the majority of apprentices, however, were bound to a variety of trades and industries in Staffordshire industrial villages such as Walsall, Darlaston, Wednesfield or Wolverhampton.²³ Evidence from the sample parishes in Staffordshire and Worcestershire shows that pauper children were more likely to be apprenticed in their home parish, or in the industrial villages of south Staffordshire, rather than in Birmingham. These findings thus emphasize the strong links parishes maintained with the traditional trades and industries of south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire. This concurs with the findings of Levene's study that individual parishes in London supported specific industries in local areas with which they had links.²⁴

Children from Warwickshire parishes were more frequently apprenticed to Birmingham masters, yet were equally likely to be placed in other local parishes. It is unclear whether parish overseers preferred to place children with tradesmen in the Black Country industrial villages of south Staffordshire, or whether they were simply taking up any employment opportunities which presented. Certainly, the evidence suggests that apprenticeships were not popular with the small manufacturers of Birmingham. Levene highlights the importance of investigating apprenticeship employment patterns to identify where opportunities existed and which trades were willing to accept pauper apprentices.²⁵ Parish apprenticeship patterns can be used to identify both rapidly expanding industries which needed a flexible workforce, such as the cotton industry, and contracting or impoverished industries less attractive to parents seeking private apprenticeships, such as cordwaining. One of the more surprising findings of the current research study is that even the parishes of Harborne and Northfield, on Birmingham's doorstep, bound very few

²³ SCRO, D3773/5/1059-1251, Parish Apprenticeships, Tamworth.

²⁴ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 939.

²⁵ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 918.

children there. From a total of more than 2,000 parish apprentices in this sample, 240 children were placed in Birmingham, a far smaller number than might have been anticipated.

It appears that although a ready supply of child workers was available from the surrounding areas, and despite the evidence that parishes had close links with masters in metal trades, there was little demand for parish apprentices in Birmingham. It may be the case that non-apprenticed children met the demand for child labour in Birmingham, or that children from the Birmingham parishes of St Martin's and St Philip's took up any available opportunities. Unfortunately, apprenticeship records for the Birmingham parishes during this period have not survived, but many pauper children from Birmingham were apprenticed to Lancashire cotton mills and to Staffordshire coal mines.²⁶ The practice of despatching Birmingham children to cotton mills ceased around 1800, according to evidence given in 1816 by Theodore Price, J.P., to the Parliamentary Select Committee investigating children's employment in manufactories. Price stated that 'for many years' Birmingham children had not been apprenticed to cotton mills because of an unfavourable report following a visit in 1800 by the overseers, 'in general cotton mills were spoken of unfavourably, as improper places for those children.' Price added that the custom in Birmingham was for masters to have 'out-door apprentices', who were allegedly free at night to 'cause mischief' and become involved in the theft of metal.²⁷

Child labour and the changing demands of industry

What can parish apprenticeships tell us about continuity and change in occupations over time and did child labour under the old poor law reflect the expansion of industry in Birmingham? Children from the three Warwickshire parishes in the sample were more

²⁶ BAH, 660982, *Minutes of the Birmingham Overseers of the Poor*, 1803-1813.

²⁷ BPP, 1816, 397, *Report on the Minutes of Evidence to Select Committee on the State of Children employed in the Manufactories of the United Kingdom*, 124.

likely to be apprenticed in Birmingham than children from the Worcestershire or Staffordshire parishes. Of the 184 Warwickshire parish apprentices sent to Birmingham, the highest numbers were apprenticed in the two decades from 1790 to 1809. From 1810 onwards fewer children were apprenticed by the parishes, but a higher percentage of apprentices were bound to Birmingham masters, as shown below.

Table 2.4 Destinations of Parish apprentices from three Warwickshire Parishes²⁸

	Home parish	Birmingham & Aston	Warwicks, Worcs or Staffs	Other	Total	% to Birmingham
1750 - 1759	5	9	33	0	47	19%
1760 - 1769	35	7	19	1	62	11%
1770 - 1779	55	20	15	0	90	22%
1780 - 1789	49	16	31	1	97	16%
1790 - 1799	29	34	20	4	88	39%
1800 - 1809	75	46	54	8	184	25%
1810 - 1819	5	21	26	0	52	40%
1820 - 1829	3	22	13	1	39	56%
1830 - 1835	0	9	8	0	17	53%
Total	264	184	218	15	681	27%

Children from the parish of Coleshill were apprenticed to a wide range of traditional crafts and metal trades in Birmingham.²⁹ In 1770, Thomas Dowler was apprenticed to a breeches maker, James White to a blade maker and John Ward to a basket maker. In 1776, John Ridden, aged 11, to a Birmingham locksmith, and William Clarkson, aged 10, to Sam Clemenson, a hingemaker. Other boys from Coleshill became apprentice toymakers, buttonmakers, steel bucklemakers and cordwainers, reflecting the

²⁸ Warwickshire Apprenticeships: Coleshill, Knowle & Tanworth in Arden.

²⁹ WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Parish Apprenticeships, Coleshill.

nature of Birmingham industry.³⁰ The relatively small number of girls from Coleshill apprenticed to Birmingham masters were most likely to be apprenticed in 'housewifery', which can be interpreted as domestic service in an urban setting, although it traditionally referred to agricultural service. The evidence suggests that few girls were apprenticed in metal industries: one example is Elizabeth Gray, who at the age of seven years in 1777 was apprenticed as a button burnisher.³¹ During the early nineteenth century, fewer parish children from Coleshill were apprenticed in Birmingham, and more children were apprenticed to Staffordshire cotton mills, Leicestershire framework knitters, and Staffordshire locksmiths.³² However, from 1810 onwards children from Coleshill were apprenticed in the Birmingham trades of gun-lock filer, cabinet maker, cabinet locksmith, cordwainer, and pearl-button turner.³³

Parish officials from Knowle and Tanworth in Arden also apprenticed pauper children to a range of occupations in Birmingham: in 1759, William Kimberley of Knowle was apprenticed to William Freeth, a Birmingham toymaker; the following year, William Terry of Knowle was apprenticed to Charles Freeth, a Birmingham brass founder, suggesting the Knowle overseers had links with important Birmingham trades.³⁴ Although the parish children of Tanworth in Arden were typically bound in agriculture, Birmingham apprenticeships increased from the 1790s onwards, to include trades such as button making, buckle making, watch chain making, gun finishing and awl-blade making.³⁵ The Tanworth in Arden overseers undoubtedly had links with craftsmen in the Aston area of Birmingham: they apprenticed William Handy to William Hodges, a compass maker in Aston in 1802; Henry Bissell to William Rollason, a whitesmith in Aston in 1803; Thomas Wadsworth to Joseph Rogers, a comb maker in Aston; and William Edwards to John

³⁰ WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Parish Apprenticeships, Coleshill.

³¹ WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Parish Apprenticeships, Coleshill.

³² WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Parish Apprenticeships, Coleshill.

³³ WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Parish Apprenticeships, Coleshill.

³⁴ WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

³⁵ WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

Ansell, an Aston cordwainer.³⁶ Boys from Tanworth in Arden were apprenticed in a variety of trades in Birmingham and Aston, including rule maker, steelyard and beam maker, bridle bit and stirrup maker, gunfinisher, fish hook maker and wheelwright.³⁷

The range of well-paid trades in Birmingham suggests that apprenticeships in the town were probably highly sought-after, with parish officials in competition with parents who were seeking private apprenticeships for their children. It is perhaps less surprising, therefore, that relatively small numbers of pauper children were apprenticed to Birmingham masters (see Appendix 1). If brass founders and button makers in Birmingham could take on a 14-year-old apprentice living nearby with his own family, as opposed to a 10- or 11-year-old parish apprentice who must be housed, fed and clothed, the choice of apprentice seems to be obvious. These were, after all, small-scale manufacturers motivated by the need to be profitable in order to survive and expand in a competitive environment. An advertisement in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* in 1791 offered 'A good Opportunity for Boys': three boys aged 12 to 14 years 'from honest industrious families' were offered the opportunity to become apprentices in the engraving business.³⁸ A further six boys aged 12 to 16 years were required as apprentices in an established steel-toy business, the advertisement clearly aimed at parents rather than parish overseers. It seems likely that Birmingham tradesmen who did take on parish apprentices may have had connections with the child's family or with the parish. One example of a local link comes from the parish of Knowle (see Appendix 2): John Smith and Christopher Smith of Knowle were apprenticed by the parish in 1754 and 1756 to John Chinn, a toymaker and button maker in Birmingham.³⁹ The records show that John Chinn of Birmingham was originally from Knowle, having been a parish apprentice himself 28 years earlier in 1728 when he was bound to Joseph Hunt, a Birmingham button maker. This is

³⁶ WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

³⁷ WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

³⁸ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 13 June 1791.

³⁹ WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

evidence that John Chinn had not only maintained a connection with his home parish of Knowle, he had successfully completed his apprenticeship and followed the trade of button maker.⁴⁰

Parish apprenticeship records from the sample parishes in Worcestershire and Staffordshire have revealed that there were few placements in Birmingham for pauper children from these areas. Less than 3% of children from the Worcestershire sample and 6.5% of children from the Staffordshire sample were bound to Birmingham masters.⁴¹ At the same time, parishes also did not appear to have any access to apprenticeships in important local industries within their respective counties. Worcestershire was a predominantly agricultural county, with glove making and porcelain industries in the county town, whereas Staffordshire was the centre of the pottery industry. However, none of the parish apprentices from the sample were apprenticed into either glove making or the pottery industry. A majority of children from the Worcestershire parishes were apprenticed into agriculture: approximately 80% of the 898 children from the three sample parishes were bound into husbandry or housewifery.⁴² Additionally, Alvechurch placed 26 children in crafts and trades and Bromsgrove found places for 78 children, typically in trades related to agriculture or the traditional metal industries of north Worcestershire and south Staffordshire. For example, Joseph Shepherd was apprenticed as a blacksmith in Alvechurch; Mary Warren of Alvechurch was apprenticed as a needle maker in Redditch; Mary Layton and Francis Moreton of Bromsgrove were apprenticed as nailors; Elizabeth Hunt, Martha Kings and Ann Taylor were apprenticed as needle makers in Bromsgrove, Redditch and Tardebigg.⁴³ In the early nineteenth century parish apprentices from Worcestershire were also placed in mining and carpet weaving: Joseph Tilt and James Reynolds were apprenticed as miners in Darlaston, Staffordshire in 1811; Sarah and

⁴⁰ WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

⁴¹ WoCRO, 5498/9, Parish Apprenticeships, Alvechurch; WoCRO 9135/38-41, Bromsgrove; BAH, EP/157, Northfield; SCRO, D4383/6/5, Wednesbury; D3773/5/1059-1251, Tamworth.

⁴² WoCRO, 5498/9, Alvechurch; WoCRO 9135/38-41, Bromsgrove; BAH, EP/157, Northfield.

⁴³ WoCRO, 5498/9, Alvechurch; WoCRO 9135/38-41, Bromsgrove.

Susannah Lee became bombazine weavers and John Lamsdale a carpet weaver in Kidderminster.⁴⁴

Children from Worcestershire parishes bound to Birmingham masters entered a variety of trades, such as gimlet maker, bellows maker, hairdresser and peruke maker, locksmith, wood turner and horn button maker.⁴⁵ Northfield parish, only six miles from Birmingham, apprenticed almost 70% of its pauper children in agriculture; of the remainder, 10 boys became apprenticed as miners in the south Staffordshire towns of Dudley and Tipton, and 38 children went into crafts and trades.⁴⁶ The 15 children who were apprenticed in Birmingham included: George Folley, an apprentice hardwood turner; Edward Walker, a brush maker; William Faulkner, a brass founder; and Samuel Southall, a tailor. The last two parish boys from Northfield to be apprenticed in Birmingham were Joseph Evetts, aged 10, apprenticed in 1819 to a pearl button maker, and Benjamin Haycock, aged 15, apprenticed in 1820 to a pump maker.⁴⁷ The Staffordshire parish of Harborne, close to Birmingham at a distance of just three miles, also found few opportunities for its parish apprentices. Only 12 children from Harborne were bound to Birmingham masters over a period of 60 years between 1750 and 1810.⁴⁸

In contrast to Worcestershire, the Staffordshire sample parishes were more likely to bind pauper children in crafts and trades rather than in agriculture. The parish of Tamworth, for example, apprenticed 128 children in crafts and trades but only 21 children in agriculture.⁴⁹ Boys were most likely to be found in metal trades such as buckle maker, brass-cock maker, locksmith, gunlock filer, steel-trap maker and cabinet lock maker. These bindings were frequently with tradesmen in the small industrial towns and villages

⁴⁴ WoCRO, 5498/9, Alvechurch; WoCRO 9135/38-41, Bromsgrove.

⁴⁵ WoCRO, 5498/9, Alvechurch; WoCRO 9135/38-41; Bromsgrove; BAH, EP/157, Northfield.

⁴⁶ BAH, EP/157, Parish Apprenticeships, Northfield.

⁴⁷ BAH, EP/157, Parish Apprenticeships, Northfield.

⁴⁸ BAH, EP/61/7/8, Parish Apprenticeships, Harborne.

⁴⁹ SCRO, D3773/5/1059-1251, Parish Apprenticeships, Tamworth.

of south Staffordshire. Girls from Tamworth were bound either in housewifery or to silk ribbon weaving and cotton mills. From the 13 Tamworth children apprenticed in Birmingham, William Walters was bound to a wiredrawer, Thomas Doves to a hatter, William Arnold to a button maker and John Fenton to a buckle chape maker. Some of the girls were also apprenticed in trades: Sarah Pigford was a leather clog maker in Birmingham and Anne Capewell a steel-blade grinder.⁵⁰

Children from the Staffordshire parish of Wednesbury were the least likely to be found placements in Birmingham: only four children from a total of 224 parish apprentices over the period from 1750 to 1834. These four children were: Elizabeth Hall and Ann Whitall, apprenticed in housewifery to Birmingham tradesmen; William Robinson to a Birmingham gun finisher and John Stokes to a button castor.⁵¹ A majority of the boys from Wednesbury were apprenticed to trades in south Staffordshire towns, particularly in metal trades such as gun finishing, gunlock filing or brass lock making. A further 32 boys from Wednesbury were apprenticed in coal mining, many at the age of just seven or eight, reflecting the proximity of the south Staffordshire coalfields. Girls from Wednesbury were typically apprenticed in housewifery to tradesmen rather than farmers, suggesting they were expected to combine domestic service with assistance in the workshop business of the master. For example, in 1798 Mary Foster was apprenticed in housewifery to a gunlock filer and Mary Holland in housewifery to a box-lock maker in Wednesbury.⁵²

The wide range of occupations children were bound into suggests overseers found places for pauper children as and where they could be obtained. Parish apprenticeships were frequently in low-paid occupations, such as husbandry and housewifery. Apprenticeships in crafts and trades were invariably linked to local industries, such as nail making and needle making in north Worcestershire and lock making and coal mining in

⁵⁰ SCRO, D3773/5/1059-1251, Parish Apprenticeships, Tamworth.

⁵¹ SCRO, D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury.

⁵² SCRO, D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury.

south Staffordshire. The relatively small number of parish children sent to Birmingham indicates that few opportunities were available for pauper apprenticeships in the town, despite the rapid expansion of industry. A number of explanations might be offered for this situation: firstly, that Birmingham's fame as the 'town of a thousand trades' meant that its industries comprised numerous small manufactories and workshops. There were few establishments employing large numbers of workers such as were found in the textile towns. Secondly, the Birmingham men engaged in metal industries were skilled and well-paid tradesmen who would have had little problem in obtaining older boys or girls locally as apprentices or assistants, and often employed family members. Thirdly, the Birmingham industries which did employ young children, such as the pin industry, also found sufficient child workers from the local population and so did not resort to bringing parish apprentices from other areas. The Birmingham pin industry will be discussed further in later chapters. In view of this diversity of occupations and the small number of parish apprentices employed in each trade, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this evidence about changes in Birmingham occupations over time. Levene found that 76% of London bindings were in manufacturing industries, including both traditional and developing sectors of the economy.⁵³ A breakdown of parish apprentices in Birmingham shown in Appendix 1 reveals that 90.5% were employed in trades and crafts. Only very small numbers were found in the other categories of domestic service, building and retail trades. When children apprenticed to cordwainers, tailors, mantua makers and peruke makers are excluded, 71% of the Birmingham apprenticeships were in metal or wood trades.

Gender differences in child labour

The discussion so far has highlighted some of the gender differences in employment for parish boys and girls. Katrina Honeyman argues that gender differences between child

⁵³ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 927-931.

workers have been inadequately explored by historians.⁵⁴ Honeyman’s study focuses largely on parish apprenticeship in textile industries, whereas this study sheds light on trade and craft apprenticeships. One point to note is that girls were mainly apprenticed in ‘housewifery’ but this general term could have different meanings for the girl concerned. Whereas boys apprenticed in husbandry became agricultural workers, girls were apprenticed in housewifery in both agricultural and non-agricultural settings. In the agricultural county of Worcestershire, 80% of the children were bound in husbandry or housewifery to local husbandmen and farmers (see table 2.5).

Table 2.5 Apprentices occupations by gender – three Worcestershire Parishes⁵⁵

Occupation	Number of boys	Number of Girls
Agriculture		
Husbandry/Housewifery	400	319
Trades and Crafts	137	14
Textile Factories		1
Mining	24	
Domestic Service		4

Where girls were apprenticed in a trade, this was specifically stated on the apprenticeship certificate: Mary Mills of Alvechurch was apprenticed as a maidservant in 1773, Harriet Francis of Alvechurch as a needle maker and Sarah Wardle as a nailor in 1807. Girls from Alvechurch and Bromsgrove were less likely than boys to be apprenticed away from their home parish and only two girls were placed in Birmingham, including Sarah Webb, who was apprenticed to her step-father, indicating the importance of family connections.⁵⁶ Girls from the Worcestershire parish of Northfield, six miles from Birmingham, were apprenticed in housewifery to yeoman farmers in Northfield, Kings

⁵⁴ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 151.

⁵⁵ WoCRO, 5498/9, Parish Apprenticeships, Alvechurch; WoCRO 9135/38-41, Bromsgrove.

⁵⁶ WoCRO, 5498/9, Parish Apprenticeships, Alvechurch; WoCRO 9135/38-41, Bromsgrove.

Norton or Halesowen until as late as 1821. One girl from Northfield, nine-year old Sarah Hollis, was apprenticed in the trade of nailing at the same time as her eight-year old brother, William Hollis.⁵⁷ None of the girls from Northfield were placed in Birmingham, although 15 of the Northfield boys were placed in various Birmingham trades including gun barrel grinder, cordwainer and bricklayer.⁵⁸

The Staffordshire parish of Wednesbury apprenticed 100 girls in total, including 87 girls bound in 'housewifery', most often to tradesmen.⁵⁹ For example, Agnes Brown was apprenticed in housewifery to a gunlock filer in Wednesbury and Jane Bushell apprenticed in housewifery to a shopkeeper in Wednesbury. Eight of the girls from Wednesbury were sent to work in cotton mills and two girls became ribbon weavers. In a more unusual example, Mary Hale of Wednesbury was apprenticed in 1803 'in the art of pipe making'.⁶⁰ Unlike the girls, none of the 124 boys from Wednesbury parish were bound to cotton mills or textile industries; they were typically apprenticed in metal trades such as gunlock filing or brass lock making, and a number of boys were bound to coal miners in south Staffordshire.⁶¹ The Staffordshire parish of Tamworth apprenticed 126 boys compared to 45 girls over this period. Boys were bound into trades such as buckle-making in Walsall, ribbon weaving in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, and linen weaving in Tamworth. Amongst the girls, 10 girls were despatched to the Staffordshire cotton mills, 17 were apprenticed in housewifery and 18 girls were bound to trades such as ribbon weaving in Warwickshire or Leicestershire (see table 2.6 below).⁶²

⁵⁷ BAH, EP14/157, Parish Apprenticeships, Northfield.

⁵⁸ BAH, EP14/157, Parish Apprenticeships, Northfield.

⁵⁹ SCRO, D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury.

⁶⁰ SCRO, D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury.

⁶¹ SCRO, D4383/6/5, Parish Apprenticeships, Wednesbury.

⁶² SCRO, D3773/5/1059-1251, Parish Apprenticeships, Tamworth.

Table 2.6 Apprentices occupations by gender – three Staffordshire Parishes⁶³

Occupation	Number of boys	Number of Girls
Agriculture		
Husbandry/Housewifery	26	115
Trades and Crafts	220	25
Textile Factories	2	18
Mining	37	
Domestic Service		1

Although the parish of Harborne was just three miles from Birmingham, only three of the 13 female parish apprentices were placed in the town: Elizabeth Pritchett was apprenticed in housewifery to a Birmingham gun barrel forger in 1753; Sarah Osbourn apprenticed in housewifery to a buckle maker in 1781; and Mary Smith apprenticed in housewifery to a button maker in 1785.⁶⁴ Some Harborne girls were apprenticed in housewifery to farmers, others in trades such as mantua making or needle making. Boys from Harborne were more likely to be placed in Birmingham trades such as cordwainer, brass founder and spectacle frame maker. However, boys were also apprenticed to a wide range of trades in other local areas: Thomas Darby as a gardener in Rowley Regis; Samuel Thompson as a ram rod maker in Halesowen.⁶⁵

From the Warwickshire parish of Knowle, 35 children were bound to Birmingham masters; these were all boys with the exception of Sarah Bentley who was bound to a relative, Martha Bentley, a milliner and mantua maker.⁶⁶ Coleshill found apprenticeships for 80 of its poor children in Birmingham, including seven girls. Four of the girls were apprenticed in housewifery, one as a button burnisher, one as a mantua maker, and one a 'steale piercer'. The Warwickshire parish of Tanworth in Arden apprenticed 63 boys and

⁶³ BAH, EP14/157; SCRO, D4383/6/5; SCRO, D3773/5/1059-1251, Parish Apprenticeships.

⁶⁴ BAH, EP/61/7/8, Parish Apprenticeships, Harborne.

⁶⁵ BAH, EP/61/7/8, Parish Apprenticeships, Harborne.

⁶⁶ WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

six girls in Birmingham, including Phebe Hunt as a button shanker; Mary Hodgkins, as a watch-chain maker; and Hannah Mills, as a fish-hook maker.⁶⁷ The three Warwickshire parishes apprenticed a total of 184 children to Birmingham masters, but only 14 girls were apprenticed.

Table 2.7 Apprentices occupations by gender – three Warwickshire Parishes⁶⁸

Occupation	Number of boys	Number of Girls
Agriculture		
Husbandry/Housewifery	125	129
Trades and Crafts	345	55
Textile Factories		18
Mining	2	
Domestic Service		8

The parishes of Coleshill and Knowle apprenticed far fewer girls than boys, perhaps because they did not formally bind children in agricultural roles. Coleshill apprenticed 168 boys and 48 girls over the period, whereas Knowle apprenticed 80 boys and five girls. In contrast, the parish of Tanworth in Arden apprenticed almost equal numbers of boys and girls in agriculture: 122 boys in husbandry and 119 girls in housewifery. However, in trades and crafts they placed 97 boys and 37 girls.⁶⁹ These differing rates of apprenticeship suggest there were few trades open to girls in Warwickshire. Furthermore, it appears that, unlike Worcestershire, overseers in Warwickshire were less willing to bind girls in ‘rougher’ industries such as nail making and needle making.

Honeyman suggests the parish apprenticeship system offered more opportunities for girls than the private system of apprenticeship, since parish officials were anxious to

⁶⁷ WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

⁶⁸ WCRO, DRB0100/107-109; DRB0019/83-89; DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships.

⁶⁹ WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

remove pauper children from the parish as early as possible.⁷⁰ Even so, parish girls were offered fewer training opportunities than boys, being largely confined to textiles and service trades. According to Honeyman, there is no evidence to show that parishes were more protective of girls because no examples exist of girls being prevented from being sent to distant textile mills.⁷¹ The findings of this study support the view that fewer opportunities were open to girls, but the small number of girls apprenticed suggests that parishes prioritised the training and future economic self-sufficiency of boys. It appears that where no suitable local placements were available, girls from Warwickshire parishes were not necessarily despatched to the textile mills. Only 18 girls from Warwickshire were bound to cotton mills, suggesting that factory employment was not generally considered as a suitable option, despite the nearby presence of cotton mills at Warwick and in Staffordshire. Interestingly, the cotton mill at Emscote near Warwick advertised for parish apprentices in local newspapers at Coventry, Warwick and Oxford, but the advertisements did not appear in the Birmingham newspapers.⁷²

Levene's study found 75.9% of boys and 76.8% of girls recorded in the London parish apprenticeship registers were employed in the manufacturing sector, in both traditional and factory settings.⁷³ By comparison, 69.2% of boys and 34.9% of girls from the Warwickshire parishes were apprenticed in manufacturing trades. The variation by gender in the types and locations of parish bindings was thus closely linked to local parish networks and the attitudes of parish overseers towards child labour. Furthermore, the relative absence of girls from parish apprenticeship registers may be explained by the practice of placing pauper children into service within the parish rather than formal

⁷⁰ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 152.

⁷¹ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 152.

⁷² Joan Lane, 'Apprenticeship in Warwickshire Cotton Mills, 1790-1830', *Textile History* 10 (1979):162.

⁷³ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 928.

apprenticeship.⁷⁴ As Peter Jones points out, from the end of the eighteenth century onwards parishes frequently placed children in service, even agreeing to provide clothing for children already in service, in their anxiety to keep control of the spiralling poor rate.⁷⁵ It seems likely, therefore, that girls from pauper families who do not appear as parish apprentices were removed from parish responsibility by being placed in service with local farmers and land-owners.

Age of starting work

This section considers the question of pauper children's age of starting work and whether this age increased or decreased over time for children apprenticed in Birmingham. The average age of binding parish children can also indicate attitudes of parish overseers towards child labour, as well as attitudes of the masters willing to take on parish apprentices.⁷⁶ The practice of apprenticing children at a very young age suggests that child workers were profitable for the masters, and that passing on responsibility for the child to another parish was the most important consideration for the parish of origin. Levene's study of 3,285 London parish apprentices found the average age of binding was 12 years for boys and 12.5 years for girls. There was a sustained lowering of ages in the 1790s and 1800s when the average age fell below 12 years.⁷⁷ Honeyman found children were bound to textile mills at a variety of ages, with many ten years or younger, reinforcing the perception that mills employed younger children.⁷⁸ In contrast, the parish apprentices at the Warwick cotton mill were generally much older when bound, ranging from 12 years to 17 years. These children were all girls and recruited from rural parishes within 20 miles of the mill. Benjamin Smart's advertisement in the *Oxford Journal* of 1812

⁷⁴ Peter M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, technology and culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 38-39.

⁷⁵ Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, 40.

⁷⁶ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 919.

⁷⁷ Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 924.

⁷⁸ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 45-47.

addressed to ‘Overseers of the Poor’ specified his requirement for ‘active healthy girls about 14 years of age’.⁷⁹ The age of starting work for children from the sample parishes apprenticed in Birmingham was indicated on 193 certificates. From these, 23 children (12%) were between the ages of seven and nine years, bound into trades such as cordwainer, gun-barrel borer, domestic service or pin/wireworker.⁸⁰ A majority of children sent to Birmingham were at least 10 years old and 45% were apprenticed at 13 years or more. This evidence indicates Birmingham industries did not generally engage very young parish apprentices. Moreover, it shows a marked preference by Birmingham masters for older child workers, who were not only more competent but could be properly trained.

It has been suggested above that Warwickshire parish overseers focused on finding suitable apprenticeships for boys rather than girls. Warwickshire pauper apprenticeship bindings in Birmingham increased in number between 1790 and 1810, with an average age of 11 to 12 years as shown in table 2.8.

Table 2.8 Children apprenticed in Birmingham by three Warwickshire Parishes⁸¹

Years	Number to Birmingham	Average Age	% of all parish children
1750-59	9		19%
1760-69	7		11%
1770-79	20	11.5	22%
1780-89	16	12.1	16%
1790-99	34	12.1	39%
1800-09	46	11.6	25%
1810-19	21	12.3	40%
1820-29	22	13.2	56%
1830-1835	9	12.6	53%

⁷⁹ Lane, ‘Apprenticeship in Warwickshire Cotton Mills’, 164.

⁸⁰ WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden.

⁸¹ WCRO, DRB0019/83-89, Parish Apprenticeships, Tanworth in Arden; WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Coleshill; WCRO, DRB0056/143-144., Knowle.

However, there were differences between the parishes: whereas Tanworth in Arden apprenticed some children at a younger age, children bound to Birmingham masters from the parish of Coleshill tended to be older. During the 1790s for example, John Crockett of Coleshill was bound at 14 years old as a tailor, John Boden at 14 years old as a Joiner and Cabinetmaker, Joseph Phillips was bound in 1800 as a gun and pistol stock finisher at the age of 14, and Thomas Lyndon at the age of 13 years as a file cutter.⁸² These examples show there were variations not only in the location and type of parish apprenticeship, but also in the age that children started work. The pauper child's experience of early work and future employment prospects may therefore have depended on the networking ability of parish overseers and their attitudes towards child labour. The records of the parish of Knowle offer additional insights as discussed below.

The experiences of pauper children – case studies from Knowle, Warwickshire

What were the particular social and economic circumstances that resulted in children's removal from their families? The accounts and financial records for the Warwickshire parish of Knowle prove a valuable source by revealing that families of parish apprentices were recipients of regular assistance during times of hardship in the form of cash payments, fuel, clothing and shoes.⁸³ However, the surviving records are limited by an absence of information about parish apprentices following binding or the reasons for a family's financial difficulties. For example, Thomas Shakespear was apprenticed in 1764, at the age of 11, to a curry comb maker in Birmingham, but after his removal his family continued to receive support from the Poor Law overseers in Knowle.⁸⁴ Cash payments of between 6d and 1s 0d were made to the family on 22 different occasions between April

⁸² WCRO, DRB0100/107-109, Parish Apprenticeships, Coleshill.

⁸³ WCRO, DRB0056/137, Overseers Accounts, Parish of Knowle, 1764-1766.

⁸⁴ WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

1765 and April 1766, as well as 2s 4d for 'shoes for Shakespear's Girl'; 8s 4d for coals; and 12s 7d for '11 yards of cloth' as shown in table 2.9.⁸⁵

Table 2.9 Payments to Shakespear family by Knowle Overseers, 1765-1774

Date	Record of payment	Amount
12 Nov 1765	Gave Eliz. Shakespear	1s 0d
24-Nov	Gave Eliz. Shakespear	6d
28-Nov	Gave Eliz. Shakespear	1s 0d
05-Dec	Paid for shoes for Shakespears Girl	2s 4d
07-Dec	Gave Betty Shakespear	1s 0d
14-Dec	Gave Shakespear 6t of coals	5s 0d
2 Jan 1766	Gave Shakespears wife	1s 0d
05-Jan	Gave her	1s 0d
07-Jan	Gave Thomas Shakespear	6d
12-Jan	Gave Thomas Shakespear	6d
13-Jan	Gave Thomas Shakespear	6d
17-Jan	Gave Thomas Shakespear	1s 0d
19-Jan	Paid for 4t of Coals for Shakespear	3s 4d
21-Jan	Gave him	1s 0d
21-Jan	Gave him	6d
26-Jan	Gave Betty Shakespear	1s 0d
29-Jan	Gave Thos Shakespear	6d
04-Feb	Gave him	6d
06-Feb	Gave Thos Shakespear	6d
08-Feb	Gave Shakespear	1s 0d
13-Feb	Gave Shakespear	1s 0d
17-Feb	Gave Shakespear	1s 0d
19-Feb	Gave Shakespear	6d
22-Feb	Gave Shakespear	1s 0d
02-Mar	Gave Shakespear	1s 0d
03-Mar	For 11 yards of Cloth for Shakespear's	12s 7d
13 Nov 1766	For a pair of shoes for Shakespear's Child	2s 0d
Apr 1767	Gave Thomas Shakespear at several times in his need	£1 18s 2d
Apr 1770	Gave Thomas Shakespear when his Family had the Smallpox	8s 0d
Apr 1770	For a Coffin for Shakespear's Child	7s 0d
March 1774	Gave Elizabeth Shakespear at several times when her husband was in prison	£3 6s 6d

⁸⁵ WCRO, DRB0056/137, Overseers Accounts, Parish of Knowle, 1764-1766.

Regular payments were also made to the Bayliss family of Knowle: amounts of between 6d and 2s 0d were provided on 15 occasions from 1765 to 1766, in addition to 3s 0d ‘for a Pair of Shoes for Bayliss’s son’ and 7s 4d ‘for clothes for Bayliss’s son’ as shown in table 2.10.⁸⁶ The frequency of parish assistance to these families suggests they were in dire financial straits, forced to repeatedly turn to the Poor Law overseers for help to support their children. John Bayliss was apprenticed by the overseers in 1766 to a Coventry weaver at the age of 13, and his brother Isaac was apprenticed the following year to a Birmingham toymaker.⁸⁷

Table 2.10 Payments to Bayliss family by Knowle Overseers, 1765-1767

Date	Record of payment	Amount
1765	Gave Jacob Bayliss	1s 0d
1765	Gave Bayliss's Children	6d
1765	Gave Jacob Bayliss	2s 0d
1765	Gave his children	6d
1765	Gave them	1s 6d
1765	Gave Bayliss's Children	1s 6d
1765	Gave Bayliss's Children	1s 0d
1765	Gave Bayliss's Children	1s 0d
1765	Gave Jacob Bayliss	2s 0d
1765	Gave his children	1s od
1765	Gave his children	1s 6d
1765	Gave his children	2s 0d
1765	Gave his children	1s 0d
1765	Gave his children	1s 0d
1765	Gave his children	1s 0d
1765	Paid for a Pair of Shoes for Bayliss's Son	3s 0d
1765	To Mr Boston for Clothes for Bayliss's Son	7s 4d
1767 - 1768	To Isaac Bayliss 16 weeks at 3s 0d	£2 8s 0d
6 Aug 1767	For going to Birmingham to agree with a Master for Isaac Bayliss	2s 6d
6 Aug 1767	Spent when he was bound Apprentice	6d
6 Aug 1767	Paid for part of his Indentures	3s 0d
6 Aug 1767	For marking the register for his age	6d
6 Aug 1767	For 2 Shirts and Stockings for him	8s 4d
12 Dec 1767	For a Coffin for Bayliss's Child	2s 0d

⁸⁶ WCRO, DRB0056/137, Overseers Accounts, Parish of Knowle, 1764-1766.

⁸⁷ WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

Pauper letters to Poor Law overseers in England requesting relief were frequently centred on the parents' inability to find work and thus support their children.⁸⁸ Joanne Bailey points out that these requests tended to emphasize the temporary nature of difficulties and petitioners were anxious to be perceived as hard working and industrious. Paupers were well aware of the need to present themselves as deserving of relief and not examples of the idle poor. A similar analysis of pauper letters to overseers in Berkshire and Hampshire by Peter D. Jones found that requests for clothing and issues around clothing were as important as problems relating to illness and ill-health. Such letters frequently emphasized their extreme economic distress through terms such as 'nakedness' due to lack of decent clothing, thus placing a moral obligation on the parish to restore them to a state of 'decency'.⁸⁹ The numerous payments made to the Shakespear and Bayliss families by the Knowle overseers indicates these families were in severe distress during the 1760s, forcing them into the position of making repeated pleas for parish assistance. In order to hold down the parish rates and encourage economic independence, parish overseers would undoubtedly have been anxious to secure apprenticeships for those children old enough to be bound.

Although mothers were expected to contribute financially in providing for their families, the low wages paid to women meant this was very difficult without a male earner.⁹⁰ Women who were widowed with young children invariably needed to rely on the parish for support. 'Widow Bentley's' daughter, 10-year-old Sarah Bentley, was apprenticed in 1806 to a relative, Martha Bentley of Aston, Birmingham as a milliner and mantua maker.⁹¹ The Knowle overseers made two journeys to Birmingham at a cost of 6s 0d to arrange the formalities, paying a fee of £3 3s 0d to Martha Bentley and 8s 0d for the

⁸⁸ Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830, Emotion, Identity & Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

⁸⁹ Peter D. Jones, "I cannot keep my place without being deascent': Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750-1830," *Rural History* 20 (2009):32-35.

⁹⁰ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 9.

⁹¹ WCRO, DRB0056/137, Overseers Accounts, Parish of Knowle, 1764-1766.

apprenticeship indentures to be signed and completed. Sarah's mother, perhaps with younger children to care for, remained in the parish and was still receiving a weekly payment of 4s 0d in 1811.⁹² Another Knowle widow, 'Widow Gumley', was receiving a sum of 5s 0d weekly in 1811, but the amount was reduced to 2s 6d following the apprenticing of her two young sons. John Gumley, aged 10, was apprenticed to a brass founder in Birmingham, and Matthew Gumley, aged 13, to a clock maker in Aston.⁹³ As these cases illustrate, the absence or loss of a father, through early death, desertion or imprisonment was clearly a common experience for many parish apprentices and particularly for those children who started work at a young age.

In view of the extreme difficulties these children experienced in early life, questions arise about what may have happened to parish apprentices in later life. How did children from Knowle who were parish apprentices in Birmingham fare as adults, and is it possible to trace any of them? Children apprenticed from 1810 onwards were those most likely to appear in the later census records. The apprenticeship records show that Knowle overseers apprenticed eight children in Birmingham between 1810 and 1833, and five of these have been successfully traced in the census records. Matthew Gumley, who was apprenticed to a clock maker, died in 1840 at the age of 41, and there is no record of a wife or children. His younger brother, John Gumley, appears to have been more fortunate, despite starting work in a brass foundry at the age of 10. The 1851 census shows that at the age of 50, John Gumley was living in Birmingham and employed in the trade of a brass founder. He was married and had two sons living at home, John, aged 27 and Henry, aged 14, both also recorded as brass founders, perhaps working with their father.⁹⁴ William Bayliss was apprenticed in 1817 by the Knowle overseers to a relative, Isaac Bayliss, a cordwainer of Aston in Birmingham. The census returns of 1841 and 1851 show that William Bayliss remained in Aston, working at the trade of shoemaker,

⁹² WCRO, DRB0056/137, Overseers Accounts, Parish of Knowle, 1764-1766.

⁹³ WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

⁹⁴ Census of England and Wales 1851.

and was married with six children.⁹⁵ These two cases suggest that the opportunity to train for a trade had enabled these former parish apprentices to overcome the initial disadvantages of an impoverished childhood, however, the extent to which their living standards improved remains unclear.

In two further examples, boys from Knowle who had been apprenticed in Birmingham returned as adults to live in their home parish. Firstly, Daniel Dyke was apprenticed by the parish as a cordwainer in Birmingham and continued in this occupation as an adult.⁹⁶ He had left Birmingham for Knowle by 1841, along with his wife Sophia and children. In 1851 Daniel was working as a cordwainer in the village of Knowle, residing with his wife and six children. His two eldest sons, George aged 15 and Samuel, aged 13, were working as brick-yard labourers, and a third son, 11 year-old Charles Dyke, was a farmer's labourer. It seems likely that Daniel's family were living on the edge of poverty, but managing to stay together with contributions from the three eldest children's work to the family income. In the second case, William Bant, was bound as a parish apprentice to a plumber and glazier in Aston in 1833. At the end of his apprenticeship in 1840, it appears that William married his wife Elizabeth and, like Daniel Dyke, returned to live in his home village of Knowle. His two children, William Henry and Eliza were both born in Knowle, but by 1851 the family had moved back to Aston where William worked as a plumber and glazier. William continued in this trade in 1861, his wife worked as a laundress, his son worked as a nail caster and his daughter was a spectacle maker.⁹⁷ The former parish apprentices in these examples were successfully employed with their own families. Nevertheless, it seems that in order to survive, many working families needed wives and older children to work to provide additional income. For three of these four families, Birmingham provided greater opportunities for than rural Warwickshire.

⁹⁵ Census of England and Wales, 1841 and 1851.

⁹⁶ WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Parish Apprenticeships, Knowle.

⁹⁷ Census of England and Wales 1841, 1851, 1861.

Conclusion

Parish apprentices were a major source of child labour under the old Poor Law.⁹⁸ In a period of social and economic transition, many parishes sought to reduce the demands on poor relief by off-loading parish apprentices to textile mills, coal mines and traditional craft industries. As a rapidly expanding industrial town, Birmingham may have been expected to attract parish apprentices from surrounding towns and villages in Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire. However, the research findings in this chapter found very few children were apprenticed in Birmingham from neighbouring areas, even from parishes such as Harborne, only three miles from Birmingham. Children from Worcestershire parishes were largely apprenticed in husbandry and housewifery, with a smaller number bound into traditional north Worcestershire trades of nailing and needle making. Parish apprentices from Staffordshire remained mostly within the county as placements were found in small industrial villages and mines in the south of the county and textile mills close to Tamworth.

Children from Warwickshire were more likely to be apprenticed to Birmingham masters, but they were equally likely to be apprenticed in other towns such as Coventry, Wolverhampton or Walsall. As such, these findings demonstrate that where employment opportunities were available, parish apprentices were most likely to be bound in local areas and in occupations traditional to the locality. Many children were apprenticed in their home parish or a nearby parish, with little evidence of children being sent to distant locations. The ability of parish overseers to maintain links with local sectors of the economy was thus of crucial importance. Furthermore, the research findings indicate that Birmingham craftsmen and small manufacturers did not welcome pauper apprentices,

⁹⁸ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*; Honeyman, *Child Workers*; Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship'.

possibly because they found a ready supply of child workers and older non-parish apprentices within the Birmingham population.

The parish children apprenticed to Birmingham masters were overwhelmingly employed in trades and crafts: 71% of parish apprentices in Birmingham were engaged in metal and wood trades; and a further 20% in cordwaining, tailoring and mantua making (see Appendix 1). The emphasis on metal trades such toy making, buckle making, gun finishing and button making reflects the wide range of Birmingham metal industries, but offered very few opportunities for girls. An important point to note is that girls were typically bound in 'housewifery' but the meaning of this could vary depending on the occupation of the master. Housewifery might involve agricultural and domestic duties or it could involve assisting a nailer or brass-lock maker. Some girls were apprenticed to cotton mills in Staffordshire or ribbon weaving in north Warwickshire, but these tended to be in the local area. In some parishes, such as Knowle, very few girls were apprenticed at all. Parish overseers were clearly concerned with finding a suitable apprenticeship for boys, especially in crafts and trades, but were more likely to place girls in housewifery or domestic service.

The attitudes of parish overseers towards pauper children and child labour thus reflected wider perceptions of the poor and gendered roles in society. It was important for boys to learn the habits of work and a trade in order to become economically independent, a future provider for his family rather than dependent on the Poor Law. Girls were trained in domestic duties and the habits of work in order to enable them to contribute to family incomes, in addition to raising children. By apprenticing children from pauper families, parishes were able to reduce the poor rate by investing in human capital through the training of a future workforce. The examples above suggest children who were apprenticed to masters in Birmingham tended to remain there as adults, obtaining employment not only for themselves but for their wives and children. The findings

presented in this chapter provide evidence of a lack of demand for parish apprentices in Birmingham, suggesting child workers were available in sufficient numbers without the legal, economic and social responsibilities entailed in formal apprenticeship agreements. This raises new questions about the numbers of non-apprenticed children working in Birmingham industries, their occupations, and the attitudes of parents towards children's work. These are issues to be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3

Birmingham Workhouse Children¹

Introduction

This chapter examines the treatment of pauper children in the Birmingham workhouse from the late eighteenth- to the mid-nineteenth century, exploring changes in attitudes towards child labour during this period. Birmingham adopted an innovative approach towards the twin problems of overcrowding in the workhouse and the rising cost of boarding out children at the end of the eighteenth century by establishing a separate children's institution in 1797. The Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor removed pauper children from the adult workhouse and put them to work in workshops on the same premises.² This type of purpose-built residential accommodation for children of the poor, combined with work or training for work, was not adopted in other areas of England until the 1840s when district or industrial schools such as the Kirkdale Industrial School in Liverpool were established.³ These Poor Law institutions followed the earlier example of schools of industry by providing traditional skills training for boys in agriculture, tailoring or shoemaking and for girls in sewing, knitting and domestic work.⁴ In contrast to the approach taken by proponents of the schools of industry, the Guardians of the Poor in Birmingham did not view pauper children as requiring education in traditional skills, but as an economic resource that could be utilised by training in the repetitive tasks of simple manufacturing processes. This pragmatic view of childhood and child labour in 1790s

¹ A version of this chapter has been published in *Family and Community History*, 20, 3 (2017).

² Mary Nejedly, 'Earning their Keep: Child Workers at the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor', *Family and Community History*, 20, 3 (2017): 206-217.

³ Patrick McCrory, 'Poor Law Education and the Urban Pauper Child: The Theory and Practice of the Urban District School, 1840-1896', in *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the History of Education Society of Great Britain*, ed. John Hurt, (Leicester, History of Education Society, 1980), 83-100.

⁴ Malcolm M. Dick, 'English Conservatives and Schools for the Poor c1780-1833' (PhD, University of Leicester, 1979)

Birmingham and the adjustment in attitudes that occurred over the next fifty years are the main themes of this chapter.

The minutes of meetings of the Birmingham Board of Guardians are a rich source for examining the perception of Poor Law officials towards the problems of overcrowding in the workhouse and the increasing cost of placing children with foster families in the countryside outside the industrial centre of the town. One obvious limitation of this source is that it presents only the official viewpoint recorded at meetings. The minutes of meetings cover the full period from inception of the Asylum for the Infant Poor until its closure in 1852, offering insights into the attitudes of guardians towards child labour during a period of rapid social and economic change.⁵ In addition, information from the census records has been used to track a number of the children resident in the asylum in 1851. The main focus of this chapter consists of a case study of the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor, addressing three principal research questions. Firstly, why did the Birmingham poor law guardians decide to establish an asylum for pauper children who were housed in the workhouse or boarded-out? Secondly, to what extent did work at the infant asylum differ from other institutions? Thirdly, how far did the attitudes of the guardians towards children and child labour in the asylum change over the period to 1852?

An asylum for pauper children

The problem of how to deal with increasing numbers of pauper children, either resident in the workhouse or placed with foster families in the countryside, became an urgent issue for the Birmingham Guardians of the Poor at the end of the eighteenth century as the town's population expanded. A meeting of the guardians in September 1795 recorded that Thomas Smallwood, a cabinet maker from Bull Street, had established a small

⁵ BAH, GP/B/2/1-5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1852.

manufactory for children at the workhouse. Smallwood informed the guardians of the reason for his actions as follows:

That there are in the workhouse thirty or forty children of the age of five years upwards unemployed and conceiving they cannot be too early initiated to habits of industry...they (could) be employed in the manufacturing of Laces.⁶

Smallwood added that approximately 30 children in the workhouse and a further ten children 'at nurse' in nearby Castle Bromwich had learnt to weave lace in the course of a few days. He suggested that whereas 100 Birmingham children aged five years and above were placed 'at nurse' with foster families in nearby parishes, it would be more cost effective to place them under one roof in a residential 'infant manufactory'. Such an establishment would house all pauper children from five years upwards in order: 'to habituate them to industry and to preserve their morals'. As a secondary objective, it was possible 'that their industry might be profitable'. Smallwood thus proposed that an infant manufactory might provide an income from the children's labour, whilst solving the problem of unruly children fostered in the countryside who, '...for want of some employment range about the fields and are frequently found committing some depredations...' ⁷

Taking up Smallwood's recommendations, the Guardians of the Poor built separate accommodation for pauper children at Summer Lane on the outskirts of the town, some distance away from the workhouse. A committee was formed to oversee the running of 'the new nursery', together with the appointment of a matron, a schoolmistress and two female servants. By October 1797, more than 200 children had been admitted to 'the nursery' and in the following year it was re-named the Asylum for the Infant Poor'.⁸ The use of the term 'asylum' indicates the guardians wished to present the new institution as a refuge or place of safety for pauper children, removing them from the undesirable

⁶ BAH, GP/B/2/1/1, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1806, September 1795.

⁷ BAH, GP/B/2/1/1, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1806, September 1795.

⁸ BAH, GP/B/2/1/1, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1806, October 1797.

influences of adults residing in the workhouse. They emphasised the therapeutic benefits of clean air provided by the institution's location on the edge of the town, similar to the reasons given for establishing county lunatic asylums in rural locations. These claims were made despite the reality that most of the children at the Asylum for the Infant Poor were destined to spend their days in workshops, labouring at pin-making or lace-making.⁹ When the asylum committee reported annual savings of more than £500 for the first year, in comparison to the cost of placing children with foster families, it seemed that the new institution had not only reduced overcrowding in the workhouse but also saved a considerable amount of poor law expenditure.¹⁰ Furthermore, it provided additional income from the children's labour and acted as a method of control for unruly children. From the guardian's point of view, the asylum was clearly a successful innovation.

An infant manufactory

The Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor was a distinctive institution in that its intention from the outset was to put children to work in manufacturing industries, rather than provide education and training in traditional craft skills. Children were expected to work for their keep in the asylum, earning their board and lodging from a very young age. Links were established in early 1796 with a local pin manufacturer for the employment of child workers, a year before the infant asylum opened. The guardians meeting of February 1796 recorded: '...the Manufacturing Committee have agreed with Mr Samuel Ryland for the use of twenty three children to be employed in the Pin Manufactory at the rate of one shilling per head per week each from the 22nd Inst...'¹¹ It was also agreed that employed children would not be removed or apprenticed for at least one month, ensuring some continuity of child labour. At the same meeting, the guardians decided to provide a Sunday school at the workhouse and appoint a tutor under the direction of the House

⁹ Nejedly, 'Earning their Keep', 209.

¹⁰ BAH, GP/B/2/1/1, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1806, October 1797.

¹¹ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, February 1796.

Committee. Through these combined activities, the Guardians of the Poor had set a timetable for pauper children in Birmingham to ensure they were fully occupied in manufacturing work during weekdays and with religious education on Sundays. This pattern of full-time directed work and education continued at the infant asylum into the nineteenth century: the Birmingham guardians thus ensured there was no opportunity for pauper children to be unoccupied or unruly at any time whilst under the control of the poor law authorities.¹²

The number of children resident in the asylum fluctuated from month to month and from year to year. In September 1813, there were 264 children resident in the asylum; 94 of these were employed, bringing an annual income from child labour of £288.¹³ By September 1817, the number of resident children had increased to 397, with 150 employed, resulting in an annual income from child labour of £566. October 1818 saw the number of children increased to 205 boys and 183 girls, a total of 388 residents. Amongst these children, around one-third (137) were orphans; a further 92 were fatherless, and 43 children were motherless.¹⁴ These statistics indicate that the loss of one or both parents was the primary reason for children's admittance to the infant asylum, rather than families who depended on poor relief. More than three-quarters of children resident in the asylum in 1818 were employed: 'in the Manufacture of Pins, Straw Platt and figuring British Lace',¹⁵ demonstrating the close links that existed with local businesses. A majority of the employed children were working at pin-making, the industry cited by Adam Smith as an example of increased productivity associated with the division of labour. There were 135 boys and 90 girls employed at making and carding pins for local firm, Phipson's Pin

¹² Nejedly, 'Earning their Keep', 208.

¹³ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, September 1813.

¹⁴ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, October 1818.

¹⁵ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, October 1818.

Manufactory. A further 55 girls worked 'in the straw platt business for Mr & Mrs Sharpe' and 20 girls 'in the British lace business for Mrs Ford'.¹⁶

The relationship between the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor and local businesses, especially pin manufacturing, contrasted with the philosophy underpinning the establishment of schools of industry in England at this time. Whereas the Birmingham asylum focused on preparing children for a lifetime of manual labour in workshops and manufactories, schools of industry were set up to teach children traditional occupations such as spinning, tailoring and weaving together with domestic skills for girls. These schools for children of the poor emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries along with Sunday schools and charitable institutions for vagrant and criminal children.¹⁷ A number of schools of industry were established by individual women philanthropists, such as Sarah Trimmer and Catherine Cappe, who were concerned about the perceived degeneration of morals, manners and traditional family values amongst the labouring poor. They attributed the breakdown of family life to the spread of industrialisation, especially the employment of women and young girls in manufactories and mills. A spinning school set up in York in 1783 by Catherine Cappe, was specifically aimed at removing girls from 'the evils of employment' in a local hemp manufactory.¹⁸ Cappe, the wife of a clergyman, believed that if girls could earn wages from spinning, they would also become educated in 'the habits of industry' and prepared for work in domestic service. Several similar schools of industry were set up around London, such as Sarah Trimmer's school in Brentford. Other schools were established in the provincial towns of Bath, Cheltenham, Ipswich, Kendal and Exeter, as well as in industrial towns such as Bolton, Leeds, Wakefield, and Wigan.¹⁹

¹⁶ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, October 1818.

¹⁷ Dick, 'English Conservatives and Schools for the Poor c1780-1833'.

¹⁸ Dick, 'English Conservatives', 194-195.

¹⁹ Dick, 'English Conservatives', 194-195.

Some schools of industry were supported by voluntary subscriptions and overseen by committees of ladies who visited regularly, such as the school at Kendal. Others were run by Poor Law authorities; for example, the King Street School of Industry in London. Girls were typically taught spinning, sewing, knitting and domestic tasks to prepare them for domestic service rather than factory work. Boys in rural schools learnt spinning, weaving and agricultural labour, whereas boys in towns were taught the crafts of tailoring and shoemaking.²⁰ The middle-classes viewed training for children of the poor in traditional occupations and domestic skills as an important way of avoiding the social disruption brought about by industrialisation.²¹ However, the high cost of materials and equipment required by schools of industry contributed to their decline by the 1830s and there is no evidence to suggest that these schools were able to profit from the children's labour or become self-financing as was the case at the infant asylum in Birmingham. Child labour for children from poor families was generally accepted as inevitable, but there were differences in attitudes towards its purpose and the type of work regarded as suitable for children. For supporters of the schools of industry, vocational training in traditional skills prepared children for a lifetime of labour yet avoided the degradation of industrial occupations, particularly for girls. On the other hand, the Birmingham Guardians of the Poor had no reservations about employing children in industry, since many of the guardians themselves were small-scale industrial manufacturers such as brass-founders or gunsmiths.²² An approval of industrial employment did not necessarily mean, however, that the guardians were opposed to changing ideologies about the benefits of educational provision for pauper children. Changes in attitudes over time are illustrated by amendments agreed by the Board of Guardians to the amount of time asylum children spent in the schoolroom as opposed to the workshops during the 1820s and 1830s.

²⁰ Dick, 'English Conservatives', 228-229.

²¹ Dick, 'English Conservatives', 305.

²² Nejedly, 'Earning their Keep', 209.

Concerns about education and health in the infant asylum

In response to concerns expressed by the Guardians of the Poor about children's educational progress, a school master and mistress were engaged by the infant asylum committee in 1822 to provide instruction in reading.²³ The number of resident children had risen to 389 by September 1826, yet at this point less than half the asylum children were employed in manufacturing occupations. Children engaged in pin-making had declined from 225 in 1818 to 73 by 1826, and the straw-plait trade had disappeared altogether from the list of occupations.²⁴ However, new processes such as bead-stringing, glass-cutting and the manufacture of small wire items had been introduced, reflecting further connections with local Birmingham industries. The reduction in pin-making at the infant asylum may have resulted from a lack of demand for child workers in the pin industry due to advances in mechanisation, or from an over-supply of available child labour.

Additional concerns about the asylum children's welfare emerged in the 1830s when attention became focused on the impact of work on children's health. The guardians were called to a special meeting in August 1836 'to discuss the state and management of the Asylum for the Infant Poor'.²⁵ Visitors from the asylum committee had noticed the 'general unhealthy appearance' of the children, especially the youngest, and parents had complained their children were ill-treated. An investigation found that children were being set to work at the age of seven for eight hours per day at pin-heading and lace-making: 'employments which do not qualify them for earning their subsistence after they quit the Asylum.'²⁶ The report added that the children's health and growth was harmed by such work, 'due to the positioning of the body'. It made three important

²³ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807-1826, October 1822.

²⁴ BAH, GP/B/2/1/3, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1826-1838, September 1826.

²⁵ BAH, GP/B/2/1/3, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1826-1838, August 1836.

²⁶ BAH, GP/B/2/1/3, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1826-1838, October 1836.

recommendations: the girls should be taught plain sewing and domestic work and boys should learn tailoring and shoemaking; children should not begin work before the age of nine and for no longer than six hours daily; and the amount of time spent in school should be increased.²⁷

These measures were based on the 1833 Factories Act, which prohibited children under the age of nine years from employment in textile mills and specified that employed children between the ages of nine and 13 in textile mills must be provided with at least two hours at school each day. The recommendations made in 1836 at the Birmingham infant asylum followed government legislation aimed at improving conditions of work for children in textile mills. The emphasis on craft skills for boys and domestic service skills for girls also mirrored the type of training in traditional roles promoted by the schools of industry. These recommendations thus reflected changing ideologies in society about the most appropriate forms of occupational training for pauper children. By 1837 girls at the asylum were no longer employed in lace-making but had taken up needlework and domestic duties, and notice had been given to employers that pin-making was to be discontinued. The asylum committee was thus able to report at the end of 1837 that most of the improvements suggested by the investigating committee had been implemented.²⁸ Nevertheless, boys continued to be employed at pin-heading for the next four years, suggesting the guardians may have been reluctant to withdraw child workers from the lucrative pin-making industry despite the need to make changes for the benefit of children's health. This failure to act quickly highlights the tensions between the guardians' duty towards the welfare of children under their care and their perceived duty to the Birmingham ratepayers.

²⁷ BAH, GP/B/2/1/3, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1826-1838, October 1836.

²⁸ BAH, GP/B/2/1/3, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1826-1838, December 1837.

Changes in attitudes towards child labour

Child labour at the infant asylum changed quite significantly over the five decades of its existence, reflecting changing attitudes in society towards childhood and child labour. John Locke's seventeenth-century theories of education and the poor law remained influential for much of the eighteenth century, including his view that parishes should provide 'working schools' for pauper children. This philosophy was shared by William Pitt, whose 1796 speech promoted the employment of children in manufacturing. Yet even at this time, attitudes towards children and work had already changed in some sectors of society. Published in English in 1763, Rousseau's *Emile* depicted children as innately good and innocent until corrupted by the outside world, a view that appealed to early opponents of child labour, such as Jonas Hanway and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.²⁹ Poets and artists of the Romantic Movement, who were inspired by the natural environment opposed industrialisation and exploitation of the labouring poor. The work of Coleridge and William Blake drew attention to the plight of children working as chimney-sweeps and in cotton mills in the late eighteenth century, adding weight to the idealisation of childhood and campaigns aimed at regulating children's employment. The belief that children needed to be protected during childhood continued to spread during the early nineteenth century, influencing the debates around child factory workers. These ongoing debates, political campaigns and the legislation passed between 1802 and 1833 aimed to reduce hours and improve working conditions for children.³⁰ The discourses around childhood and child labour clearly filtered through to the guardians in Birmingham, pushing them towards reforms.

²⁹ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 4; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 138-139.

³⁰ Eric Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed Working Class Children in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 74-77; Kathryn Gleadle 'We Will Have It: Children and Protest in the Ten Hours Movement', in *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914*, ed. Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 215-219.

Industrial schools and district schools

In contrast to the decision made by Birmingham in 1839 to close its separate residential establishment for pauper children and return them to the workhouse, other Poor Law Unions in the 1840s were opening residential industrial schools or combining to form district industrial schools. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 required Boards of Guardians to provide education in the workhouses, but for many guardians education was a low priority in comparison with other demands. Two influential members of the Poor Law Board, Edward Carleton Tufnell and James Kay-Shuttleworth, were avid proponents of residential schools for pauper children separate from the workhouse. Tufnell believed that pauperism was hereditary, that pauper parents raised their children to be paupers and thus dependent on the poor rate. In order to break the cycle of dependency, children needed to be separated from their families and from the workhouse environment.³¹ One notable example of this policy was the Bridgnorth Union's Farm School at Quatt in Shropshire, set up in 1845 in a house owned by William Whitmore, a Bridgnorth Guardian of the Poor. This rural school catered for around 80 children and provided training in agriculture for boys and domestic service for girls. As Whitmore wrote in his memoir, the school provided numerous long-term benefits for both the children and the ratepayers and also made a profit of approximately £67 per year, although profit was less significant than education and training: 'The question of profit, though of importance, is trifling when compared with the benefits derived, by the children immediately and the ratepayers ultimately, from the improved system of education'.³² The Farm School set up by the Bridgnorth Union in Shropshire thus provided a model system for training children in

³¹ R.J. Phillips, 'E.C Tufnell: Inspector of Poor Law Schools, 1847-1874', *Journal of the History of Education Society*, 5:3, (1976): 227-240.

³² William W. Whitmore, 'A memoir relating to the industrial school at Quatt, addressed to the rate-payers of the South East Shropshire District School', *LSE Selected Pamphlets*, (1894): 4.

traditional agricultural skills; its methods of educating pauper children for rural occupations became known as 'the Quatt System'.³³

The district industrial schools advocated by Kay-Shuttleworth and Tufnell were, however, more suited to urban areas than rural districts. Manchester and Liverpool were the first Poor Law authorities to build large residential schools accommodating up to 1,000 pauper children.³⁴ Liverpool's Kirkdale Industrial Schools were built in 1845 and provided skills in tailoring, shoe-making and carpentry for boys, as well as preparation for life at sea. Girls at the school were taught household skills, cooking, knitting and needlework to prepare for employment in domestic service. Manchester's Swinton Industrial Schools opened in 1846, as did the Leeds Moral and Industrial Training Schools. In London, three large district schools opened in 1849, and in the west midlands, the Walsall and West Bromwich unions joined together to set up the Wigmore Schools in 1869. Within a short time, overcrowding in the district schools (also known as 'barrack schools' because of the emphasis on regimentation) resulted in health problems and the rapid spread of contagious diseases amongst the children. In addition, the constant movement of children in and out of these schools disrupted the education and training provided, undermining potential levels of achievement.³⁵ In contrast to the 'certified' Industrial Schools and Reformatory Schools established after 1857, the children at Poor Law industrial and district schools were not committed to the school by a magistrate, but were free to leave according to their family situation.³⁶

A blueprint for industrial schools

By 1841 the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor provided what might be regarded

³³ BPP, 1855, XXVIII, *Eighth Annual Report of the Poor Law Board*, 59.

³⁴ McCrory, 'Poor Law Education', 83-99.

³⁵ McCrory, 'Poor Law Education', 83-99.

³⁶ Gillian Gear, *Industrial Schools in England, 1857-1933*, (PhD, University of London Institute of Education, 1999), 11.

as a blueprint or model for the district schools and industrial schools established during the mid-1840s in industrial Manchester and Liverpool, despite the fact that by this time the Birmingham institution had been earmarked for closure. In December 1841, the infant asylum accommodated 240 children: of these, 63 boys aged nine and above were employed at tailoring, shoemaking and knitting, earning a total of £38-8s-8d per week for the asylum in these traditional crafts. Shoemaking proved to be the most profitable occupation, bringing in £22-9s-2d per week. Girls of nine and above were engaged in unpaid domestic work within the asylum, possibly including the care of younger children, thus saving on staff wages.³⁷ By this time, children's labour in the infant asylum had changed in a number of ways.

Firstly, children below nine years, approximately 50% of the residents, were no longer expected to work. Secondly, for children over nine, gender differences in employment were more pronounced than previously as girls were restricted to unpaid domestic work within the asylum. Thirdly, employment for boys was no longer connected to local metal-working industries, but had been replaced with traditional crafts of tailoring and shoe making. Above all, children in the infant asylum were being trained for future work in 'respectable' traditional trades and roles, rather than working at repetitive manufacturing processes that might be more profitable for the institution. It seems possible this transition may have taken place with some reluctance on the part of the Poor Law guardians; nevertheless, by 1841 the infant asylum had evolved into an institution similar to the industrial or district schools later established in other industrial towns. This pattern of education and traditional training continued throughout the 1840s, although the majority of resident children were below the age threshold for work as shown in the table below.

³⁷ BAH, GP/B/2/1/4, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1838 to 1845, December 1841.

3.1 Children resident in the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor 1845-1847³⁸

	1845	1846	1847
Average number of children	356	325	293
Average weekly maintenance per head	1s/0d	1s/9d	n/r
Boys employed at tailoring	30	36	27
Boys employed at shoemaking	32	27	23
Girls employed at knitting	26	24	11
Girls employed in sewing	40	35	50
Girls employed in domestic work	31	31	31

Making a profit from child labour

From its earliest beginnings the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor was designed as an institution that would reduce expenditure on pauper children in two ways: by making savings on the cost of their maintenance and support, and by profiting from the children's labour.³⁹ The main stated objective of the asylum committee was: 'to train up the Children to habits of industry'.⁴⁰ Finding employment for large numbers of children required additional workshops to be added to the asylum buildings; however these costs were 'defrayed by the produce of the Children's Labour.'⁴¹ For example, the income for 1818 from children's labour was £900, whereas expenditure on wages for employees in the asylum amounted to an annual total of £139-19s-0d. This sum covered the cost of wages for the governor and governess of the asylum, two cooks, five chambermaids, one sick room assistant, three school room assistants, a gardener and three visiting staff.⁴² As this example demonstrates, earnings from children's employment far exceeded expenditure

³⁸ BAH, GP/B/2/1/5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1845-1849.

³⁹ Nejedly, 'Earning their Keep', 212.

⁴⁰ BAH, GP/B/2/1/1, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1806, September 1795.

⁴¹ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, January 1819.

⁴² BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, January 1819.

on the wages of staff employed to care for them. Even when other running costs are taken into account, it seems evident that children's labour at the infant asylum provided a substantial source of income for the Birmingham Guardians of the Poor in the early nineteenth century.

The number of children resident in the asylum fluctuated continually and the guardians had no control over the length of time children stayed there. The potential for children's earnings from pin-making may have been one factor enabling parents to remove their children from the asylum and themselves from the workhouse. For the three months to January 1819, eight children were admitted to the asylum and 30 children left, chiefly at the request of their parents.⁴³ Once children had acquired some experience of pin-making or lace-making during their stay at the infant asylum, they would then have been able to contribute to the family income, providing a route for families to leave the workhouse. Overall, however, the number of children accommodated at the asylum increased to an average of 390 children over the course of 1819, leading to problems of over-crowding. This issue was highlighted by the visiting Medical Officers who reported the need for larger premises. When the asylum committee presented their case for expansion to the Board of Guardians, they made it clear the institution had become self-financing due to profits earned by the children's labour:

It is equally well known that the expense of building these premises as well as the sum required for the purchase of the Estate on which they are situated amounting to upwards of £4500 has been defrayed solely by the product of the children's labor, in addition to which the committee has had the satisfaction of paying over to Mr James Welch the Sum of £225 arising from the same source and to be appropriated to general purposes.⁴⁴

⁴³ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, January 1819.

⁴⁴ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, June 1819.

There was no challenge to this claim, and by the next quarterly meeting work on the additional buildings had already begun. Child workers in the asylum had, therefore, not only become self-supporting, but had also refunded the cost of the asylum land and buildings. Furthermore, surplus income from the children's labour was apparently helping to fund general poor relief in Birmingham, perhaps for their own parents in the workhouse.

Additional buildings were completed by January 1820, providing new dormitories, a new infirmary and 'a day room for instruction in reading'.⁴⁵ Extra accommodation provision also brought more children, the numbers increasing to 442 by the summer of 1820. Regardless of the higher number of residents, the asylum committee reported that children engaged in the pin trade, straw plait and lace trades were all fully employed and 'at the usual prices'.⁴⁶ Changes in attitudes towards child labour in the 1830s restricted employment to older boys and girls to domestic duties, resulting in a considerable loss of income from the children's labour. In January 1839, there were 321 children in the asylum, with average costs of 2s per week per child. Amongst boys who were employed, 80 boys were engaged in pin-heading, eight boys at tailoring and four boys in mending shoes. Maintenance costs for 321 children amounted to approximately £32 per week, whereas the income from children's earnings was in the region of £23 per week, a substantial shortfall compared to the profitability of children's labour in earlier years.⁴⁷ Despite the loss of income from children's work and increased expenses, official visitors to the asylum reported that the advantages to the children in terms of physical health and morality: '...far outweigh all the money and attention which have been bestowed upon them and are a noble example of the Humanity, Liberality and Wisdom of the Guardians

⁴⁵ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, January 1820.

⁴⁶ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, July 1820.

⁴⁷ BAH, GP/B/2/1/4, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1838 to 1845, January 1839.

of Birmingham.⁴⁸ These comments from the official visitors appear to have been concerned solely with the well-being of the children, yet at the same time they fail to acknowledge the economic contribution made by the children themselves to the asylum finances.

The decision by the guardians in 1839 to build a new workhouse and close the infant asylum was justified on the basis of cost-savings and enabling closer supervision of the poor. There was no suggestion that this decision was reached because children might benefit from being accommodated with their families. On the contrary, the conclusions reached appear to have been based mainly on financial issues rather than welfare concerns, although it does seem clear the existing asylum premises had become inadequate for the number of children to be housed. The workhouse site in Lichfield Street was valued at £11,000, the asylum site at £5,000, and a sum of £4,194 was on deposit with the Bank of England, providing a total of £20,194 to meet the £15,000 estimated building costs for a large new workhouse to be built on land at Winson Green.⁴⁹ The guardians had noted in 1819 that profits from children's labour had repaid the original costs of the asylum land and buildings: the children had, therefore, also contributed up to a third of the cost of building the new Birmingham workhouse.

Employment in pin-making finally ceased in 1840 at the infant asylum, yet earnings from child labour continued to be significant when compared to those of other children's institutions. The Kirkdale Industrial Schools in Liverpool accommodated more than 1,000 children, providing training for boys in shoemaking and tailoring, yet earnings from this work were far lower than those achieved at the Birmingham asylum. Whereas in Birmingham 63 boys earned more than £38 per week from tailoring and shoe-making in 1841, the boys at the Kirkdale Industrial School earned just over £120 in six months in

⁴⁸ BAH, GP/B/2/1/4, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1838 to 1845, January 1839.

⁴⁹ BAH, GP/B/2/1/4, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1838 to 1845, June 1839.

1850.⁵⁰ The equivalent earnings over six months at Birmingham would have amounted to approximately £988, a huge difference. It is possible, of course, that earnings were recorded differently, such as Kirkdale mainly making clothing and shoes for children resident at the school. Nevertheless, it appears to be the case that child workers in the Birmingham asylum continued to make substantial contributions to the costs of running the institution, even from traditional craft occupations. The ability of the Birmingham Guardians of the Poor to make a profit from child labour, of any description, seems to have been quite exceptional.⁵¹

Children's health and closure of the asylum

Reports concerning child health and the number of deaths of children at the asylum became more prominent towards the end of the 1830s. In September 1838 eleven cases of illness were recorded in the sick room including, 'Two cases of atrophy or wasting disease; three cases of inflamed eyes; three cases of fever; one case of canker of the mouth; one case of scald head; one case of Hooping cough'. Three of these children subsequently died: Catherine Stanley from tuberculosis 'and the disease called wasting'; William Higgs was admitted with fever and died from congestion of the lungs; and Ann Egginton, an infant in the nursery, was 'affected with canker in the mouth.....she gradually grew worse and died from exhaustion'.⁵² Apart from three cases of inflamed eyes, which may have been related to conditions of work, these illnesses do not have any obvious connection with child labour, but are an indication of the poor physical condition of children admitted to the infant asylum and the risks of infection amongst large numbers of children confined in close quarters. Nevertheless, the asylum visitors' report of 1839 highlighted an improved appearance amongst the children, especially the boys, who

⁵⁰ Anne Brogden, 'Clothing Provision by Liverpool's Other Poor Law Institution: Kirkdale Industrial Schools', *Costume*, 37, 1, (2003): 71-74.

⁵¹ Nejedly, 'Earning their Keep', 213.

⁵² BAH, GP/B/2/1/4, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1838 to 1845, October 1838.

seemed to be 'healthy, intelligent and cheerful', concluding that improvements were due to a reduction working hours from eight hours to four hours per day. Children had also benefitted from additional schooling and 'frequent access to the extensive new play ground, being formerly confined to the yard paved with stones.'⁵³ These comments suggest that some of the Birmingham guardians were primarily concerned with the health and education of pauper children, rather than with the financial burden on the ratepayers. Shortly after this favourable report, however, the decision was made to establish a new workhouse for adults and children at Winson Green. The infant asylum site in Summer Lane was described as damaging to the children's health, because it was situated: 'in a low valley exposed to prevalent winds which resulted in a cold and damp environment'.⁵⁴ This justification by the guardians to close the infant asylum contradicts the positive view of children's health included in the visitor's report of a few months earlier. The loss of income from children's labour, rather than children's health, may have been an important factor influencing the decision to close the institution.

From 1841 until its closure in 1852, the asylum accommodated around 300 children on average, rising to 412 children in 1849. A schoolmaster and mistress provided boys and girls with three hours daily instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic and the principles of the Christian religion, so that by the late 1840s asylum children spent longer periods in the classroom and less time working.⁵⁵ Children continued to work in traditional occupations, but reports to the guardians became notably focused on children's health and education rather than on income from child labour. For example, smallpox was prevalent in the borough in 1845, yet there were no cases of smallpox at the asylum due to of its policy of vaccinating all children before admittance. The asylum committee reported this as proof of the value of vaccination, 'as no child is admitted until that

⁵³ BAH, GP/B/2/1/4, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1838 to 1845, January 1839.

⁵⁴ BAH, GP/B/2/1/4, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1838 to 1845, June 1839.

⁵⁵ BAH, GP/B/2/1/5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1845 to 1849, January 1839.

operation has been performed.⁵⁶ The guardians thus demonstrated forward thinking in their approach to public health, since legislation making infant vaccination against smallpox compulsory was not passed until the Vaccination Act of 1853. At the same time, renewed concerns about overcrowding and the general health of children in the asylum were raised by the Medical Officer, Dr Thomas Green, in 1849.⁵⁷ With 422 children accommodated in the asylum there was considerable overcrowding, especially in the lower nursery which contained 66 children although certified for a maximum of 38 children. Dr Green found that children had 'dull eyes, a vacant countenance and listless attitude' as a result of breathing in 'impure air in badly ventilated rooms'.⁵⁸ Poor environmental conditions in the asylum were thought to have been the cause of six deaths from scrofula within the previous three months.

Dr Green's concerns were confirmed by members of the maintenance committee who reported the buildings were inefficiently drained and ventilated, resulting in a 'foul and fetid atmosphere'.⁵⁹ Shortly afterwards, architects were invited to submit plans for a new workhouse housing a total of 1,550 residents, including 600 children. Separate schoolrooms and class-rooms were to be provided within the workhouse site.⁶⁰ It is not clear whether overcrowding and pressing health problems at the infant asylum in 1849 triggered the request for workhouse plans; however, the Birmingham guardians appear to have become pro-active with regard to public health, taking any potential threats very seriously. It may have been these concerns that finally underpinned the relocation of children to premises on the new workhouse site.

⁵⁶ BAH, GP/B/2/1/5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1845 to 1849, August 1845.

⁵⁷ BAH, GP/B/2/1/5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1845 to 1849, April 1849.

⁵⁸ BAH, GP/B/2/1/5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1845 to 1849, April 1849.

⁵⁹ BAH, GP/B/2/1/5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1845 to 1849.

⁶⁰ BAH, GP/B/2/1/5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1845 to 1849.

Leaving the infant asylum

The constant movement of adults in and out of the workhouse resulted in a steady transfer of pauper children in and out of the infant asylum. Records for October 1822 show that 54 children had been admitted in the previous 12 months, whereas 112 children had been withdrawn by parents or relatives and 32 children were apprenticed.⁶¹ Removal of a large number of older children from the asylum resulted in reduced income from child labour, but expenses were consequently less. A similar pattern was noted a few years later in December 1826 when 96 children were removed from the asylum over a three month period, mostly by their parents. The asylum committee were informed that very few children in the asylum were old enough to be apprenticed, recording: 'Demand for apprentices for several years has been greater than the supply.....an indication of a preference for children educated in the institution.'⁶²

This report indicates that during the 1820s families with younger children experienced the greatest financial pressures, forcing them to turn to the workhouse for support. It seems likely that families with slightly older children were able to leave the workhouse because family incomes could be bolstered by children's earnings at pin-making or lace-making. It further suggests that families may have removed their children from the infant asylum as soon as possible in order to avoid them being apprenticed under the Poor Law, resulting in a shortage of parish apprentices. It could thus be argued that children who had reached the age of nine or ten years were viewed as economic assets to their families, rather than a burden, because of their earnings potential as child workers in Birmingham industries.

⁶¹ BAH, GP/B/2/1/2, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1807 to 1826, October 1822.

⁶² BAH, GP/B/2/1/3, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1826 to 1838, December 1826.

Parish apprentices from Birmingham

Children who were orphaned, or whose families were unable to care for them because of the death or illness of a parent, were those likely to be apprenticed to cotton mills or coal mines by the Birmingham guardians. An overseer's report of an inspection in 1796 of Birmingham parish apprentices in Lancashire cotton mills provides a detailed description of the long working hours and harsh conditions endured by these children.⁶³ Apprentices sent to Ratcliffe Bridge Mill worked from 5am to 8pm each day; their clothing was poor, they had no shoes and received no schooling, conditions were so harsh that 'the boys begged they might not stay'.⁶⁴ Parish children sent to Hind Mill and Somerset Mill in the Lancashire town of Bury fared no better, working from 6am to 7pm each day. The overseers reported the children's clothing was very poor; they had been beaten with sticks as a punishment and 'many of the children cried to come home'.⁶⁵ Despite these reports of shocking ill-treatment and the desperate situation of cotton mill apprentices in Lancashire, the only action taken by the Birmingham guardians was to cease the practice of apprenticing children to Lancashire mills. They continued to apprentice children to cotton mills in Staffordshire and the east midlands and to coal mines and other industries in the south Staffordshire towns of Dudley, Stourbridge, Sedgley, Bilston, Wolverhampton and Walsall.⁶⁶ Conditions in the Lancashire cotton mills seem to have been particularly severe, which may explain the guardian's decision to send children only to textile mills in neighbouring midlands counties, where they could be visited on a regular basis.

An inspection visit in August 1805 by overseer Beddowes to cotton mills in Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire highlights the very substantial numbers of Birmingham pauper children apprenticed to various cotton mills. This visit included an

⁶³ BAH, GP/B/2/1/1, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1806, June 1796.

⁶⁴ BAH, GP/B/2/1/1, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1806, June 1796.

⁶⁵ BAH, GP/B/2/1/1, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1806, June 1796.

⁶⁶ BAH, 660982, *Minutes of the Birmingham Overseers of the Poor*, 1803-1813.

inspection of the conditions of 60 children at Alrewas, 50 children at Tutbury, 29 children at Cuckney, 26 children at Bulwell, 30 children at Ashby, eight children at Measham and 30 children at Appleby. Beddowes inspected the living and working conditions for a total of 203 children during this visit, giving a favourable report on the accommodation and healthy appearance of the children. He recorded a complaint from a child about severe treatment from a mill overlooker, but the views of other children remain hidden from these official records and would almost certainly provide a different perspective. At the same time, Beddowes' report provides an insight into the attitudes of the Birmingham overseers towards child labour, suggesting that, 'preference should at all time be given to placing the Children of Paupers in these healthy situations and Clean Trades to the impure air and dirty Manufactories of Birmingham'⁶⁷ He suggested it might be 'highly beneficial to the Parish of Birmingham to establish similar employment for Poor Children in a Manufactory of its own.'⁶⁸

The guardians' response to this suggestion of establishing a cotton mill in Birmingham so that children could work in a 'clean' trade rather than an unhealthy metal trade has not been recorded. It seems unlikely such an idea would be considered, given the guardians' tight control of finances and the capital investment required for a cotton or silk mill. The guardians certainly shared the view that children should be provided with the basic necessities of shelter, food, and clothing, but they also believed it was their duty to place pauper children in full-time employment at the earliest possible opportunity. By removing these children from the parish, any future financial burden was shifted away from the Birmingham ratepayers. Although children in the infant asylum were able to produce a profit from their labour, the guardians frequently preferred to apprentice children who were without family support away from Birmingham, rather than accept long-term responsibility for their welfare.

⁶⁷ BAH, 660982, *Minutes of the Birmingham Overseers of the Poor*, 1803-1813, August 1805.

⁶⁸ BAH, 660982, *Minutes of the Birmingham Overseers of the Poor*, 1803-1813, August 1805.

Life after the infant asylum

In view of the large numbers of children who spent at least some of their childhood at the infant asylum, one of the important questions to be considered is how did these children fare as adults? The census returns of 1851 provide information on 274 children living at the asylum at that time, together with 15 staff, two relatives of staff and six adult paupers, a total of 297 residents. The census returns are an important source of information about individual children living at the asylum since they provide names and approximate ages, despite the drawback of missing or inaccurate data. The names and date of birth of children enable further exploration of individual life experiences during adulthood in addition to the statistical information. The table below shows a breakdown of the children by age:

3.2 Children in the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor in 1851⁶⁹

Age	Boys	Girls	Total
2 to 4 years	17	9	26
5 to 7 years	39	30	69
8 to 10 years	67	43	110
11 to 13 years	30	25	55
14 + years	5	9	14
Totals	158	116	274

The 1851 census indicates that children were most likely to be resident in the asylum between the ages of five to ten years, with boys outnumbering girls in nearly all age groups. Four boys and three girls have been successfully traced through later census and parish records, some of whom experienced considerable difficulties as adults.

⁶⁹ Census of England and Wales, 1851.

For example, Hezekiah Bibb was four years of age when living at the infant asylum in 1851, and was imprisoned for larceny at Warwick in 1866 at the age of 19. In the same year, his sister Jane Bibb, died at the age of 23. Former infant asylum resident, Alfred Ashbrook, was employed as a cutter and boarding with a family in Birmingham in 1861 at the age of 17. He married three years later, but his wife died shortly after childbirth, leaving Alfred a widower with a baby son at the age of 23. By the time of the 1871 census Alfred appears to have overcome his misfortunes, since he was employed as a surgical instrument maker, and was living with a second wife and his young son.⁷⁰ Former child resident Moses Jesson appears in the 1881 and 1891 census returns. In 1881 Moses was a 42-year-old basket-maker living with his wife and five children in Birmingham, but ten years later he was a boarder in the household of another family at Court 15, Essex Street in Birmingham.⁷¹ One possibility is that Moses may have been a widower by this time, living as a boarder with a married daughter.

Two sisters, Selina and Harriet Selvey were aged 13 and 10 respectively during their stay at the asylum in 1851. Ten years later, 23 year-old Selina was boarding with a family in Caroline Street, Birmingham, but with no occupation recorded. She next appears in official records in 1868, having died at the age of 28. Her sister, Harriet Selvey, is recorded in the 1891 and 1901 censuses as the proprietor of a sweet shop in Boulton Road, Handsworth. Her father William Selvey, a retired jeweller, was a patient in the Birmingham workhouse infirmary in 1891 at the age of 79. In a final example, former child resident Joseph Hollick, was employed as a boot-maker in 1881, living with his wife and five children in Wolverhampton. Joseph continued to live and work in Wolverhampton with his family, dying in 1916 at the age of 75.⁷² These life stories of former infant asylum children provide evidence that some individuals were able to

⁷⁰ Census of England and Wales, 1851-1871.

⁷¹ Census of England and Wales, 1881-1891.

⁷² Census of England and Wales, 1881-1891.

overcome the early setbacks of their childhood. Alfred Ashbrook, Moses Jesson and Joseph Hollick were able to establish stable occupations, marry and raise families of their own. Harriet Selvey pursued a career as a self-reliant business woman with a sweet shop located in the Birmingham suburb of Handsworth, a significant achievement for a working-class woman in the nineteenth century. Others were less fortunate, the variety of outcomes raises further issues about the effects of childhood experiences in an institution and separation from family on subsequent life-chances.

Conclusion

Children were transferred from the infant asylum to children's accommodation blocks at the new workhouse in 1852, bringing to an end the practice of housing pauper children on a separate site from their parents. This chapter has argued that changes in attitudes towards childhood and child labour during the early decades of the nineteenth century forced the Birmingham guardians to alter their policies towards children's work and education in the infant asylum. The asylum was opened at the end of the eighteenth century as an 'infant manufactory' to reduce costs, provide work for 'idle' children, and produce an income. A key finding of this research is to illuminate the guardians' viewpoint that even the youngest children should be employed in manufacturing in order to contribute to their own maintenance, rather than being a burden on the ratepayers. This contrasted with the usual practice of parish support for families by out-door relief or boarding-out young children with foster families. The research reveals that asylum children made significant profits for the institution, repaying more than the original costs of the land and buildings. This was a considerable economic contribution that has not previously been recognised. The guardians were firmly focused on finances, but legislation and changing perceptions of child workers forced them to adopt new approaches to children's education, health and overall well-being. Following the final withdrawal in 1840 of manufacturing occupations, the asylum children divided their time

between schoolwork and tailoring, shoemaking or domestic work. Even when children were engaged in these more traditional activities, the guardians continued to extract a profit from child labour, highlighting the distinctiveness of the infant asylum as a poor law institution. The investigation of policies at an infant asylum over five decades offers new insights into changing attitudes towards childhood and child labour in response to the wider political, social and cultural context. Furthermore, it uncovers some of the strategies adopted by pauper families in their interactions with the poor law, and the extent to which children from these families were expected to contribute to their own upkeep. The demand for child workers in Birmingham's workshops and manufacturing industries is explored and discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

The Industrious Child Worker

Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 show that there was little demand for parish or charity apprentices in Birmingham during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This contrasts with the level of demand in the textiles districts of England, where parish apprentices have been identified as an important part of the early industrial labour force.¹ The reluctance of Birmingham tradesmen and industrialists to employ pauper apprentices did not, however, mean a corresponding absence of child workers from its manufacturing industries. This chapter aims to demonstrate that significant numbers of non-apprenticed children were employed in Birmingham workshops and factories, and that child workers were an essential part of its economic expansion. Jan de Vries has argued that an 'industrious revolution' occurred before and during the Industrial Revolution, involving an intensification of work by adult males and widespread participation of women and children in the labour market, driven by a desire to acquire new consumer goods. The theory proposed by de Vries suggests that an intensification of work by households took place before and during the Industrial Revolution alongside a greater demand for consumer goods amongst all social classes.² This included increased consumption of fuel for lighting and heating, clothing, and household goods such as crockery. Child workers in Birmingham, who were typically under-fed and poorly clothed, became part of an industrious revolution through the need to provide financial support to their families. This coincided with a growing demand for child workers to produce consumer goods manufactured in Birmingham. This pattern of working, with whole families included in the

¹ Honeyman, *Child Workers*; Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*; Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship'.

² Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution, Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy 1650 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 121.

paid labour force, declined only during the second half of the nineteenth century as the sole male bread-winner family began to predominate.³ In the light of this interpretation, a second aim of this chapter is to illuminate how far the employment of child workers contributed towards an 'industrious revolution' in Birmingham. It suggests that child workers laboured to support the basic needs of their own families, whilst at the same time working to meet the consumer demands of others for the manufactured goods they produced. A third aim is to question the timeline for the demise of child labour in England. Humphries and Kirby have identified the early decades of the nineteenth century as the peak participation period for child labour, with a decline from the mid-century onwards.⁴ This chapter explores the question of whether the employment of child workers in Birmingham similarly declined in the mid-nineteenth century.

Two issues related to sources are particularly relevant for research into non-apprenticed child workers. Firstly, business records from this period are notoriously scarce and those records that have survived are unlikely to record details of child workers, since wages were paid either to the parent or to the workman who was directly employing the child.⁵ In a few cases, surviving Birmingham business records have been identified which include details of weekly wages. For example, the Soho Foundry paid wages of £313 7s 6d for the week of 27th October 1826. These included payments to carpenters, smiths, fitter, labourers, brick-layers, foundry men and pattern-makers, but there is no list of individual workers or indication of payments to child assistants.⁶ Similarly, wages records for the coin manufacturing firm of Ralph Heaton & Sons of Birmingham list all weekly payments from 1840 to 1861.⁷ For the week of 4th January 1840, the company employed 24 workers, whose wages ranged from 2s 6d paid to Elizabeth Hinks up to £3 4s 0d paid to Thomas Adams. The sum received by Elizabeth

³ de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, 121.

⁴ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*; Kirby, *Child Labour*.

⁵ Kirby, *Child Labour*, 16.

⁶ BAH, MS3147/8, *Boulton & Watt Collection*, Staff and Employment Records, 1784-1888

⁷ BAH, MS1010/8-9, *Ralph Heaton & Son*, Wages Books 1840-1873.

Hinks suggests she was most probably a child worker, but the wages records do not confirm her age, occupation or the hours worked. By April 1861 the company employed 189 workers, receiving weekly payments of between 2s 6d and £7 0s 2d, but conclusions are difficult to make without information on ages and occupations.

A second issue is that until at least the mid-nineteenth century, apart from a few notably large-scale enterprises, Birmingham industry was characterised by numerous small-scale firms and masters who each employed a handful of workers.⁸ In order to obtain an overall picture of child labour a substantial number of business records would be needed. Evidence of child labour in eighteenth-century industry is particularly problematic, relying on comments about the presence of child workers in Birmingham manufactories recorded by visitors. Inspections of manufacturing industries undertaken by the Factories Inquiry Commission and the Children's Employment Commissions in the nineteenth century provide not only statistical information, but offer a range of direct testimonies from employers, supervisors, adult workers and child workers themselves.⁹ Evidence from these reports forms the basis of research in this chapter, utilising case studies of particular industries such as pin making and button making to explore a number of research questions.

This chapter identifies a number of influences that impacted on the level of industriousness amongst child workers in Birmingham. One important factor was the widespread belief that early work was preferable to 'idleness' for children from poorer families who could not afford school fees, since this brought in extra income, prepared them for future employment and removed them from the streets. A second factor was the

⁸ Eric Hopkins, *Birmingham The First Manufacturing Town in the World 1760-1840* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1989); Clive Behagg, 'Myths of Cohesion: Capital and Compromise in the Historiography of Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', *Social History* 11 (1986).

⁹ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.I, *Factories Enquiry Commission, First Report*; BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*; BPP, 1863, 3170, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, First Report*; BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Second and Third Reports*.

relative lack of employment opportunities, other than casual and temporary work, for adult male workers who were inexperienced and unskilled in manufacturing work. This resulted in a reliance on children's earnings, particularly amongst families that were newly arrived from agricultural districts. The introduction of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 was an additional factor that pushed families to rely on their children's earnings, as it became more difficult to obtain outdoor relief during times of unemployment or ill-health. A further factor was the change in attitudes towards childhood as a period requiring protection and the view that children from all social classes should be educated. As these views became more widespread from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, child labour amongst the youngest children in Birmingham began to decline. The main research questions include: firstly, what was the extent and nature of child labour in Birmingham industries? Secondly, were child workers regarded as essential in manufacturing processes? Thirdly, was there an intensification of child labour amounting to an 'industrious revolution' and when did child labour decline? Finally, what were the attitudes in Birmingham towards child labour and how did these change over time? These issues will be explored using case studies from the pin-making and button-making trades, together with examples from a number of Birmingham industries.

Birmingham industry and child labour

The tradition of metal-working in Birmingham has a long history. John Leland famously described Birmingham in 1538 as a market town with one parish church and 'many smithes in the towne that use to make knives and all manner of cuttynge tools'.¹⁰ The important Birmingham trade of gun-making was established in the seventeenth century, and by the early eighteenth century a variety of metal goods were being produced in the

¹⁰ John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland In or About the Years 1535-1543* (London: George Bell, 1907), 96-97.

town, contributing towards its reputation as the 'city of a thousand trades'.¹¹ Industrial expansion during the eighteenth century involved the establishment of a number of large-scale manufacturing firms alongside numerous small-scale metal industries and workshops that evolved from the Birmingham tradition of self-employed workers and small masters.¹² The Soho Manufactory set up by Matthew Boulton employed a large workforce of between 800 to 1,000 men, women and children in 1770, and John Taylor's button-making factory employed 500 workers. Printing, japanning and papier-mâché industries were established in eighteenth-century Birmingham by John Baskerville.¹³ Birmingham's national and international reputation as a centre for the manufacture of metal 'toys', notably buttons, buckles, watch-chains, snuff boxes, pins and silver-plated tableware attracted a succession of visitors to the town, eager to view innovative methods of manufacturing and purchase newly available consumer goods.¹⁴ The Soho manufactory showrooms displayed desirable luxury goods that proved a particular magnet for overseas visitors, attracting French, Spanish, German, and Norwegian buyers as well as a succession of prominent Russian visitors.¹⁵ Matthew Boulton established an important and long-lasting relationship with the Russian Embassy, welcoming the Russian

¹¹ 'Economic and Social History: Industry and Trade, 1500-1880, in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham*, ed. W B Stephens (London, 1964), 81-139. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/81-139> [accessed 12 September 2017]; Malcolm Dick, 'The City of a Thousand Trades, 1700-1945', in *Birmingham the Workshop of the World*, ed. Carl Chinn and Malcolm Dick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 125-157; Peter Jones, 'Birmingham and the West Midlands in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', in *Matthew Boulton A Revolutionary Player*, ed. Malcolm Dick (Studley: Brewin, 2009), 3-29.

¹² Hopkins, *Birmingham*; Peter Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 172-173; Behagg, 'Myths of Cohesion', 379; Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820, Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994), 264-269; Harry Smith, 'William Hutton and the Myths of Birmingham', *Midland History* 40, no.1 (2015): 53-73.

¹³ 'Economic and Social History: Industry and Trade, 1500-1880, in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 7, the City of Birmingham*, ed. W B Stephens (London, 1964), 81-139. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol7/81-139> [accessed 12 September 2017].

¹⁴ Jones, 'Birmingham and the West Midlands', 13-29; Berg, *Age of Manufactures*, 267.

¹⁵ Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, 172-173.

Ambassador to Soho in 1770 for the first of many visits to purchase articles on behalf of the Empress Catherine, a leading patron of the decorative arts.¹⁶

Despite the establishment of large-scale manufacturing enterprises in eighteenth-century Birmingham, even the largest firms relied on hand-operated machinery such as the stamp and the press in manufacturing, and these were especially important to the development of the toy and jewellery trades. When giving evidence to a House of Commons Committee in 1759, two leading Birmingham manufacturers, John Taylor and Samuel Garbett, stated that at least 20,000 people were employed in the toy trade in Birmingham and local towns.¹⁷ The coin and button trades utilised the hand-operated press, stamp and lathe, and the draw-bench was used in pin-making to draw out wire to a uniform thickness. Eric Hopkins has argued that these four machines were vital for production in the toy trade and that 'children were used to keep the Birmingham machines working' in the same way that children were employed to keep spinning and weaving machinery working in the textile regions.¹⁸ This can be backed up by first-hand accounts written in the mid-eighteenth century by visitors to Birmingham's manufacturing industries.

Child workers and the division of labour

Josiah Tucker, the Dean of Gloucester, made a visit to the Birmingham manufactories in 1758.¹⁹ His account of the visit described the Birmingham workmen's practice of employing child workers to assist them, a method of manufacturing production that increased output through the division of labour. He cited an example which he witnessed in Birmingham button manufacturing to illustrate its economic advantages:

¹⁶ Olga Baird, 'His Excellency Count Woronzow the Russian Ambassador and the Hardware Man: The History of a Friendship', in *Matthew Boulton A Revolutionary Player*, ed. Malcolm Dick (Studley, Brewin, 2009), 92-106.

¹⁷ Hopkins, 'Birmingham', 6-9.

¹⁸ Hopkins, 'Birmingham', 7-9.

¹⁹ Josiah Tucker, *Collected Works of Josiah Tucker, Economics and Social Policy Volume III: Instructions for Travellers, 1758* (London, reprinted 1993), 34.

When a man stamps a metal Button by means of an Engine, a Child stands by him to place the Button in readiness to receive the Stamp and to remove it when received, and then to place another. By these means, the Operator can stamp at least twice the Number, which he could otherwise have done, had he been Obligated to have stopped each Time to have Shifted the Buttons.²⁰

Dean Tucker found that whereas an adult male worker earned 14d to 18d per day, the child assistant was paid just 1d to 2d per day, resulting in large savings in daily wages. Furthermore, he wrote that this method of production, ‘...trains up Children to an Habit of Industry, almost as soon as they can speak. And hence it is, that the bijoux d’Angleterre, or Birmingham Toys, are rendered so exceedingly cheap as to astonish all Europe’.²¹ Dean Tucker’s enthusiastic description of the advantages of the division of labour in button-making thus provides contemporary evidence that child workers were employed in Birmingham’s metal industries as early as 1758, enhancing its manufacturing competitiveness.

Further first-hand evidence of child labour comes from the account of a 1766 visit to Birmingham manufactories by Lord and Lady Shelburne.²² These visitors toured the premises and showrooms of many of Birmingham’s leading manufacturers, such as Samuel Garbett, Matthew Boulton, John Baskerville and John Taylor. Lady Shelburne described their tour of the Baskerville’s garden and hot-house, which was followed by a visit to the japanning premises led by Mrs Baskerville: ‘...which business she has chiefly the management of.’²³ Lord Shelburne’s description of their visit to the button factories noted the employment of child workers:

...a button passes through fifty hands, and each hand perhaps passes a thousand in a day; likewise, by this means, the work becomes so simple that, five times in six, children of six or eight years old do it as well as men, and earn from ten pence to eight shillings a week.²⁴

²⁰ Josiah Tucker, *Collected Works of Josiah Tucker, Economics and Social Policy Volume III: Instructions for Travellers, 1758* (London, reprinted 1993), 34.

²¹ Tucker, *Instructions for Travellers*, 35.

²² Edmund Fitzmaurice, *Life of William, Earl of Shelburne* (London, 1912), 274-277.

²³ Edmund Fitzmaurice, *Life of William, Earl of Shelburne* (London, 1912), 274-277.

²⁴ Fitzmaurice, *Life of Shelburne*, 274-277.

Another visitor to the Birmingham manufactories was an Italian, Carlo Castone, who after visiting Birmingham in 1787 wrote that in the button industry, ‘...women, men and children do a huge amount of work and produce several kinds of buttons, which grow into thousands and thousands into a heap.’²⁵ According to Castone, some tasks required so little skill, that women and children were employed rather than skilled, well-paid male workers: ‘Work is simply done without effort and quickly. Badly paid women and children are involved in the production and not men...’²⁶ These first-hand accounts by Dean Tucker, Lord and Lady Shelburne and Carlo Castone provide evidence that child workers were widely employed in Birmingham industries in the mid-eighteenth century, identifying children as essential to production methods based on the division of labour. However, because child workers in Birmingham were employed by individual workmen rather than by firms, they are more difficult to locate as a group in the same way as children who were apprenticed in textile mills or coal mines. This method of direct employment by workmen, who were often themselves self-employed, also resulted in the exclusion of Birmingham child workers from protective employment legislation for much of the nineteenth century.

Factory Acts aimed at regulating the hours of work and conditions of employment for child workers in factories from the beginning of the nineteenth century applied only to textile industries. The 1802 Health and Morals of Apprentices Act prohibited the employment of children in the cotton industry under nine years and limited work to 12 hours per day for children of nine to 16 years. A further Act in 1819 extended these regulations to non-apprenticed children in the cotton industry. The Factory Act of 1833 brought children in other textile industries (except silk mills) under the same regulations, but did not include children in Birmingham’s manufacturing industries, even though they

²⁵ Malcolm Dick, ‘Discourses for the new industrial world: industrialisation and the education of the public in late eighteenth-century Britain’, *History of Education* 37, no.4 (2008): 572.

²⁶ Dick, ‘Discourses’, 572.

had been visited by the Factories Inquiry Commission.²⁷ Factory inspectors Horner and Woolriche, reported that in Birmingham much of the manufacturing was piece-work, completed by workers at home and, ‘...there is no establishment in Birmingham where children are collected in large numbers to work together, as is the case in cotton, woollen and flax mills.’²⁸ Manufacturing production depended on agents known as ‘undertakers’ who provided raw materials to small domestic workshops and set the rates of payment per piece. This system encouraged families to put even the youngest children to work to maximise family incomes. In consequence, the factory inspectors found that despite identifying ‘many thousand children employed in the manufactures of the town’, the child workers were scattered in small workshops and frequently worked at home with their parents.²⁹

‘The unhappy pin headers’: a case study of the pin industry

The inspectors for the 1833 Factories Inquiry Commission reported that no firms in Birmingham employed large numbers of child labour, yet they had visited Phipson’s pin manufactory where more than 100 children worked and the button factory of Thomas Ledsam & Sons employing 87 children.³⁰ Children comprised the majority of workers at Phipson’s, according to the testimony of one of the adult workers, William Bishop, employed as a pin-pointer.³¹ He gave evidence that more than 100 children were employed at the firm out of a total workforce of 150 to 160. Men, women and children worked at pin-making from 7am to 7pm on Mondays to Fridays and from 7am to 5pm on Saturdays, excluding the two hours per day for meals, a total working week of 58 hours. Approximately 40 of the children were below the age of nine and a few were less than seven. Wire-drawer William Miles, aged 34, said he had worked in the trade for 27 years

²⁷ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:1-10.

²⁸ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:2.

²⁹ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:2.

³⁰ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:2.

³¹ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:7.

from the age of seven, and he thought that children's health was not affected by the work or the long hours. He had always enjoyed good health, although the wages were too low. William Bishop also said that children did not find the work exhausting and there were no complaints of ill-health. It seems likely, however, that these employees wished to preserve their employment and would have avoided any comments to factory inspectors about unfavourable working conditions.

Richard Phipson confirmed to the inspectors that around 130 children worked at his firm on a piece-work basis, either at pin-heading or sticking pins onto paper. They were directly employed by five over-lookers who were responsible for giving out the work and determining the rates of pay.³² Evidence about the hours of work and age of child workers was confirmed by direct testimony from children interviewed by the inspectors. Elizabeth Crofts, aged 14, had worked at Phipson's since the age of nine, working for nine and a half hours each day and received wages of 5s 0d per week. Elizabeth said she had never attended a day-school but had joined a Sunday school for some time, '...I was not long there to learn'.³³ A second girl, Sarah Foster aged 12, earned 2s 9d weekly and lived with her widowed mother and four siblings. When questioned by the inspector about tiredness, both girls said they were not tired in the evenings, despite the long hours at work.³⁴

Inspectors also visited the button factories of Thomas Ledsam and John Turner. Children worked for nine to ten hours per day from 7am to 7pm with two hours for meal breaks. John Sexty, the manager of Ledsam & Sons said that apprentices were not employed in the industry because they were troublesome to employers, stating 'I should be glad if we never had another, as they are not under the same control as those children

³² BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:8.

³³ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:8.

³⁴ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:8.

who can be turned away when we like'.³⁵ This evidence reveals that Birmingham employers preferred to control child workers through the threat of dismissal and loss of wages, rather than taking on the responsibility of a formal apprenticeship agreement. As these forms of employment were verbal and temporary, unlike formal apprenticeship agreements, they have remained largely un-documented in the archives.

The 1833 Factories Inquiry reported favourably on the conditions for child workers in Birmingham, noting the 'kind friendly feeling so generally subsisting between the master and his work-people'.³⁶ Manufacturers preferred not to employ children below the age of nine, but since many families could not afford school fees it was believed the children: 'would be much better in the factory, working, as they often do, with their father, than running about in idleness, acquiring bad habits'.³⁷ Child labour in Birmingham was thus perceived as a form of social control for children who were not attending school. Furthermore, it was believed that many parents, especially widows, depended on the earnings of their children and therefore limiting the age of starting work would be problematic for those families. Child workers in Birmingham industries were not perceived as in need of protective legislation in the same way as children employed in textile mills for three main reasons. Firstly, although large numbers of children were employed overall in Birmingham industries, they were not found in large groups. Even in the pin industry, children were employed either as home workers in domestic workshops or by overseers in small groups of 20 children. Secondly, children in Birmingham typically worked for nine or ten hours per day, which was the central demand of the Ten Hours Movement in the textile districts. Thirdly, children in Birmingham worked in industries that utilised hand tools and presses, rather than the large machinery regarded as hazardous to children's health in textile mills. For these reasons, the protective legislation for child workers implemented by the 1833 Factory Act did not apply to Birmingham industries.

³⁵ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 145:9.

³⁶ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 108.

³⁷ BPP, 1833, 450, XX.1. *Factories Inquiry Commission, First Report*, 109.

Within a decade, similar investigations for the Children's Employment Commission of 1843 revealed that attitudes of the commissioners towards child labour had changed considerably, perhaps a reflection of the growing middle-class commitment to education for all children regardless of social status. According to the report by sub-commissioner Grainger, large numbers of very young children were employed in the Birmingham pin industry and 'are in every respect ill-used'.³⁸ He found the 'sedentary and monotonous' nature of the work for 12 hours per day prevented young children from enjoying healthy exercise or relaxation. Child workers in the pin workshops were continually watched by over-lookers and punished for the slightest inattention. They were 'pale and sickly looking', dressed in rags without shoes or stockings, and the premises were crowded, dark, cold, and dilapidated. In some Birmingham workshops children faced such severe cruelty and ill treatment that Grainger concluded, 'In the whole of my inquiries I have met no class more urgently requiring legislative protection than the unhappy pin-headers.'³⁹

Intensification of children's work in the pin industry

Phipson's Pin Manufactory on Birmingham's Broad Street was visited on several occasions in November and December 1840 by sub-commissioner Grainger.⁴⁰ Between 90 and 100 children were employed in small workshops on the premises and were still at work at 8pm, even though the adult workers had left at 7pm. Samuel Phipson said children were employed from the age of eight, but the sub-commissioner found several seven-year-old children at work. In one case, a woman who lived two miles from the premises 'had carried her child, who was too young to walk so far, and set him down at the factory door'.⁴¹ Samuel Phipson maintained that children in the pin manufactory came

³⁸ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII. *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report of the Commissioners*, 79.

³⁹ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII. *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report of the Commissioners*, 80.

⁴⁰ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 119.

⁴¹ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 119.

from the poorest families living in Birmingham. Parents who had fallen into poverty 'through lack of work or dissipation' often sent their children to work as pin-headers because no previous experience was needed. Phipson's manager confirmed that pin-heading was the most laborious and worst paid part of the pin-making process, undertaken exclusively by women and children. The more skilled processes of pin-making, such as wiredrawing, pin-pointing and head-cutting were completed by men with the assistance of children, often sons of the workers. The final process of sticking the pins onto sheets of paper was mostly completed by girls.⁴²

Children working as pin-headers at Phipson's were employed in two workshops by workshop masters John Field and Hampton Jay, each with around 40 children. The employment arrangements were agreed between the parents and the workshop master, often involving an advance payment to the parents of a few shillings to be repaid from the child's wages. Jay said that parents were from the poorest class of families living in Birmingham, mainly from Ireland, and they were often 'beggars and other vagrants'.⁴³ He added that children were poorly cared for by their parents and inadequately clothed. Mary Bowling aged 13, had worked as a pin-header for six years from the age of seven, working alongside her younger sister who had begun work at the age of five. The two sisters earned joint wages of 5s per week that were paid directly to their father, with nothing for themselves. The girls said their mother had died and their father worked at unloading coal carts, but was not regularly employed. Mary said her health was not good, and that other children complained of being unwell, 'they are bad in the head...the cane is often used. The children are struck on the head, back or anywhere...some of the children made ill by being beat'.⁴⁴ In another example, Charles Hughes, aged 11, had been working at Phipson's for two years. His father was a stone-breaker for the parish, earning 4s a week, although he had formerly earned between 13s and 14s a week at making

⁴² BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 119-121.

⁴³ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 121.

⁴⁴ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 122.

silver pencil cases. Due to his father's lack of work, Charles and his brother were sent to work at pin-heading. He earned 2s 6d per week, which he gave to his mother who did not work, and was allowed to keep 3d for himself. Sub-commissioner Grainger reported that Charles wore shoes without stockings and a very ragged shirt.⁴⁵ As this evidence suggests, the children working at Phipson's pin manufactory were clearly from families living in severe poverty. Children whose parents were unable to support their families financially, either due to the absence of one parent or a lack of regular paid work, were sent to work from an early age. One factor affecting the ability of parents to support their children during times of hardship was the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Kirby has argued that the introduction of more stringent policies towards outdoor relief for able-bodied adults in 1834 had the effect of increasing a dependence on children's earnings.⁴⁶ It seems likely this was the case in Birmingham, as families who had fallen on hard times, or who had recently arrived from Ireland, faced a stark choice between sending their children out to work or to the workhouse.

At Palmer and Holt's pin manufactory approximately 46 children were employed in 'old and very dilapidated' premises by workshop master, George Latham, and over-looker Maria Field. One employee, 21-year-old Sarah Clarke, had worked in pin factories since the age of ten and said many children worked all day without food because they were sent without breakfast or midday dinner. She suggested the children were neglected by their parents as well as at work: 'the parents of the "headers" care very little about them, except to get their wages to spend in drink'.⁴⁷ Sarah and another female worker, Eliza Woolridge, claimed they had been severely beaten by a male over-looker in the past, although the man concerned was no longer employed. The firm of Palmer and Holt's also had a contract with the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor for child workers to manufacture pins. In December 1840, a total of 82 boys resident in the asylum were

⁴⁵ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 123.

⁴⁶ Kirby, *Child Labour*, 95.

⁴⁷ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 124.

employed as pin-headers. These children were permitted to work for a maximum of four hours daily, a regulation protecting children in the asylum that was not extended to other child workers. The asylum governor claimed boys were sometimes removed from the asylum by their parents after learning the trade of pin-heading and then sent out to work.⁴⁸ It is open to debate whether this action was due to parental indifference to their children's welfare or because parents preferred their children to live within the family rather than the infant asylum.

There was a widespread perception in Birmingham at this time that many child workers were supporting their families financially. This viewpoint was confirmed by sub-commissioner Grainger's report of visits to children working from home at pin-heading, where he found a number of families dependent on their children's work because the parents were unemployed:

It seems to be the universal opinion of all persons, high and low, with whom I have spoken on the subject, that the pin-headers and their families to which they belong, are the most wretched part of the population of the town; that no decent mechanic would allow his children to go to this work.⁴⁹

The examples above provide evidence that children comprised a large section of the pin industry workforce in 1840s Birmingham. They also suggest that child workers were often the principal breadwinners within their own families, since the availability of work for children sometimes exceeded that for adults. The inability of adults to obtain employment, combined with the effects of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, appears to have left some families with no choice other than to rely on their children's earnings. Interviews with the children themselves reveal evidence of ill-health amongst child workers in Birmingham and incidences of ill-treatment by over-lookers.

Nevertheless, despite the assertion by sub-commissioner Grainger that child workers in the Birmingham pin industry also needed protection, government legislation

⁴⁸ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 126.

⁴⁹ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 126.

following these investigations focused on children employed in coal mines and textile mills. The 1842 Mines Act prevented children under 10 years and women from working underground. This legislation was partly in response to the public outcry caused by publication of the commission's report, which revealed that women and children worked partially clothed when underground.⁵⁰ The Birmingham pin-headers may have been neglected, poorly-clothed and ill-treated, but this was not sufficient to draw attention to their welfare needs. The Factory Act passed in 1844 actually lowered the permitted age of employment from nine years to eight years, but there was a proviso that children between the ages of eight and 12 years should attend school for three hours daily, thus reducing their daily hours of work. However, the 1844 factory legislation applied only to children employed in textiles and did not extend to child workers in other types of industries. For Birmingham, this omission was partly explained by the organisation of production in small factories and workshops, which would have made detailed inspection and enforcement difficult. Another reason was that far fewer children were employed in Birmingham industries when compared to the national totals for children in coal mining and textiles.⁵¹ Figures from the 1851 census for England and Wales show the cotton industry alone employed 54,651 children between the ages of 10 to 14, and the coal industry employed 23,038 boys aged 10 to 14. The number of child workers employed in Birmingham's manufacturing industries was far lower, yet still significant as outlined below.

The demand for child workers: diversity in child labour

One of the factors behind the failure to regulate child labour in Birmingham industries was the diverse range of employment in small-scale firms. Children in 1840s Birmingham were employed in a variety of occupations, including button-making in metal, bone, glass

⁵⁰ Kirby, *Child Labour*, 100.

⁵¹ Kirby, *Child Labour*, 53-55.

or pearl; brass-casting; japanning; lacquering; glass-making and polishing; glass-blowing; gun-making; spoon-polishing and nail-making.⁵² This wide range of occupations indicates the high level of demand for child labour in Birmingham manufacturing industries. Daniel Baker, a clerk in a button manufactory, said many young children from the age of six were employed in the button trade. Boys were employed to assist adult stampers in the button trade, paid directly by the workmen rather than the workshop master or the proprietor.⁵³ Normal working hours were from 8am to 7pm with half an hour for breakfast and one hour for dinner breaks, but if the men worked late to meet demand, the boys were also required to stay. Adult workers often employed their own sons as assistants, but in the horn-button trade each man required three assistants. William Elliott's factory was one of the largest in Birmingham, employing up to 500 workers when demand for buttons was high.⁵⁴ When sub-commissioner Grainger visited in 1841, 50 boys and girls under 13 years were employed at the factory. William Elliott said he expected his employees to follow a policy of strict moral conduct within and outside the workplace. In principle, he disagreed with the employment of children below the age of nine, but he also thought that children excluded from manufacturing work would be neglected by their parents and left to roam the streets. His views thus coincided with other contemporaries who believed that if children were not attending school, then they should be at work under adult supervision and control.

Some of the children working at Elliott's button factory in 1841 were well below the age of nine. For example, Betsey Toe, aged seven, had been working at 'putting in' for two or three months, earning 1s 6d per week for working from 8am to 8.30pm.⁵⁵ Amelia Delaney, who was just under six years old, had been working for 12 months at 'putting in',

⁵² BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 126-140.

⁵³ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 128.

⁵⁴ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 135-136.

⁵⁵ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 136.

indicating she started work in the button factory at just four or five years old.⁵⁶ The firm of Elliott's was featured in an article on Birmingham industry in an 1844 edition of the *Penny Magazine*, but its description of button making failed to mention the involvement of child workers. According to this article, female workers were employed in large numbers, and stamping-presses were operated solely by male workers: 'The man places the button on the lower die, raises a heavy weight to the lower part of which the upper die is attached, and allows it to fall with great force...'⁵⁷ In contrast, an article in *Household Words* in April 1852, which also referred to Elliott's button factory, stated that nearly all of the 400 workers were women and children, with very few men employed: 'We see hundreds of women, scores of children, and a few men...'⁵⁸ The *Penny Magazine* article was one of a series of supplements aimed at promoting the merits of Birmingham, hence the failure to mention child workers. The article did, however, refer to button production under a 'factory-system' employing hundreds of workers in one building.⁵⁹ The illustration of Elliott's factory showed a large, clean and well-lit workshop in which a number of women and older girls were engaged in button making. The workers were comfortably seated and respectably clothed, ensuring the appearance of an organised and well-paid workforce.

The impression conveyed by the *Penny Magazine* article was that the Birmingham button industry provided clean, light work for young females in congenial surroundings, which was in contrast to many of the findings of the Children's Employment Commission report published in the previous year. Six children were interviewed in 1841 by sub-commissioner Grainger at Smith and Kemp's Button Manufactory. These included Betsey Woodroff aged nine, Emma Reeves aged 12, Mary Ann Tibbits aged 12, William Chaplin aged 13, and Thomas Baldwin aged nine. Emma had begun work in the button

⁵⁶ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 136.

⁵⁷ *The Penny Magazine*, 'A Day at the Birmingham Factories', 30 November 1844.

⁵⁸ *Household Words*, 'What there is in a button', 17 April 1852, 108.

⁵⁹ *The Penny Magazine*, 30 November 1844.

manufactory aged five as a 'putter in' and now worked at lacquering with Mary Ann. They found this work was very hot, working over a stove, and Mary Ann complained of headaches from the heat. These girls were paid at a higher rate, earning 3s 6d and 3s 3d per week respectively, reflecting the greater skill required for this work. At Hasluck's button factory in Summer Lane, the workshops were small and crowded, one room containing nine women at the presses, assisted by nine girls employed at putting in the blank buttons. The youngest girl was eight years old, and two others were nine years old.⁶⁰ One of the button-makers, Samuel Page, said he sometimes worked from 6am until 12 midnight when trade was busy, keeping the boy assistant with him as his work was essential to the process. Page added that, because of poor trade and low wages, 'the children have to help very much in supporting their parents. There is more demand for the labour of children and young people than for that of adults; half as much again'.⁶¹ As this statement suggests, child labour was considered essential to the manufacturing process in the button trade because button-makers relied on the help of child assistants. At the same time, Page's statement to the Children's Employment Commission supports the contemporary view that children provided vital financial support for poor families because the demand for child workers in Birmingham was often greater than the demand for adult workers.

Intensification of children's work in various industries

The demand for child labour was not restricted to the pin-making and button-making trades in the 1840s. Children were employed in numerous Birmingham industries where they were required to work for long hours from an early age. Thomas Andrews aged 14, had been working in the blacksmiths shop of Winfield's brass foundry for three years, working from 7am to 7pm and earning 7s per week; Thomas Harper aged 12, had worked

⁶⁰ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 137-138.

⁶¹ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 134-135.

as a brass-filer for three years, earning 3s per week; Benjamin Bradley aged seven, worked at japanning; Eliza Leadbeater aged 14, had begun lacquering when aged 11.⁶² At Ledsam and Sons, a brass-nail manufactory on Great Charles Street, each adult nail caster employed three or four boys from seven or eight years of age. Child assistants were often the sons of the men who employed them, indicating that adults in these well-paid trades were willing to set their own young children to work as well as children from poorer families. For example, Benjamin Beach, aged nine, was an assistant to his father who worked as a brass caster. Benjamin was expected to arrive for work at 6am, bringing his breakfast and starting work immediately, before his father arrived between 7am and 9am. He walked a mile home after work and 'gets very tired at night; is glad to go to bed'.⁶³ These examples provide evidence that children were expected to work long hours in harsh conditions, even those more fortunate children from relatively prosperous families who were employed by their relatives. The demand for child workers in Birmingham industries was high because the organisation of production for manufactured goods depended on the labour of low-paid child assistants. These children were, therefore, part of an 'industrious revolution' in Birmingham as outlined by Jan de Vries.⁶⁴

Children such as nine-year-old Benjamin Beach forfeited their leisure so that their families could have an improved standard of living. Demand for consumer goods by the general population was the driving force behind an intensification of work in Birmingham, including amongst child workers, thus supporting the theory of an industrious revolution as outlined by de Vries. However, the research findings in this study highlight the differences in economic circumstances between child workers' families. Benjamin Beach's father was a skilled brass caster with the ability to earn a good income for his family. On the other hand, girls such as Emma Reeves and Amelia Delaney, who had started work in the button factories at just five years of age, were from some of the

⁶² BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 142-143.

⁶³ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 145.

⁶⁴ de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, 71-72.

poorest families living in Birmingham. Therefore, although the intensification in child labour was driven in some instances by a desire to acquire more consumer goods, it was also important in providing families with the basic items of food, housing, fuel and clothing. Furthermore, the findings in this study suggest that industriousness extended well beyond the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Gender differences in employment

The evidence on child workers obtained by the Children's Employment Commission of 1843 is supported by additional evidence drawn from locally conducted surveys undertaken by the Birmingham New Meeting Sunday Schools in 1841 and by the Birmingham Educational Association in 1857. A survey of 273 children attending the Birmingham New Meeting Sunday Schools in July 1841 recorded details of occupations, age of starting work, hours of work, time allowed for meals and weekly wages.⁶⁵ Amongst the 168 boys, 73% were employed in manufacturing industries, such as brass founding, gun-finishing and other metal industries. These included: John Parkes aged 13, a spoon-maker working from 6am to 9pm daily, whose wages were paid entirely to his father; Thomas Oldbury aged 11, a pearl button maker working from 7am to 4pm and paid 2s 6d per week; James Wilson aged 12, a gun-finisher working from 8am to 5pm and earning 2s 6d per week; and William Bell, aged nine, working as a brass-founder from 6am to 7pm and earning 1s 6d per week. Some of the older boys with several years work experience were able to earn considerably more. Charles Kirby, a 17- year-old gun-finisher with seven years experience, was paid 6s 9d weekly; Joseph Reginton, aged 17, who had begun work at ten years old, earned 12s per week as a snuffer maker; and William Yates, aged 18, who had started work at the age of seven, was earning 10s per week as a metal roller.⁶⁶ A further 6% of boys were employed in trades such as printing, engraving or

⁶⁵ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

⁶⁶ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

bricklaying and two boys were working as errand boys. Peter Rooke, a nine-year-old errand boy, 2s per week for working from 8am to 7pm each day. George Bayliss aged 11, also earned 2s per week working in the printing trade; and Thomas Branwick aged nine, earned 2s per week as a japanner. The remaining 21% of boys in the survey were either at school or 'at home'.⁶⁷

Table 4.1 Gender differences in employment (Birmingham New Meeting Sunday Schools, 1841)⁶⁸

Boys			Girls		
Type of employment	Number	Age of starting work	Type of employment	Number	Age of starting work
Brass foundry	42	8 yrs	Button making	13	7 yrs
Button making	7	7 yrs	Warehouse girls	6	8 yrs
Gun making	12	9 yrs	Lacquering	4	10 yrs
Other metal	49	8 yrs	Other metal	16	10 yrs
Jewellery	5	10 yrs	Service/nurse	11	8 yrs
Other trades	24	9 yrs	Other trades	10	11 yrs
At school	23	-	At school	16	-
At home	6	-	At home	28	-
Total	168		Total	105	

Amongst the 105 girls attending the New Meeting Sunday Schools, 46% were employed in manufacturing industries, and 42% were at home or at school. The remaining 12% included nine girls in service, two girls working as nurses, and two errand girls.⁶⁹ Girls employed in manufacturing included: Sarah Turner aged 12, working at coffin furniture manufacture and earning 4s per week; Laura Payne aged ten, a button maker earning 3s per week; and Ellen Elks aged 12, earning 3s 6d per week making umbrella wires. Older girls, such as Mary Anne Bissell, a 15-year-old button maker, could earn 6s per week. This was far more than the wages of girls who were in service, such as Sarah Purden aged 14, and Elen Hughes aged 13, who each earned just 6d per week in wages

⁶⁷ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

⁶⁸ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

⁶⁹ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

along with board and accommodation. Two girls described as nurses, Eliza Parker and Mary Ann Williams, were both nine years old, and earning 1s 6d per week. This indicates employment by a relative or neighbour as a childminder, a common occupation for girls around the age of nine, and perhaps also accounting for some of the girls in the survey who were 'at home'. This was confirmed by the headmistress of St Mary's Girls Day School in Birmingham who reported that 'girls leave at 8 or 9, as soon as they can nurse a baby or earn something at work.'⁷⁰ Although the Sunday Schools survey lists fewer girls than boys in employment, it seems likely that girls were often working as unpaid childminders or domestic helpers within their families. Overall, 79% of boys and 58% of girls in the 1841 survey were working in paid employment. The survey also found that 73% of boys and 46% of girls in the survey were employed in manufacturing industries, showing a high concentration of child labour in industrial occupations.

An extensive survey of child labour conducted by the Birmingham Educational Association in 1857 provides further details of changes in child employment patterns over time. This survey covered 14 districts of Birmingham, obtaining information on the employment status and education of 753 boys and 620 girls between the ages of seven and 13 years.⁷¹ Amongst the boys, 39% were employed, 41% were at school, and 20% were 'idle' or at home. Few of the younger boys were employed in the 1857 survey, yet more than 70% of boys aged 11 to 13 were employed. The majority of employed boys worked in manufacturing, including brass founding, button making, glass working, umbrella making and spoon making. Boys engaged in non-manufacturing occupations included errand boys, shoemakers and blacksmiths.⁷²

⁷⁰ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

⁷¹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 154-161.

⁷² BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 160-161.

Table 4.2 Boys in employment/or at school (Birmingham Educational Association Survey, 1857)⁷³

Boys (753)				
Age	Number	In employment	At school	At home
7 to 8 years	126	6%	62%	32%
8 to 9 years	147	13%	61%	26%
9 to 10 years	133	28%	45%	26%
10 to 11 years	116	44%	41%	14%
11 to 12 years	107	73%	17%	9%
12 to 13 years	114	82%	10%	7%

Table 4.3 Girls in employment/or at school (Birmingham Educational Association Survey, 1857)⁷⁴

Girls (620)				
Age	Number	In employment	At school	At home
7 to 8 years	129	3%	53%	43%
8 to 9 years	112	9%	63%	27%
9 to 10 years	96	18%	46%	35%
10 to 11 years	84	27%	33%	39%
11 to 12 years	89	46%	36%	18%
12 to 13 years	110	60%	17%	22%

Amongst the girls, 26% were employed, 42% were at school, 31% were 'idle' or at home. Again, few of the younger girls were employed, but this increased to more than 50% of girls between the ages of 11 and 13. A majority of employed girls worked in manufacturing, including 34 at button making. Girls in non-manufacturing work included 25 girls in service and eight warehouse girls. For children between the ages of 10 to 11 years, there were significant gender differences: 44% of boys in this age group were at work, compared to 27% of girls; 41% of boys aged 10 to 11 were at school, compared to 33% of girls. However, 39% of girls aged 10 to 11 were 'idle' or at home, suggesting that

⁷³ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 160.

⁷⁴ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 160.

girls in this age group were the most likely to be engaged in unpaid child-minding and domestic work.⁷⁵ The results from these two surveys suggest some changes had taken place in Birmingham between 1841 and 1857. Fewer of the youngest children were employed in 1857, but employment remained high for boys and girls aged 11 to 13.

The age of starting work

Children apprenticed by their parish under the Old Poor Law, particularly those apprenticed to textile mills and coal mines, were some of the youngest child workers. Honeyman found children were frequently apprenticed to cotton mills at ten years old or younger in the early nineteenth century, whereas Levene's study of London parish apprentices found the average age of binding was 12 years for boys and 12.5 years for girls.⁷⁶ Evidence from the 1841 survey of children attending the Birmingham New Meeting Sunday Schools indicates that non-apprenticed child workers in Birmingham manufacturing industries typically started work at eight or nine.⁷⁷ Boys mainly started work at nine years of age, such as Henry Taylor, a gun finisher; John Oldbury, a bullet mould maker; James Taylor, a brass founder and Josiah Probert, a gilt toy maker. Some boys began work much earlier: Samuel Jones aged five, employed as a stamper; John Atfield aged six, a button maker; William Field aged six, a die sinker; and Thomas Jones aged six, a tea-pot maker.⁷⁸ Girls mainly started work at eight years of age, such as Eliza Timmins, a gilt toy maker; Martha Eddowes, a button burnisher; Sarah Cartwright, a piercer; and Anna Hammond, a button carder. Anne Davis started work at just four years of age as a 'tye stitcher'. As these findings indicate, employment was available in Birmingham for boys and girls at a young age and in a wide range of trades and occupations. Much of the demand for child labour was due to the organisation of

⁷⁵ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 154-161.

⁷⁶ Honeyman, *Child Workers*, 45-47; Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship', 924.

⁷⁷ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

⁷⁸ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

production in Birmingham industries, which was dependent on low-paid child assistants. In addition, women's participation in the labour force was often dependent on the availability of inexpensive childcare, provided by young girls of just eight or nine years of age.

The 1857 survey by the Birmingham Educational Association suggests the average age of starting work had increased slightly for boys, from nine to nine and a half between 1841 and 1857, and for girls the average age had increased from eight to ten years of age.⁷⁹ By 1857, the youngest children were more likely to be at school than at work; 62% of boys and 53% of girls aged seven to eight years were in education, indicating progress for the youngest children in the intervening period. Nevertheless, at the age of 13, 82% of boys and 60% of girls were in paid employment, indicating the high demand for child workers and the willingness of parents, perhaps through economic necessity, to send their children out to work. Interestingly, where occupations have been recorded for mothers of children in the survey, approximately one-third listed their occupation as 'domestic duties'. The most frequently cited paid work by mothers included: laundress; keeping shop; needlewoman; charwoman and shoe-binding. Only a small minority of mothers were employed in manufacturing, revealing that contemporary concerns about married women with children preferring factory work may have been exaggerated.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the evidence shows a rise in the age of starting work in 1857, indicating a stronger commitment to education for children up to the age of nine or ten, a significant shift when compared to earlier decades.

Child labour and the changing demands of industry

The greater number of children at school, rather than work, reflected changing attitudes

⁷⁹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 160.

⁸⁰ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 161.

to childhood in Birmingham, alongside technological changes in industries such as pin-making. When reports on child labour in Birmingham industries were made to the Children's Employment Commission of 1862, children previously employed at pin-heading had been replaced by machines producing 220 complete pins per minute. These new machines were installed at the Birmingham firm of Edelsten & Williams, permitting a single operative to supervise four machines, producing 3,000,000 pins per week.⁸¹ The introduction of new technology in the pin trade and cut-nail trade led to these industries employing only a few children by the 1860s. Although demand for child workers in these trades had declined, children were still employed in large numbers in other Birmingham industries. The population of Birmingham increased rapidly from 183,000 in 1841 to 310,000 in 1861, providing industrial employment for 18,460 children and young people under the age of 20, including approximately 2,000 children under the age of ten years.⁸² It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that perhaps 6,000 children under 14 years were employed. The most important manufacturing industries in Birmingham at this time were brass, guns, jewellery, electro-plate, metal bedsteads, buttons, hooks and eyes, steel pens, tools, nails and screws. Investigations for the 1862 Children's Employment Commission found the largest numbers of boys were employed in brass foundries, and girls in button-making factories.⁸³

In a continuation of earlier working traditions, child workers in 1860s Birmingham were never directly employed by the owners of firms but hired as assistants by adult workers paid on a piece-work basis. This practice was described by Assistant Children's Commissioner White as 'very much to the prejudice of the children and young persons so employed' because they were controlled by the worker who employed them.⁸⁴ Although the stated hours of work in Birmingham industry were not excessive, the actual hours

⁸¹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 108.

⁸² BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, x.

⁸³ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, x.

⁸⁴ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, xii.

worked by children varied considerably. The workmen followed a tradition of working fewer hours during the early part of the week, making up their time with long hours towards the end of the week. This had an impact on working children's health, leisure time, and on their access to education as illustrated by three cases of boys employed in a brass foundry.⁸⁵ Frederick Clarke aged 11, George Rose aged 14 and Joseph Howell aged 12, had each attended day school for five or six years before starting work and continued to attend Sunday school and night school if they were not required to work until late. The examples provided by these boys show a commitment to education amongst working-class families in Birmingham, and a desire to continue with education after beginning employment.

It seems likely that many working families in 1860s Birmingham experienced a tension between their commitment to education and the need for children to make a financial contribution to the family. However, some employers expressed the view that parents in Birmingham were anxious only to exploit the earnings potential of their offspring. Watson's brass foundry employed ten men and two youths of 16 or 17 who normally worked from 8am to 7pm but sometimes to 9pm. Watson's opinion was that brass casting was 'a very unhealthy occupation' and that children should be excluded from factory work by the Factory Acts: 'They are so penned up in factories during the day that they do not care to go to evening schools, but go into streets...many persons here raise children merely for the sake of sending them to work'.⁸⁶ Watson also disagreed with the employment of women and girls in factories, suggesting that girls preferred manufacturing work to being in service because the higher earnings made them independent. Women with children also preferred to work and pay for child-minding services, with the consequence that 'The destitute state of children here can nearly

⁸⁵ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 64.

⁸⁶ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 66.

always be traced to the fact of females being so much employed'.⁸⁷ Watson's opposition to the employment of women and children in industry may have represented a typical middle-class Victorian perspective on family life, but important Birmingham industries such as the button trade remained dependent on cheap child labour.

“The forlorn little button girls”: a case study of the 1860s button industry

Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson have suggested that child labour in England reached a peak in the early decades of the nineteenth century and then declined.⁸⁸ This section focuses on the Birmingham button industry in the 1860s as a case study to explore the extent of decline in child labour, and suggests that the reality may have been different for children in this trade. William Aston's button factory employed 800 workers, including 100 young girls between the ages of seven to 13 years.⁸⁹ Children were employed directly by overseers or by adult workers. Women workers were seated close together on one side of the workbench to work the presses, with children in rows facing them to 'put in' blank buttons under the press. Assistant Commissioner White reported: 'Many of the girls are ragged and apparently ill-fed, and 13 young boys employed in a mere dark outhouse or hovel in cracking vegetable ivory nuts appeared especially rough and neglected'.⁹⁰ Normal hours were 8am or 8.30am to 7pm with breaks for meals, but if a woman press operator worked late the child assistant also remained.

The girls in the press shops started work at 'putting in' at seven or eight years old, and could be working the presses themselves within a few years. The girls interviewed by the Assistant Commissioner who worked at 'putting in' included: Bridget Conway aged 7, Harriett Rickett aged 7, Emma Robinson aged 8, Emma Anson aged 7, Sarah Ebb aged

⁸⁷ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 66.

⁸⁸ Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson, 'Rehabilitating the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 2, 45 (1992): 35.

⁸⁹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 91.

⁹⁰ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 91.

9, Susan Stokes aged 9, Betsey Walls aged 10, and Mary Conroy aged 12.⁹¹ These younger girls earned around 1s 3d per week, whereas older girls who operated the presses were paid 2s 6d or 3s per week. The press operators were: Elizabeth Hope aged 13, Esther Crowder aged 13, Ann Crompton aged 13, Sarah Hooper aged 15, and Mary Ann Collins aged 15. Sarah Hooper earned 3s per week but added, 'I am not strong in health. We doesn't have sufficient to eat as we ought. Mother is a cripple with children and father is dead'.⁹² The employment of 100 girls below the age of 14 in this button factory and the presence of a number of young girls highlights that the demand for child labour in the Birmingham button industry remained strong in the 1860s, and family poverty ensured a plentiful supply of child workers.

The proprietor of Hammond, Turner & Sons confirmed that more women and girls were employed in the button industry than any other trade in Birmingham, but he was also opposed to married women in factories as it: 'makes them neglect their homes and families'.⁹³ In a contrasting view, the owner of Smith & Wright's button factory maintained that fathers who were addicted to alcohol were responsible for sending their children out to work because they were, 'unable to resist the temptations which public-houses...hold out to our industrious and skilful artisans'.⁹⁴ Wright emphasised the importance of child workers to the button trade because they could perform many operations more swiftly and effectively than adults. In addition to the children assisting with the presses, a large number of girls worked from home at sewing buttons or hooks and eyes onto cards. Child labour was particularly important to the button and other metal trades because of competition from abroad, especially Germany.⁹⁵ This illustrates that in the face of overseas competition, child workers were perceived as vital to the survival of Birmingham's button manufacturing industry. Evidence from this case study highlights the

⁹¹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 91.

⁹² BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 93.

⁹³ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 95.

⁹⁴ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 95.

⁹⁵ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 95.

extent to which young child workers continued to be employed in Birmingham during the second half of the nineteenth century. The demand for child labour in button-making, together with the willingness of parents to send their children out to work, combined to produce industrious but frequently unhealthy children. In his report, Assistant Commissioner White identified that amongst Birmingham child workers, 'the most delicate and forlorn looking are to be found amongst the little button girls...'⁹⁶

Demand for child workers in 1860s Birmingham

In addition to the button trade and brass foundries, children worked in a wide variety of metal industries such as screw manufacture, wire-working, stamping and piercing, thimble-making, gold chain-making, jewellery, gun-making, tin-plate, japanning, and steel-pen making.⁹⁷ Beckett Brothers manufactured small tin-plate items, such as lucifer match boxes, toys, mugs and plates. The owner of this firm said they could manage without child workers if all employers agreed, but: 'many parents come to live in the town for the sake of their children's earnings. It pays a man to do so, even if he only makes half as much himself as he did elsewhere.'⁹⁸ Whereas a male agricultural labourer could earn only 7s or 8s a week, a man plus his working children could earn £2 to £3 per week in Birmingham. This information had become widespread, encouraging more families to come to Birmingham to obtain work for their children, and leading to the presence of a large number of unskilled male workers. Beckett's views represented a contemporary perception that many families migrated to Birmingham from rural districts to take advantage of child employment opportunities. The combination of low agricultural wages together with the availability of work for whole families in manufacturing provided a powerful economic incentive for migration. It also highlights the issue of intense

⁹⁶ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 60.

⁹⁷ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 82 – 135.

⁹⁸ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 84.

competition between small firms as a factor that prolonged child labour. A further point is that the availability of child labour may have discouraged the introduction of new machinery requiring capital investment, furthering the reliance on traditional production methods and working practices.

The experience of child workers in 1860s Birmingham

In this section, the differing experiences of child workers in Birmingham are explored. By the early 1860s, the chief industry in Birmingham was the brass trade, followed closely by the gun-making and the jewellery trade. Rather than being dependent on these three industries, the town was noted for its huge variety of trades in which numerous small masters employed a few skilled workmen.⁹⁹ Boys were predominantly employed in the brass trade, where they could earn between 3s 6d and 7s per week.¹⁰⁰ Girls in the button industry earned from 1s to 1s 6d per week.¹⁰¹ The Birmingham button industry in 1865 provided employment for approximately 6,000 workers, including 4,000 women and children.¹⁰² At Iliffe and Player's button factory in Newhall Street, children were employed as 'putters in' of linen buttons and older girls at presswork. Sarah Anne Greely aged nine, had worked there for 'two or three years and at another button place for two years before'. Elizabeth Porter aged six, said she was 'here for three months, and was at another button place before, where I worked from 8 to 7. The woman pays me 1s 1d a week.' Caroline Perks aged 13, a japanner, had started work at eight years old as a 'putter in'.¹⁰³ These children provide evidence that in the 1860s girls were beginning work in the button industry at between five and eight years of age, despite the campaigns against child labour. This evidence also contradicts the findings of the 1857 survey by the Birmingham Educational Association which found that girls were not beginning work until around ten

⁹⁹ Samuel Timmins, ed., *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District* (London, 1866), 222-223.

¹⁰⁰ Timmins, *Birmingham*, 285.

¹⁰¹ Timmins, *Birmingham*, 444.

¹⁰² Timmins, *Birmingham*, 443.

¹⁰³ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 99.

years of age. It appears that for some children there had been little change since the early decades of the nineteenth century in terms of the age of starting work and weekly earnings.

A further example from the button industry indicates that some children may have preferred to start work rather than attend school. Seven-year-old Henry Greatorex worked as a 'nipper', clipping off the corners of small squares of glass in a glass button factory. He worked as an assistant to Catherine Coley aged 19, who said he had been sent by his mother, 'because he would not go to school and wanted to run the streets. Her said her didn't care if he came and worked for nothing if her could get him out of the way'.¹⁰⁴ Child workers were also involved in new methods of production. For example, at Kirby's Hook & Eye Manufacturers boys were employed as machine operators in control of expensive new machinery. John Hinks aged 12, was employed to: 'Mind machine. Was never at day-school. Do not know any letters'. Albert Pipkin aged 10, said: 'Mind seven machines, have minded 11. Here 11 months. Wasn't at day school long'. A third boy, Henry Bradley aged 10, said, 'Mind an eyelet machine. If it gets wrong I stop it and get the scrap off the punch. Clean it on Saturday at 1, after it stops. Get 2s per week. Was at nails before. Can read, not so very well'.¹⁰⁵ From the testimony provided by these boys, it appears that children were placed in charge of factory machinery without the supervision of adult workers, regardless of the safety implications. The advantages for employers were twofold: not only were child workers adaptable and quick to learn new methods, more importantly they were very cheap to employ.

The differences between adult and child workers in terms of wages costs are clear in examples from one of the leading Birmingham industries. The jewellery and gilt toy trade employed approximately 7,500 workers in Birmingham by 1865, with artisans

¹⁰⁴ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 105.

¹⁰⁵ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 107.

earning average wages of 30s to 50s per week and enamellers £3 to £5 per week. Few women were employed directly in the trade, although approximately 500 women and girls were employed in making gold and silver chains.¹⁰⁶ The firm of B. Goode in St Paul's Square was a leading manufacturer of gold chain. Each of the women workers making chains employed one or two girl assistants, who were paid 1s per week.¹⁰⁷ Many of the workers were young people who had been employed in the trade for several years. Sarah Anne Bone aged 15: 'Make chains with pliers and links at a gas pipe, sometimes using the blow pipe. Have done so for three years and a half. Have a sore throat. Have it most in summer'. Jane Adderly aged 14, had worked at the firm for three years and also complained of a sore throat: 'Press links at a hand press. The hours are from 8am till 7pm, or if we are busy, till 9pm. Went to work at buttons at about 6 years old'.¹⁰⁸ John Kimberley aged 17, worked as a wire drawer at Goode's. After attending day-school for a year, he had left at the age of nine to start work, then attended Sunday school and night school for a time, but was unable to continue school because the family could not afford suitable clothing. 'Left because I had no clothes. Father gets such low wages, 10s or 12s or 14s a week, and there are nine of us. I get 9s a week, one of my brothers 19s, another 15s and another 5s'.¹⁰⁹ Although the father and four boys in the Kimberley family were working, they were a large family unable to afford clothing for school. It seems possible, however, that younger children in the family may have been able to attend school instead of starting work at a young age. This evidence from the Kimberley family also shows that two of the older brothers were able to earn higher weekly wages than their father, highlighting the preference of Birmingham industries for juvenile workers.

The steel pen industry was one of the newer manufacturing industries in Birmingham, dating from the 1820s. The industry employed 360 men and 2,050 women

¹⁰⁶ Timmins, *Birmingham*, 453.

¹⁰⁷ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 118.

¹⁰⁸ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 119.

¹⁰⁹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 119.

in 1861, plus a large number of workers employed indirectly in the manufacture of paper boxes and accessories for the pen trade.¹¹⁰ Twelve firms were involved in the Birmingham pen trade, including Joseph Gillott's factory on Victoria Street. Here, some 500 workers were employed in 'very large works, conveniently arranged, and the work rooms clean, fresh and cheerful'.¹¹¹ The stated company rule was not to employ any children below 13 years of age, but two children aged 12, Eliza Jackson and George Swain, were found operating machinery at the factory when the premises were visited by the Children's Employment Commission. At Josiah Mason's steel pen factory, Henry Warner aged 13, was employed at steel rolling, earning 4s 6d a week. Samuel Enfield aged 10, said: 'Here nearly four years. Lacquer pens, turning them in a barrel by a handle. Worked at umbrellas before and went there when going seven'. Charles Walters aged 10, was also in his second job: 'Harden pens. Fill pens, and about every half hour for five minutes pull them out of the muffle with an iron, and help the man. Get 4s a week. Was at gun work before, and minded a machine'.¹¹² At Hinks and Wells' Steel Pen Works and Rolling Mills, John Caraghan aged nine, had worked at the firm for about a year: 'Used to be at the rollers, and have scoured them four or five times, but now my work is to carry steel coils from one mill to another; carry several coils at a time'. Albert Flint, age ten, had worked at the firm for six months:

Was at guns before for a short time, at a big place. My work was to carry guns to another place. Before that played about in the streets. Mother said I ought to go to school, and would have paid for me, 2d a week, but I didn't want. My brother and sister go.¹¹³

These examples from the steel pen industry suggest that the newer Birmingham industries employed fewer children than the more traditional workshop industries. As the evidence illustrates, they were not present in large numbers and appear to have earned relatively high wages, though perhaps for more demanding or hazardous work. Five

¹¹⁰ Timmins, *Birmingham*, 633.

¹¹¹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 89.

¹¹² BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 87.

¹¹³ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 88.

years after the publication of the 1862 report, the 1867 Factory Act and 1867 Workshops Regulation Act finally extended the existing legislation on child labour to all factories and workshops. Children could no longer be legally employed below the age of eight years and children from eight to 13 years could only work half-time. In 1878 the minimum age of employment was increased to 10 years.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the extent and nature of child labour in Birmingham, exploring children's employment, particularly in manufacturing industries, from the mid-eighteenth century to the later decades of the nineteenth century. The research has highlighted that parish apprentices were unlikely to be found in Birmingham industries, and that in general child workers were not directly employed by the owners of firms. Instead, the organisation of production in Birmingham's manufacturing industries encouraged the employment of thousands of young children by individual workmen and women. In some trades, notably pin-making, children were employed in groups of 20 by overseers or supervisors, permitting owners of firms to claim they neither approved of nor employed child labour. Nevertheless, the research evidence has shown that child workers made a significant contribution to the development of manufacturing industry in Birmingham and to its competitiveness in international markets. Child labour also boosted family incomes, providing a vital safety net for families who may have been close to destitution because of unemployment or ill-health. Demand for child labour in Birmingham was so strong that many people believed families migrated to the town purely to obtain work for their children. This research has shown there was often greater availability of work for children and adolescents than for adults, the examples in this chapter shining a light on child workers who supported their parents. The findings suggest there was a gradual decline in child labour in Birmingham in the 1860s, especially amongst younger children as attitudes towards education and child labour changed over time. Even in the 1860s, however, the

majority of children began work at the age of 10 or 11. In the second half of the nineteenth century the tendency of older employed children to remain in the family home may have significantly reduced the need for younger children in a family to find employment. Fundamentally, children from working-class backgrounds had little choice about starting work, being largely dependent on the decisions made by their parents and the economic circumstances of their families. The importance of children's earnings to family incomes is discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Child Labour and the Family Economy

Introduction

The evidence in chapter 4 shows that children were widely employed in Birmingham industries, thus supporting Eric Hopkins' contention that it was traditional for children from Birmingham working-class families to go out to work as soon as they were old enough and physically strong enough to do so.¹ This chapter explores the issue further, considering the relationship between child labour and the family economy in nineteenth-century Birmingham. Family labour was widespread in industries such as textiles, metal working and coal-mining: under this system a principal worker was employed on a piece-rate basis with responsibility for employing his assistant workers, usually members of his own family. Coal miners in the early nineteenth century, for example, frequently employed their wives and children as a family labour unit, and did not support the exclusion of women and children from underground working.² Despite the growing opposition to child labour in England in the early nineteenth century, these views were not necessarily shared by labouring families who regarded all family members as economic contributors.

As Peter Kirby highlighted, family poverty was an obvious reason for employment at an early age, with children from unskilled households and single-parent families the most likely to be at work.³ In view of Birmingham's reputation for well-paid employment opportunities, how far was family poverty an important factor in child labour? This chapter

¹ Eric Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760-1840* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 158.

² Jane Mark-Lawson and Anne Witz, 'From Family Labour to Family Wage? The Case of Women's Labour in Nineteenth-Century Coalmining', *Social History*, 13, no.2 (1988):151-174.

³ Kirby, *Child Labour*, 28.

explores and evaluates the questions of why and to what extent parents in Birmingham sought employment for their children. Furthermore, it examines the economic contribution made by children to family incomes: how much did Birmingham child workers earn and how important were these earnings to families?

Male incomes, family incomes and expenditure in Birmingham

The population of Birmingham expanded rapidly from 23,688 in 1750 to 73,670 in 1801, and more than doubled to 182,922 by 1841.⁴ Birmingham had a reputation for highly paid employment, but the availability of work was subject to fluctuations in trade conditions with severe depressions from 1793 onwards during the French wars.⁵ Restrictions on trade with Europe and America introduced in 1807 and 1809 resulted in such severe hardship that petitions against the Orders in Council were made by Birmingham manufacturers in 1812.⁶ Thomas Attwood, a banker and High Bailiff of Birmingham said in evidence to the House of Commons: 'Great numbers of workmen have been dismissed in the last twelve months...', and men who had previously earned 20s per week, '...cannot now obtain more than 10s or 12s, and hundreds of them are to be had at 12s a week'.⁷ According to the evidence of Thomas Potts, an export merchant, every branch of trade in Birmingham was depressed, with at least 20,000 to 25,000 men unemployed for half the week. Whereas a button burnisher or plater had previously earned 40s to 50s per week, and lesser skilled workmen 25s to 30s per week, the same men could now earn only half these amounts.⁸ Button manufacturer Henry Dunbar had significantly reduced his workforce, placing the remaining workers on short-time earnings of 10s to 15s per week

⁴ Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 119.

⁵ Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 70-73.

⁶ BPP, 1812, *Minutes of Evidence to the Committee for Petitions against the Orders in Council*, Volume III.

⁷ BPP, 1812, *Minutes of Evidence to the Committee for Petitions against the Orders in Council*, Volume III, 2.

⁸ BPP, 1812, *Minutes of Evidence to the Committee for Petitions against the Orders in Council*, Volume III, 28.

instead of 40s to 50s per week.⁹ A report by the Birmingham Statistical Society in 1837 estimated that despite fluctuations in wages and availability of work, the town's population had increased to approximately 180,000, including 45,000 children and young people between the ages of five and 15 years.¹⁰ Throughout the nineteenth century, Birmingham was a magnet for young families in search of work opportunities despite further economic depressions in the mid-1820s and early 1840s. How, then, did wages in Birmingham industries compare with average earnings in other regions and industries? The Chadwick Report of 1842 included a survey of average wages in Birmingham provided by a provident society:

Table 5.1 Average weekly wages - Birmingham, 1842 ¹¹

	Weekly Amount	Nos.
Male wages (over 21)	24s 2d	134
Female wages (over 21)	7s 10d	68
Juvenile males (age 14 - 20)	5s 10d	211
Juvenile females (age 14-20)	5s 2d	62
Boys (up to 14)	3s 1d	278
Girls (up to 14)	2s 5d	34

Provident society members in this survey were employed in 110 different occupations, including 623 male and 164 female workers. These were more affluent manual workers, as Chadwick's report points out: 'the circumstance of their depositing a portion of their earnings in this society shows the members of it to be a more provident and better class of workpeople'.¹² Nevertheless, the fact that provident society members included boys and girls as young as seven or eight raises questions about the financial situation of their families. It suggests some working-class families in Birmingham could afford to put money aside for future events, even from the smallest weekly wages. It also

⁹ BPP, 1812, *Minutes of Evidence to the Committee for Petitions against the Orders in Council*, Volume III, 105.

¹⁰ BAH, MS 1683/1, *Birmingham Statistical Society Report* (1837).

¹¹ BPP, 1842, 007, xxvii, *Sanitary Inquiry England, Local Reports*, 209-210 (henceforth *Chadwick's Report*, 1842)

¹² *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 210.

gives an indication of the extent to which children were regarded by their parents as economic contributors to the family, whose loss of earnings would be significant. According to the findings of Chadwick's report, 'a very numerous class of workpeople' earned considerably more than average wages.¹³ Some workmen earned 30s to 50s a week and young women could earn 10s to 14s in Birmingham. Moreover, members of the same family rarely worked in the same trade, so that if one trade was depressed, another might be expanding.¹⁴

The Heaton family of Birmingham represent an example of a family who worked together in the trade of 'coin, metal, wire and tube making' for the firm of Ralph Heaton & Sons.¹⁵ Four family members were employed in 1842, headed by Ralph Heaton who was paid 80s per week. Ralph Heaton Junior and Elizabeth Heaton each earned 5s per week, and Harry Heaton, earned 1s per week, suggesting the two eldest children were around 13 or 14 years old and the youngest around eight years old. Wages for the first quarter of 1842 show that although one or two employees received the same amount each week, such as Richard Sutherland who earned 25s weekly, nearly all other employees earned varying amounts each week, indicating they were paid on piece-work rates. The lowest paid workers were women or girls: Jane Brown earned 2s 2d per week; Elizabeth Hinks between 2s and 4s weekly; Charlotte Brisband, 4s to 7s and Harriet Morton, 5s to 8s weekly. The lowest paid male workers were Luke Brisband, earning an average of 7s weekly and Thomas Butler averaging 14s per week. Amongst the 18 employees, six workers earned an average of 24s or more per week. The highest paid employee was Thomas Adams who earned 85s 7d in the first week of January 1842, and was paid an average of 47s per week, confirming he was one of the elite workmen identified by Chadwick's report. The business records of Ralph Heaton & Sons show the owner was employing members of his own family in 1842, a decision that may have

¹³ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 210.

¹⁴ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 210.

¹⁵ BAH, MS1010/8, *Ralph Heaton & Sons*, Wages Book, 1840-1861.

contributed to the successful expansion of the firm, which employed more than 200 workers by 1862.¹⁶

The evidence about average wages for Birmingham workers relates largely to those employed in the town's metal industries. Additional evidence of typical weekly earnings during this period is provided by the Statistics of Wages in the Building Trades compiled and published by the Royal Statistical Society. This reveals that in 1843 average weekly wages for carpenters in Birmingham were 25s per week, compared with 26s in Manchester, 24s in Liverpool and 23s in Oldham and Derby.¹⁷ Average earnings for skilled workers in Birmingham were roughly similar to those in other industrial towns. On the other hand, a comparison of Birmingham rates of pay with earnings in various occupations as compiled by Sarah Horrell and Jane Humphries, indicates that manual workers in Birmingham were highly paid, earning at least twice the weekly pay of agricultural workers.¹⁸

Table 5.2 Comparison of national average weekly wages with average wages in Birmingham, 1841-1845¹⁹

	Male Wages	Family Wages
Textile Factory	19s	30s
Trades	15s	15s 9d
Mining	16s 6d	23s 9d
Agriculture (high)	12s	13s 5d
Agriculture (low)	8s 6d	12s 3d
Birmingham	24s 2d	37s 6d (estimated)

The figures for agricultural workers earnings in table 5.2 are supported by data from the Royal Statistical Society, which calculated average annual incomes for

¹⁶ BAH, MS1010/8, *Ralph Heaton & Sons, Wages Book, 1840-1861*.

¹⁷ A. L. Bowley, 'Wages in the Building Trades - English Towns', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. LXIII, Part II (1900).

¹⁸ Horrell & Humphries, 'Old Questions', 855-859.

¹⁹ Horrell & Humphries, 'Old Questions', 855-859; *Chadwick's Report, 1842*.

agricultural workers of £30.11s 0d per annum or 11s 9d per week in 1833.²⁰ These considerable income differentials made Birmingham an attractive destination for migrating families in the nineteenth century, particularly those from rural areas of Warwickshire and the neighbouring counties of Worcestershire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire. Whether these newcomers, along with migrants fleeing from the famine in Ireland, were able to rapidly acquire the industrial trade skills required for well-paid work in Birmingham seems unlikely. A lack of appropriate skills and experience may therefore provide an additional explanation of why the earnings of children and young people were so important to family incomes. Nicola Verdon's analysis of the Poor Law Commission's 1830s survey found that children's earnings were often more important than women's earnings in rural districts, yet the most significant contributions to family incomes were made in non-agricultural occupations.²¹ For example, children were employed in Cornwall's copper and tin mines and the china clay industry; in Wiltshire, children worked in domestic silk weaving; and in rural areas of Staffordshire and Worcestershire nail-making provided opportunities for child employment. Verdon concluded that rural counties with non-agricultural work for children had the greatest impact in offsetting low male earnings.²² In view of the demand for child workers in Birmingham, it seems reasonable to suggest a similar reliance on children's earnings may have existed amongst recently arrived families, especially in the early decades of the nineteenth century when population expansion was rapid.

Newly-arrived families, along with families of unskilled or unemployed workers and those headed by lone parents, were the most likely to rely on children to contribute to the family economy. When average expenditure on rent, fuel and food are considered, they

²⁰ A.L. Bowley, 'Agricultural Wages', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. LXII, Part III (1899).

²¹ Nicola Verdon, 'The rural labour market in the early nineteenth century: women's and children's employment, family income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *Economic History Review*, LV,2 (2002), 319.

²² Verdon, 'The rural labour market', 320.

appear to have been affordable for a skilled workman earning the average wages of 24s or 25s per week. Chadwick's 1842 report found most working families in Birmingham were housed in courts of back to back housing, paying rents of 2s 6d to 3s 6d per week.²³ For fuel, families were likely to use two hundredweight of coal per week at a cost of 14d. Although there is no break-down of expenditure on food for a family, Chadwick records that a cooked dinner of meat and potatoes for a workman was available from cook-shops for 4d and stewing meat was sold at 9d a pound. Women and children were unlikely to receive a share of the good meat, however, as 'the more careful housewife buys what are called bits of meat at 5d a pound – these she stews with potatoes and onions, and forms a wholesome and nutritious meal for herself and her children.'²⁴ Assuming there was continuity of employment, the evidence from Chadwick's investigation suggests that basic requirements of food, shelter, and heating were within the means of those on average wages, especially if incomes of working wives and children were added. The combined cost of a family's rent and heating of around 4s 2d per week could be covered by the wages of a boy of 13 or 14 years.²⁵

Birmingham's population expanded to 232,000 in 1851, an increase that seems to have been linked to high average wages and the availability of work for children and young people which drew in migrants. Table 5.3 below outlines the average earnings in 1866 for men, women, boys and girls in the leading Birmingham metal industries. As these figures show, by 1866 the average wages for skilled workers in Birmingham were between 30s and 40s per week, with elite workmen earning as much as £4 or £5 for some weeks. The average wages for unskilled workers and labourers were considerably lower at 15s to 20s per week. This source provides evidence of the wages people could earn, but does not indicate the proportion of the workforce who were skilled workers earning the higher amounts.

²³ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 195.

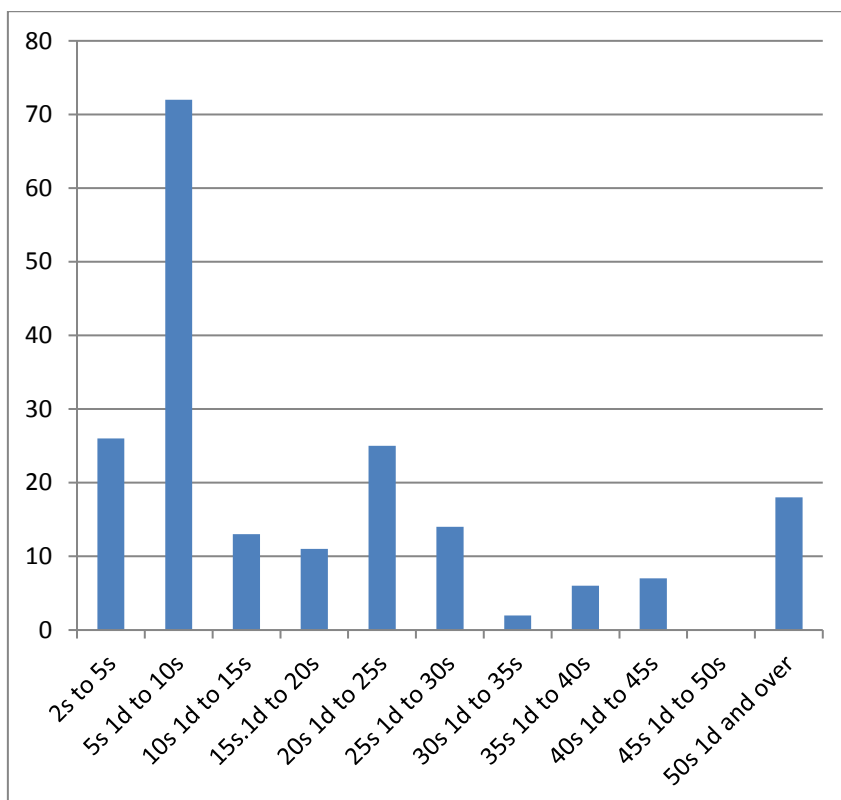
²⁴ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 212.

²⁵ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 209.

Table 5.3 Average weekly wages in Birmingham metal trades (1866)²⁶

Industry	Skilled male workers	Highest earnings	Unskilled/Labourers	Boys	Women	Girls
Button trade	25s	40s to 80s 60s to			7s to 9s	1s to 1s 6d
Jewellery trade	30s to 50s	100s	10s to 11s	4s		
Hemp & wire rope	30s to 40s				6s to 10s	
Wire drawing	35s	50s to 65s				
Hinges	30s				5s to 10s	
Cut nails	25s to 50s	90s to	15s to 20s	10s to 15s	10s to 15s	
Steel pen trade	30s to 80s	100s	18s to 20s	4s 6d to 16s	15s to 20s	2s 6d to 12s
Brass tubes	30s		15s to 18s	4s 6d to 10s	10s to 12s	4s to 8s
Hydraulic machinery	30s to 40s	55s	30s to 40s			

Figure 5.1 Weekly Wages at R Heaton & Sons (1st March 1861)²⁷



²⁶ Timmins, *Birmingham*, 285, 362, 432, 444, 453, 616, 636, 647.

²⁷ BAH, MS1010/8, *Ralph Heaton & Sons, Wages Book, 1840-1861*.

The wages record of Ralph Heaton & Sons in Figure 5.1 above, shows that approximately 98 workers, or almost half the workforce at Ralph Heaton & Sons, were earning 10s a week or less, with a further 63 employees earning more than 10s but less than 30s weekly.²⁸ Only 33 employees received the 'average' wages of 30s per week or more. This data indicates that the majority of workers at this firm were women and young people, although the ages of workers are not specified in the wages records. At the same time, some of the skilled workmen appear to have earned considerably more than average wages. Two of the highest paid employees were J. Willder who earned £29.2s.4d, and William Hems who was paid £28.5s.11d for the week ending 1st March 1861.²⁹ These amounts do not appear to have been isolated payments, since Hems earned a total of £284.11s.5d in the first quarter of 1861, averaging almost £22 per week. One explanation for these very high weekly payments may be that these workmen employed their own teams of workers, and perhaps supplied their own raw materials. Payments to these workmen would therefore have to cover these costs. Other high-earning workmen included T. Simmonds, who was paid £19.0s.2d, and Joseph Moore, £14.5s.4d. John Evans and Thomas Fisher were paid £7.18s.5d and £7.3s.0d respectively in the same week. The evidence from this firm raises a number of points: firstly, it confirms that skilled workmen in Birmingham were able to command high wages, and in a few cases, quite exceptional weekly earnings; secondly, it suggests that if this was a typical employer, skilled workers comprised a relatively small proportion of the workforce; and thirdly, that the majority of workers were earning less than 20s per week, highlighting the extent of employment for women and children in the workforce, and their financial value to the family economy.

In the case of one employee, the firm of R Heaton & Sons not only provided employment for many years, but it also employed several members of his family. Moses

²⁸ BAH, MS1010/8, *Ralph Heaton & Sons, Wages Book, 1840-1861.*

²⁹ BAH, MS1010/8, *Ralph Heaton & Sons, Wages Book, 1840-1861.*

Howlett was listed in the wages records for March 1842, earning average wages of between 22s 6d and 24s per week. Twenty years later Howlett continued to be employed by the firm, earning 66s for the week ending 1st March 1861.³⁰ The increased pay since 1841 placed him in the category of 'high-earning' skilled workers by 1862, according to the information drawn from contemporary sources.³¹ Listed in the wages records alongside Moses Hewlett were his three children: John Howlett who was paid 12s 2d, Moses Howlett Jnr was paid 8s 2d; and Elizabeth Howlett who was paid 8s 9d, a weekly total for the family of £4.15s 1d. The 1861 census recorded Moses Howlett as a 47-year-old toolmaker, living with his family in Brearley Street near the Birmingham jewellery quarter.³² His sons, John aged 16, and Moses aged 15 were also recorded as toolmakers, and his daughter Betsy, aged 19, was a warehouse woman. Additional family members living in the Howlett household were daughter Mary Ann aged 21, who was employed as a harness stitcher and two younger sons, William aged 13 and George aged 12, both gold-chain makers.

This example of the Howlett family, headed by a well-paid workman with six older children at work, indicates that Birmingham's reputation for good employment opportunities was certainly true for some families. Birmingham also provided lucrative employment for William Hems, mentioned above, who was paid an average of £22 per week at R. Heaton & Sons. The 1861 census records William Hems as a 38-year-old copper roller who lived with his wife and four young children.³³ Mrs Hems had no occupation listed and the children were recorded as 'scholars'. Clearly, there was no financial necessity for William Hems' wife and children to work, since the head of the household was able to provide comfortably for his family. For those less fortunate in

³⁰ BAH, MS1010/9, *Ralph Heaton & Sons, Wages Book, 1861-1873.*

³¹ Timmins, *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District*, 453, 636.

³² Census of England and Wales, 1861

³³ Census of England and Wales, 1861

obtaining well-paid employment, the poorest families were forced to turn to the Guardians of the Poor for relief, or rely on the earnings of their children.

Children at work, at school or 'at home'

The Birmingham Statistical Society for the Improvement of Education conducted an extensive survey in 1835 on the state of education in Birmingham.³⁴ It reported that from a total of 45,000 children between the ages of five and 15 years resident in Birmingham, only 11,645 or approximately 25%, were attending day and evening schools. These findings indicate that more than 30,000 children within the age group were either at home or at work, although as the survey was concerned solely with education, it gave no indication of the numbers in employment. A survey conducted in 1841 by the New Meeting Sunday Schools of 273 children attending Sunday schools found 44% of children aged five to nine years were at school and 22% were at work. Amongst children aged 10 to 13 years, 11% were at school and 78% were at work.³⁵ The Birmingham Education Society conducted an extensive survey in 1867, involving 15,847 families with a total of 45,056 children aged between three to 15 years.³⁶ The survey identified 86 boys and 90 girls aged five to nine years who were employed, representing less than 1% of the 20,527 children in this age group. This figure is lower than the national figure of 2% child employment for this age group as calculated by Hugh Cunningham from the 1851 census data.³⁷ It is also significantly lower than the 1851 census data for the county of Warwickshire, which recorded that 3.4% of boys and 1.4% of girls were employed in the age group. The 1867 Birmingham survey reveals that amongst children aged 10 to 13 years, 2,425 or 36.9% of boys were employed and 1,425 or 23.6% of girls. These figures compare with 37% of boys and 20% of girls nationally as reported in the 1851 census.

³⁴ BAH, MS 1683/1, *Birmingham Statistical Society Report* (1837).

³⁵ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 200-203.

³⁶ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868).

³⁷ Cunningham, 'The employment and unemployment of children', 115-150.

For the country of Warwickshire, the 1851 census recorded 44.8% of boys and 24.8% of girls in this age group were employed.³⁸

Table 5.4 Birmingham Education Society Survey of 1867 (Boys)³⁹

Boys (age)	3 - 4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	Total
No of boys	1883	2083	2241	2114	2097	1991	1893	1763	1578	1546	1679	2184	23052 (100%)
Been at school	559	1215	1585	1650	1728	1638	1550	1436	1240	1264	1407	1804	17076 (74%)
Not been at school	1324	868	656	464	369	358	348	327	338	282	272	380	5976 (26%)
At school now	559	750	1016	1134	1159	1057	970	721	523	321	179	198	8587 (37%)
At work						26	60	291	427	715	992	1391	3902 (17%)
Average earnings						1s 4d	1s 10d	2s 0d	2s 3d	2s 8d	3s 1d	4s 1d	

Table 5.5 Birmingham Education Society Survey of 1867 (Girls)⁴⁰

Girls (age)	3 - 4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	Total
No of girls	1985	1983	2113	2064	2082	2018	1914	1702	1514	1500	1312	1617	22004 (100%)
Been at school	577	1108	1431	1553	1691	1611	1566	1388	1256	1228	1228	1284	15921 (72%)
Not been at school	1404	875	682	511	391	407	348	314	258	272	284	333	6083 (28%)
At school now	577	673	926	946	1061	1032	985	771	625	394	284	157	8436 (38%)
At work						18	34	96	183	342	542	740	1966 (9%)
Average earnings						1s 1d	1s 8d	1s 8d	2s 0d	2s 3d	2s 6d	3s 2d	
In service						16	22	37	50	78	97	180	430 (2%)

³⁸ Cunningham, 'The employment and unemployment of children', 115-150.

³⁹ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868).

⁴⁰ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868).

Overall, 4,026 children under the age of 14 in the Birmingham survey were employed in 1867, or 12% of the 33,321 children in the age group between five and 13 years. This suggests was a substantial reduction in child employment compared to the possible numbers employed in 1841 and 1851, but the survey results also show that only 50.1% of five to nine year-olds were 'at school now', alongside 10,065 children in this age group who were neither at school nor at work. Amongst children of 10 to 13 years, there were 3,818 'at school now', or 30.3% of the age group, with a further 4,926 children in this age group who were neither at school nor at work. The Birmingham Education Society was formed in 1867 as a campaigning organisation with the ultimate aim of achieving universal free education in Birmingham. The 1867 survey may therefore have been designed with an in-built bias in framing the questions to suit the aims of the organisation; for example, by assuming that parents failed to send their children to school simply because they could not afford to pay the school fees. Another explanation may be that parents relied on children's earnings and that a loss of these was more significant than the cost of school fees. The economic circumstances of families involved in the survey thus adds further insights, as explored in the next section.

Children's earnings and family budgets

The Birmingham Education Society visited 15,847 families in 1867, establishing that 10,227 families had incomes of 20s 9d per week.⁴¹ This weekly amount was well below the average wages for skilled workers in Birmingham at the time, but reflected the wages typically paid to unskilled workers and labourers. The remaining families included: 1,222 families who were unemployed; 1,587 families headed by widows or deserted women; and 2,811 families where information on wages was not given.⁴² The society was also able to obtain more detailed information from 300 of the families visited (see table 5.6).

⁴¹ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868).

⁴² BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868):19.

Table 5.6 Details of 300 families interviewed in 1867⁴³

Families		
Total no of persons	1842	%
Average income per head/per wk after rent	1s 1¼d	
Rent per head per week	5¼d	
Total no of children of all ages	1322	100%
No of children at school	31	2%
No at work above 15 years	334	25%
No. at work below 15 years	79	6%
Neither at work or school above 15 yrs	28	2%
Neither at work or school, 3 yrs to 15 yrs	440	33%
Children under 3 years	410	31%

The information on these families indicates that each family had an average of six members, with a weekly income of 1s 1¼d per head per week, or a total income of 6s 7½d per family after rent, or 9s 3d per family before rent, a considerably lower income than the average wages of 30s per week for a skilled worker.⁴⁴ The Society provided a second example of 80 families headed by widows or women deserted by their husbands:

Table 5.7 Details of 80 families headed by women in 1867⁴⁵

Families		
Total no. of persons	494	%
Income per head per wk after rent	10¼d	
Rent per head per week	5½d	
Total no. of children	414	100%
No. of children at school	4	1%
No. at work under 15 years	90	18%
No. at work above 15 years	64	15%
Neither at work nor school above 15 yrs	18	4%
Neither at work nor school 3 yrs to 15 yrs	174	42%

⁴³ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868).

⁴⁴ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868):9.

⁴⁵ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868):9.

The details in table 5.7 illustrate the very low incomes of single-parent families, averaging an income of 1s 4d½ per person per week after rent, or 8s 3d per week for a family of six people. It is also particularly noticeable that within this group of families, only four children from a total of 414 children were attending school. Members of the Education Society paid an annual subscription of £1 1s 0d so that the society could support poorer families by paying all or part of their children's school fees. The first society's report in 1868 recorded that school fees of 2½d per week had been paid for 3,097 children, with an average school attendance of 8¼ half-days per week.⁴⁶ However, they found that 1,178 of the free school orders, approximately 25% of the total number issued had not been taken up. After making allowances for children who were ill or who had gone to work, the society reported that 'a large number of children and parents remain indifferent to the advantages offered them.'⁴⁷ They thus suggested that poor families were sub-divided into two classes: one class were prevented from sending their children to school due to poverty, and were making good use of the free school orders provided by the society, sending their children to school regularly. The second class of families had no interest in education, and failed to send their children to school even when the fees were paid.

Member of the society came to the conclusion that children from the second class of families could only be drawn into education by compulsion. Interestingly, they focused on children who did not take up the opportunity of a free school place, rather than on children absent from school due to work. Although the society's aim was to increase the numbers of children in education, in this report it did not appear to be critical of working children who were contributing to the family finances. Later reports by the society's successor, the National Education League, did however comment on parents' reliance on their children's earnings. A National Education League leaflet, published in 1871, insisted

⁴⁶ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868):10.

⁴⁷ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868):10.

that compulsory and free education was necessary because parents were not only too poor to pay for school fees, but were 'aggrieved by any interference with their right to the earnings of their children'.⁴⁸

The importance of clothing

The Birmingham Education Society's 1867 report identified a third group of children whose parents could not afford school fees, but who could not be offered free school places by the society 'through want of clothes'.⁴⁹ According to the society's investigators, this group, which comprised a total of 931 children, lived with their families in such extreme poverty they were 'almost naked'. Such a lack of clothing meant that no school would be able to accept them. The report noted, 'In many cases, families of children are found with nothing that can be called a garment on them', highlighting that a significant number of children were from families so poor as to be beyond the help of the charity. The importance of clothing, or more accurately the absence of suitable clothing, has been identified by a number of writers as a barrier to accessing education and employment. Writing about his childhood in 1890s Salford, Jack Lanigan recalled that his widowed mother took in washing to pay the rent, and although Jack and his brother went to school they were unable to attend Sunday school because they did not possess adequate clothing and shoes. In Jack's neighbourhood, 'You were considered posh if you could attend Sunday school.'⁵⁰ Similarly, historians researching pauper letters in parish records of the early nineteenth-century have found a predominance of requests for clothing and shoes to relieve extreme poverty.⁵¹

⁴⁸ BAH, MS 4248, *National Education League Leaflet* (1871).

⁴⁹ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868):17.

⁵⁰ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 88.

⁵¹ Peter D Jones, 'I cannot keep my place without being deascent: Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750-1830', *Rural History*, 20, 1 (2009):31-49; Peter Jones, 'Clothing the Poor in Early-Nineteenth-Century England', *Textile History*, 37 (2006): 17-37; Joanne Bailey, 'Think wot a mother must feel: Parenting in English Pauper Letters c.1760-1834', *Family & Community History*, 13,1 (2010):6-19.

For the Birmingham children whose families were too poor to clothe them, there would also have been no opportunity to assist their families through paid work, unless the work could be undertaken at home. At the same time, the earnings declared by children in the 1867 survey seem particularly low, ranging from 1s 0¼d to a maximum of 3s 1¼d per week for children aged eight to 13 years, which is at the lower end of average wages for boys and girls.⁵² One explanation for this may be that respondents were under-reporting their earnings. Another explanation is that many of the children may have been undertaking low-paid work at home, alongside other family members. What seems clear, however, is that incomes reported in this survey were far lower than average incomes for families of skilled workers in Birmingham. This suggests a substantial proportion of Birmingham families were headed by unskilled male workers, whose earnings needed to be supplemented by the earnings of their wives and children.

Case studies: George Jacob Holyoake and Will Thorne

Differences in average earnings and the extent to which Birmingham parents may have relied upon children's earnings is further illuminated by an examination of the autobiographies of George Jacob Holyoake and Will Thorne. Holyoake, born in Birmingham in 1817, was from a hard-working family whose children were expected to work from an early age.⁵³ Holyoake's mother, Catherine, was a horn button maker with her own workshop attached to the house. She had run this business before marriage, employing several workers, receiving orders, purchasing raw materials and supervising the manufacture of the buttons. After marrying, she continued to run her business from the family home in Inge Street, alongside raising a large family of eleven children. As Holyoake writes, 'There were no "Rights of Women" thought of in her day, but she was an

⁵² BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868).

⁵³ George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, (London: Fisher Unwin, 1900).

entirely self-acting, managing mistress.⁵⁴ He adds that it was 'a peculiarity of Birmingham' that numerous small trades existed in households, providing families with independence and prosperity when trade was good. From a young age George had been trained to work in his mother's horn button-making business, using the lathe and press: 'I learned to wind the copper wire on a flat steel turned by a lathe, to stamp the coil into shank form under a press, and to cut the shanks with shears which often strained my little hands.'⁵⁵ He also helped with processes which involved using a hammer, vice and file before the buttons were dried and polished in a long bag: 'They were then strung into grosses, and delivered to the merchants who ordered them.'⁵⁶

Following this early career as a button-maker, Holyoake worked for a 'tinman' making lanterns. He undertook this work in the evenings after school, indicating his family could afford to send him to school, although perhaps his employment paid for the school fees. The work involved using a soldering iron to solder handles onto metal lanterns, for which he could earn up to 3s 6d per week, although he often burned his hands on the soldering iron.⁵⁷ Holyoake was therefore able to make a very useful contribution to the family income, even as a part-time worker after school. Nevertheless, it appears he wanted to leave school as soon as possible in order to work full-time, 'Afterwards, I persuaded my father to take me with him to the Eagle Foundry, from a desire to be at work. I must have been very young then, as I remember asking my father to let me hold his hand...'⁵⁸ He began work at the foundry in Broad Street when he was 12 or 13, learning the trade of whitesmith. Writing his autobiography some 60 years later, he recalled his good fortune in acquiring a life-long skill, 'The capacity to work as a whitesmith or engineer has always been a source of pride to me. Anything I could do in

⁵⁴ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 10.

⁵⁵ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 19.

⁵⁶ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 19.

⁵⁷ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 19.

⁵⁸ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 19.

my mechanic days I could do ever after. It gave me a sense of independence.⁵⁹ This belief supported him during his adult years when he became a lecturer and a leader in the co-operative movement.

George Holyoake's account of his childhood throws light on a number of points about attitudes towards child labour in Birmingham during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Firstly, it seems clear that although the family was financially stable, with the head of the household employed at the Eagle Foundry for more than 40 years, Holyoake worked as a very young child alongside his mother and siblings in a home-based workshop. This example fits with the view that children in Birmingham were traditionally expected to work as soon as possible and contribute to the family income, especially in family businesses. Secondly, Holyoake writes about working in the evenings after school, implying that attending school and then going to work was quite normal for a boy in his neighbourhood. This indicates working families recognised children needed to acquire basic educational skills, but they also believed in the value of hard work and self-help, especially for children from a large family. Thirdly, his autobiography suggests he was not only happy to work after school, but also that he chose to work full-time in the foundry alongside his father. This desire for self-sufficiency as a skilled workman became a matter of pride which remained with him. Finally, there is nothing in Holyoake's account to suggest he resented his parents' expectation that he should work as a child. In fact, he was willing and eager to learn and proud to be able to make a financial contribution to his family.

Will Thorne was born in Hockley, Birmingham in 1857, approximately 40 years later than George Holyoake. Thorne achieved success in adult life as General Secretary of the National Union of Gas Workers and General Labourers in 1889, and was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1906. His lack of education during childhood was remedied by

⁵⁹ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 19.

evening classes at an institute of adult education in East London, where he met George Bernard Shaw and other leading socialists. On becoming secretary of the gas workers union, Thorne was fortunate in being able to rely on Eleanor Marx, the daughter of Karl Marx, for assistance with report writing and drafting union rules.⁶⁰ His early life, however, was dominated by hard work and severe hardship following the death of his father when he was only seven years old.⁶¹ Thorne began work at just six years of age at Rob's Rope Walk in Duddeston Mill Road, Birmingham. His job was to assist a rope and twine spinner by turning a wheel, for which he was paid 2s 6d a week for a 12-hour working day. On Saturdays, after finishing at the rope walk at 1pm, he worked in his uncle's barber's shop until 11pm, and returned on Sundays for a further six hours, earning an additional 1s per week. Thorne describes how, after the death of his father in 1864, life became even more difficult. His mother and sister worked at sewing hooks and eyes onto cards for a tiny reward, but the family had to turn to the Poor Law for relief, receiving 4s and four loaves of bread per week for a family of five.⁶² He went to work for an uncle at a brick and tile works, adding a three-mile walk to the beginning and end of his 12-hour working day, for which he earned 7s a week.

After being dismissed for falling asleep during night-time work, Thorne found work at another brickyard at 8s per week, but was forced by his mother to give this up when he started to develop a hump-back. As Thorne describes his life at this time, 'Here was I, a boy of nine years of age, that should have been in school, getting up in the cold of early morning, leaving home at about 4.30, walking four miles to work, and then after a twelve-hour day, walking back again...'⁶³ Following this experience, he worked as a plumber's mate and general handyman. After this came a stint with a firm which collected cow and pig hair from butchers shops, then at the age of 14, employment at a Birmingham metal

⁶⁰ Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx, A Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 322-323.

⁶¹ Will Thorne, *My Life's Battles* (London: Whitefriars, Press, 1915), 15.

⁶² Will Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 16.

⁶³ Will Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 19.

rolling and ammunition works. The work here was hot, noisy and dangerous, removing metal bars from furnaces into pickling tubs containing a solution of acid that burnt the skin and clothes.⁶⁴ Like Holyoake, Thorne made no criticism of his mother, but pointed out the lack of legislation to protect children, the ignorance of health and safety, and general exploitation of workers by employers. His early experience of 'long years of drudging work' created a life-long desire to improve working conditions through the trade union movement. In contrast to Holyoake's experience, Thorne was from a single-parent family and forced to work in order to support his family, rather than making a contribution. The declaration in his autobiography that 'I can never forget the horror of my childhood days and the misery and suffering I have seen...' highlights the differing work experiences of children, depending on the individual circumstances of their family.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter has been to examine the relationship between child labour and the family economy in nineteenth-century Birmingham. It was traditional in Birmingham for children to begin work at a relatively early age in order to supplement family incomes and become self-sufficient. As Hopkins has emphasized, success in Birmingham was expected to be achieved through self-help, hard work and initiative, with less value placed on advancement through education.⁶⁶ Birmingham was also renowned as a town of opportunity, offering the prospect of well-paid employment to anyone prepared to work hard. The evidence in this chapter supports the perception that average wages for skilled workers in Birmingham compared favourably with other industries and trades, such as textiles and mining. Nevertheless, it was also the case that the wages earned by skilled workers were considerably higher than the earnings of unskilled workers and labourers. Newly-arrived families who did not possess the necessary skills required

⁶⁴ Will Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 21.

⁶⁵ Will Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 221.

⁶⁶ Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 158-161.

for well-paid employment in Birmingham were therefore likely to rely on the supplementary earnings of their children. It also appears to be the case that families with young children below the age of 10 were those most likely to be surviving on low incomes. Families with older children, such as Moses Howlett's family, were likely to do particularly well, since young workers between the ages of 14 to 20 were in high demand. By the time of the Birmingham Education Society survey in 1867, average wages for skilled workers in Birmingham were approximately 30s per week, with some workers earning 40s or 50s per week, or higher. However, the average earnings of more than 15,000 families included in the survey were only 20s per week, just two-thirds of the average earnings paid to skilled workers. This disparity in incomes suggests many Birmingham families were reliant on their children's earnings because of low-pay, but the financial situation of individual families may have improved when adult workers acquired additional skills and older children entered the workforce. The society's report that almost 1,000 children were 'too poor to be helped by a free school place' because of insufficient clothing, indicates the extent of absolute poverty alongside more prosperous families in nineteenth-century Birmingham.

Differences in children's experiences is further emphasised in the accounts provided by George Holyoake and Will Thorne in their respective autobiographies. Holyoake was able to attend school and work in the evenings during the 1820s, after persuading a small tradesman to employ him. His earnings of 3s 6d per week were undoubtedly an important addition to the family budget, but perhaps not vital, since his father was a skilled worker in regular employment. Will Thorne's childhood experiences in the 1860s were much harsher, because of the loss of his father. In effect, he became the family breadwinner from the age of seven, working full time in the brickyards after a long walk to work. Nevertheless, he recalls his mother's insistence on his leaving the brickyards for the sake of his health, even though the family would suffer from the drastic loss of income. In contrast to the viewpoint of the National Education League, some

parents were more concerned with the well-being of their children than earnings from child labour. These case studies illustrate the differing economic circumstances of labouring families in Birmingham and the impact of poverty on children. As this chapter demonstrates many families often had no choice other than to rely on the earnings of their children.

Chapter 6

Education, Industrialisation and Child Labour

Introduction

Children in Birmingham faced a variety of childhood experiences closely dependent on the economic circumstances of their families. A survey by the Birmingham Statistical Society in 1838 found that only 25% of Birmingham children were attending either day or evening schools, and successive government enquiries revealed the lack of education amongst Birmingham children, citing the early age of starting work as a major barrier.¹ However, George Jacob Holyoake's childhood experience offers an alternative explanation of working-class approaches to schooling and child labour. The Holyoake family lived in back-to-back housing in the centre of Birmingham, where the young Holyoake found 'it was an attraction to me to watch at a tinman's shop window, and see him make lanterns. At length he consented to take me, when the afternoon school was over, to work through the evening soldering the handles on lanterns.'² What stands out from this piece is the inclusion of the phrase 'when the afternoon school was over', indicating it was quite normal for a boy from a large working-class family with eleven children to attend school daily and work part-time in the evenings. The type of school Holyoake attended was not recorded in his autobiography, but given the location of his home in Inge Street close to the town centre, he may have been a pupil at the Royal Lancasterian School in nearby Severn Street. He also regularly attended Sunday school at Carr's Lane Congregational Church, another typical route into schooling for working-

¹ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol.3, no.1 (1840): 25-49; BPP, 1843, 430, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 167.

² Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 19.

class children.³ This example thus raises questions about the availability of schooling for working-class children in the nineteenth century, challenging the perception that Birmingham labouring families did not value education for their children.⁴

This chapter argues that working families in Birmingham adopted a variety of strategies to enable their children to access basic schooling combined with contributions to the family income through paid work. It highlights the tensions between middle-class perceptions of the role of education in socialising and controlling children from the lower classes with the use of flexible schooling opportunities by members of the working-class. It further suggests that early forms of mass schooling in which children worked as monitors and pupil teachers, responsible for teaching and controlling the behaviour of younger children, could also be interpreted as examples of child labour. The relationship between education, industrialisation and child labour in eighteenth and nineteenth century Birmingham is examined, addressing three research questions. Firstly, how did changes brought about by industrialisation and rapid population growth in Birmingham impact on access to schooling? Secondly, how did working families view and experience the costs and benefits of schooling? Thirdly, to what extent did families adopt strategies that enabled their children to combine schooling with paid work?

Access to schooling for children of working families in Birmingham

Early-eighteenth century Birmingham was served by a single endowed or charity school, the King Edward VI Free Grammar School in New Street, established in 1551 to provide education for 170 boys from artisan families. It was joined in 1722 by the Blue Coat School, a boarding school for poor parish children offering 150 places for boys and 50 places for girls. Additional places for girls were provided by the Crowley's Charity School

³ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 19.

⁴ Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 158.

and the Protestant Dissenting Charity School, offering a further 55 places.⁵ Birmingham's population increased from 11,400 at the beginning of the eighteenth century to 52,250 by 1785, but the six additional schools provided by the Grammar School for working-class boys added only another 300 places. This relatively limited educational provision for the lower classes in Birmingham was supplemented by an undocumented number of privately-run dame schools and common day schools, plus 59 Sunday schools offering free instruction in religious education, reading and writing by 1786.⁶

The growth and popularity of Sunday Schools from the 1780s onwards was one of the important educational changes taking place in England before the Education Act of 1870. Sunday schools provided by both Anglican and dissenting churches were significant in introducing the idea of education for the masses even as industrialisation and the rising demand for child labour prevented most children from accessing day schools. At Sunday school child workers could be provided with basic literacy skills without the loss of earnings. As Keith Snell points out, huge numbers of adults and children attended Sunday schools, far outnumbering those at day schools, rising nationally from 425,000 in 1818 to 2,600,000 by 1851.⁷ Sunday schools attracted large numbers of children in Birmingham: 16,757 children were attending Sunday schools in 1838, compared with 14,480 at day schools.⁸ Apart from the advantage of providing free instruction, Sunday schools were important to working families because they did not interfere with their children's ability to undertake paid work. Furthermore, attendance was not compulsory: children could move out of Sunday school instruction or from one Sunday school to another according to their family circumstances. The importance of flexibility, lack of compulsion in attendance and the power of working families to retain control over

⁵ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol.3, no.1 (1840): 25-49.

⁶ Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 159.

⁷ K.D.M. Snell, 'The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales: Child Labour, Denominational Control and Working-Class Culture', *Past and Present* 164 (1999):122-168.

⁸ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 27.

their children's time also provide an explanation for the popularity of dame schools amongst Birmingham's labouring classes.

The 1838 survey of education estimated there were 45,000 children in Birmingham between the ages of five and 15 years old, of whom 48% were receiving instruction at either day schools or Sunday schools. From a total of 14,480 children attending day schools 3,900 were at dame schools, 4,280 were at common day schools, 3,331 were at charity/voluntary schools, and 2,166 children were at 'superior' private schools.⁹ Dame schools were 'very numerous in Birmingham' with an average of 14.6 pupils per school, lower than in comparable schools in Manchester, Bury, Salford, Liverpool and York.¹⁰ Birmingham's dame schools also occupied more appropriate premises than schools in Manchester or Liverpool, with none held in cellars and 'very few in garrets or bed-rooms', but teachers were poverty stricken, '...some were found suffering extreme privation and nearly the whole complained of their inability to provide a sufficient number of books...'¹¹ The Birmingham report found 44% of children at dame schools were below five, but dismissed the possibility that these children were too young for formal instruction: '...they are more open to judicious cultivation at this period than any other, habits being then formed, tastes acquired, associations and impressions received, and principles inculcated...'¹² The tone of the report thus suggests its authors were concerned that small local schools were failing to meet middle-class educational standards and values, issues that may not have been of concern to families sending their children to dame schools.

Working-class families chose to send their children to local dame schools because they offered flexible, affordable childcare, facilitating the household arrangements of

⁹ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 27.

¹⁰ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 29.

¹¹ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 30.

¹² Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 30.

mothers who needed to go out to work or were over-burdened with caring for younger children. According to the report, a major problem with dame schools was ‘...that they are generally taken up by persons destitute of every qualification for teaching, and who have no other object in view than obtaining a subsistence.’¹³ It added that dame school mistresses were frequently unhappy with their earnings and many combined running a school with additional work, such as taking in laundry. The report failed to include any views of the parents, but it seems unlikely they would have found fault with the school premises, since they were living in similar accommodation. In addition, most working families favoured the teaching of letters and reading skills for young children, and they also understood the need for people to make a living as best they could. Eric Hopkins comments that dame schools in Birmingham ‘...hardly deserve to be dignified by the name of school...’¹⁴ This may be a fair comment in terms of educational provision, but it should also be noted that dame schools provided a valuable service that more closely resembled childminding services or nursery schools that catered for the working classes.

Children attended dame schools until the age of six or seven, often followed by a common day school, a charity school or voluntary school. There were 177 privately-run common day schools in Birmingham in 1838, providing places for more than 4,000 children, but the Report on the State of Education in Birmingham severely criticised them for overcrowding and poor methods of instruction. The report found children were expected to memorise lessons without understanding what was being taught: ‘Instead of the master exerting himself to teach, the scholars are expected to learn.’¹⁵ Children in these schools were taught reading, writing and arithmetic, with lessons in needlework for girls. Despite the alleged shortcomings of common day schools, the report recognised

¹³ Royal Statistical Society, ‘Report on the State of Education in Birmingham’ (1840), 30.

¹⁴ Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 160.

¹⁵ Royal Statistical Society, ‘Report on the State of Education in Birmingham’ (1840), 34-35.

that teachers at these schools in Birmingham were faced with numerous problems including poverty, irregular attendance by the children, and the early age at which children were removed from school by their parents to begin work. In addition to the places provided by common day schools, a further 3,331 places were available in Birmingham's charity and voluntary schools. An important innovation in early nineteenth century schooling for working-class children was the introduction of monitorial schools by the British and Foreign School Society and the National Society.¹⁶ In Birmingham, these voluntary schools added considerably to the number of places offered by the existing charity schools at the Free Grammar School, Blue Coat School, Workhouse School and the Infant Asylum School as shown below.

Table 6.1 National Society and British Society Schools in Birmingham¹⁷

Year est.	School	No of places	Fees (weekly)	Location
1809	Royal Lancastrian	400		Severn St
1812	Bham National	650	1d	Pinfold St
1812	Handsworth National	195	1d	Handsworth
1813	Erdington National	132	1d	Erdington
1826	Lancastrian Girls	110	1d	Ann Street
1829	Christchurch National	180	1d-3d	Pinfold St
1831	St Mary's National	101		Bath St
1834	Weslyan School		2d -4d	Cherry St
1834	St Bartholomew's	350		St Bart's Sq
1834	St Peter's RC	160	1d-4d	Broad St
1834	St George's National	90	2d-4d	Gt Russell St
1839	Erdington British Sch	159	1d-6d	Erdington
1839	Legge St British Sch	160		Legge St
1843	St Philip's National		2d-3d	Lichfield St
1843	Hebrew National	180	1s	Hurst St
1844	Carr's Lane British	400		Carr's Lane
1845	St Peter's National	145		Moor St

¹⁶ W.B. Stephens, *Education in Britain 1750-1914*, Basingstoke, 1998; Michael Sanderson, *Education, economic change and society in England 1780-1870*, Cambridge, 1995; Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, Cambridge, 2010; Victoria County History, *A History of the County of Warwick, the City of Birmingham*, vol. 7, 1964; M.B. Frost, 'The development of provided schooling for working class children in Birmingham 1781-1851' (M.Litt., University of Birmingham, 1978).

¹⁷ VCH, *A History of the County of Warwick, the City of Birmingham*, 501-548.

Monitorial schools were founded by the Quaker schoolmaster Joseph Lancaster, who visited Birmingham in 1808 to give two public lectures promoting his method of affordable schooling for children from the lower classes. This visit was quickly followed by the formation in Birmingham of a Lancasterian School committee, dominated by members of Quaker families such as the Lloyds, Galtons and Sturges and Unitarians such as William Beale. A plot of land was acquired in Severn Street in the town centre and the Royal Lancasterian School opened in 1809.¹⁸ Although mainly supported by leading non-conformists, the school was open to children of all denominations and attracted a number of Anglican subscribers. However, the Anglican clergy in Birmingham refused to support the new school, preferring to open their own National School in 1812, based on the Madras monitorial system promoted by Dr Andrew Bell.¹⁹ Lancasterian schools taught spelling, reading, writing and arithmetic, and aimed to instil 'habits of subordination, industry and cleanliness'. The cost of running this new type of school was minimized by an innovative teaching method: a single schoolmaster was employed to teach up to 1,000 children through the medium of monitors chosen from the oldest and most able pupils. The monitors were instructed by the schoolmaster, and then taught the lesson to a group of around ten younger pupils.²⁰

The role of the monitor was described by James Bonwick who began as a pupil at the Borough Road British School in Southwark in 1823, later becoming head monitor and a qualified teacher at the age of 15.²¹ The Borough Road schoolroom accommodated up to 500 pupils, with a raised platform at the entrance for the master. The youngest children were placed at the sand desk, where the monitor held up a board with a printed letter for

¹⁸ Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 167-168.

¹⁹ Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 169.

²⁰ Phillip McCann, 'Popular education, socialization and social control: Spitalfields 1812-1824', in *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Phillip McCann (London: 1977), 12-13.

²¹ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 169-175.

children to copy on the sand using a stick. The other seven classes were placed in semi-circular groups or 'drafts' with a monitor heading each group of pupils who stood with hands behind their backs reading from printed cards.²² Each day around 50 monitors gathered at the schoolmaster's platform to read lessons from the scriptures: 'At times, at our noon gathering, a sudden and wild burst of applause would rise from the class at some extra fine rendering.'²³ The monitorial system revolutionised schooling for poor children because of the low expenditure involved, but the education of the monitors suffered. Senior monitors were selected for training as schoolmasters, before being sent to open their own schools. Bonwick trained as an assistant master for three months and then began work as a temporary schoolmaster in Ipswich at just 15 years old. The issue of discipline was clearly prominent when he was introduced 'to about a hundred of rough-looking Suffolk boys, to whom my London pale face and delicate appearance presented a decided contrast.'²⁴ The boys tried to leave, but Bonwick locked the door and ordered them to continue with their studies: 'not the slightest insubordination ever afterwards appeared and we were good friends till the Master returned to the school...'²⁵

Bonwick's first-hand account of the monitorial system provides invaluable insights into the beginnings of mass education for children in England, illuminating the extent to which working-class children were taught by other children from a similar background. It suggests that the parents of children at monitorial schools were likely to have been highly motivated, and willing to forsake the possibility of paid work for their children. In addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, the Borough Road School in Southwark offered geography, grammar, geometry, science and singing lessons, but this was unlikely to have been typical of other schools. One major problem encountered in this system was that the monitors were disadvantaged by the requirement to teach. As Thomas Dunning,

²² Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 169-175.

²³ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 169-175.

²⁴ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 169-175.

²⁵ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 169-175.

a monitor at Newport Pagnall National School in 1820, revealed: 'The boys who could read moderately well were appointed to teach the younger or lower classes. I was one of these, and I had very little time allowed me for either writing or arithmetic, and none for grammar or geography.'²⁶ The master appointed to the first Lancasterian School in Birmingham in 1809 was 19- year-old John Veevers, a young man sent by Joseph Lancaster from the Borough Road School, indicating the close links between the development of monitorial schooling in Birmingham and Lancaster himself.²⁷

The Anglican Church in Birmingham responded to the popularity of the Lancasterian School by opening the National School in Pinfold Street in 1813. The original plan of providing 500 places was revised upwards to 1,000 places when large numbers of applications were received by the school committee. The school was in a two-storey building with the boys' school on the ground floor and girls' school on the first floor. Teaching was undertaken by child monitors as at the Lancasterian School, with the addition to the curriculum of religious instruction.²⁸ However, the initial enthusiasm for the National School was not reflected in attendance figures, which fluctuated from 750 in 1817 to less than 200 in 1825. The Lancasterian School in Severn Street maintained its original intake of 400 boys until 1820, falling to 300 from 1821.²⁹ The reasons behind these declines remain unclear; though it is possible the National School problems were linked to the spread of political radicalism in Birmingham around this period. A series of gatherings protesting against economic conditions held on Newhall Hill in 1817 under the leadership of George Edmonds attracted thousands of workmen. This radicalism was condemned by members of the Anglican clergy who feared social unrest, notably the Reverend J. H. Spry, the Vicar of Christ Church, who gave a sermon on 'The Duty of

²⁶ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 144.

²⁷ Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 173.

²⁸ Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 183-185.

²⁹ Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 194-198.

Obedience to Established Government'.³⁰ The number of children attending school tended to vary with periods of economic expansion and contraction in Birmingham as children were withdrawn to take advantage of the availability of paid child labour, or because their earnings were needed to replace lost adult wages. However, this variation in attendance would have equally affected the Anglican National School and the non-conformist Lancasterian School. It seems likely that parents of children at the Pinfold Street National School withdrew their children in response to criticism of their political beliefs and activities by the Anglican clergy. Birmingham was an intensely radical town at this period, where it is quite possible that political events impacted on enrolment at the National School.

National Schools and Lancastrian British Schools were advised by their respective societies at a national level, but were managed and funded by local school committees which raised funds through subscriptions and school fees. The decline in children attending the Pinfold Street National School in the 1820s and 1830s was matched by a substantial increase in the number of private common day schools in Birmingham for boys and girls: a total of 41 schools for boys opened during these two decades, together with 108 schools for girls. In addition, there were 245 new dame schools opened between 1821 and 1838.³¹ Regardless of the criticisms aimed at these establishments by the inspectors of the Birmingham Statistical Society for the Promotion of Education in 1838, the existence of these new private schools indicates that working families wished to send their children to school and were prepared to pay the fees where possible. It also indicates families were concerned to maintain independent control over their children's education and future working lives. In short, they were not prepared to submit to pressure from the Anglican Church or from employers seeking a more subordinate workforce. This tension between middle-class and working-class attitudes towards the provision of

³⁰ VCH, *City of Birmingham*, 270-297.

³¹ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 27.

schooling in the nineteenth century was not confined to Birmingham: a similar pattern emerged at schools in the Spitalfields and Bethnal Green areas of London. Phillip McCann has suggested that the main cause of low attendance at schools was, 'the conviction, shared by many of the poor, that the schools had been provided *for them* by the middle classes, and were thus in some way alien to the interests of the labouring population.'³² As McCann points out, better-paid members of the working-class were willing to pay school fees to support local dame schools and common day schools, rather than send their children to free schools maintained and controlled by middle-class subscription. The attitudes towards schooling of working-class families in the east end of London thus closely resembled the attitudes of similarly independent-minded families in Birmingham.

By 1837 the number of children admitted annually to the National School in Pinfold Street had fallen to 175, with an average period of just 10 months spent at the school by each child. Corresponding figures for the Lancasterian School were 233 children admitted, with an average of 1 year and four months at the school.³³ There was an expansion of National and British Schools throughout Birmingham during the 1820s and 1830s which may explain the falling numbers at the central schools. However, when viewed in the context of an expanding Birmingham population, there were clearly problems with the system of voluntary school provision. The 1838 report found the buildings of the monitorial schools were well-ventilated, clean and generally light, although few had playgrounds attached. On the other hand, teaching was limited to reading, writing, and arithmetic, plus sewing and knitting in girls' schools, but '...in many schools they effect far more than could be expected from persons furnished only with the means of teaching the greatest number at the least possible expense'.³⁴

³² McCann, 'Popular education', 29.

³³ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 36.

³⁴ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 37.

The Report on Education in Birmingham thus recognised the requirement for provision of low-cost schooling for the lower classes, but failed to acknowledge the real shortcomings of a system which relied on child monitors to teach younger children. In effect, the children responsible for teaching in monitorial schools were undertaking the same work as teachers in private sector schools who were severely criticised for being unqualified. Although the middle-classes may have admired the monitorial system because it resembled the 'division of labour' principles used in industry, the teaching method of monitorial schools used a form of unpaid child labour. Clearly, some working-class families recognised the limitations of the system and refused to allow their children to be exploited, preferring instead to take advantage of the system for short periods of time and then removing their children from school as soon as they were old enough to obtain paid employment at the age of eight or nine.

Duration of schooling

Jane Humphries has identified a dip in the duration of schooling during the intensive years of industrialisation in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Evidence from autobiographies suggests that average years of schooling fell from 4.2 years in the 1760s to 3.01 years in 1801 and 2.37 years in the 1830s, then increasing over the following decades.³⁵ Humphries suggests that the 2.5 average years in the early nineteenth century represents '...a nadir associated with social and economic conditions...'³⁶; and Hopkins further suggests that school attendance in Birmingham was even shorter, at two years or less, because it entailed a loss of child earnings and the payment of school fees.³⁷ The 1838 report indicated the average duration of schooling in Birmingham was 1.15 years, with the shortest time of 0.25 years at St George's National School in Great Russell Street. Children typically spent 1.58 years at the Wesleyan School and 1.17 years

³⁵ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, 314.

³⁶ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, 315.

³⁷ Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 160.

at St Bartholomew's National School. In contrast, children at Birmingham's Blue Coat School attended for 4.58 years because of the strict regulations for acceptance at the school. However, these calculations indicate only the average length of time children spent at particular schools, as opposed to the actual length of schooling each child received. Large numbers of working-class children began their schooling at the age of three or four at a dame school, where they acquired basic reading skills. They then attended a monitorial school, a common day school, or perhaps a Sunday school. It is quite possible, therefore, that children had received four to five years of intermittent and flexible schooling before beginning work in Birmingham industries, and that parents regarded this as sufficient preparation for the manual or domestic work the majority of working-class boys and girls were destined to undertake.

It was certainly the case that Birmingham employers expressed a preference for young workers with some education, although more for the qualities of discipline and respectfulness acquired at school rather than any literacy skills. In his report to the Children's Employment Commission of 1843, sub-commissioner Grainger emphasised that employers found the better educated mechanics 'more valuable to their employers and more trustworthy', they were 'more respectful in their behaviour to their superiors than the opposite class', 'more accessible to reason and willing to conform' and overall 'more refined in their tastes and more guarded in their language than the uneducated'.³⁸ These comments indicate that employers were concerned with moderating the behaviour and attitudes of employees in order to make them more compliant workers. In the workshops of Birmingham, many children and young people interviewed by sub-commissioner Grainger could read but were apparently unable to sign their names. Amongst those employed at Wallis's Mill in Dartmouth Street, Charles Tinney, aged 12, attended school every Sunday but was still learning his letters; Joseph Childs, aged 9, also attended Sunday School and knew the alphabet but could not sign his name; John Chadwick, aged

³⁸ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 38.

14, could not yet read or write but was attending the Wesleyan Sunday School for 5 hours per week.³⁹ These examples highlight the importance of Sunday Schools for working children and their desire to learn, despite the long hours at work. Unfortunately the interviews with children conducted by sub-commissioner Grainger were relatively brief and he did obtain information about the length of time children had lived in Birmingham. In view of the large influx of people moving into the town, it is possible that many working children had spent their early years elsewhere, moving into Birmingham with their families. Hopkins points out that the literacy rate was low in Birmingham in the 1840s with 29% of bridegrooms and 47% of brides in 1846 making their mark on the marriage register.⁴⁰ However, an undocumented number of brides and bridegrooms may have migrated to Birmingham as adolescents or adults, so this information indicates the literacy rate of Birmingham's adult population, rather than access to education. In contrast to Hopkins' view, it should be noted that 71% of males and 53% of females signed their names, which compares favourably with literacy rates in other manufacturing regions. For example, the literacy rates of bridegrooms in 1855 Lancashire were 67% and brides 41%; in the West Riding of Yorkshire, rates were 71% and 49% respectively; for the county of Warwickshire in 1855, the rates were 71% for bridegrooms and 62% for brides.⁴¹

From 1839 voluntary schools were provided with financial aid by the state and were subject to government inspections, which in effect created a public elementary school system. The voluntary sector included monitorial schools of the National Society and British Society, together with other voluntary schools established by non-conformists, Roman Catholics and Anglicans that were not associated with the societies.⁴² This new process of inspection evidently created some problems for monitorial schools, highlighting the deficiencies of the existing system in relying heavily on monitors. William Chell,

³⁹ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 158-160.

⁴⁰ Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 161.

⁴¹ Stephens, *Education in Britain*, 29-30.

⁴² Stephens, *Education in Britain*, 5.

master of Pinfold Street National School, when interviewed for the Children's Employment Commission in 1841 said: 'it is a great evil in this system that the master is obliged to judge of the progress of the scholars more by the reports of the monitors than his own observations'.⁴³ Chell doubted the trustworthiness of pupils' progress reports as he believed monitors might be bribed.⁴⁴ As master of the school, he was responsible for any discrepancies in standards found by school visitors or inspectors, thus the age and unpaid status of monitors had clear implications for the reputation of the school and hence for the master.

Similar problems were faced by Mrs Chell, who was the mistress of Pinfold Street girls' school. Few girls attended the school for more than a year, most of them leaving at eight or nine to begin work in factories or help with domestic duties at home: 'Many children do not stay more than two or three months...the school is thus constantly changing and few receive much benefit.'⁴⁵ Although the girls were taught sewing at the school most of the girls left at such a young age that: 'they cannot make a garment, only learning plain sewing and marking.'⁴⁶ Children who had attended infant schools before enrolment were 'more playful and volatile' than other children and could read well, understood what they read, knew their tables and were generally well-informed: 'These children come from Anne-Street school. On the whole, they are much quicker than those who have not been to school.'⁴⁷ The report to the Children's Employment Commission of 1843 found that teachers in National and British Schools were: 'generally uneducated and untrained; they are acquainted with no other than the monitorial system; the teaching in almost all instances is of a mechanical kind.'⁴⁸ Highlighting these inadequacies in the

⁴³ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 197.

⁴⁴ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 197.

⁴⁵ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 197.

⁴⁶ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 197.

⁴⁷ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 197.

⁴⁸ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 34,

monitorial school system contributed towards the reorganisation of elementary schooling in England that followed shortly afterwards.

The pupil teacher system introduced by James Kay-Shuttleworth in 1846 gradually replaced monitors in elementary schools with pupil teachers, although still utilising children aged 13 to teach younger children. Pupil teachers undertook 5.5 hours of teaching each day and received 7.5 hours of instruction per week, placing a considerable burden of hard work and commitment on these young people. However, the system also offered the possibility of a Queen's Scholarship and training at a specialist college after five years, allowing working-class boys and girls to become fully qualified teachers.⁴⁹ The National Education League reported in 1871 that Birmingham had almost 65,000 children between the ages of five and 13 years, of whom 43% were attending school.⁵⁰ The number of children at day schools in Birmingham had increased substantially from 14,480 or 32% in 1838, yet remained relatively low. What the statistics fail to take into account is the intermittent and flexible nature of working-class attendance at school. Children in Birmingham typically experienced schooling on an irregular basis, subject to the changing economic demands of their families and the local economy. They attended school in times of prosperity, but were withdrawn by their parents when circumstances changed and their economic contribution was required. This might include illness or loss of work by adult family members or the birth of additional children, requiring boys to find paid work or girls to be occupied with domestic duties. When family circumstances improved, children might be returned to school or combine paid employment with Sunday school or evening school.

⁴⁹ Sanderson, *Education, economic change and society*, 15.

⁵⁰ BAH, MS 4248, *National Education League, Leaflet No.1* (1871).

Further insights into schooling are provided by a door-to-door survey of families conducted by the Birmingham Education Society in 1867.⁵¹ This large survey of 23,052 boys and 22,004 girls between the ages of three and 14, found 19.8% of boys and 21.09% of girls aged five and above had never attended school. The findings thus indicated that approximately 80% of working-class children in Birmingham were receiving some schooling even before the 1870 Act. The National Education League was formed to campaign for universal education, citing ‘the poverty of parents’ and ‘their apathy and indifference to education’ as barriers to schooling in Birmingham, suggesting that ‘parents are aggrieved by any interference with their right to the earnings of their children.’⁵² Educational reformers and some Birmingham employers believed that many parents were interested only in the earnings potential of their children, sending them to work at the earliest opportunity.⁵³ An alternative interpretation might be that parents were determined to maintain control over their children’s schooling and work, rather than submit them to the control of others. The costs and benefits of schooling for each working-class child had to be carefully considered by parents within the constraints of the family economy. Whereas the costs of schooling were relatively easy to determine, the economic benefits of schooling for children in a nineteenth-century manufacturing town were less obvious.⁵⁴ These issues are discussed further in the following sections.

The costs of schooling

The direct costs of schooling to be considered by working families were the cost of school fees together with suitable clothing and shoes, costs which could be substantial for families depending on their level of income and the number of children in the family. The indirect costs were much larger, however, since these represented the opportunity cost of

⁵¹ BAH, LB.48, *First Annual Report of Birmingham Education Society* (1868):3.

⁵² BAH, MS 4248, *National Education League, Leaflet No.1* (1871).

⁵³ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children’s Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 84-85.

⁵⁴ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, 316.

the child's potential earnings. The establishment of the Blue Coat School in early eighteenth-century Birmingham aimed to remove the burden of the direct costs of schooling from poor parish families, but the number of places at the school was limited to 200 children with restricted access. A sermon preached by the Reverend Thomas Bisse at St Philip's Church in Birmingham on 9th August 1724 emphasised the benefits of the school to the public, the church and the state since education, '...tends to root out by degrees that race of idle vagrant poor, that sore evil and burden to this nation...that generation therefore of vagrant poor, which swarm in our streets and infest the land, are not born such, but bred up to it.'⁵⁵ This sermon was given at the opening of the school in 1724, aimed at persuading the wealthy parishioners of St Philip's to subscribe to the charity in order to solve the perceived threats of idleness, crime and vagrancy: 'Instead of the idle it brings forth the industrious; instead of the ignorant, the understanding, instead of the mischievous, the useful.'⁵⁶ The Blue Coat School aimed to prepare poor children for their allotted station in life, by providing schooling up to the age of 14 and then placing them as trade apprentices or domestic servants. Nevertheless, free school places at the Blue Coat and other charity schools in Birmingham were very limited; in 1838 they offered only around 300 school places in a town of 45,000 children.⁵⁷

More than 8,000 children were enrolled at dame schools or private common day schools in 1838, for which their parents covered the full fees. A further 3,000 children attended monitorial schools which were partly supported by subscribers and partly fee-paying.⁵⁸ The average weekly fees at a dame school in Birmingham were 3d to 4d per week, with a small number of schools charging only 2d per week and 19 schools charging 6d per week. The fees for children attending common day schools in Birmingham were between 6d and 1s per week, averaging 9d per week for boys and 8d per week for girls.

⁵⁵ Thomas Bisse, *Publick Education, particularly in the charity schools*, London, 1725.

⁵⁶ Bisse, *Publick Education*.

⁵⁷ VCH, *City of Birmingham*, Vol 7.

⁵⁸ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 27.

The average fees at evening schools were 7d per week.⁵⁹ School fees for monitorial schools were substantially lower, ranging from 1d to 4d per week.⁶⁰ National School fees varied according to the location and efficiency of the school: St Paul's school in the jewellery quarter of Birmingham had a three-tier system, charging 9d per week for children of manufacturers and shopkeepers, 6d for journeymen's children and 3d for children of other working men.⁶¹ A child's place at a monitorial school depended on recommendation by a subscriber; parents were thus placed in the position of having to make a request to their employer or other subscriber. One example is revealed in a list of requests to the firm of Boulton & Watt for recommendation to the National School at Handsworth, dated 14th January 1813:

Table 6.2 Requests to Boulton & Watt for Handsworth National School, 1813⁶²

Workman's Name	Weekly wages	No of children	Name of child wished to be recommended	Age of child
Wm Higginshaw	20s	2	Susannah Price	9
Jn Collingwood	30s	5	Wm Collingwood	8
John Tandry	24s	8	Jas & Wm Tandry	8 & 6
John Wells	24s	2	John Wells	9
Thos Galey	20s	6	Josh Galey	7
James Seager	40s	7	Ann Seager	8
" "	"	"	Edward Seager	11
Benjamin Seager	18s	1	Benjamin Seager	7
Henry Molyneux	60s	6	Edward Molyneux	8
Wm Lucas	40s	5	Samuel Lucas	9
John Turner	34s	3	Wm Turner	9
" "	"	"	Josh Turner	6
Thos Hands	10s	1	Mary Ann Hands	11
Wm White	18s	3	Joseph White	9
" "	"	"	Hannah White	6

⁵⁹ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 41-42.

⁶⁰ VCH, *City of Birmingham*, Vol 7.

⁶¹ Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 370.

⁶² BAH, MS3147/9/29 Boulton & Watt Archive, Note in Folder 3.

This list of requests indicates that children attending monitorial schools in Birmingham were likely to be from families of relatively well-paid working men, who could forego the potential earnings of their children. Some parents, however, disliked the notion of paying school fees for their children to be taught by other children, preferring instead to pay the higher fees at private common day schools. The Children's Employment Commission report in 1843 noted that at schools in the Staffordshire potteries, '...monitors are appointed over each class. Boys, as well as girls, as soon as they arrive at eight, nine or ten years of age, are sent to work...parents even of the church have a strong objection to pay the weekly 2d, 3d or 4d for their children to be made the monitors of others, or to their receiving instruction from others as such.'⁶³ For other families, the inability to provide the clothing and shoes required by school rules was a major barrier to attendance. The Unitarian mission in Birmingham noted that the 'usual causes' for non-attendance at day schools were sickness and 'want of clothes' due to the extreme poverty of the parents.⁶⁴

The direct costs of schooling in the form of school fees and clothing were important to family budgets, but for some families they were less significant than the loss of children's earnings, as Humphries suggests: 'Children's first wage can be taken as the opportunity cost of their final year of schooling.'⁶⁵ For a Birmingham family's son to remain at school beyond the age of nine, the opportunity costs were around 3s 1d per week, and for a daughter around 2s 5d per week, based on average rates of pay.⁶⁶ The availability of paid work for children in Birmingham meant that these direct and indirect costs represented significant disincentives for families to keep their children at school beyond the age of nine. The question arises, therefore, of how the benefits of schooling were viewed and understood by working families.

⁶³ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*.

⁶⁴ Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 369.

⁶⁵ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, 318.

⁶⁶ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 21.

The benefits of schooling

For the families of children sent to the Blue Coat School, the benefits included not only the upkeep, clothing and schooling of the child, but also the opportunity of apprenticeship when education was completed. Blue Coat School boys in eighteenth-century Birmingham were apprenticed to occupations such as engraver, gun-maker, brass caster, cordwainer, brass founder, baker and taylor. Prominent industrialists such as John Baskerville and Matthew Boulton were connected with the school: for example, James Brown was apprenticed by the school in 1751 to John Baskerville to learn the trade of japanning; and in 1766 George Craven was apprenticed to Matthew Boulton as a watch chain maker. In the following year, 1767, Matthew Boulton became Treasurer of the Blue Coat School Charity.⁶⁷ Whereas boys became apprentice toymakers, brush-makers or buckle-makers, girls from the school were placed as domestic servants in similar households.

Children at endowed charity schools benefited from their school's links to apprenticeships and service placements in middle-class households, yet whether they obtained any improvement in social status is an issue debated by historians.⁶⁸ However, there is some evidence to suggest that children benefited from attending other Birmingham schools with links to local employers, such as the Handsworth National School. The Children's Employment Commission of 1843 interviewed young workers at Boulton, Watt & Co.'s Soho Engine Manufactory.⁶⁹ Thomas Wilkinson, aged 18, had attended the Handsworth National School for more than three years and spent one year at Sunday school. He was apprenticed at 14 and worked as a fitter, earning 11s to 12s per week. William Harley, aged 20, also attended Handsworth National School for three

⁶⁷ BAH, MS1622/2/1/1 *Blue Coat School, Register of Pupils, 1724-1783*.

⁶⁸ Alysa Levene, 'Charity Apprenticeship and Social Capital in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Childhood and Child Labour*, ed. N Goose & K Honeyman (Farnham:Ashgate,2013).

⁶⁹ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 163.

years and Sunday school for four years. Although Boulton, Watt & Co. was not exclusively connected with the Handsworth National School, many of their workmen's children attended the school and the firm's proprietors contributed towards it.⁷⁰ The social capital acquired by pupils attending the school provided opportunities for them to become apprentices at the Soho firms: 'wages of apprentices are ample to allow them to subscribe to the evening schools and other institutions for their instruction, of which the greater number avail themselves.'⁷¹ It seems that education was viewed as on-going process by these employers, who encouraged apprentices to continue learning alongside employment.

Some Birmingham employers established their own night schools for employees, such as Winfield Brass Works in Cambridge Street and William Tonks and Sons of Moseley Street, another brassfounders. The night school established by R.W. Winfield & Co. involved benefits for the employer and the employee, creating good relations between master and workers. J.F. Winfield wrote in 1857: 'Your people become attached to you. They serve you from a love to you, because they feel you care for their best interests...We have no strikes, no disorder.'⁷² Winfield's paternalist viewpoint illuminates the underlying motives of employers in providing schooling as a way of creating a workforce that was not only educated, but more disciplined and compliant. At the same time, the willingness of young workers to attend evening classes after the working day highlights their desire for self-improvement through education. For those less fortunate, industrialist William Chance founded Birmingham's first ragged school in Windmill Street near the town centre in 1845 with places for 280 children.⁷³ This example was followed by the opening in 1846 of St Philip's Ragged School in Lichfield Street and St Martin's Ragged School in Well Lane in 1848, offering school places to children from the most destitute families, those

⁷⁰ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 163.

⁷¹ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 163.

⁷² Dennis Smith, *Conflict and Compromise*, 133.

⁷³ VCH, *City of Birmingham*, Vol 7.

unable to afford either school fees or suitable clothing for their children. In fact, working-class families in Birmingham went to great lengths to provide some level of schooling for their children: the high demand indicated by the wide range of educational establishments in Birmingham before the introduction of compulsory education. Parents typically sought a basic grounding in reading and spelling for their offspring, with the possibility of acquiring skills in writing and arithmetic at a later date, adopting a pragmatic approach in preparing their children for a lifetime of manual work. For the majority of people, access to flexible schooling which could accommodate the economic requirements of the family was the most important consideration. This approach to schooling contrasted with the views of school committees who were confronted with the problems of irregular attendance and a high turnover of school pupils. Comments on poor school attendance made by the Reverend Wigram of Lambeth in 1835 illustrate the differences in perception:

...the evil complained of arises much more extensively from the indifference of parents to their children acquiring anything more than an ability to read and write. When this is once obtained, they have got the chief thing they want, and they do not choose to be under any restraint or to conform to the discipline arising out of settled rules.⁷⁴

Reverend Wigram added that fluctuations in wages presented particular problems for school attendance, arguing that when wages were good, 'the parents become high in their manners and difficult to manage' and during periods of low employment, children were removed from school because they were needed at home or for 'the want of clothes'.⁷⁵ This view indicates that the middle-classes were aware of working-class families' aspirations for their children in terms of acquiring basic literacy skills, but they failed to understand why earning a living or supporting the family in domestic duties should take precedence over schooling. It also fails to recognise the extent to which families utilised a variety of strategies that might provide access to schooling for their children.

⁷⁴ Beryl Madoc-Jones, 'Patterns of attendance and their social significance: Mitcham National School 1830-39, in *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century*', ed. Phillip McCann (London: 1977), 60.

⁷⁵ Madoc-Jones, 'Patterns of attendance and their social significance', 60.

Strategies for combining schooling with child labour

One of the main strategies adopted by working families was to begin schooling as early as possible, before the age when children could obtain paid employment. From three years of age children could attend a local dame school, often run by a single schoolmistress in the living room of her own house. For a small fee of 2d to 3d a week, mothers could leave their children 'out of harm's way', allowing them the freedom to undertake paid work either within or outside the home. The women running dame schools were unlikely to have formal teaching qualifications, but focussed on teaching the alphabet and basic reading plus craft skills such as knitting and sewing. A toleration of absences and flexibility of hours at these local schools suited the needs of working families, but dame schools were highly criticised by officials because of the lack of teaching qualifications.⁷⁶ Despite this, many children appear to have received a good grounding in reading. Charles Shaw, born in Tunstall, Staffordshire in 1832, recalled attending 'old Betty W's school' from the age of three or four, where he learned the alphabet, followed by reading simple words, spelling and then reading the bible: '...though she never taught writing, her scholars were generally noted for their ability to read while very young. I know I could read my Bible with remarkable ease when I left her school, when seven years old.'⁷⁷ Shaw's teacher may have been more proficient than the average dame school mistress, but the schooling working-class children received at dame schools provided a base enabling them to learn writing and arithmetic at Sunday school or night school. Shaw himself was a Sunday school pupil and credits his success at Sunday school with his early schooling: '...old Betty's teaching me to read so early and so well, placed me in front of much bigger boys, and by the time I was six years of age I was in a

⁷⁶ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840).

⁷⁷ Charles Shaw, *When I Was a Child: Autobiography of Charles Shaw* (London: Methuen, 1903), 3.

Bible class.⁷⁸ As this example suggests, dame schools provided a valuable service for the working classes, offering a combination of childminding and nursery school services.

Sunday schools were a second strategy families adopted to secure schooling for their children without limiting their ability to contribute to the family economy. Members of the working-class in Birmingham may have followed the example of wealthy Birmingham industrialist and philanthropist, Sir Josiah Mason, a self-made man whose schooling was a combination of dame school and Sunday school, similar to that of Charles Shaw. Josiah Mason was born in Kidderminster, Worcestershire in 1795 where he attended a dame school next to his own house before beginning work at around the age of eight.⁷⁹ At this early age, the young Josiah Mason became a street trader, buying cakes and rolls from a bakery and selling them from door to door for a small profit. He subsequently trained as a shoemaker and learned to write at the Unitarian Sunday School in Kidderminster. He also attended the Wesleyan Sunday School: ‘...for the purpose of making pens for the use of learners of writing, which was then commonly taught in Wesleyan Sunday Schools.’⁸⁰ Mason’s Sunday school attendance not only taught him to write, but possibly provided the inspiration for his subsequent manufacturing business of steel pen making, begun in Birmingham in 1828. After moving to Birmingham in 1816 to work in his uncle’s gilt toy business, Mason continued to attend the Wesleyan Chapel and taught at the Wesleyan Sunday School in Erdington, where he founded the Josiah Mason Orphanage in 1858.⁸¹ The growth of Sunday schools during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, particularly in the industrial towns, thus provided an important way of children obtaining further schooling beyond the age of seven or eight without any loss of earnings.

⁷⁸ Shaw, *When I Was a Child*, 5

⁷⁹ John Thackray Bunce, *Josiah Mason: A Biography* (Birmingham: The Journal Printing Works, 1882), 4-5.

⁸⁰ Bunce, *Josiah Mason: A Biography*, 8.

⁸¹ Bunce, *Josiah Mason: A Biography*, 17.

The establishment of dissenting Sunday schools was strong in Birmingham when compared to Anglican Sunday schools.⁸² Dissenters were particularly successful in attracting increasing numbers of pupils because they were prepared to teach writing and arithmetic on Sundays, unlike the Anglicans. Some of the Anglican clergy in Birmingham believed this practice encouraged parents to transfer their children from Anglican Sunday schools in order to take advantage of free lessons in writing and arithmetic.⁸³ This is a further example of the strategies adopted by families to ensure their children received educational skills that did not interfere with their access to paid employment. The Birmingham Educational Association survey of 1857 involved 1,373 children between the ages of seven and 13. The survey found 42% of children in the age group were attending day schools, 32% were employed and 25% were 'unemployed' (unoccupied). Amongst the children in the survey, 63% attended Sunday schools, confirming these were an important source of schooling for a majority of children, as shown below:

Table 6.3 Birmingham Educational Association Survey (1857)⁸⁴

	No. of children	Percentage
Children at both day and Sunday school	419	30%
At day school only	156	11%
Employed and at Sunday school	264	19%
Employed and at evening school	6	<1%
Employed & at evening & Sunday school	38	2%
Employed & not at any school	144	10%
Unemployed and at Sunday school	167	12%
Unemployed and not at any school	179	13%
Total number of children	1,373	

⁸² Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 34-37.

⁸³ Frost, 'The development of provided schooling in Birmingham', 205.

⁸⁴ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 158.

The survey highlighted that amongst employed children Sunday school attendance remained consistently high, at 62% of employed seven year-olds to 63% of employed children aged 12 to 13. It peaked at 73% of employed children aged nine to ten, the age when children typically began work. Sunday school attendance was lower for children who were not working, ranging from 45% of unemployed seven year-olds to 61% of children from 12 to 13, as shown below:

Table 6.4 Percentage of employed children at Sunday school by age⁸⁵

Total Number	Age	Number Employed	% Employed	Employed at Sunday school	% at Sunday school
265	7 to 8	13	5%	8	62%
259	8 to 9	29	11%	19	66%
229	9 to 10	56	24%	41	73%
200	10 to 11	75	38%	50	67%
196	11 to 12	119	61%	83	70%
224	12 to 13	160	72%	101	63%

Table 6.5 Percentage of unemployed children at Sunday school by age⁸⁶

Total Number	Age	Number Un-employed	% Un-employed	Unemployed at Sunday School	% at Sunday school
265	7 to 8	99	37%	45	45%
259	8 to 9	70	27%	33	47%
229	9 to 10	69	30%	20	29%
200	10 to 11	49	24%	26	53%
196	11 to 12	26	13%	13	50%
224	12 to 13	33	15%	20	61%

⁸⁵ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 158.

⁸⁶ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 159.

The 1857 survey found the average age of boys beginning employment in Birmingham was 9.5 years, and girls began at an average of 10 years. In the age group nine to 10 years, 24% employed, 30% were 'unemployed', and 46% at school. Only 29% of the 'unemployed' children in this age group attended Sunday school, compared to 73% of employed children, suggesting that children who were 'unemployed' were also likely to be from the most destitute families in Birmingham, lacking suitable clothing for Sunday school. In the age group 11 to 12 years, 61% were employed, 13% were 'unemployed', and 26% at school. The evidence from this sample suggests that a majority of Birmingham children in 1857 received schooling until the age of nine or possibly 10, but by the age of 11 they had been withdrawn from school to begin work, relying on Sunday schools to further their education. Birmingham industries employing the largest numbers of children included in the 1857 survey are shown in the table below:

Table 6.6 Occupations employing the largest number of children and average age of starting work (Birmingham Educational Association Survey, 1857)⁸⁷

Boys age 7 to 13			Girls age 7 to 13		
Type of employment	Number	Age of starting work	Type of employment	Number	Age of starting work
Brass foundry	43	9 yrs 7 months	Button making	34	9 yrs 2 months
Errands	31	9 yrs 5 months	Service	25	10 yrs 3 months
Button making	23	9 yrs 1 month	Warehouse girls	8	11 yrs 6 months
Gun making	11	9 yrs 1 month	Paper box making	6	10 yrs 7 months
Jewellery	11	9 yrs 10 months	Guard-chain making	4	9 yrs 10 months
Glass cutting	11	10 yrs 1 month	Pin making	3	11 yrs 3 months

A further strategy used by families to maximise schooling opportunities without loss of children's earnings was the selective use of private and voluntary schools for children over the age of seven. Private 'adventure' or common day schools expanded

⁸⁷ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, Appendix B, 160.

rapidly in Birmingham during the 1820s and 1830s providing places for 4,280 pupils in 1838 compared to 3,331 pupils at the voluntary schools. The Birmingham Statistical Society for the Improvement of Education reported that common day schools were overcrowded, with poor teaching methods and a lack of moral instruction.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, private schools for the working classes in Birmingham continued to attract pupils until at least the 1870s; the Fitch Report in 1870 identified 260 dame schools and common day schools, attended by 2,623 children over the age of five.⁸⁹ By this date there were 25,203 children enrolled in publicly-aided elementary schools in Birmingham, indicating that state control over schools had been established; but differences of opinion about who should be in control of children's attendance and duration of schooling were yet to be resolved.

The popularity of private schools for working-class children for much of the nineteenth century was due largely to the amount of control parents were able to exert. Like dame schools, common day schools were located in working-class areas, and unlike the voluntary schools, they were not under the control of church or state authorities. Parents who could afford to pay the fees preferred to buy the services of a schoolmaster or mistress at a small local school, rather than send their children to a large voluntary school.⁹⁰ Private schools were willing to accept irregular attendances for children who might be needed for domestic or work reasons, thus fitting in with working-class lifestyles. They were lenient over children's appearance and offered the type of schooling working families preferred: basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, and an absence of religious and moral instruction. Families also preferred private schools because they were perceived as more genteel, but in the absence of regulation many schools were allegedly run by individuals with no knowledge or experience of teaching. The 1861 enquiry into popular education was particularly scathing about private schoolteachers in working-class

⁸⁸ Royal Statistical Society, 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham' (1840), 33-34.

⁸⁹ BPP, 1870, (91) LIV 54, *Return of Schools for Poorer Classes of Children in Municipal Boroughs of Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester; Report on Quality of Education*, 48.

⁹⁰ Sanderson, *Education, economic change and society*, 14-15; Stephens, *Education in Britain*, 82.

areas of London: ‘...none are too old, too poor, too ignorant, too feeble, too sickly, too unqualified in any or every way, to regard themselves and to be regarded by others, as unfit for school-keeping.’⁹¹ Birmingham schools were not included in the 1861 report, but the 1870 report by Inspector Fitch detailed his visit to a private school in Birmingham: ‘...I found 40 boys in the upper apartment of a mean and very dirty house...It is half past ten in the morning and the master is downstairs in his own sitting-room...it seems to be the normal state of the school that three-fourths of boys remain sitting at a time in complete idleness.’⁹² The inspector concluded that qualifications of teachers in private schools in Birmingham were ‘...of the lowest order...teaching in the true sense of the word is almost unknown in the private schools...But the most striking characteristic of these humble private schools is the extraordinary idleness which prevails in them.’⁹³

Although still popular with working-class families, the quality of private schools had remained unchanged over the decades, whereas elementary schools had improved with the introduction of state funding, trained teachers and the replacement of monitors by pupil teachers. The majority of school pupils were therefore enrolled at public elementary schools by 1870, but in the absence of compulsion working-class parents failed to ensure regular attendance and persisted in removing children early. Even though 25,203 children were enrolled at elementary schools in Birmingham, the average number of children actually attending was 16,053. Furthermore, less than half the children enrolled undertook the end of year examinations, with an average of 8,753 children passing exams in reading, writing and arithmetic at the appropriate standard for their age-group.⁹⁴ Following the implementation of the Revised Code in 1862, school funding operated on a payment-by-results system, so schools were anxious for pupils to put in sufficient attendances and to undertake the examinations. A school log book entry for a National

⁹¹ BPP, 1861, *Report of Commissioners into the State of Popular Education in England*, Vol.1, 93.

⁹² BPP, 1870, (91) LIV 54, *Return of Schools for Poorer Classes of Children*, 50.

⁹³ BPP, 1870, (91) LIV 54, *Return of Schools for Poorer Classes of Children*, 55.

⁹⁴ BPP, 1870, (91) LIV 54, *Return of Schools for Poorer Classes of Children*, 30.

school in Leeds highlights the extent to which schools depended on the attitudes of parents: ‘...the mistress asked all those children who were afraid of the Examination to put up their hands – the only hands held up were the Teachers.’⁹⁵ Publicly-funded schools were under pressure to ensure that children attended regularly and were not withdrawn from school before taking the examination, putting teachers in conflict with parents over attendance, rules of behaviour, punishments and the school curriculum.⁹⁶ The situation in Leeds appears to have mirrored that in Birmingham elementary schools, where only a third of enrolled pupils passed the examinations on which school funding depended.

One final strategy for combining schooling with child labour was to lengthen the possible years of schooling by taking advantage of classes at evening schools. Children and young people who had access to only intermittent and flexible schooling, depending on the economic circumstances of their family, were able to learn additional skills at evening schools without any loss of earnings. The 1838 Statistical Society survey found there were 36 evening schools in Birmingham with 563 students.⁹⁷ Most of these schools were taught by masters of common day schools, offering instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic with some offering additional classes in grammar, geography, drawing and mathematics. Fees ranged from 3d to 1s per week, depending on the subject. Some working-class parents were highly ambitious for their children, seeking opportunities via trade apprenticeships followed by promotion within manual work. Children with basic schooling in reading, writing and arithmetic were able to study additional subjects at a later date.⁹⁸ Evening classes in specialist subjects were provided by the Birmingham and Midland Institute, which in 1855 offered classes in physics, chemistry and physiology.⁹⁹ Around 39% of students were recorded as ‘artisans’, rising to 45% in 1868, by which time

⁹⁵ Simon Frith, ‘Socialization and rational schooling: elementary education in Leeds before 1870’, in P. McCann, p.86

⁹⁶ Frith, ‘Socialization and rational schooling’, 85.

⁹⁷ Royal Statistical Society, ‘Report on the State of Education in Birmingham’ (1840), 27.

⁹⁸ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, 329-330.

⁹⁹ Dennis Smith, *Conflict and Compromise, Class Formation in English Society 1830-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 146.

the number of classes had risen to 14, including writing, algebra, geometry, practical mechanics, French and German. The Institute offered 'penny classes' in arithmetic which proved so popular that teachers complained of overcrowding, indicating that young people in Birmingham were anxious to improve their prospects at work.¹⁰⁰

The arithmetic class at the Birmingham and Midland Institute was included in Fitch's inspection of Birmingham schools in 1870: '...I saw the room inconveniently crowded with 154 young people, boys, girls and young men up to the age of 25, who formed the lower arithmetic class.'¹⁰¹ Fitch was surprised to find so many young working people '...were ready to come on a winter's night into an inconvenient room, and sit for an hour solemnly listening to an explanation of the mysteries of compound multiplication, evidently as if the subject were quite new to them.'¹⁰² The popularity of the penny class in arithmetic and other subjects showed evidence of young workers desire for knowledge, yet Fitch viewed their enthusiasm as proof of the inadequate quality of schooling in Birmingham. His viewpoint was reinforced by a visit to the night school at the Winfield Brass Company for workers aged 13 to 18. In a class of 24 boys tested by Fitch, only six reached the appropriate Revised Code school standard in reading and writing and only three in arithmetic.¹⁰³ These examples shine a light on how evening schools were perceived in two different ways: one the one hand, working-class families saw attendance at evening school as an alternative route into additional learning without impacting on paid employment. On the other hand, officials such as Fitch who wished to promote universal schooling viewed the demand for evening classes in literacy and arithmetic as evidence of the poor quality of existing schooling.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, *Conflict and Compromise*, 146.

¹⁰¹ BPP, 1870, (91) LIV 54, *Return of Schools for Poorer Classes of Children*, 69.

¹⁰² BPP, 1870, (91) LIV 54, *Return of Schools for Poorer Classes of Children*, 69.

¹⁰³ BPP, 1870, (91) LIV 54, *Return of Schools for Poorer Classes of Children*, 69.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the relationship between education, industrialisation and child labour, considering the question of how working-class families in Birmingham were able to access schooling for their children without any consequent loss of earnings from children's work. It began with the example of George Jacob Holyoake, one of eleven children from a working-class family in Birmingham. For children from families such as the Holyoakes, opportunities for schooling developed steadily over the nineteenth century; by the mid-century a variety of low-cost schools existed in Birmingham from dame schools for the youngest children through to evening classes and penny lectures.

Economic circumstances forced working-class families, especially those with numerous children, to weigh-up the costs and benefits of sending their children to school. The direct costs of school fees, clothing and shoes were important considerations, but probably less significant than the opportunity cost of forfeiting children's earnings. In a manufacturing town such as Birmingham, where there was a high demand for child labour, the opportunity costs of schooling were greater than in market towns or county towns where there were fewer employment opportunities for children. On the other hand, the benefits of additional schooling for children who were destined for manual labour were more difficult to identify once children had acquired basic skills in literacy and arithmetic.

This chapter has argued that Birmingham families adopted strategies to enable their children to access schooling on a flexible basis, facilitating children's availability for work. This might include beginning schooling at age three at a neighbour's dame school, followed by one or two years at a voluntary school or common day school before finding employment in a button manufactory or brass foundry at nine years old. After three or four years of schooling with a focus on reading and writing, children could attend school on Sundays or in the evenings after work. An important point to consider is that literacy

skills were likely to be rapidly forgotten if children did not continue to practice them after entering the workforce. This may partly explain why working children appeared not to have been adequately schooled when interviewed for official enquiries. In addition, children under pressure of questioning by a visitor on behalf of an Employment Commission would naturally be nervous and not respond well. The middle-classes viewed education as desirable because it socialised children and controlled behaviour, producing more compliant employees. In contrast, working-class parents wished to retain control over their children, prioritising schooling that was appropriate for manual work with the expectation that children might contribute to the family income as early as possible. The evidence revealed in this chapter demonstrates that differences of opinion over the form, duration and function of schooling were central to the debate about child labour.

Chapter 7

The Health and Ill-health of Child Workers

Introduction

It seems self-evident that children's health must have been damaged by starting work at a very young age, but how far was this true? George Jacob Holyoake began his early working life learning to make buttons in his mother's Birmingham workshop, exposed to the dust from horn button-making and using a press, cutting shears, hammer, vice and file.¹ As a schoolboy he progressed to lantern-making using a soldering iron before beginning full-time work at the age of 10 or 11 at the Eagle Foundry where the dangers from molten iron and heavy machinery were ever present. Holyoake recounts the story of a workman whose leg was torn off when he was caught in a machine, and how he almost lost his own life as a child when he came close to being strangled in an accident at work. Fortunately, his calls for help were heard by a workman who '...stopped the machinery, and unwound me, just as the "chock" was beating into my throat...'² Will Thorne also had a varied career as a child worker in Birmingham, beginning with the rope-works at six years old, followed by the brickyards, as a plumber's mate, and as a collector of cow and pig hair. By the age of 14, Thorne was employed at a metal-rolling works with the task of removing metal bars from furnaces and placing them in an acid solution.³ Given the hazardous nature of these different jobs and the potential threats to health, questions arise about whether they were typical experiences for child workers in Birmingham and to what extent did these experiences change over time?

¹ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 19.

² Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 24.

³ Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 21.

The relationship between early work and health has received relatively little attention from historians of child labour.⁴ However, a number of studies have utilised data on stature as a measure of health in specific communities: the landmark study by Floud, Wachter and Gregory in 1990 found average heights of British males increased between 1740 and 1840, then decreased between 1840 and 1850, before increasing from 1850 onwards. This evidence, based on heights of military recruits, highlighted regional differences showing that recruits from Scotland and the north of England were taller than those from London and the south-east, and men from rural areas were taller than urban men. The authors concluded that early industrial growth resulted in improved health and welfare amongst the working classes in general, but the impact of urban expansion tended to erode those benefits, leading to an overall decrease in average heights.⁵ Further studies have found the heights of both rural and urban workers fell from 1780, offering a number of explanations for the decline in stature, such as lack of adequate nutrition, adverse environmental conditions, chronic childhood disease and greater work effort.⁶ These studies have identified a greater fall in urban living standards than rural living standards during the early years of industrialisation, with a consequently more significant impact on children's health in urban districts.⁷

Concerns about the impact of work on factory children's health were identified in the 1833 Factories Report, with one physician, Dr Loudon, noting that factory children

⁴ Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*; Honeyman, *Child Workers*; Goose and Honeyman, *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England*.

⁵ R. Floud, K Wachter and A. Gregory, *Height, Health and History: Nutritional Status in the United Kingdom, 1750-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Roderick Floud and Bernard Harris, 'Health Height and Welfare: Britain 1700-1980', *National Bureau of Economic Research*, Historical Paper 87 (1996).

⁶ John Komolos, 'Shrinking in a Growing Economy? The Mystery of Physical Stature during the Industrial Revolution', *The Journal of Economic History*, 58, 3 (1989): 793-795; Floud and Harris, 'Health Height and Welfare', 48-49.; Pamela Sharpe, 'Explaining the short stature of the poor: chronic childhood disease and growth in nineteenth-century England,' *Economic History Review* 65, 4 (2012): 1475-1494; Sara Horrell and Deborah Oxley, 'Bringing home the bacon? Regional nutrition, stature, and gender in the industrial revolution,' *Economic History Review* 65, 4 (2012):1354-1379; Peter Kirby, 'Causes of Short Stature among Coal-Mining children,' *Economic History Review* 48, 4 (1995): 687-699.

⁷ Stephen Nicholas and Richard H. Steckel, 'Heights and Living Standards of English Workers During the Early Years of Industrialization,' *Economic History Association* 51, 4 (1991):955.

presented with 'stunted growth, relaxed muscles and slender conformation'.⁸ This view was supported by Dr Hawkins of the Lancashire District, who reported on 'the lowness of stature, the leanness, and the paleness which present themselves so commonly to the eye at Manchester, and above all among the factory classes'.⁹ Recent work by Peter Kirby has offered a new perspective on the origins of ill-health amongst child workers in textile mills. He suggests, for example, that children from industrial towns were suffering from poor health and deformities such as rickets before beginning employment and these conditions were exaggerated in campaigns by the opponents of child labour.¹⁰ In addition to placing the issue of the health of child workers within a broader environmental context, Kirby has identified a number of potential risks to children's health at work. These include: exposure to hazardous materials, such as dust and fumes; deformities caused by repetitive tasks at work; injuries resulting from accidents in the workplace; and violence or ill-treatment of child workers by adult workers.¹¹

In the light of this analysis, this chapter is structured using Kirby's approach to test whether similar conclusions can be applied to the health of child workers in Birmingham. It investigates whether a link can be identified between child labour and ill-health, utilising reports produced by the various factory enquiries in Birmingham together with local medical records and newspaper reports. It also questions whether the extent and strength of any relationship can be determined in view of the difficulties involved in establishing the causes of ill-health. The main research questions to be addressed include: to what extent was children's health affected by long hours of work and poor working conditions? How significant for child health was exposure to hazardous materials and processes in the workplace? What were the attitudes in

⁸ BPP, 1833, 519, Factories Inquiry Commission, Second Report, Appendix 3, 5.

⁹ BPP, 1833, 519, Factories Inquiry Commission, Second Report, Appendix 3, 6.

¹⁰ Peter Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health in Britain, 1780-1850* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013).

¹¹ Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health*, 27-35.

Birmingham towards ill-treatment or violence against child workers and to what extent were these issues addressed?

Working conditions and child health

Theories linking occupations and ill-health date back many centuries; the first systematic account was Bernardino Ramazzini's *De Morbis Artificum Diatriba*, published in English in 1746, based on his personal experiences of visiting workplaces in Italy and interviewing the workers.¹² Ramazzini investigated more than 50 occupations, including gilders, tinsmiths, glass-makers, printers, coppersmiths and brick-makers, as well as 'workers who stand' and 'sedentary workers'. Regarded as the father of occupational medicine, Ramazzini identified the dangers of inhaling dust and fumes, exposure to excessive noise, heat, cold or humidity and musculo-skeletal disorders resulting from repetitive or restricted movements. The expansion of industry in Birmingham during the later decades of the eighteenth century led to differences of opinion between local medical practitioners about the potential dangers in the workplace. The Birmingham workhouse surgeon Thomas Tomlinson expressed the view in 1774 that 'the air and situation of Birmingham was very healthful', adding that 'the employment of the working people does not expose them to diseases or accidents, but is rather a means of their preservation from both.'¹³ The exceptions were those whose employment involved the use of mercury and lead, such as gilding and painting, but these were 'a very small proportion comparatively with the rest.'¹⁴

A different view of occupational health was taken by another Birmingham surgeon, William Richardson, who wrote in 1790: 'In the application of metals to the different arts, the persons employed are often injured to a great degree, by some of the particles

¹² G. Franco, 'Ramazzini and workers' health', *The Lancet*, Vol. 354 (September 4, 1999):858-861.

¹³ Thomas Tomlinson, *The Medical Miscellany*, (Birmingham: Aris, 1774): 203-207.

¹⁴ Tomlinson, *The Medical Miscellany*, 203.

entering their bodies; either in consequence of being swallowed along with the spittle, drawn in along with the breath, or absorbed by the pores of the skin.¹⁵ In addition to mercury and lead, Richardson identified processes involving copper, iron, tin and arsenic as potentially hazardous to the health of Birmingham artisans. To take one example, those who worked with copper: 'The makers of verdigrise and verditer, painters who grind and mix this last preparation with oils, and braziers, but in a slighter degree, are liable to take in some cupreous particles, which disorder the constitution somewhat in the same manner as lead.'¹⁶ Richardson noted these workers presented with sallow skin, their hair and spit was green and they aged prematurely with trembling limbs. In a second example, Richardson found that workers employed in forging and hammering iron were likely to suffer from eye injuries, recommending that specks of iron were removed by washing the eye with water or '...picking out the object with a needle. But these methods sometimes fail, in which case recourse must be had to the magnet, which will frequently succeed.'¹⁷ In addition to accidental injuries, workers employed in the polishing and grinding of metal were likely to be affected by stomach and bowel illnesses caused by dust from the grinding stones. Although Richardson's 1790 account did not specifically mention the health of child workers, it has already been noted in previous chapters that each Birmingham workman traditionally employed one or two child assistants; it thus seems very likely these children would also be at risk from exposure to dust, fumes or airborne particles as they worked alongside the adults.

William Richardson's investigation of hazardous industrial occupations and trades in Birmingham was amongst a series of studies by members of the medical profession linking occupations to illnesses. These included James Johnstone and Charles Hastings on lung diseases amongst needle pointers in Worcestershire, Thomas Percival on lead

¹⁵ William Richardson, *The Chemical Principles of the Metallic Arts* (Birmingham, 1790), 189.

¹⁶ Richardson, *The Chemical Principles*, 190.

poisoning, and Arnold Knight on lung diseases of metal grinders.¹⁸ These studies were followed in 1832 by Charles Turner Thackrah's *The Effects of the Principal Arts, Trades and Professions and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity*, in which he compared the relative health and life expectancy of industrial workers with agricultural workers and estimated that 50,000 people per year died from the effects of industrialisation in Great Britain.¹⁹ Thackrah's work was praised by the medical press, but state involvement in protecting workers from industrial illnesses was slow to emerge, with recognition of the 'dangerous trades' embodied in legislation only towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Factory and Workshop Act of 1895 identified workers employed in trades involving lead, phosphorous, arsenic and anthrax as working in dangerous trades. These workers were from the poorest and least powerful sectors of society, often including a high proportion of women and young people.²⁰ In the same way that industrial workers in the nineteenth century accepted long hours and poor working conditions, there was also a general acceptance that industrial illnesses were an inevitable part of earning a living. As well as changes in physical appearance, such as the greenish tint acquired by brass and copper workers, the common use of terminology such as 'black spit' (miner's asthma), 'potter's rot' (potter's asthma) or 'Monday fever' (brassfounders ague) illustrate the extent to which occupational ill-health was part of everyday working-class life.²¹

Legislation concerned with the health and safety of children working in industrial settings began with the 1802 Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, followed by a series of Factories Acts in 1833 and 1844. Early state intervention, however, focused on restricting hours of work for children employed in textiles mills and preventing accidents with textile machinery; hence the legislation did not extend to child workers in other industries such as Birmingham's metal trades. The adverse effects of early work on

¹⁸ P.W.J. Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Amsterdam: The Wellcome Trust, 2002), 14-15.

¹⁹ Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, 17.

²⁰ Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, 267-289.

²¹ Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives, Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London:Dent, 1983), 264.

children's health in Birmingham were recorded by a Birmingham physician, Dr John Darwall, in his published thesis on *Diseases of Artisans* presented to the University of Edinburgh in 1821.²² Darwall was born in Birmingham and educated at the Free Grammar School before training as a surgeon, and was thus familiar with the main trades and methods of working in the town. In 1820 he visited the Asylum for the Infant Poor, observing that children from the age of seven were employed in work that adversely affected their health: 'The power and ability of movement are completely lost and the height is obviously reduced. The knees too are often bent inwards and become weak.'²³ Based on personal observation, Darwall concluded that children were deformed by long hours of work in a sedentary position. Furthermore, he also linked a range of diseases in adults to their occupations in Birmingham industries. For example, workers likely to suffer from pulmonary phthisis (tuberculosis) were frequently employed in japanning, needle-pointing, sword-pointing, gun-barrel grinding, pearl and horn button making, and metal grinding.²⁴

The majority of child workers at the Birmingham asylum in 1820 referred to by Darwall were employed in pin-making, with smaller numbers employed in straw-platt and lace-making. These children were from pauper families admitted to the workhouse, and so were likely to be under-nourished, short in stature and perhaps in poor health before admittance to the asylum. This particular group of children, then, may fit with Kirby's suggestion that child workers' health was already damaged by the environment and living conditions of industrial towns before they started work.²⁵ Their economic and social circumstances may have been similar to those of parish apprentices shipped in large numbers from London workhouses to northern textiles mills. The Birmingham pin industry employed children from the most destitute families who were poorly clothed without shoes

²² A Meiklejohn, 'John Darwall and "Diseases of Artisans",' *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* 13,2 (1956): 142-151.

²³ Meiklejohn, "John Darwall and 'Diseases of Artisans'," 144.

²⁴ Meiklejohn, "John Darwall and 'Diseases of Artisans'," 146-147.

²⁵ Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health*, 36-53.

or stockings, and this remained unchanged into the 1840s.²⁶ Elizabeth Dace, an overlooker at Phipson's pin manufactory said: 'About half of the headers appear to have enough to eat, and are pretty well clothed; the other half don't ever know what it is to have enough to eat; some often come without breakfast...None but the poorest would like to send their little children to work at this trade.'²⁷ Sub-commissioner Grainger found many children in the Birmingham metal trades were very pale and weak in appearance, attributing the 'stinted growth' and general ill-health amongst workers to long hours of confinement in unhealthy conditions.

This view was supported by medical evidence from the Birmingham surgeon, Dr E.T.Cox, who had ten years experience of examining military recruits enlisted in Birmingham. According to Dr Cox, recruits previously employed in agriculture were taller, stronger and healthier than mechanics from the manufactories who were 'shorter, more puny and altogether inferior in their physical powers.'²⁸ Many potential recruits from Birmingham were rejected because they were below the standard height of 5ft 6 inches required to enlist in the marines. Additional evidence from Lieutenant Herbert, the recruiting officer for the district, confirmed that men formerly employed in manufacturing industries were frequently rejected due to poor physical build, lack of height and diseases caused by their occupation. A list of 60 Birmingham men rejected for military service on medical grounds included 19 cases where 'want of stamina' was the reason given for rejection by the Military Surgeon.²⁹ Furthermore, Serjeant H. Buchan of the 82nd Regiment stated that he rejected three or four applicants each day in Birmingham because the general height of men in the town was between 5ft 4 inches to 5ft 5 inches, 'shorter than in any town he has known', whereas men from the neighbouring country

²⁶ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report of the Commissioners, Trades and Manufactures*, 121.

²⁷ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 122.

²⁸ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 175.

²⁹ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 175.

districts were 'generally taller and stouter'.³⁰ This direct evidence of below-average growth and poor physical condition prevalent amongst male workers in 1840s Birmingham confirms the findings of studies that have highlighted urban-rural differences in military recruits and convicts facing transportation.³¹ It seems reasonable to suggest that early work and long hours of labour in unhealthy working environments were significant factors contributing to the general ill-health and short stature typically found in Birmingham workmen. Sub-commissioner Grainger concluded from his investigation that agricultural workers enjoyed better health, appearance and stature than the manufacturing population due to 'exercise in the pure air, moderation in the hours of work, and absence of night work'. In addition, he noted that children from country areas were 'better fed' than children from urban districts such as Birmingham.³² Child workers in Birmingham were thus vulnerable to a combination of factors likely to have an adverse effect on their physical growth and general health, including long hours of work at a young age, poor nutrition and an unhealthy urban environment.

Environmental conditions in Birmingham workplaces that contributed to health problems included lack of effective ventilation, contaminated air, excessive heat or cold and sedentary occupations. By contrast, sub-commissioner Grainger was impressed by the availability of housing for individual families in Birmingham, as opposed to the shared accommodation typical of other industrial towns, together with a good water supply: 'There can be no doubt that the fact of each family having a distinct and usually comfortable dwelling has a most beneficial influence; it is probable that there is no large town in the kingdom where proportionally there are so many comfortable residences for the labouring population.'³³ However, Grainger's favourable view of the state of working-class housing was questionable. Although Chadwick's 1842 report on sanitary conditions

³⁰ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 176.

³¹ Floud, Wachter and Gregory, 'Height, Health & History', 20; Nicholas and Steckel, 'Heights and Living Standards of English Workers', 945-947.

³² BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 42.

³³ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 101.

in Birmingham found 'the supply of water is ample, and pumps are to be seen in almost every court', it was less complimentary about the state of older housing and drainage in the town: 'The old courts are for the most part narrow, filthy, ill-ventilated and badly drained; but this remark does not apply to the new courts...the privies in the old courts are in a most filthy condition.'³⁴ Courts in Birmingham consisted of back-to-back housing for up to 20 families sharing a wash-house, ash-pit and privy; although the system of drainage and sanitation was poor, the report suggested 'the comparative exemption of the inhabitants of this populous town from contagious fever may be in some measure owing...to the circumstance of almost every family having a separate house...'³⁵ In comparison with other industrial towns, workers in Birmingham were relatively well-housed and because families were unlikely to be living in shared housing, they were less susceptible to contagious fevers such as typhus. In the year ending 30th June 1839, for example, the proportion of deaths in Birmingham from fever was 1 in 27 of all deaths, compared to 1 in 13 deaths in London and Liverpool, and 1 in 12 deaths in Manchester. On the other hand, the proportion of deaths in Birmingham from pulmonary diseases was far higher than in these towns.³⁶

The high rate of ill-health from pulmonary diseases suggests the causes may have been related to the type of industries prevalent in Birmingham, but the Chadwick report identified 'only a few processes' as harmful, such as white-lead manufacture, gilding, and dry-grinding of metal. It drew attention to the dust produced in pearl-button making, fumes in brass foundries and the unhealthy process of lacquering. However, the report concluded that small, damp and poorly ventilated workshop premises were more detrimental to health than the actual work processes. It also maintained that few children below the age of ten years were employed in manufacturing, other than in the pin industry and that workers with a 'predisposition to disease' unfairly attributed their illnesses to

³⁴ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 193-194.

³⁵ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 196.

³⁶ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 202.

'harmless occupations'. A final point emphasised by the report was that more disease and death was caused by the poor lifestyle choices of workers, notably excessive consumption of alcohol, than by manufacturing occupations.³⁷

It seems surprising that the 1842 report on the state of public health in Birmingham, which was produced by a committee of Birmingham physicians and surgeons, failed to make a clear link between ill-health and occupations. It also denied the existence of employment of children under ten years of age in industry, despite evidence from schools that children in Birmingham usually began work at eight or nine years old. This omission raises the question of whether members of the medical profession in Birmingham reached conclusions about ill-health which would not alienate wealthy industrialists in the town, who were the main subscribers and supporters of the voluntary hospitals. Hospitals in Birmingham were funded through voluntary subscriptions and support of fund-raising events such as the series of music festivals held in the Town Hall. The festival held in 1826 produced profits of £4,500 for the General Hospital, more than twice the annual income received from individual subscribers.³⁸ Doctors were thus dependent on the goodwill of the Birmingham manufacturing elite to support them in founding specialist hospitals such as the eye and ear hospitals, the children's hospital and the women's hospital. Their financial support and the strength of the local manufacturing economy placed Birmingham in a leading position for hospital provision when compared to other towns.³⁹ At the same time, however, the committee reporting on public health did not deny all links between occupations and ill-health, instead concluding that employment in Birmingham industries could not be linked to any specific disease 'with the exception of

³⁷ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 216.

³⁸ Jonathan Reinartz, 'Industry and Illness: Investing in Health and Medical Provision,' in *Birmingham the Workshop of the World*, ed. Carl Chinn and Malcolm Dick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 243.

³⁹ Reinartz, 'Industry and Illness,' 256-257.

those we have already noticed'.⁴⁰ The latter category included metal-grinding and brass-foundry industries, some of the largest Birmingham employers.

The prevalence of unhealthy working conditions in Birmingham workplaces were highlighted two decades later in the Children's Employment Commission Report of 1862. This report identified overcrowding, lack of ventilation, poor lighting and insanitary conditions in numerous workplaces, including 'some of the establishments of the highest standing in Birmingham'.⁴¹ It noted that large numbers of workshops were 'merely adaptations of common street houses', whereas some of the large button manufactories were so overcrowded that girls were 'creeping in under the women's legs and the benches', to join the 'rows of little girls sitting back to back on common benches'.⁴² This was the situation at William Aston's button factory in Princip Street, where the 800 to 900 employees included 100 girls between the ages of seven and 13; 200 girls between the ages of 14 and 18; and 300 women.⁴³ Overcrowding and lack of ventilation together with gas lighting contributed to the unhealthy working environment. Many of the girls employed at this factory, including Susan Stoke (9), Bridget Conroy (7) and Susan Russell (12), complained of suffering from 'sick headaches' and sore throats due to the conditions at work.

The working environment in some of the smaller workshops was far worse. For example, three young boys and one girl were found employed at Cope's button workshop where the manufacturing process involved boiling bones for bone buttons, giving off 'an offensive smell' and where there were 'sacks full of bones and refuse bones lying about'.⁴⁴ At Lepper's button works on Aston Road, bone and vegetable ivory buttons

⁴⁰ *Chadwick's Report, 1842, 217.*

⁴¹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report of the Commissioners, 53.*

⁴² BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report, 53.*

⁴³ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report, 91.*

⁴⁴ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report, 99.*

were made using steam power. Conditions at this workshop were described as 'very dirty with rubbish etc' and there were strong smells from the bone and vibration from the machinery. Three young boys, Thomas Hughes (11), William Billingsley (8) and Henry Hands (9) were found 'squatting on the floor' employed in their task of cracking the ivory nuts.⁴⁵ These examples illustrate that young children in Birmingham continued to be employed in unhealthy working environments well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, whereas legislation had been introduced in the 1830s and 1840s to restrict the employment of children in mining and in textile factories, no attempts were made to prohibit children from working in industries such as metal grinding and brass founding which were recognised as hazardous to health. These issues are discussed in the next section.

Industrial diseases and chronic conditions

Workers in Birmingham's metal trades who were exposed to fine particles of dust were at particular risk of damaging their health; these included file makers, metal grinders and polishers working in the pin-making industry or at gun-barrel making. Workers developed respiratory complaints, beginning with tightening of the chest and shortness of breath which would be followed by a cough and eventually chronic bronchitis and lung disease known as 'grinder's asthma' or 'grinder's rot'. This condition was particularly well-known in the cutlery trades of Sheffield; Dr Arnold Knight had traced the origins of grinder's asthma to the mid-eighteenth century when the division of labour resulted in some workmen being employed solely as grinders.⁴⁶ Dr Knight reported in 1819 that from a total of 2,500 grinders in Sheffield, only 35 had survived to the age of 50, and amongst the 80 fork grinders in Sheffield none were more than 36 years old. A further survey conducted in Sheffield in 1843 into the deaths of 61 fork-grinders established that 47 had died before

⁴⁵ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 101.

⁴⁶ Arnold Knight, *Observations on the Grinder's Asthma, Medical and Surgical Society of Sheffield* (1822), 5-8.

reaching the age of 36, and none lived beyond the age of 50.⁴⁷ Dr Darwall had experienced the noxious effects of dust when a brief visit to a Birmingham gun-barrel workshop left him with a troublesome cough.⁴⁸ Yet Darwall's conclusions about the dangers involved in workers' exposure to dust, and the adverse effects of long hours of sedentary work on the health of young child workers in Birmingham, were not echoed in the findings of the 1833 Factories Inquiry Commission. Inspectors who visited Phipson's pin manufactory reported there was no evidence of ill-health, noting only that children were crowded together and spent long hours sitting down at work. Similarly, at Ledsam's button factory, where 87 children were employed, they found no signs of ill-health amongst child workers, describing the work as 'light'.⁴⁹

A further enquiry by the Children's Employment Commission in 1843 stated their intention was to examine 'the influence of occupations upon the health of the artisan population of Birmingham', concluding that pearl button-making, lacquering, dry-grinding and brass-foundry work were unhealthy industries for workers.⁵⁰ The enquiry found large numbers of children employed in various kinds of button manufacture, who frequently started employment as young as seven years of age to assist the adult button stampers. They usually worked from 8am to 7pm with breaks for meals, but when trade was brisk children were expected to work from 6am to 9pm alongside the adults. The child workers' task of 'cobbing' or arranging the buttons for the stamper was a simple process, and since the normal working day was less than 10 hours, the work was not considered damaging to health. At the same time, some occupations for child workers in Birmingham were more hazardous than others even within the same industry. Although the 1843 enquiry found large button factories were spacious, light and airy, the small workshops and dusty processes involved in the manufacture of pearl, bone and horn buttons were clearly

⁴⁷ Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 271.

⁴⁸ Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, 17.

⁴⁹ BPP, 1833, 450, *Factory Inquiries Commission*, First Report.

⁵⁰ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission*, Second Report.

unhealthy for both adult and child workers.⁵¹ At Thomas Bullock's horn and bone button factory in Cleveland Street, the bone button workshops were 'very small, dark and close' with 'a great quantity of dust from cutting out the bones'. A young girl was employed at a machine for shaking the buttons, causing a great deal of dust, and at the same firm children of around seven years of age were so small they were provided with stools in order to reach the lathe.⁵² Very young children were employed in the pearl button trade 'as soon as they are in any way tall enough to reach the lathe' even though adult workers considered it an unhealthy trade because of the amount of dust. William Tonks, a pearl-button maker who employed three children, testified that the dust from pearl-button making caused 'sickness and cough' and claimed to have known 'several who were not accustomed to it who have died from it'.⁵³

Children employed in small metal-polishing workshops were also at risk from the effects of dust. At Wallis's Mill in Dartmouth Street, five metal-polishers employed a number of women, boys and girls in crowded workshops with 'a most noxious smell' and dust that 'makes the eyes smart'.⁵⁴ Some of the spoon-polishers covered their mouths with handkerchiefs, but the most dangerous task involving lime-dust, appears to have been reserved for the youngest child workers. Elizabeth Thompson, aged 16, had begun work making Florentine buttons, but when that trade declined she became a spoon-buffer at Wallis's Mill. Spoons were polished with pumice and sand, and then finished with lime-dust that led to stomach complaints when ingested. Elizabeth said she often felt ill and the spoon-buffers complained about using the lime, although the worst task of 'lime-shaking' was done by the youngest children in the workshop.⁵⁵ Joseph Childs, aged nine, worked as an assistant to a spoon-polisher, wiping the spoons after polishing. Joseph said he was tired at night but could not sleep well, having to sit up due to 'a belly-ache

⁵¹ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 138.

⁵² BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 138.

⁵³ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 140-141.

⁵⁴ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 158.

⁵⁵ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 158-159.

and pain in his back'. He also complained the dust in the workshop made him cough and vomit.⁵⁶ Even though spoon-polishing and many other trades in Birmingham were recognised as unhealthy trades by the workers employed in them, the risks to health appeared to be accepted by workers as an inevitable price to be paid in order to earn a living. Furthermore, no special consideration was given to the health of child workers, perhaps because the long-term effects of dust or fumes, in the form of progressive and irreversible pulmonary disease, took many years to become apparent. The long-term effects on health reflected the situation in textile industries, where inhalation of cotton dust led to high levels of pulmonary diseases amongst cotton workers. Workers such as spinners rarely remained in the occupation beyond the age of 30 to 40, and it was commonly accepted that the development of asthma and other lung diseases was a normal consequence of the work.⁵⁷

The 1843 Children's Employment Commission report identified the extent of pulmonary diseases such as chronic bronchitis in Birmingham, yet failed to make any link with occupations and trades in the town. The reports of three Birmingham physicians were combined for five years from 1831 to 1835, indicating there were 7,220 cases of pulmonary diseases, accounting for a sixth of the total of 45,951 cases. There were 678 deaths from pulmonary disease over the same period, accounting for a third of the total 2,092 deaths. The number of deaths from pulmonary disease in Birmingham thus far exceeded the 163 deaths from fever such as typhus, or the 286 deaths from contagious diseases such as small-pox and scarlet fever.⁵⁸ The report noted pulmonary diseases were 'nearly twice as fatal as fevers in Birmingham', highlighting that the relatively small number of cases of fever was due to the natural drainage, water supply and availability of family housing. Nevertheless, the possible factors underlying high rates of pulmonary disease were not fully discussed, apart from identifying a number of occupations as

⁵⁶ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 158-159.

⁵⁷ Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health*, 78-86.

⁵⁸ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 177.

'producing injurious effects'. These included: white lead manufacture, gilding, dry grinding, lacquering, pearl button making and brass foundry work.⁵⁹ Despite these conclusions, child workers who spent long hours working in unhealthy Birmingham industries were not included in the protective legislative measures introduced in the mid-nineteenth century for children working in textile mills and mining.

High death rates in Birmingham from pulmonary diseases were highlighted again in the Fourth Report of the Medical Officer of Privy Council in 1861. The inquiry by Dr Greenhow reported that death rates from pulmonary diseases for the years 1848-1854 in Birmingham were 8.38 per 1,000 males and 6.99 per 1,000 females, concluding that 'rates are considerably in excess of the standard rate' for both adults and children.⁶⁰ High death rates were attributed to industrial occupations, notably those affected by dust and fumes such as sword grinders, edge-tool grinders, pearl button makers, brass founders and pin pointers. Jewellers and goldsmiths were at risk from the use of gas blow pipes and workers in the button trade and steel pen trade suffered from over-crowding, lack of ventilation and excessive heat or cold. Furthermore, the report noted that '...young children of both sexes are employed at an earlier age, or for longer hours, than is permissible in factories worked under the restrictions imposed by the Factory Acts.'⁶¹ For example, Daniel Thompson (8) worked in a brass casting workshop earning around 2s per week as an assistant to his father. When he first started work he 'felt short of breath and it hurt me in the chest and made me sick...coughed last night awful, and often cough here.'⁶² Isaac Skivington (25), a brass caster in a candlestick factory from the age of 13, said he was often ill with 'shivering' caused by inhaling the fumes and dense white smoke created by the molten brass, adding, '...about 40 is the outside age a man works as a brass caster...casting is the worst job in Birmingham.' His assistant was Richard Marsh

⁵⁹ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 181.

⁶⁰ BPP, 1861, *Medical Officer of the Privy Council, Fourth Report*, 138.

⁶¹ BPP, 1861, *Medical Officer of the Privy Council, Fourth Report*, 141.

⁶² BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 66.

(18) who had worked in brass casting workshops from the age of nine. He had no symptoms of ill-health but always drank milk for breakfast, '...it keeps the sulphur off your stomach. Have heard the casters say so.'⁶³ There was a general recognition within the industry that brass casting was an unhealthy trade, with several workmen confirming that very few brass casters were still working at the age of 50 due to ill-health. Nevertheless, many young boys from nine years of age upwards were employed in brass casting workshops in 1860s Birmingham. The future health of these children was clearly at risk, as stated in the Medical Officer's Report: 'Brass casters are almost unanimously said to be short-lived, and very liable to suffer from asthma.'⁶⁴ If the risks to health were already well-known within the brass industry and metal grinding and polishing, why were so many young children employed in these industries?

The manufacturing and employment structure of Birmingham industry provides a number of possible explanations. Firstly, the owners of factories and workshops in Birmingham employed the adult workforce, often on a piece-work basis, but generally did not directly employ child workers. They could therefore deny any responsibility for the children on their premises. Secondly, workmen typically employed one or two child assistants, without whom they could not complete their work. Moreover, as in the case of Daniel Thompson, workmen frequently employed their own sons as assistants, despite any risks to their health. Thirdly, the parents of child workers in these industries may have been unwilling to forego the wages children could contribute to family incomes where there was no immediate perceived threat to the child's health. The child workers themselves seem to have been resilient in the face of potential injuries or ill-health. Henry Martingale (11) was employed as a metal polisher for a gun manufacturer, and although he suffered from a cough and sore throat from working with emery powder, he was more anxious to avoid the sparks that flew off the grinding wheel: '...sometimes they fly into my

⁶³ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 68.

⁶⁴ BPP, 1861, *Medical Officer of the Privy Council, Fourth Report*, 145.

eyes. One piece stuck in the middle of it for a week, and at last the grinder got it out with his penknife.⁶⁵ These examples highlight that child workers and adult workers alike were regularly faced with the serious threat of injuries or accidents at work, which were more urgent concerns than the possibility of future ill-health.

In addition to the risk of developing lung diseases, some child workers in Birmingham were employed in industries that by the end of the nineteenth century were identified as dangerous trades. These industries exposed workers to the hazards of lead, arsenic, mercury, phosphorus and anthrax.⁶⁶ Processes using lead, arsenic and mercury in the Birmingham metal trades were identified in 1790 as dangerous to health by the Birmingham surgeon William Richardson.⁶⁷ The threats to health were discussed further by Dr John Darwall in his 1821 thesis, 'Diseases of Artisans with Particular Reference to the Inhabitants of Birmingham.'⁶⁸ White phosphorus was used almost exclusively for the manufacture of Lucifer matches, an industry where vulnerability of the workforce to necrosis of the jaw (phossy jaw) caused by exposure to oxidising phosphorus vapour was recognised in the 1840s.⁶⁹ The Children's Employment Commission of 1862 reported on a number of Lucifer match factories in Birmingham, including David Bermingham's factory in Aston Brook, Dowler's in Great Charles Street and Loder's in Hill Street. The Commission found children employed in each of these factories, some as young as eight or nine years of age.⁷⁰ Although no cases of necrosis were identified, child workers were obviously at risk of the developing the condition.

⁶⁵ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 77.

⁶⁶ Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, 59, 137, 171, 233; Barbara Harrison, *Not only the 'Dangerous Trades'* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996), 55-57, 66-67; Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 265-270.

⁶⁷ Richardson, *The Chemical Principles of the Metallic Arts*, 193-199.

⁶⁸ Meiklejohn, "John Darwall and 'Diseases of Artisans'," 147.

⁶⁹ Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, 177.

⁷⁰ BPP, 1863, 3170, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, First Report*, 91-94.

White lead was a common name for lead carbonate, a white powder used in the manufacture of paint and pottery glazes. Workers involved in the manufacture of white lead were at the greatest risk of lead poisoning, but painters and potters were also frequently affected through handling sheets of white lead and inhaling the dust or vapour when mixing the paints and glazes. The symptoms of lead poisoning included abdominal pains, anaemia, convulsions, paralysis, blindness, and in some cases proved fatal.⁷¹ Edward Dayers (14) was treated at Birmingham General Hospital as an urgent in-patient case in 1862, suffering from severe spasms. Edward had the tell-tale 'blue lead line' on his gums confirming the diagnosis of lead poisoning brought on by his work as a painter of venetian blinds. He had been a painter for three years, working from 7am to 7pm in a workshop with little ventilation, with two younger boys working alongside him.⁷² These cases illustrate that known threats to health from lead and white phosphorus were ignored. Furthermore, the evidence concerning children working in Birmingham's metal industries indicates that risks to child workers' health increased rather than decreased over the course of the nineteenth century as industries expanded. To what extent was this indifference towards the health and well-being of children at work also reflected in attitudes towards accidental injuries and ill-treatment of child workers?

Industrial injuries and child workers

Accidents in Birmingham industries typically involved injuries to the fingers, hands, arms and legs caught in machinery; injuries to the eyes from dust and metal fragments; or burns from molten metal and explosions. The Chadwick Report of 1842 stated that accidents to the manufacturing population of the town were 'very severe and numerous', identifying three main areas of concern: accidents were caused by lack of fencing around machinery so that workers were dragged into machines by their clothing; a second class

⁷¹ Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, 59-82.

⁷² BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Second Report*, 146.

of accidents resulted in severe burns and scalds; and a third from the inherent dangers of percussion-cap manufacturing.⁷³ However, the report did not focus on injuries to children and no details of industrial accidents were provided. Records of the Birmingham General Hospital show that 29 working children (under 14) were admitted as urgent in-patients in the period 1840-1848, yet none of these cases involved an accidental injury in the workplace.⁷⁴ The medical evidence thus suggests that accidents to children working in Birmingham factories and workshops were unlikely to have been of the serious nature indicated by the Chadwick Report. This may have been because many child workers in 1840s Birmingham assisted adults who were using intermediate technology, notably the stamp and the press, rather than large-scale machinery. They were thus more vulnerable to suffering relatively minor injuries which did not require hospital admittance.

The evidence suggests some injuries at work appear to have been regular events, but were accepted by children as an inevitable part of the job. William Hall (10) worked at Ingram's horn button factory where he 'had many a crack on the head from the fly...has had a black eye from it.'⁷⁵ The 'fly' was a lever on the press operated by the adult button maker, and since each button maker employed two or three child assistants, William's story suggests this type of accident was a common event amongst child workers. A serious accident occurred in 1840 at Clifford's rolling-mill where William Field (13) was employed. Nine boys were employed at the mill, including three who were under 13. William suffered severe injuries when his right hand was caught in the rollers resulting in the loss of all four fingers on his right hand and one finger on the left hand as he tried to free himself. According to the owner of the mill, Charles Clifford, the accident was due to the boy's 'carelessness', cleaning the rollers from the wrong side and so being pulled into the machine. He denied that cleaning the rollers was a dangerous procedure for

⁷³ *Chadwick's Report*, 1842, 208.

⁷⁴ BAH, HC GH/4/2/15, *Birmingham General Hospital, Urgent Medical In-patients 1839-1848*.

⁷⁵ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 139.

children.⁷⁶ Despite hearing this type of evidence from the 1843 Children's Employment Commission, no action was taken to protect child workers in Birmingham from dangerous machinery such as metal-rolling machines. This was in contrast to the steps taken to protect textiles workers under the Factory Act of 1844 which required compulsory fencing of flywheels, gearing and shafts. However, Kirby points out that the number of accidents in textiles factories was very high: in 1849 factory inspectors reported 2,021 accidents over a six-month period involving 109 amputations and 22 deaths. Industrial accidents were probably the most damaging to child workers' health, but were also the least reported until the 1840s.⁷⁷ The failure to extend safety legislation to Birmingham factories may be explained by the relative lack of industries using heavy machinery at this time. It also suggests that attitudes towards the health and safety of workers remained complacent, with employers typically blaming industrial accidents on the workers themselves, regardless of their age or experience. Nevertheless, official attitudes towards industrial safety began to change over the following two decades.

By 1862 the possibility of accidents caused by industrial machinery in Birmingham had increased as industry expanded to employ 19,500 young people under the age of 20, including 2,000 children below the age of ten.⁷⁸ The Children's Employment Commission highlighted the dangers of shafts and bands used for turning lathes and wheels, particularly in screw manufactories where a large proportion of employees were female. Whilst noting that serious accidents to child workers were relatively rare, they suggested this was due only to chance, citing the case of a woman factory worker who had recently been killed after becoming entangled in the shaft. On the other hand, less serious accidents involving injuries to fingers and thumbs from the use of stamps and presses were 'extremely common' to the extent that a well-known saying amongst workers in Birmingham was that 'a person cannot be a good stamper till he has lost two or three

⁷⁶ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 157.

⁷⁷ Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health*, 98.

⁷⁸ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*.

fingers'.⁷⁹ The out-patient book at Birmingham General Hospital for the two months ending 19th June 1862 shows there were 31 injuries to children under 14 resulting from accidents at work (see table 7.1 below).

Table 7.1 Industrial Injuries at Birmingham General Hospital (April to June 1862)⁸⁰

m/f	Age	Occupation	Part Injured	Cause
M	13	Guns	Finger	
M	12	Guns	Finger	
M	10	Guns	Forearm	Chisel
M	10	Firewood		Resin burn
M	13	Press	Finger	Press
M	13	Clogs	Finger	
M	11	Guns	Arm	
M	11	Stamping	Finger	Stamp
F	13	Cutler	Thumb	Press
M	12	Buttons	Finger	
M	11	Guns	Hand	Bayonet
M	11	Finisher	Finger	Wood
M	10	Brass	Finger	Press
M	12	Gilding	Foot	Sulphuric Acid
F	12	Press	Finger	Press
M	9	Brass	Finger	
M	12	Buttons	Finger	Press
M	10	Saws	Finger	Saw
M	12	Shears	Finger	Shears
M	12	Guns	Finger	
M	13	Guns	Thumb	
F	10	Press	Finger	Press
M	12	Files	Abdomen	
F	13	Tin-work	Thumb	Shears
M	10	Hinges	Finger	Machine
M	11		Hand	Press
M	13	Drilling	Finger	Hook
F	12	Press	Finger	Press
M	12	Printer	Finger	Press
F	13	Buttons	Finger	Press
M	11	Machine	Finger	Stamp

⁷⁹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 158.

⁸⁰ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 158.

The Commission's report included details of a number of examples of children and young people attending the General Hospital in 1862 as surgical in-patients: Robert Kelly (10) was injured during metal rolling, resulting in the amputation of his hand; Thomas Brand (10) had a fractured forearm caused by a mill-band; William Inman (9) had a wound on the sole of his foot after treading on waste metal in a workshop; Edward Cartwright (18) employed as a moulder, had a burn on his foot from a hot iron; William Matthews (14) had severe burns of the arms and legs from an accident with liquid metal during brass casting; and Mary Kennedy (18) suffered severe lacerations 'probably fatal' after being caught in cogwheels at a penholder works.⁸¹

The potential danger from industrial accidents was made particularly clear to Assistant Commissioner White when a significant explosion occurred at Walker's percussion cap factory in the centre of Birmingham only three days after his visit in 1862. Nine people died in the explosion and at least 40 were injured, many of them young girls. Amongst the workers who died were Emily Holmes (10) who was employed in the warehouse, Rosanna Whately (13), and Anna Maria Wood (14). This accident followed five or six previous explosions in Birmingham, including one in 1858 when 19 people were killed.⁸² The four percussion cap factories in Birmingham were described as adapted from private houses and located in crowded streets. The Children's Employment Commission recommended that storage of materials and the dangerous processes of priming, mixing and drying should only take place in buildings separate from other workshops. It further recommended that the provisions of the Factory Act regarding age and hours of work should apply to the percussion cap industry and the Lucifer match industry.⁸³ Unfortunately, these measures did not prevent further percussion cap factory explosions during the following decade.

⁸¹ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 147.

⁸² BPP, 1863, 3170, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, First Report*, 105.

⁸³ BPP, 1863, 3170, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, First Report*, 57.

A report in the *Birmingham Daily Post* about a large explosion at Kynoch's ammunition manufactory in Witton on 17th November 1870 stated that nine explosions had taken place since the factory opened in 1862.⁸⁴ The explosion in November 1870 resulted in eight deaths including five children: James Whiting (12), Eliza Hale (12), Eliza Reeve (12), Elizabeth Bracey (11) and Charles Matthews (11), and injured at least 20 other workers. The inquest held on 25th November revealed that James Whiting was admitted to the General Hospital with severe burns on his face, arms and body but died the following day. Eliza Hale died from burns three days later and Charles Matthews after seven days.⁸⁵ The tragedy at Kynoch's factory was followed just three weeks later by a further large explosion involving fatalities at nearby Ludlow's cartridge factory on 9th December 1870.⁸⁶ The evidence from these examples illustrates that child workers in Birmingham were at considerable risk from accidents in the workplace, ranging from relatively minor injuries to very serious injuries resulting in amputation of limbs, severe burns and loss of life. Although steps were taken to protect children in textile factories and mines in the 1840s, the health and safety of child workers in other industries appears to have been seriously neglected.

Ill-treatment and violence towards child workers

Peter Kirby has suggested that any analysis of the ill-treatment of children in the workplace should be set within a wider social context, since children in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were routinely exposed to violence as part of everyday life. Not only was physical discipline commonplace in schools and at home, but children were likely to have witnessed drunken fights, ill-treatment of animals for sport or violent industrial disputes.⁸⁷ According to Kirby, violence towards child workers was linked to their social

⁸⁴ 'The Witton Explosion', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 26th November 1870

⁸⁵ 'The Witton Explosion', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 26th November 1870

⁸⁶ 'The Explosion at Messrs Ludlow's, Witton', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22nd December 1870

⁸⁷ Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health*, 124-128.

background rather than occupation, hence children most likely to suffer severe violence in the workplace were parish apprentices and illegitimate children sent to work at an early age. There were no large groups of parish apprentices employed in Birmingham similar to those in the textile industries; however, young child workers in the pin-making industry were known to be drawn from the most destitute families. Sub-commissioner Grainger visited the premises of Phipson's pin factory on 8th December 1840 at 7.45pm. He found the adult workers had left for the day but the children were still at work, supervised by a woman with a cane that she used to strike a child.⁸⁸ This was evidently not an isolated event, since overlooker John Field confirmed that children were sometimes 'corrected' with the cane over the head or back. The female overlooker, Elizabeth Dace, said if the work was not done properly she 'gives the child a tap with the cane on the back, has never struck a child over the head or face.' However, her statement was contradicted by 13-year-old Mary Bowling who had worked at Phipson's since the age of seven. According to Mary, the female overlooker often used the cane on the children, especially at night when they became tired: 'The children are struck over the head, back or anywhere.'⁸⁹ These cases from the pin industry suggest overseers frequently used violence towards tired young children in order to keep them working at night after the adult workers had left. It demonstrates that young children at the lowest end of the social scale were likely to be ill-treated in the workplace, even when they were living with their families. This supports Kirby's view that socially deprived children were the most likely to be the targets of violence in the workplace, and that ill-treatment was generally meted out by supervisors or overseers rather than the owners of factories. Moreover, the evidence from Birmingham illustrates that ill-treatment of child workers was not restricted to parish apprentices living away from home.

⁸⁸ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 119.

⁸⁹ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 121-122.

Children working in the pin industry were not alone in receiving this kind of treatment. Adult workers in the button industry reported incidents of violence towards child workers to the Children's Employment Commission. Daniel Baker said boys had been 'severely beaten' by the men who employed them, in one case he saw a boy struck with iron tongs.⁹⁰ In a further example, John Harrold, a button stamper, claimed that men often worked rapidly to make up for lost time and if the boys could not keep up with them, '...they were ill-used and knocked about. Has seen little boys, 7, 8, or 9 years old, seriously beaten.'⁹¹ These findings highlight that ill-treatment of child workers was a regular event in mid-nineteenth century Birmingham. In the statements provided by child workers themselves, it seems to be the case that children accepted certain levels of violence as part of everyday life. William Chaplin (13), employed at a button factory reported: 'Gets a box (on the ears) if he neglects his work'; William Hall (10) working at Ingram's Horn Buttons: 'Gets a rap now and then, has never known any lad seriously beaten'; Benjamin Bradley (7), a japanner, was 'never beaten, except a box on the ear, which does not hurt him.'; and spoon-buffer William Lawless (9) said: 'When the boys neglect their work the master corrects them, he beats them with the strap, he does not hurt them much but frightens them.'⁹² This testimony suggests children accepted there would be some physical punishments, but since they were interviewed in the workplace it seems unlikely they would have made any complaints about harsh treatment from their employer for fear of the consequences. Ill-treatments were therefore typically described as a 'rap' or 'tap' which 'did not hurt much' and were quickly dismissed.

Nevertheless, it was not necessarily the case that young child workers were hardened by everyday violence and thus immune to acts of ill-treatment in the workplace. For example, Sir Henry Parkes, the Premier of New South Wales, never forgot his own experience of being subjected to violence as a child worker in Birmingham, despite his

⁹⁰ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 128-129.

⁹¹ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 128-129.

⁹² BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 138-158.

later success and rise to political prominence.⁹³ Parkes was born in 1815, the son of a tenant farmer on the Stoneleigh Estate in Warwickshire. The family fell on hard times during an economic downturn and later moved to Birmingham when the father was imprisoned for debt. Parkes found work at the age of 11 in a rope works where he was struck by an overseer with a crowbar, leaving him unconscious.⁹⁴ This attack clearly left a strong impression that remained throughout his life. The trade union leader and M.P., Will Thorne, also remembered the ill-treatment he received when working in a brickyard at the age of nine. Working to support his widowed mother and sister, he had to walk the four miles to work from home. The brick maker worked very quickly, and if kept waiting ‘...he would give me a sharp tap on the head with a piece of wood used for levelling the clay at the top of the brick mould.’ Thorne progressed to working at metal rolling by the age of 14, undertaking brass rolling where he had to keep the metal straight and tight on the rollers ‘...otherwise it became spoilt and I received many a sharp knock or blow from my overman, Jack Groves.’⁹⁵ The first-hand evidence of Henry Parkes and Will Thorne suggests that even if children had been exposed to everyday violence at home, at school or elsewhere, they were not immune to violence directed at them in the workplace. Both Parkes and Thorne remembered for decades their ill-treatment at the hands of adult workmen, indicating that childhood experiences of violence had long-term psychological as well as physical effects.

A campaign against a specific type of abuse of child workers, the use of climbing boys by chimney sweeps, began in the 1830s by the Birmingham Association for the Suppression of Climbing Boys. A number of Chimney Sweeps Acts were introduced in 1788, 1834 and 1840 aimed at preventing sweeps from employing climbing boys, yet a lack of enforcement meant the legislation was continually ignored. The Birmingham

⁹³ Stephen Dando-Collins, *Sir Henry Parkes, The Australian Colossus* (Sydney: Random House, 2013), 8-11.

⁹⁴ Dando-Collins, *Sir Henry Parkes*, 8-11.

⁹⁵ Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 18-22.

campaign was headed by John Cadbury and supported by chimney sweep Richard Bennett, who had been apprenticed as a climbing boy himself. Bennett recalled that as a child he had been forced up chimneys two or three times a day.⁹⁶ Despite the efforts of the Birmingham Association in funding prosecutions against sweeps who disobeyed the law, there were still 25 climbing boys employed in Birmingham in the 1860s.⁹⁷ It was only after the introduction of the Chimney Sweepers Act in 1875, requiring sweeps to be licensed and making it a duty of police to enforce all previous legislation that the practice eventually ceased. The history of the campaign against climbing boys illustrates that even where there were national campaigns with middle-class support children remained vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous adults in the absence of legislation backed-up by enforcement.

A second group of young people who were at particular risk of abuse and in need of protection were the girls and young women drawn into prostitution, a problem that was widespread in 1840s Birmingham. The police reported that Birmingham in 1840 contained 200 brothels, 110 'houses of ill-fame' and 187 'houses where prostitutes lodge'.⁹⁸ George Redfern, keeper of Birmingham prison, suggested that prostitution had greatly increased in the previous few years, adding that prostitution was so common 'as to be regarded as a not unusual mode of obtaining money, like other employments.'⁹⁹ According to Redfern and local police officers, many prostitutes were country girls from Shropshire and Worcestershire who had arrived in Birmingham as servants before turning to prostitution to earn a living. More importantly, the 'promiscuous mingling' of boys and girls in local manufactories resulted in girls taking the first steps to prostitution at the age of 13, 14 or 15. Police Constable John Upton stated that boys and girls working together in Birmingham manufactories tended to form personal relationships in which girls were

⁹⁶ BAH, MS 466/253, *Richard Bennett, A Few Extracts from Memory to the Association for the Suppression of Climbing Boys*, (1858)

⁹⁷ BPP, 1863, 3170, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, First Report*, lxxxiv.

⁹⁸ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 172-173.

⁹⁹ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 172-173.

seduced and then abandoned, subsequently leading them into prostitution: 'Girls who are seduced in this way frequently become prostitutes. They rarely marry the party who is the seducer.'¹⁰⁰ Hence police officers appeared to view juvenile prostitutes as morally deficient young girls, who were the victims of a lack parental care and economic circumstances. It could be argued there are parallels in these nineteenth-century police attitudes with modern-day cases involving the grooming and sexual abuse of teenage girls. Recent cases brought before the English courts in 2015 to 2016 revealed that police officers and social workers failed to intervene on behalf of abused girls because they believed the victims had made 'a lifestyle choice'.¹⁰¹ These attitudes reflect the attitudes of police officers towards girls who had turned to prostitution in the 1840s.

Similar views were held by middle-class female reformers in Birmingham in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Women from prominent non-conformist families focused on poverty as a major cause of prostitution, joining organisations such as the Ladies Association for Friendless Girls and setting up Reform Homes for young women convicted of prostitution.¹⁰² Birmingham was not unusual in this respect: juvenile prostitution during the nineteenth century was widespread in London and in ports such as Liverpool.¹⁰³ One of the issues contributing to the sexual exploitation of children was the legal age of consent, which remained at 12 years for much of the period. Research by Sarah Toulalan into trials for rape and sexual assault at the Old Bailey between 1694 and 1797 has found that approximately half of the cases involved child victims aged 14 and under.¹⁰⁴ From a total of 109 girls involved in these trials, only 17 were between the ages of 12 and 14, indicating that allegations of rape and sexual assault were more likely to be

¹⁰⁰ BPP, 1843, 430, XIII, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*, 173.

¹⁰¹ 'Rochdale grooming trial', *The Telegraph*, 8th May 2012; 'Rochdale grooming case', *The Guardian*, 8th April 2016; 'I exposed the Rochdale scandal', *The Guardian*, 15th May 2017.

¹⁰² Paula Bartley, 'Moral Regeneration: Women and the Civic Gospel in Birmingham, 1870-1914,' *Midland History* 25, 1 (2000), 146-148.

¹⁰³ James Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood, 1800-1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 144.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Toulalan, 'Child Sexual Abuse in Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century London: Rape, Sexual Assault and the Denial of Agency,' in *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England*, ed. Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (Farnham, Ashgate, 2013), 24.

brought to court where girls were very young. Government intervention increased the age of consent from 12 to 13 years in 1875, and to 16 years in 1885 under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which also gave police the powers to close down brothels. As in the case of climbing boys, juvenile prostitution required legislation and enforcement to eradicate the sexual abuse of young girls.

Interviews with child workers in Birmingham for the Children's Employment Commission enquiry of 1862 differed from the 1843 enquiry in that none of the children mentioned acts of violence or ill-treatment in the workplace. There may be a number of possible explanations for this. Firstly, it seems likely that children in 1862 were not questioned about violence towards them, and since interviews were held in the workplace it is unlikely such information would have been volunteered. Secondly, it is possible that attitudes towards child workers had changed since the 1840s. There was a great demand for child labour in Birmingham and since most children were not apprenticed they were thus free to leave any employer who was violent towards them and find employment elsewhere. Thirdly, there were no large groups of very young children in a single industry, as had been the case with the pin industry of the 1840s. On the other hand, child workers were most likely to be punished for working too slowly for an adult worker dependent on piece work payment, a common method of working in Birmingham industries. Some insights can be gained from interviews conducted with young people who were in-patients at Birmingham General Hospital and thus away from their places of work.

Joseph Hood (17) was admitted to hospital suffering from heart disease brought on by rheumatic fever. He had been employed in the glass industry for four years, working six-hour shifts day and night. According to Joseph, 'The men are not very kind to you in a glass-house; they're rough brutes there.'¹⁰⁵ He claimed that boys were beaten on the head with iron pinchers or were kicked and sworn at for making small mistakes. The

¹⁰⁵ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 145.

boys did not report this behaviour to the master, or they would be beaten again. He said boys were often knocked down to the ground and kicked. One boy of 12 was hit 'on the back of his head with the blowing iron, which had some glass on the end of it, and cut his head open.'¹⁰⁶ Another witness, Joseph Slater (14) who had begun work at 10 years old, had caught a chill at the foundry and was admitted to hospital with acute rheumatism. He also claimed boys were hit and kicked by the workmen, 'One man kicked me on the bottom of the spine so that I could not bend my back for two or three days.'¹⁰⁷ Another boy, George Ingram (10) was left at the hospital by two men who employed him. According to doctors, the boy was 'at the point of death from English cholera', but left on a bench by the men 'without a word of information or concern.'¹⁰⁸ The violence shown towards child workers described by Joseph Hood and Joseph Slater together with the callous treatment of George Ingram supports the view that attitudes towards ill-treatment of child workers had not changed by the 1860s. It seems likely that children interviewed in the workplace by the commission were not questioned on this topic, perhaps in order to avoid any retribution from the workmen. It also appears to be the case, however, that child workers in Birmingham were subjected to routine and in some cases severe levels of violence from adult workers in the form of beatings and kicks to the body and blows to the head. Kirby argues that most punishments in the workplace 'tended to be moderate' and were closely related to safety in the workplace, for example, the role of child trappers in opening ventilation doors in mines was essential for safety.¹⁰⁹ While accepting that this may have been the case in certain circumstances, Kirby's conclusion that 'the beating of child factory workers was extremely rare'¹¹⁰ is not supported by the evidence of children in Birmingham industries.

¹⁰⁶ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 145.

¹⁰⁷ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 145.

¹⁰⁸ BPP, 1864, 3414, *Children's Employment Commission 1862, Third Report*, 146.

¹⁰⁹ Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health*, 142.

¹¹⁰ Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health*, 150.

Conclusion

Thousands of children were employed in Birmingham industries during this period, yet first-hand accounts of children's work in Birmingham are rare. Nevertheless, the danger to children from accidents and violence in the workplace described by George Jacob Holyoake, Will Thorne and Henry Parkes provide small but significant insights that are reinforced with evidence from the factory enquiries and newspaper reports. Holyoake's memories of his near-fatal accident at work remained with him during his lifetime, as did Thorne's memories of working at Abraham's metal rolling and ammunition works.¹¹¹ Thorne particularly recalled the scars he received from the 'brutalising' work of taking metal bars to be placed in 'pickling tubs' of acid solution: 'This biting acid would splash my hands and eat the flesh to the very bone...my clothes suffered badly from this solution: boots, trousers and shirts were attacked and eaten'.¹¹² Moreover, the evidence in this chapter has shown that in addition to accidental injuries or injuries from violence, children were exposed to numerous risks to their health, such as the dust and fumes that could lead to serious pulmonary disease. Ramazzini's work linking ill-health and occupations was available in English from the 1740s, and in 1790 William Richardson published a detailed analysis of the health risks related to specific Birmingham metal industries.¹¹³ Despite the existence of this scientific evidence, and indeed the acceptance by workers themselves that occupations such as metal-grinding and brass-founding were injurious to health, children continued to be employed in these industries throughout the nineteenth century. The effect on children of exposure to these hazards is particularly difficult to establish, since damage to health becomes apparent only many years afterwards. However, the high death rates from pulmonary disease reported in Birmingham in the 1840s and 1860s, indicate that child workers were being placed at risk of long-term

¹¹¹ Holyoake, *Sixty Years*; Thorne, *My Life's Battles*.

¹¹² Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 21.

¹¹³ Richardson, *The Chemical Principles*, 190.

chronic ill-health.¹¹⁴ Measures to combat these problems were not addressed until the implementation of the 1867 Factory and Workshops Acts; this legislation required factories and workshops producing dust to install extraction fans. The 1867 Acts also restricted employment to children of at least eight years of age, raised to ten years in 1878. As this chapter has illustrated, Kirby's assertion that by the mid-to-late nineteenth century 'the employment of young children in urban districts had become a highly marginal and casual activity' was certainly not the case for Birmingham.¹¹⁵

The extent to which child workers in Birmingham were exposed to accidental injuries or deliberate acts of violence in the workplace becomes clear from the number of incidents recorded. The evidence suggests industrial injuries to children and young people were frequent but often relatively minor, involving fingers caught in the stamp or press. However, the expansion of Birmingham industries over the course of the nineteenth century resulted in increased threats of harm to child workers from large-scale machinery, such as metal rolling machines, and from industrial processes involving acids, molten metal and explosives. The reports of serious burns and fatal injuries to children employed in Birmingham percussion cap factory explosions between 1862 and 1870 further highlight the increased risks to child workers compared to the earlier years of industrialisation. Furthermore, examples of the ill-treatment of child workers in factories and of climbing boys illustrate the violence children could experience from adults in the workplace.

In conclusion, the research findings in this chapter have shown that child workers in Birmingham faced increasing levels of danger in the workplace alongside the expansion of industry during the nineteenth century, and some workplaces were particularly hostile environments for children. Even though Will Thorne had been working from the age of

¹¹⁴ BPP, 1861, *Medical Officer of the Privy Council, Fourth Report*, 138-150.

¹¹⁵ Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health*, 158.

six, his childhood experiences at the ammunition works appear to have been especially disturbing: 'The roar and the rattle, the steam and the heat of that inferno remains vivid in my memory, and many times I have dreamt of the place, waking up in a cold sweat of fear.'¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 21.

Chapter 8

Set adrift: Birmingham's child migrants

Introduction

Eleven-year-old Mary Adams of Dale End was sent to the Birmingham workhouse for seven days 'correction' in January 1878 after being caught stealing. Her mother Elizabeth Adams was imprisoned for receiving the goods stolen by Mary, leaving her younger daughter Elizabeth aged ten to fend for herself. Mrs Adams had been separated for some time from the girls' father, allegedly 'a fearful drunkard', and had given birth to a child by another man who had also abandoned the family.¹ This family were part of a poverty-stricken and potentially semi-criminal underclass that existed in Birmingham below the level of the poor but respectable working-class. The circumstances of the family came to the attention of John Stead, a visitor for Middlemore's Emigration Homes in Edgbaston, who recommended Mary and Elizabeth for admittance to the Girls' Home. From the perspective of the Birmingham philanthropist John Middlemore, the Adams sisters were exactly the type of children who needed to be saved from the threat of sinking into a life of crime and juvenile prostitution. The sisters would be housed, fed, clothed, trained and educated for a few months in the home, before being shipped-out to a new life with a Canadian farming family.² Thousands of children from the overcrowded slum dwellings and lodging-houses of nineteenth-century Birmingham were transported across the Atlantic from the Middlemore Homes; younger children were adopted by families, and children aged ten and above were employed as farm-hands and domestic servants in rural Canada. The migration of poor Birmingham children to Canada thus represents a further dimension of nineteenth-century child labour that has been largely unexplored.

¹ BAH, MS 517/245, *Middlemore Homes Application Book* (1877-1878).

² BAH, MS 517/245, *Middlemore Homes Application Book* (1877-1878).

Missing information about the children and their family circumstances is one of the limitations encountered when researching the early years of child migration from Birmingham to Canada. A further limitation of the sources is the complete lack of children's 'voice' in records related to child migrants' experiences before departing for Canada. Gaps in the archives in relation to the authentic voices and experiences of children have recently been highlighted as one of the major methodological problems facing historians of childhood, with researchers having to rely on fragmentary glimpses of the past from a child's point of view.³ The focus on searching for evidence of children's agency can obscure children's contribution to historical change because children's voices are only rarely found in archival sources. Mona Gleason suggests that a wider interpretation of agency is required for the history of children, involving the use of 'empathic inference' with a focus on the age of a child to understand their perspective.⁴ Rather than seeking out examples of children's agency, researchers should attempt to interpret historical sources by making reasonable inferences about events from a child's point of view. In other words, researchers should use their imagination to empathise, to 'walk in the footsteps' of the child in an attempt to understand how events may have felt to them.

This chapter aims to capture the experiences of some of these children before and after migration from Birmingham to Canada, and to explore the issues around practices that today might be described as child trafficking. The research questions to be addressed are: firstly, what were the attitudes of middle-class philanthropists, such as John Middlemore, towards the numerous deprived children found in towns such as Birmingham, and commonly referred to as 'gutter children' or 'street arabs'? Secondly, to what extent were child migrants to Canada drawn from so-called criminal or immoral

³ Johanna Skold & Kaisa Vehkalahti, 'Marginalized children: methodological and ethical issues in the history of education and childhood', *History of Education*, 45:4 (2016): 405.

⁴ Mona Gleason, 'Avoiding the agency trap: caveats for historians of children, youth and education', *History of Education*, 45: 4 (2016): 446-459.

families that put them at risk? Thirdly, were migrant children welcome in Canada purely as a source of cheap labour for Canadian farms and rural settlements? Finally, what were the experiences of child migrants sent from Birmingham?

Child Saving

The Middlemore Emigration Homes were founded in 1872 by John Throgmorton Middlemore (1844-1924), who was the son of a wealthy Birmingham businessman.⁵ From the age of twenty, Middlemore spent four years in the U.S. and Canada, where he was impressed by the equality of opportunities and healthy rural lifestyles these countries seemed to offer. On his return to Birmingham he resolved to set up an emigration scheme for deprived and seemingly abandoned children living on the streets, convinced they would have a better life as 'helpers' with farming families in Canada. The first home for boys opened in Edgbaston in 1872, and over the next five decades more than 5,000 Birmingham children made the journey on board ships bound for Canada.⁶ Middlemore followed in the footsteps of evangelical child savers such as Maria Rye and Annie Macpherson. Rye began work by forming the Female Middle-class Emigration Society in 1862, arranging for groups of middle-class women to emigrate to Australia and New Zealand. By 1868 she was escorting young women and girls to Canada to work as domestic servants, followed in 1869 by child migrants to be placed with farming families. At around the same time Macpherson opened homes for poor children in London's East End before taking a group of boys to Canada in 1870.⁷ A number of child-saving activists and philanthropists subsequently became involved in child migration to Canada, including

⁵ Ian Cawood, 'Middlemore, Sir John Throgmorton, first baronet (1844–1924)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2013
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/97843>, accessed 21 Aug 2017]

⁶ BAH, MS517/63, *One Hundred Years of Child Care. The Story of Middlemore Homes 1872-1972*, 1-7; Roy Parker, *Uprooted: The Shipment of Poor Children to Canada, 1867-1917* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2010), 31; Roger Kershaw and Janet Sacks, *New Lives for Old. The story of Britain's child migrants* (Kew: The National Archives, 2008), 74.

⁷ Parker, *Uprooted*, 10-21.

Father Nugent in Liverpool, Louisa Birt in London and William Quarrier in Scotland.⁸ The well-known Barnardo's Homes only became involved in child migration a few years later beginning in 1882, but eventually became the largest provider of child migrants to Canada, sending 24,854 children between 1882 and 1915.⁹

From the point of view of the child savers, children were being rescued from the moral and physical dangers of Victorian Britain's dangerous and crime-ridden slums to enjoy a healthy life in rural Canada. It is important to recognise, however, that from the start of the emigration movement Maria Rye was aware that Canadian families were willing to welcome young migrants on the basis that they would undertake farm or domestic work in exchange for board and lodgings.¹⁰ In other words, Canadian families had a different perspective from the philanthropists; they wanted cheap labour to help on their farms rather than offering homes to undernourished children from impoverished backgrounds. Those involved in child migration schemes promoted a belief in the 'rural idyll', by looking back to the pre-industrial era of rural England when pauper children were apprenticed as farm servants to live as part of a family. At the same time, there was a contradiction in their attitudes towards families; evangelical activists and philanthropists such as Middlemore proclaimed their belief in the importance of family life, yet they focused their greatest efforts on breaking-up families, separating the most vulnerable children from their parents, brothers and sisters.¹¹ Rather than assisting families who may have been experiencing temporary difficulties, such as lack of employment or the loss of one parent, the leading figures in child migration decided that children should be separated from their own 'inadequate' families and placed with unknown Canadian farmers.

⁸ Parker, *Uprooted*, 25-30.

⁹ Parker, *Uprooted*, 67.

¹⁰ Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*, 21.

¹¹ Joy Parr, *Labouring Children. British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 11.

Attitudes towards child labour were also contradictory: for the middle classes, child labour was regarded as exploitation and children were dependents in need of protection, yet child migrants were handed-over to families in Canada who wanted farm labourers and servants. The lives of children from the slums and courts in large towns such as Birmingham were far removed from middle-class concepts of childhood; hence little distinction was made between street children who may have lived within a family and had regular work, and those children who fended for themselves and lived in lodgings.¹² For example, James Birch (8) was admitted to the Middlemore Emigration Homes with the comment: 'Father dead. Boy got his living by singing in the street' and George Dawson (12) was admitted on the grounds of: 'Father drunkard, turns children out of house at night, boy hawks mussels'.¹³ From this information, it is not clear whether these boys were living on the streets or simply working to earn money as best they could. Furthermore, it is unclear whether Middlemore adopted a policy of searching the streets in active pursuit and abduction of ragged children, a policy favoured by Thomas Barnardo in London.¹⁴

Child migration schemes were not without their critics: Andrew Doyle was sent to Canada by the British government in 1874 to examine all aspects of the selection and follow-up care of child migrants. His report, published in 1875, was highly critical of the methods used by Macpherson and Rye, describing emigration as 'schemes for providing cheap labour for Canadian farmers'.¹⁵ Doyle visited several hundred children and became concerned about the lack of supervision following placements, which left them at risk of mistreatment and overwork. Consequently, the Local Government Board

¹² Anna Davin, 'When is a Child not a Child?', in *Politics of Everyday Life: Continuity and Change in Work and the Family*, ed. H.Corr and L. Jamieson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 42-43; Anna Davin, *Growing up Poor: Home School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), 160-164.

¹³ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472, *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878*.

¹⁴ Ellen Boucher, *Empire's Children: Child Emigration, Welfare and the Decline of the British World, 1869-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 36; Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 17-20.

¹⁵ Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*, 35-43.

temporarily suspended any further emigration of children from workhouses.¹⁶ Other critics of child migration included George Cruikshank, the illustrator and temperance campaigner, whose 1869 cartoon *Our "Gutter Children"* depicted hordes of small children being swept-up from the streets into a cart with Maria Rye supervising the operation (see Appendix 4).¹⁷ As Cruikshank highlighted in his drawing, the use of language such as 'gutter children' and 'street arab' by the leading figures such as Rye revealed their attitudes towards the poor in society, and their lack of concern for the wishes of the children themselves.¹⁸

John Middlemore used similar language to describe the Birmingham children he wished to save; his first published report of 1873 was headed, 'Gutter Children's Homes. First Report with List of Subscribers.'¹⁹ In addition, an item published in the *Morning News* in November 1872 headed, 'Birmingham Emigration Home for Gutter Children' described Middlemore's aim for the newly opened home as 'not to relieve distress but to save from prison, and consequently only children of the street-arab class are admitted into it.'²⁰ Nevertheless, by the time the second report was published in 1875, the boy's home in St Luke's Road and the girl's home in Spring Street, both located in the wealthy suburb of Edgbaston, had been renamed the 'Children's Emigration Homes', suggesting the term 'gutter children' was soon regarded as inappropriate within the neighbourhood.²¹ From the outset, Middlemore made it clear that his intention was not to provide a children's home for destitute children in Birmingham, but to accommodate them briefly before emigration to Canada; in some cases children were transported in a matter of weeks rather than months. Furthermore, he stated clearly in the first report that 'Children are not taken to Canada because they are poor, but to save them from their bad

¹⁶ Parker, *Uprooted*, 50.

¹⁷ Parr, *Labouring Children*, 31; Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*, 22.

¹⁸ Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*, 22.

¹⁹ BAH, MS 517/463, *Middlemore Homes Reports*, 1873-1879.

²⁰ BAH, MS 517/93 & 93A, *Middlemore Homes Newspaper Cuttings Book*, 1872-1929.

²¹ BAH, MS 517/463, *Middlemore Homes Reports*, 1873-1879.

companions, to whom, if they remained in Birmingham they would always be tempted to return.²² In this respect, the Middlemore Emigration Homes differed from others, such as Macpherson's Revival Homes in London, Quarrier's Homes in Scotland or Barnardo's Homes, since these offered food and shelter to orphans or destitute children who were not necessarily destined for emigration.

The Middlemore Homes were in an unusual position since Birmingham in 1872 offered few alternatives for the residential care of vulnerable children. Firstly, the Asylum for the Infant Poor had closed in 1852 and relocated to the workhouse at Winson Green. Secondly, the orphanage founded by Josiah Mason in 1860 could accommodate approximately 300 children, but offered places only to children who were orphaned rather than abandoned or abused. Thirdly, the residential Industrial Schools in Birmingham provided a total of 70 to 80 places, a small number when compared to Industrial Schools in other large towns which housed up to 1,000 children. Fourthly, cottage homes built by the Birmingham Guardians provided for 420 pauper children in a rural village setting at Marston Green, but were not opened until 1880. For Birmingham children in the 1870s whose families were unable or unwilling to provide for them, it seems there were few alternatives to life on the streets other than the workhouse or migration to Canada. Autobiographies written by those who had experienced life in the workhouse as children suggest workhouses were often used by families under the Old Poor Law as a form of temporary relief, but this changed under the harsher New Poor Law regime of less eligibility.²³ John Munday, for example, recalled that at the age of ten he preferred a life on the streets to admission to the workhouse. Insufficient food, regimentation and corporal punishment were all hallmarks of a stay in the workhouse.²⁴ Nicola Sheldon has suggested that the state intentionally took a limited role in social welfare, preferring for

²² BAH, MS 517/463, *Middlemore Homes Reports*, 1873-1879.

²³ Jane Humphries, 'Care and Cruelty in the Workhouse', in *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914*, ed. Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 122-123.

²⁴ Humphries, 'Care and Cruelty', 127-130.

practical and philosophical reasons to leave provision to philanthropic organisations.²⁵

From 1850 to 1900 there was a rise in residential child-care institutions under three systems: poor-law residential schools, such as the Swinton Schools in Manchester and Kirkdale Schools in Liverpool; correctional institutions or reformatories for young offenders, and private children's homes run by voluntary organisations such as Barnardo's or the Waifs and Strays Society.²⁶ The apparent lack of places in these types of residential institutions in Birmingham, relative to the town's population, may have resulted in larger numbers of children being admitted to the Emigration Homes and subsequent migration to Canada. According to John Middlemore's view of Birmingham: 'a multitude of children are not only born and bred in crime, but that from the mere coercion of circumstances, they have little other than an idle, vagrant and criminal life open to them.'²⁷ To what extent, then, were children admitted to the Emigration Homes drawn from these allegedly criminal and vagrant families?

Admission to the Birmingham Emigration Homes

The entrance books show that 67 boys and 38 girls were admitted to the Emigration Homes in Birmingham over the two years from 1878 to 1879; of these children, 50 boys and 32 girls were migrated to Canada (see Appendix 3).²⁸ The stated policy of the Emigration Homes was to admit children below the age of ten or at around 13 years of age: children under ten were too young to be admitted into the industrial schools, and those of 13 were too old for industrial schools or reformatories and could only be sent to prison.²⁹ Among the 105 children admitted from 1878 to 1879 the three youngest children

²⁵ Nicola Sheldon, "Something in the place of home": Children in Institutional Care 1850-1918', in *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750- 1914* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 255.

²⁶ Sheldon, "Something in the place of home", 258-262.

²⁷ BAH, MS 517/463 *Middlemore Homes Reports, First Report*, 1873.

²⁸ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books*, 1875-1878.

²⁹ BAH, MS 517/463 *Middlemore Homes Reports, First Report*, 1873.

were just one year old and four were 13 years old, but none were above 13, suggesting that those above this age were either unwilling to enter the home or were refused.³⁰

Table 8.1 Age on entry to the Birmingham Emigration Homes, 1878-79³¹

Age in years	Boys	Girls
1	1	2
2	1	2
3	1	2
4	1	4
5	4	1
6	5	5
7	7	6
8	15	2
9	4	3
10	12	4
11	6	5
12	5	1
13	4	1
None recorded	1	0
Total	67	38

Further analysis of the admissions records for 1878 to 1879 suggests that few of the children were orphans, although many were illegitimate or from single-parent families (see table 8.2). For example, one-year-old Annie Bateman was described as: ‘child illegitimate, mother prostitute’; Elizabeth Murray (6) and her sister Catherine (4) were also recorded by the home as: ‘illegitimate, mother prostitute’. Emily Franklin (6) had no parents or relatives and was living with ‘Mrs Goodwin’. William Reardon (5) was described as: ‘illegitimate, father absconded, has been in prison, police now in search of him’. In a further example, the admission record for Abraham Murcott (11) stated: ‘father deserted, mother keeps a brothel’.³²

³⁰ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

³¹ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

³² BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

Table 8.2 Reasons for admittance to the Birmingham Emigration Homes, 1878-79³³

Main reason given for admittance	Number	% of total
Father dead	18	17%
Mother dead	10	10%
Orphaned	6	6%
Deserted by father	9	9%
Deserted by mother	8	8%
Ill-treatment by stepfather	5	5%
Ill-treatment by stepmother	1	1%
Neglected by father/mother	2	2%
Parents very poor	4	4%
Illegitimate and neglected	14	13%
Father in prison	6	6%
Mother in prison	2	2%
Child truants/runs wild	8	8%
Father a bigamist	2	2%
Mother a prostitute	2	2%
Mother insane	3	3%
No reason recorded	5	5%
Total	105	

Records for the children above indicate that many of them were too young to be involved in criminal or delinquent behaviour themselves, but on the other hand they may have been at risk if the descriptions of the family backgrounds are accurate. Steven Taylor's study of child migration to Canada from Manchester and Salford Boys' and Girls' Refuge between 1871 and 1891 found that only 19% of children came from backgrounds regarded as 'criminal' or 'bad'. In one such case, 'Richard J.' was admitted for emigration just before the death of his mother on the grounds that his elder brothers and sisters 'had all gone wrong'.³⁴ In contrast to the Manchester study, a number of children admitted to the Birmingham Emigration Homes appear to have been from potentially unstable backgrounds: Joseph Mills was admitted at the age of eight when his father was: 'sentenced to 14 years penal servitude for attempting the life of the woman with whom he

³³ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

³⁴ Steven Taylor, 'Poverty, Emigration and Family: Experiencing Childhood Poverty in Late Nineteenth-Century Manchester', *Family and Community History*, 18:2 (2015): 89-94.

lived'; Charles Greatrix (7) was admitted because: 'mother deserted, father a drunkard, boy a typical Arab'; ten-year-old Frederick Clarke's record stated: 'Father dead, one brother in reformatory, two in workhouse, mother frightful drunkard, cruel to children'. One girl, Elizabeth Sturge (11) was recorded as follows: 'Father dead, girl runs the streets ie. Wharf Street, man in jail for committing rape upon her'. She ran away from the home after one night and did not appear in further records. Another girl, eight year-old Sarah Evans, was an orphan who lived with her uncle; she was brought to the home after witnessing the murder of a woman by her uncle.³⁵ It seems clear that these children were in need of some form of care and protection, but unfortunately the details for each child entering the home are very brief. In most cases there is no information about the full circumstances leading up to the child entering the Emigration Home, or about wider family members who may have been potential carers.

The Manchester study of child migrants found examples of children considered to be in physical or moral danger from contact with their parents, but there were no cases of children involved in criminal activity and only 3% of cases involved disruptive behaviour.³⁶ Amongst children admitted to the Birmingham home in 1878 and 1879, there seems to be a similar lack of criminal or disruptive behaviour, at least for those children migrated to Canada, possibly because many of them were very young. In the case of three-year-old Sarah Hamilton, she was brought to the home because her mother had been 'kicked to death' and her father was a brothel-keeper. Seven-year-old Mary Jane Deeley's mother had been 'again and again in prison' and the records show that Mary Jane had been in prison with her mother. Only one girl of the 38 girls entering the home showed evidence of disruptive behaviour: the record for Elizabeth Bishop (13) states: 'parents living, runs the streets, seeking her own ruin'.³⁷ Elizabeth Bishop was not one of the children migrated to Canada and no information was recorded about when she left the home or

³⁵ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books*, 1875-1878.

³⁶ Taylor, 'Poverty, Emigration and Family', 93.

³⁷ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books*, 1875-1878.

whether she returned to her own parents. Amongst the 67 boys admitted in 1878 and 1879 there were nine boys whose behaviour appeared to be disruptive, for example: Michael Maley (12) 'stops out at night'; John Mitchell (11) 'truant, runs away from home a fortnight at a time'; Thomas Knight (12) 'parents living, boy incorrigible truant'; Frederick Colley (11) 'boy slept out at night and ill-treated his mother'. In two cases, there are descriptions of potentially criminal behaviour: Arthur Harris (10) had 'set house on fire, landlords won't have boy in the house'; and John Bayliss (7) was described as 'a thief'.³⁸ In the last two cases, both boys were migrated to Canada, suggesting that Middlemore viewed them as young enough to be saved from a life of criminality. On the other hand, five of the boys involved in disruptive behaviour did not go to Canada, perhaps because they ran away from the emigration home or because they were deemed 'unsuitable', although no further details were recorded.

When ten-year-old Elizabeth Adams was taken into the Birmingham Emigration Home in early 1878, the entrance book recorded: 'Mother in prison, girl utterly wild and untamed. Springs out of bed, shouts and screams, strikes other girls.'³⁹ There is no direct record of Elizabeth Adam's views, but it might be reasonable to infer from this limited evidence that, rather than being grateful for admittance to the home Elizabeth was extremely unhappy, refusing to behave quietly and obediently. She had been separated from her older sister, Mary who was sent to an Industrial School in York and from her mother who was imprisoned. The loneliness, isolation and fear experienced by a child removed from her family to an emigration home 'for her own good' can only be imagined. In a second case, nine-year-old Edward Collins was admitted to the home in 1878 with the remarks: 'Boy cursed and swore at his mother when she was apparently on her death bed'.⁴⁰ It seems reasonable to surmise from these remarks that Edward, rather than being a 'troublesome' boy was in fact a 'troubled' boy, terrified at the thought of his mother

³⁸ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

³⁹ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

⁴⁰ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

leaving him and aware she would never return. In the event, Edward did not make the journey to Canada but was removed from the home in December 1878, possibly claimed by his father or another member of his family. The third case concerns, Annie Bennett, aged 11 when she entered the emigration home in 1878; the entrance book reveals that she was living in lodgings 'provided by Miss Ickfield' and reported: 'Mother dead, thoroughly filthy man, details too vile to record'.⁴¹ These very brief comments tell us virtually nothing about the circumstances of this child, but she appears to have been removed to lodgings for her own safety. Numerous entries for other children refer to parents who were neglectful, thieves, drunkards, prostitutes, bigamists and even murderers, so it seems clear that this child was the victim of serious abuse by the man concerned. For a child who had been abused by adults, the prospect of being sent to live with complete strangers in Canada must have been very frightening.

Taylor's study of the Manchester Refuge revealed that some children who were migrated to Canada had parents who were 'decent but poor' and in one particular case a boy was left in the refuge on a temporary basis during a crisis period, but was quickly sent to Canada without his father's knowledge or consent. Taylor suggests the use of residential children's homes as a welfare resource provides an example of working class agency, but that in that case the coping strategies of the poor were exploited.⁴² It seems unlikely that parents in Birmingham would have used the Emigration Homes for temporary relief, but it may have been the case that some 'decent but poor' parents felt they had no choice but to agree to their child's emigration to Canada. Benjamin Summerfield from Deritend was admitted at the age of 11 in 1878, and his record states: 'Father dead, mother and children starving'.⁴³ Benjamin left for Canada in June 1879. Three brothers from Digbeth were also admitted early in 1878: Thomas Hughes, aged 10, and William and Walter Hughes, both eight years old. At the time of admission, their parents were

⁴¹ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books*, 1875-1878.

⁴² Taylor, 'Poverty, Emigration and Family', 94-95.

⁴³ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books*, 1875-1878.

both living but the family was starving: ‘found begging at 12 at night’.⁴⁴ The eldest brother, Thomas, was dispatched to Canada shortly after arrival in May 1878, and his brothers followed two years later in July 1880. This suggests that by 1878 the Emigration Homes in Birmingham were retaining children for longer than previously, perhaps because children below ten years were taken to Canada for adoption, and there were a limited number of families who were willing to adopt. Children aged ten and above were placed as ‘assistants’ with farming families looking for farm workers and domestic servants. The fifth report of the Emigration Homes published in 1878 revealed that 385 children had been received into the homes since 1872, and 310 children had been taken to Canada. Only 17 children had been settled in Birmingham.⁴⁵ The *Morning News* of 8th April 1875 reported that Middlemore had made efforts to settle children in Birmingham but with disastrous results: ‘Out of six who were sent out and settled in situations, five got into prison immediately after; two were taken up for larceny, one for manslaughter, and one for burglary’.⁴⁶ This experience reinforced Middlemore’s view that children in danger of slipping into criminal and immoral lifestyles should be removed as far as possible from their families in Birmingham to prevent them from absconding. How then, did children fare once they arrived in Canada?

Table 8.3 Destinations of children admitted to the Birmingham Emigration Homes, 1878-79⁴⁷

Destination	Boys no.	%	Girls no.	%
Emigrated to Canada for adoption or employment	50	75%	32	84%
Reclaimed or removed from the home	17	25%	6	16%
Total	67	100%	38	100%

⁴⁴ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

⁴⁵ BAH, MS 517/463 *Middlemore Homes Reports, Fifth Report, 1878.*

⁴⁶ *Morning News*, 8th April 1875.

⁴⁷ BAH, MS 517/471 & MS 517/472 *Middlemore Homes Entrance Books, 1875-1878.*

Experiences of life in Canada

John Middlemore took his first group of 29 children to Canada in the early summer of 1873, despite having made no advance arrangements for their reception. Fortunately, he was able to persuade three charitable organisations in Toronto to accept the children and they were later placed in Toronto and in the town of London, Ontario.⁴⁸ The older children were placed as servants with families and the younger children were adopted by childless families. However, three of the boys placed as servants in Toronto ran away 'causing much trouble and anxiety' and consequently Middlemore resolved to place future migrant children with farming families in rural districts of Ontario so they had no opportunity to abscond.⁴⁹ The majority of child migrants from all organisations were placed on farms in rural areas to meet the Canadian demand for cheap farm labour. Around 80 per cent of the population of Canada lived in rural areas in 1871, but there was a continual movement to the urban centres by the sons and daughters of small farmers, resulting in a high demand for immigrant children from the 'old country' to work on farms as farm labourers and domestic servants.⁵⁰ The greatest demand was for children and young people between the ages of 12 and 16, but many farmers were willing to accept younger children if they appeared suitable. Children were likely to be returned to the distribution homes if they were not strong enough to undertake the work, and very young children typically spent much longer in the distribution homes waiting for suitable adoptive families.⁵¹ Placing children in rural areas was thought to provide fewer temptations and less moral danger than the towns and cities, yet the distribution homes did not interview prospective employers before sending children to live with them. Canadian applicants for child workers simply sent a description of their own family and the child required, together with one reference from a clergyman and a small fee. It appears that British charities took it for

⁴⁸ Parker, *Uprooted*, 31.

⁴⁹ BAH, MS 517/463, *Middlemore Homes Reports, First Report*, 1873

⁵⁰ Parker, *Uprooted*, 129-131.

⁵¹ Parker, *Uprooted*, 138-139.

granted that child migrants would be safe with rural farmers.⁵² In this respect the Middlemore Homes in Canada seem to have been particularly neglectful, since they had a local reputation for taking insufficient care over placements and poor supervision afterwards in comparison with other organisations.⁵³ Regardless of the expectations of emigration supporters, girls who had completed their placements were keen to leave the countryside for Canadian towns and cities where they found work in factories, mills or shops.⁵⁴ Large numbers of boys also gave up working on the land to find work as labourers or factory workers in the towns, although around 22% remained in agricultural occupations and a further 23% worked in industries such as logging, mining and fishing.⁵⁵

The work undertaken by children on Canadian farms depended largely on their age, size and strength: a boy of nine was expected to fetch water and wood, gather eggs, feed pigs and bring in cows. Older boys worked in the fields, tended crops and brought in the harvest. The younger girls were given tasks such as child-minding, whereas older girls undertook domestic chores in the home and around the farm.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it was common for children to be moved between placements as employers complained urban children were unsuitable for farm work: they were 'too small', 'too slow', 'disobedient', 'obstinate', or 'untruthful'. Even in cases where children had run away, this was reported by employers only when writing to request a replacement child worker.⁵⁷ In many ways, child migrants to Canada in the late-nineteenth century were treated in a similar way to pauper children in eighteenth-century England, who were routinely apprenticed as farm servants by the parish in exchange for board and lodging. The difference was that children transported to Canada were totally isolated from everything familiar to them, unlikely to ever see their families again, and without even Poor Law officials to turn to for

⁵² Parr, *Labouring Children*, 47.

⁵³ Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants* (Toronto: Dundee Press, 2001), 185-188.

⁵⁴ Parr, *Labouring Children*, 126-127.

⁵⁵ Parr, *Labouring Children*, 130-131.

⁵⁶ Parr, *Labouring Children*, 82-83.

⁵⁷ Parker, *Uprooted*, 216-219.

assistance. As Taylor points out, child savers and philanthropists in Britain promoted child migration as a route to a better life in Canada, but the expectation that children would work for their keep was contrary to nineteenth-century legislation aimed at limiting child labour and introducing compulsory education.⁵⁸ The employment of children in factories and workshops in England was restricted by the Factory and Workshop Act of 1878, which prohibited employment of children below ten years of age: children of ten to 13 years were permitted to work for half-days only and were required to attend school for half-days. This was re-enforced by the 1880 Education Act which made school attendance compulsory for all children up to the age of 13. At the same time, children removed from England to Canada were expected to undertake long hours of farm labour in harsh conditions from the age of ten or younger, with little opportunities for schooling in remote rural areas. The strong demand for immigrant children to work on Canadian farms could, therefore, be regarded as an indication of the significant contribution made by child workers to the development of Canadian farming.

Taylor's study found that inspection reports sent to the Manchester Refuge were fairly extensive, but concentrated on presenting placements in a favourable light, providing little information about individual children or their experiences. Any problems identified by inspectors were explained in terms of poor behaviour, rather than harsh treatment, suggesting the needs of children were not a priority.⁵⁹ The progress and well-being of children provided by the annual reports of the Middlemore Emigration Homes invariably suggested that children were doing particularly well and were extremely happy in their new homes. Obviously, samples of children's letters included in these reports were chosen for their favourable comments, but even these extracts provide some insights into children's feelings about migration to Canada. Thomas Gittins: 'I am getting along pretty well at my trade, but my eyes, which are a little sore, make it hard for me...I

⁵⁸ Taylor, 'Poverty, Emigration and Family', 97.

⁵⁹ Taylor, 'Poverty, Emigration and Family', 98-99.

like Canada pretty well, but I feel a little lonesome.⁶⁰ Elizabeth Whitehead: 'Please Mr Middlemore will you tell me how my sister Florence and my brother William is getting on. I hope you will bring them next year.' William Leavy: 'Please try to bring my sister to Canada.'⁶¹ Henry Newbold: 'I thank you very much for the trouble you took with me. I am happy to tell you that I have got a good home. I will do my best to do what is right and good.' Sarah Ann Egginton: 'Please give my best love to all the children, and please think of me always trying to be your good little girl.'⁶² None of the letters from the children mentioned being unhappy or disliking their placement, but they were full of enquiries about their brothers and sisters and about the other children from the emigration homes. The children were clearly missing their siblings and friends from home, suggesting loneliness and isolation from familiar people. Many of the letters were affectionate towards John Middlemore, the matron and staff of the home, sending love and saying they were very grateful and trying to do their best. These letters indicate the psychological impact of separation was experienced even by children who appeared to be happily placed in welcoming homes.

The Middlemore Homes settlement reports on individual children contain information about children's lives once they arrived in Canada at this time (1873-1880). Details about six of the children from the 1878-1879 intakes have been traced, including three girls of four, ten and 11 years and the three Hughes brothers sent to Canada aged ten. Only the four-year-old girl was adopted; the other five children were placed with employers as assistants or servants within two weeks of arriving in Canada. These findings confirm that Birmingham children were sent to Canada as child workers at ten years old. In the first case study, Elizabeth Adams (10) was placed with Andrew Abra of Sydenham Mills on 4th July 1878 'as an assistant for one year' in exchange for accommodation, food and 'clothes washing'. The agreement was renewed in July 1879

⁶⁰ BAH, MS 517/463, *Middlemore Homes Reports, First Report*, 1873.

⁶¹ BAH, MS 517/463, *Middlemore Homes Reports, Second Report*, 1875.

⁶² BAH, MS 517/463, *Middlemore Homes Reports, Third Report*, 1876.

and according to an inspection report of September 1879, Elizabeth was in 'a good home' but her behaviour was 'not very satisfactory'. By August 1881 her behaviour had become 'very insufficient' and she was removed. Elizabeth was then sent to work for farmer N.Horton of Owen Sound, a port on Lake Huron, 'as a general servant' for the pay of '\$3 per month plus food'. She was removed five months later and moved again in October 1882 to earn \$4 per month as a general servant at the age of 14. No further reports were included in her file.⁶³ Elizabeth's views about her experiences and how she was treated by her employers remain hidden, but the evidence of her transfers between four employers over the course of four years and the reports of her alleged poor behaviour suggest her experience of life as a child worker in Canada was difficult. From this, it is possible to infer that Elizabeth missed her own family and familiar surroundings and very probably disliked working as a farm servant. Resentment of her predicament and feelings of powerlessness inevitably resulted in the non co-operative behaviour typical of a child experiencing separation anxiety disorder.

The second case study is of Annie Bennett (11), who arrived in Canada at the same time as Elizabeth and was immediately placed with Phillip Odell of London, Ontario 'as an assistant'. A visit by an inspector two years later in July 1880 stated only that Annie was in good health, she was living in a good home and her behaviour was 'very good'. Unfortunately, no further records about Annie were added to the file. In the third case study, Catherine Murray was four years of age when migrated to Canada in May 1878, leaving behind a life as the illegitimate daughter of a Birmingham prostitute. She was adopted by George Coates on 21st June 1878 who signed an agreement 'to treat her in all respects as his own child'. The family were visited annually by inspectors who recorded Catherine's 'good health', 'good home' and 'very satisfactory' behaviour. The final report was dated 1889, by which time Catherine would have been 15 years old,

⁶³ BAH, MS 517/253, *Middlemore Homes Settlement Reports*, 1873-1881.

recorded simply that she was 'happy' and her behaviour 'very satisfactory'.⁶⁴ In this example, the inspection reports were again brief, but it appears that when young children were adopted more care was taken to visit them at least once a year. Whether an adopted child would have reported unhappiness or ill-treatment by the family on which she was totally dependent remains unclear.

The fourth case study is of Thomas Hughes (10), and his brothers William and Walter. Thomas left England in May 1878 and was placed with Thomas Abbott on 12th June 1878, 'as an assistant' to work in exchange for accommodation, food and clothes washing. The agreement was renewed in October 1879, and a report at the same time recorded Thomas was in good health and his general condition was 'as a member of the family', however his behaviour was 'untruthful, otherwise satisfactory'.⁶⁵ The placement was clearly not successful, since Thomas was moved three months later in February 1880 to Mrs H Thompson 'as an assistant'. This placement lasted until August 1880 when Thomas was placed with John Ferguson, earning \$40 per annum 'with food'. Three further employers were recorded in September 1881, November 1881 and finally July 1885, by which time Thomas was 17 years old and earning \$8 per month 'with food'.⁶⁶ Thomas experienced six employers during his first seven years in Canada, suggesting a frightening lack of security for a young boy who was moved from place to place. Moreover, Parr's study of child migrants from the Barnardo's homes found that children were frequently moved, as their economic worth increased with age and ability. The Barnardo girls moved an average of four times during their early years in Canada, and the Barnardo boys moved three times on average.⁶⁷ Thomas's younger brother, William Hughes, was sent to Canada in July 1880 at the age of ten, and was placed with George Ferris on 30th July 1880 'as an assistant for the first year for food, clothes washing and

⁶⁴ BAH, MS 517/253, *Middlemore Homes Settlement Reports*, 1873-1881.

⁶⁵ BAH, MS 517/253, *Middlemore Homes Settlement Reports*, 1873-1881.

⁶⁶ BAH, MS 517/253, *Middlemore Homes Settlement Reports*, 1873-1881.

⁶⁷ Parr, *Labouring Children*, 88.

mending'. The agreement stated that William should attend Sunday school regularly and day school 'three months in the year at least'. The agreement was renewed for the next five years, and the report of a visit in 1883 found William's health 'good' and his behaviour 'very good'.⁶⁸ According to the Canadian census reports, ten-year-old William Hughes was employed as a servant in the household of farmer John Ferris in 1881, and at the age of 20 in 1891 he was employed as a farm labourer for farmer Stephen Cosens in the Ontario district of Huron East.⁶⁹

The third brother, Walter Hughes, also arrived in Canada in 1880 was placed on 30th July 1880 with William Kirkpatrick. Walter's agreement was renewed for the following three years; a report dated 1883 described his health as 'good', and his behaviour as 'very satisfactory'.⁷⁰ Information from the Canadian census confirms Walter was living in the household of William Kirkpatrick, a farmer, in 1881 as a farm servant. Ten years later, 21-year-old Walter was working as a farm labourer in the household of farmer Joseph Johnson.⁷¹ The Middlemore settlement reports provide few details and are too brief to indicate the childhood experiences of the Hughes brothers. However, a letter written by Walter Hughes in 1899, when he was 29 years old, has been retained in the Middlemore Homes files, providing some insights into his childhood and life as a young man.⁷² Walter had moved to the United States by 1899, living in Cheboygan, Michigan, a town on Lake Huron alongside his brother Thomas. They were both married by this time, as was William Hughes, who was living in Shellmouth, Manitoba. Although separated as soon as they arrived in Canada, the three brothers had managed to remain in contact as a family, despite the years spent apart. Walter reported that he had married 'a Scotch girl from one

⁶⁸ BAH, MS 517/253, *Middlemore Homes Settlement Reports*, 1873-1881.

⁶⁹ Canadian Census Reports, 1881 and 1891.

⁷⁰ BAH, MS 517/253, *Middlemore Homes Settlement Reports*, 1873-1881.

⁷¹ Canadian Census reports, 1881 and 1891

⁷² BAH, MS 517/253, *Middlemore Homes Settlement Reports*, 1873-1881; MS 517/253, *Letter from W Hughes to J. Middlemore*, 18th September 1899

of the Glasgow orphan homes. She is a good steady quiet Christian woman one that I am quite proud of we get along very happy together.⁷³

The main purpose of Walter's letter to John Middlemore was to enquire about his mother, last heard from 12 years earlier. He was obviously anxious to gain help in tracing his mother, writing that he would never forget 'the kind Christian training' he received in the Middlemore Home, which had made him into 'a good Christian man', but he also revealed that after leaving the home he was 'treated very unkind by the man I was given out to...Mr William Kirkpatrick'. Walter continued his letter by stressing the importance of enquiring after children once they were placed on Canadian farms because: 'some of them are used very rough and shameful'.⁷⁴ The evidence in Walter's letter to John Middlemore thus raises questions about the ill-treatment and over-work of child migrants by employers, even where inspections by Middlemore staff in Canada had reported arrangements were 'satisfactory'. Walter's placement with farmer William Kirkpatrick continued for three or four years, yet his letter reveals he was ill-treated as a child worker. Moreover, he suggests that other children had similar experiences to his own, implying that incidences of mistreatment or harshness were well-known amongst former child migrants. The letter also provides insights into the importance he attached to maintaining family and community ties.

Walter had retained contact with his brothers in Canada, yet for other children whose siblings were in England, such contact was less likely. It is apparent that Walter's attachment to his mother and to his home town of Birmingham had not diminished, even after 20 years. In a further point, Walter's marriage and the girl he chose to marry suggests evidence of a sense of community between former child migrants living in Canada. The confirmation that all three brothers had settled in rural regions of Michigan

⁷³ BAH, MS 517/253, *Letter from W Hughes*, 18th September 1899

⁷⁴ BAH, MS 517/253, *Letter from W Hughes*, 18th September 1899.

in the U.S. or Manitoba in Canada indicates they were following the agricultural or related occupations chosen for them as children. Furthermore, the desire amongst child migrants to maintain links to family, friends and place of birth, as illuminated by Walter's letter, was demonstrated at the outbreak of the First World War when 54% of Middlemore boys in New Brunswick volunteered for military service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force.⁷⁵ The majority of Middlemore volunteers were employed in farming and lumbering; with an average age of 22 years, they were younger than the national average age for volunteers of 26. Many of those who volunteered were motivated in part by a desire to return to England, taking advantage of periods of leave to visit Birmingham.⁷⁶ This overwhelming need to reconnect with family and home town appears to have been an ongoing theme in the experience of child migrants to Canada.

Conclusion

On 16 February 2017 the House of Commons of the Canadian Parliament issued an official apology to child migrants, recognising: 'the injustice, abuse and suffering endured by the British Home Children...who were shipped from Great Britain to Canada between 1869 and 1948, and torn from their families to serve mainly as cheap labour once they arrived in Canada.'⁷⁷ This apology not only recognised the ill-treatment received by British child migrants to Canada, but also made explicit that they were welcomed purely as child workers. The evidence in this chapter demonstrates that middle-class child savers focused their efforts on removing pauper children from families perceived as inadequate or criminal, reflecting negative attitudes towards the poor and fear of social disruption. Although these children were frequently depicted as orphaned 'gutter children' or 'street arabs', this study shows that many children were leaving behind various

⁷⁵ Curt Mainville, 'The Middlemore Boys: Immigration, Settlement and Great War Volunteerism in New Brunswick', *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region*, 42:2 (2013): 51-74.

⁷⁶ Mainville, 'Middlemore Boys', 69.

⁷⁷ House of Commons Canada Debates, Hansard No. 142, Thursday, February 16, 2017

members of their family. They were almost certainly in need of some form of care or support, as families experienced problems of destitution arising from family breakdown, unemployment, illness or death. However, there is little evidence of criminal or disruptive behaviour amongst the children despatched to Canada. Moreover, it is not clear from the records why some parents, such as the Hughes family, consented to their children's emigration to Canada rather than entering the workhouse for temporary relief. This raises further questions about the possible options, or lack of options, available to distressed Birmingham families during a period of civic improvement in the town during the era of Joseph Chamberlain and his successors.⁷⁸

This research reveals that children of just ten years of age were sent from the Emigration Homes in Birmingham to work for Canadian farmers as servants in exchange for board and lodgings. Although Middlemore claimed that children 'around the age of 13 years' were found work, the records show that much younger children were placed on isolated farms where they were regarded as live-in farm servants rather than members of the family. At around the same time, British legislators were attempting to reduce child labour by introducing compulsory education for all children up to the age of 13, a provision that did not extend to child migrants. In the later decades of the nineteenth century, children such as Elizabeth, Annie, Thomas, William and Walter should have been attending school instead of labouring on farms. In conclusion, the research findings in this chapter add an international dimension to the local study of child labour in Birmingham. It highlights the paradox that whereas, for much of the nineteenth century, families were drawn into Birmingham from the countryside to take advantage of industrial employment opportunities, by the 1870s some of the poorest children were being removed from urban streets to work on rural land overseas. The case studies of Birmingham children shine a light on the hardships experienced by child migrants in

⁷⁸ Peter T. Marsh, 'Chamberlain, Joseph (1836–1914)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2013 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32350, accessed 22 Aug 2017]

Canada, and the failure of agencies to focus on children's welfare during follow-up inspections. As this chapter demonstrates, once children had arrived in Canada, the requirements of farmers for cheap child labour took precedence over the education and well-being of child migrants. Accounts of Birmingham history have recognised the contribution made by John Middlemore as a philanthropist and later as a Birmingham M.P. It is surely time to recognise not just the sacrifices made by the Middlemore child migrants in terms of hardship, isolation and loneliness, but also the contribution of Birmingham children who were 'set adrift' to become part of the Canadian workforce.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that child workers were an integral part of the Birmingham economy from the early years of industrialisation through to the latter decades of the nineteenth century, making significant contributions to expansion and industrial development in the town. The research has provided evidence that large numbers of children were expected to begin work from an early age, some like Will Thorne at just five or six years old in 1863. Children were regarded by parents as potentially valuable contributors to the family economy, so that families migrated from rural areas into Birmingham because of the high demand for child labour in its manufacturing industries. It has drawn attention to evidence of a greater intensity of child labour in the early decades of the nineteenth century as working hours were extended, accompanied by increasing numbers of women and children in the workforce. This thesis adds to existing knowledge by shining a light on child workers in metal manufacturing and related industries rather than in textiles or mining, extending the timeline for the prevalence of child labour beyond the classic period of industrialisation.

A highlight of this study incorporates a detailed analysis of the impact of early work on Birmingham children's education, health and life expectancy, important aspects of child labour history that have received relatively little attention in other studies. Furthermore, this research includes an exploration of child migration to Canada, revealing this as a new and distinctive form of child labour aimed at removing the poorest children from urban streets and adding an international dimension to the study. It has highlighted the contrast between the labouring poor, who migrated as families from the countryside to Birmingham in search of employment, with middle-class 'child savers' who decided to send poor children overseas to a rural life as farm servants, separating them forever from

their families. Insights offered by the perspectives developed in this study thus extend beyond the existing historiography, revealing new layers of understanding for the history of childhood and child labour.

Child workers and the Birmingham economy

The initial research for this thesis began by exploring child labour under the old Poor Law. It analysed 2,028 parish apprenticeship certificates from nine parishes in Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire for the period 1750 to 1834.¹ Few cases were found of children apprenticed to Birmingham masters, even from the parish of Harborne only three miles from the town. The study found children were most likely to have been apprenticed locally in traditional crafts and trades; children bound to Birmingham masters in metal trades or crafts such as tailoring and shoe-making were at least ten years of age or above, indicating tradesmen were unwilling to accept very young children as apprentices. The general lack of demand for parish apprentices in Birmingham suggests that child workers were available in the town without the need for employers to take on the legal obligations of formal apprenticeship agreements. In contrast to these findings, the study revealed that large numbers of pauper children were employed at the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor, in effect a children's workhouse.² At this residential 'infant manufactory' children were set to work at pin-making, straw plaiting, bead-stringing and glass-cutting, with a constant movement of children in and out of the asylum over the 50 years of its existence. The Guardians of the Poor were firmly focused on making a profit from the children's work, using the profits from child labour to recover the full cost of the land and buildings of the institution plus a surplus that went towards the upkeep of the

¹ WoCRO, 5498/9, *Parish Apprenticeships*, Alvechurch; WoCRO, 9135/38-41, Bromsgrove; BAH, EP/157, Northfield; SCRO, D4383/6/5, Wednesbury; SCRO, D3773/5/1059-1251, Tamworth; WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Knowle.

² BAH, GP/B/2/1-5, *Board of Guardians Minutes*, 1783 to 1852.

poor in Birmingham. This evidence represents a significant example of the contribution made by child workers in Birmingham to the local economy.

Child workers were regarded as an essential part of Birmingham's eighteenth-century metal button industry, which depended on a division of labour between skilled adult workers and child assistants. Accounts of visits to the new manufacturing industries by Dean Tucker in 1758 and Lord and Lady Shelburne in 1766 described the manufacture of buttons in some detail, confirming the involvement of child labour.³ However, the practice in Birmingham of children being directly employed by individual workmen, rather than by the owners of firms, meant that child workers were scattered throughout the manufacturing industries, with only the pin-making trade identified by the 1833 Factories Inquiry as employing large groups of children. The methods of production and employment practices commonly found in Birmingham industries meant that child workers in these settings were excluded from protective legislation contained in the Factory Acts of the 1830s and 1840s. Nevertheless, the findings in this research have provided evidence of the high demand for child workers in a wide variety of industries, such as button making, brass casting, japanning and lacquering, glass making and the gun trade. It has shown that in 1841 the average age for starting work in Birmingham was eight or nine years, rising to between nine and ten years by 1857, suggesting there had been some changes in attitudes to child labour over the period. Despite this, there were still an estimated 2,000 child workers below the age of ten at work in Birmingham in 1862, shining a light on the prolonged existence of child labour in manufacturing industry well beyond the mid-nineteenth century.

³ Tucker, *Collected Works of Josiah Tucker*, 34; Fitzmaurice, *Life of William, Earl of Shelburne*, 274-277.

The importance of children's earnings

This study has drawn particular attention to the importance of children's earnings for family incomes. The chapter on child workers and the infant asylum found evidence that children were sometimes removed from the asylum by their parents once they were experienced at pin-making and could obtain employment in the pin workshops, their wages paid directly to the parents. Children employed at Phipson's pin manufactory in 1840 were reputed to be drawn from only the poorest and most destitute families, their terms of employment agreed between parents and the workshop masters who forwarded advance payments to be recovered from the child's wages. Furthermore, children working as pin-headers from home were found to be supporting their families financially due to the inability of their parents to find employment. Additional evidence of the importance of children's earnings was provided by a button maker, Samuel Page, who said that children in the button industry had to work to support their parents because of poor trade conditions and low wages. He added that the demand for child workers and young people in Birmingham was far greater than the demand for adult workers. Alongside these findings, the study also revealed that average earnings in Birmingham were higher than those in industries such as textiles or mining, and considerably higher than in agriculture. High wages and a strong demand for child workers contributed to Birmingham's rapid population expansion in the nineteenth century. However, the study also found that by 1867 more than 15,000 families were surviving on low incomes, highlighting the wide gulf that existed between the economic circumstances of families of skilled workers and those of unskilled workers, the unemployed and single-parent families. Will Thorne's experiences as a child worker from a single-parent family provided a first-hand account of the type of hardships encountered by children following the loss of a parent.⁴

⁴ Thorne, *My Life's Battles*, 15-16.

The impact of early work on education and health

The chapter on the industrious child worker highlighted an intensification of work in nineteenth-century Birmingham, involving the expectation that children would work for far longer than the normal ten-hour working day. For example, nine-year old Benjamin Beach began work at 6am each morning to make advance preparations before his father's arrival at work between 7am and 9am, and children employed at Phipson's in 1840 were still working at 8pm, an hour later than the adult workers who had left at 7pm.⁵ The research findings in this study demonstrate that children worked at least as many hours as adult workers in the mid-nineteenth century, an intensity of labour that clearly had implications for their education and health. The evidence indicates that working families in Birmingham chose to send their children to local dame schools at a very young age, making use of an affordable form of childcare that was easy to access and permitted mothers to return to paid employment. At the age of six or seven children moved to common day schools, charity schools or voluntary schools run on the monitorial system, typically attending for one or two years before beginning paid work at the age of eight or nine. Large numbers of children attended Sunday Schools, which not only provided free instruction in reading and writing, but also did not interfere with the child's ability to earn a living. If a child was sent to a dame school at the age of three or four, followed by a common day or voluntary school until the age of eight, they were likely to have received four or five years of basic schooling in reading, writing and religious instruction, perhaps supplemented by Sunday School. This study has thus drawn attention to the strategies adopted by many labouring families in Birmingham to ensure their children received basic educational skills without any loss of earnings. It seems reasonable to suggest that families may have considered that a few years of schooling was sufficient for a child destined for manual labour or domestic work.

⁵ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*.

Chapter 7 provided evidence of the hazardous nature of children's work, citing examples of first-hand accounts written by George Jacob Holyoake and Will Thorne. A detailed analysis of working conditions in Birmingham found children's health was adversely affected by environmental conditions, including lack of ventilation and excessive heat and cold. Children worked at harmful industrial processes, such as brass-founding, that produced dangerous fumes and dust, or were exposed to lead, arsenic, mercury and white phosphorus. Birmingham had a high rate of ill-health from pulmonary diseases in the 1840s, experiencing a greater proportion of deaths from this cause than the average rate, with brass casting noted amongst the local workforce as a particularly unhealthy trade.⁶ The study also revealed the extent to which children suffered from accidental injuries in the workplace, mainly to the head, eyes and fingers, and were often subjected to ill-treatment from adult workers in the form of beatings and kicking. These accidental injuries and beating of boys seem to have been regarded as normal everyday events: losing a finger was part of the process of becoming an experienced workman. The risks to child workers' health in Birmingham also appear to have increased quite significantly over the course of the nineteenth century, as new industrial processes and machinery were introduced. Accidents involving metal-rolling machines and the series of fatal explosions in the percussion cap industry are just two examples of these hazards to child workers. A final point on child health is the attention drawn by this study to the sexual abuse of female child workers who were drawn into juvenile prostitution following failed romances with male co-workers. Police officers in the nineteenth century made moral judgements about such girls, regarding them as morally corrupt and failing to perceive them as victims of exploitation. These attitudes are reflected in the twenty-first century police response to the grooming and sexual abuse of young girls by predatory males.

⁶ BPP, 1843, 431, XIV, *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report*.

Changes in attitudes and children's agency

Chapter 3 revealed that children housed in the Birmingham Asylum for the Infant Poor were expected to earn their keep by working at repetitive manual occupations such as pin-making and lace-making. Concerns about the children's health and education emerged in the 1830s, followed by decisions to abolish work for children under nine and limit work to six hours per day for those up to the age of 13 years, in line with legislation in the 1833 Factories Act. Girls were to undertake only unpaid domestic duties, and boys were to learn tailoring and shoemaking in place of the profitable pin-making.⁷ These policies reflected changing attitudes in society about the most appropriate training for pauper children, placing a greater emphasis on the value of education for all children as a means of reducing poverty and on traditional craft skills rather than industrial occupations. There is also additional evidence of changing attitudes towards the employment of young children in the newer manufacturing industries established in Birmingham from the 1820s and 1830s. The owners of large firms in the steel pen trade, most notably Joseph Gillott, imposed a minimum age for employment of 13 years, and many manufacturers claimed to be against child labour in principle, if not in actual practice.

Following the introduction of the 1867 Factory Act and 1867 Workshops Regulation Act, children below the age of eight could no longer be legally employed, and those between eight and 13 years could only work half-time. Children employed in Birmingham's factories and workshops were thus finally included under the same legislation as child workers in the textile industries. These measures represented a significant change in attitudes to child labour, soon to be followed by an extension of education provision to all children up to the age of 13 in the 1870 Education Act, a policy that had been promoted by the Birmingham Education Society. The implementation of legal restrictions on child labour during the 1860s took place alongside the emergence of

⁷ BAH, GP/B/2/1/3, *Board of Guardians Minutes*.

middle-class schemes to clear urban streets of poor children, often termed 'gutter children' or 'street arabs'.⁸ Wealthy supporters of the Middlemore Emigration Homes in Birmingham were persuaded that slum-dwelling children would have a better life in rural Canada, far removed from the harmful influences of their own families. This study has identified that children as young as ten, such as William and Walter Hughes, were sent to work as farm servants on isolated Canadian farms, with little scrutiny of their future employers and even less inspection afterwards. Child migration schemes therefore became a new form of forced child labour for the poorest children in the later decades of the nineteenth century, shifting children off the streets, out of sight and across the ocean.

Some evidence of agency has been identified amongst young child migrants or potential migrants who refused to comply with the rules of the Middlemore Homes. From records of those brought to the home in Birmingham, there were numerous cases of children who absconded before they could be shipped out to Canada, especially the slightly older boys of 12 or 13. In fact, these adolescent boys were the ones most in demand by Canadian farmers, who were seeking cheap labour to help with arduous farm work rather than offering a home to needy children. Other children were perceived as behaving badly after being admitted; for example, it was reported that Elizabeth Adams jumped out of bed at the Birmingham home, screaming and shouting. Elizabeth also refused to conform once she was placed in Canada as a farm assistant, being moved from employer to employer following reports of poor behaviour over a period of four years. There is no record of Elizabeth's views about her treatment by Canadian employers, but her continued protests suggest this was the only way of showing agency as a child migrant in an alien environment and in the absence of family support. Examples of agency by child workers are relatively few, since decisions were usually made by adults on their behalf. In a few instances children made a choice to undertake paid work in

⁸ Parker, *Uprooted*, 10-31.

preference to attending school, but most children did not have this option. However, examination of the evidence has also shown that child workers shared a strong sense of family duty, and like George Jacob Holyoake they were proud of their ability to earn a living and add to the family income.⁹

Study outcomes and recommendations

A significant outcome of this research is to establish that industrial child labour in Birmingham continued far beyond the classic period of industrialisation, finding that child workers made important contributions to the local economy, to poor law finances and to family incomes. This thesis shows that child workers played an essential role in the successful expansion of Birmingham manufacturing industries, such as button making and brass casting, aiding manufacturers from the mid-eighteenth century onwards in maintaining low costs and competitiveness. Furthermore, it emphasises the centrality of child workers in supporting the family economy. Birmingham acted as a magnet for labouring families during the period under discussion, drawing migrants from neighbouring counties and further afield, in search of the high wages offered to skilled workers and to meet the demand for child labour. This research identifies that families of unskilled or unemployed workers relied heavily on their children's labour to provide financial support for the family. In the second half of the nineteenth century economic divisions within the working classes widened: on the one hand, families of skilled workers enjoyed rising levels of prosperity, particularly amongst families with adolescent children earning good wages whilst remaining in the family home; on the other hand, large numbers of families had fallen into poverty because of intermittent work, unemployment or family breakdown.¹⁰

⁹ Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, 10-19.

¹⁰ BAH, LB.48, *Birmingham Education Society, First Annual Report* (1868).

The 1867 Report by the Birmingham Education Society found almost a thousand children lived in such dire poverty they were unable to take up the society's offer of free school places due a lack of clothing.¹¹ More than 300 families in the survey were living on an average family income of less than 10s per week, a similar level to wages that could be earned by a 15 year-old. In earlier decades, unemployed parents had been able to rely on children's earnings to support the family in times of need. As this research highlights, with the decline of child labour young destitute children became a more visible and potentially troublesome presence on Birmingham streets, leading to the removal of some children to work in Canada. In addition to offering new insights into child labour in Birmingham, this thesis contributes to existing knowledge by shining a light on child migration to Canada as a previously unrecognised dimension of child labour.

Future research might take this investigation further by exploring the Middlemore Homes records after 1880. One question that might be considered is whether children continued to be sent to Canada as child workers and what were their experiences? A second direction for future research might focus on the responses of the Birmingham guardians to child poverty in the late Victorian period. Why, for example, were some children allowed to be sent overseas by charity organisations while others were accommodated in the newly opened Children's Cottage Homes in the nearby Warwickshire countryside? What were the attitudes and assumptions behind these decisions? This thesis offers new insights and perspectives on child labour and child workers in Birmingham, providing a basis for further research to illuminate children's diverse experiences of childhood in the past.

To conclude, this thesis has investigated important historical questions about child labour and its consequences, yet the issues explored in this study remain relevant to

¹¹ BAH, MS 4248, *National Education League, Leaflet No. 1* (1871).

current events around the world. Firstly, only in the last few years has the extreme hardship and abuse experienced by child migrants despatched from the UK to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s been acknowledged, with a recommendation for compensation in 2018 by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.¹² Secondly, the study of historical child labour in Birmingham is relevant to understanding the experiences of millions of child workers around the globe, from children employed in the brick-kilns and mica mines of India to the garment factories of Bangladesh and agricultural child workers in Africa.¹³ Moreover, anyone who owns a smart phone, tablet or laptop computer should be aware of young child workers employed in cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹⁴ Cobalt is an essential component of the lithium batteries that power electronic devices, and more than half of the world supply of cobalt is mined in the DRC. In view of the proposals to replace all petrol and diesel powered vehicles with battery-driven electric vehicles, the global demand for cobalt will soar. The close historical links between family poverty and child labour in Birmingham resonate with the prevalence of child labour in countries around the world today, highlighting the significance of historical research for understanding current economic and political challenges.

¹² Ben Macintyre, 'When good intentions lead to awful crimes', *The Times*, 3 March 2018.

¹³ P. Bengtson and L. Paddison, 'Beauty companies and the struggle to source child labour-free mica', *The Guardian*, 28 July 2016; M. Safi, 'Child labour "rampant" in Bangladesh factories, study reveals', *The Guardian*, 7 December 2016; '200 children found working in India brick kiln', *The Guardian*, 5 January 2017.

¹⁴ A. Kelly, 'Children as young as seven mining cobalt used in smartphones, says Amnesty', *The Guardian*, 19 January 2016; P. Whoriskey and T.C. Frankel, 'Tech giants pledge to keep children out of cobalt mines that supply smartphone and electric-car batteries', *The Washington Post*, 20 December 2016; T.C. Frankel, 'Cobalt mining for lithium ion batteries has a high human cost', *The Washington Post*, 30 September 2016.

Appendix 1

Occupations of Parish Apprentices in Birmingham, 1750-1835 (from nine sample parishes)

Age	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	N/ K	Total
Domestic service			4			1	2	2	5	14
Cordwainer		2	1	6	3	5	9	8	2	36
Chape maker				1					2	3
Breeches mker									1	1
Tailor			2				1	2		5
Mantua maker				1				1		2
Peruke maker		1			1		1	1	1	5
Basket maker				1	1				1	3
Brush maker		1						1	1	3
Cabinet maker								3		3
Wood turner				1	1		1	4	1	8
Locksmith				1	3		1	2	1	8
Gunsmith/Fsher		1		2	2	2	4	1	1	13
Gunbarrel borer	1	1		1			1			4
Blade maker		1			1	1			1	4
Bayonet forger								1	1	2
Polisher						1				1
Cutler									1	1
Brass founder				1	2	1	1	3		8
Button maker	1			1				2	6	10
Buckle maker			1	2	4	2	2	2	7	20
Toymaker				2		3		1	5	11
Pin/ wireworker	1		1	1		2			1	6
Other trades			4	9	9	6	14	10	8	60
Factory manufacture										
Transport										
Building & timber				1			1	1	1	4
Retail, hostelry				1			1	3		5
Professional										
Totals	3	7	13	32	27	24	39	48	47	240

Source: Parish Apprenticeship Certificates, SCRO, D3773/5/1059-1251; D4383/6/5; BAH, EP/61/7/8; EP14/157; WCRO, DRBO100/107-109; DRB0056/143-144; DRB0019/83-89; WoCRO, 5498/9; 9135/38-41.

Appendix 2

Parish Apprentices from Knowle, Warwickshire (1750 to 1850)

Mth/Year	Firstname	Surname	Age	Master's name	Place	Masters Trade	"Apprenticed in the trade or business of..."
1751	Hester	Watton		Edmund Yardley	Knowle	Husbandman	Sewing, knitting & spinning
1754	Joseph	Martain	14	Wm Shephard	Sheldon	Blacksmith	Blacksmith
1754	John	Smith		John Chinn	Birmingham	Toymaker	Toymaker
1754	Thomas	Fitter	13	Joseph Palmer	Yardley	Taylor	Taylor
1754	Thomas	Lea	11	Samuel Brown	Birmingham	Candle stick maker	Candle stick maker
1754	Robert	Smith	10	Joseph Gibbs	Bilston	Toymaker	Toymaker
1754	John	Fitter	10	Joseph Perry	Bilston	Toymaker	Toymaker
1754	William	Martin	9	John Smith	Digbeth	Jobbing smith	Jobbing smith
1754	John	Kimberley		James Stanbury	Barston	Blacksmith	Blacksmith
1754	James	Braudbury		John Smith	Lapworth	Taylor	Taylor
1755	William	Peers		Edmund Birch	Birmingham	Toymaker	Toymaker
1755	Elizabeth	Aylesbury		Joseph Osbond	Walsal	Snuffer maker	Snuffer maker
1756	Christopher	Smith		John Chinn	Birmingham	Button maker	Button maker
1756	William	Dolson		Richard Sanders	Lapworth	Shoemaker	Shoemaker
1756	Thomas	Biddle		John Wharton	Yardley	Taylor	Taylor
1756	Joseph	Lea		Joseph Illidge	Birmingham	Chape maker	Chape maker
1756	Mary	Dike		Anthony & Mary Higgins	Bedford, Warks	Mantua maker & seamstress	Mantua maker & steamstress
1757	Thomas	Ashers	12	Joseph Gibbs	Bilston	Toymaker	Toymaker
1758	Richard	Willson		John Lindon	Yardley	Wick yarn maker	Wick yarn maker

Mth/Year	Firstname	Surname	Age	Master's name	Place	Masters Trade	"Apprenticed in the trade or business of..."
1758	Thomas	Willson		Joseph Palmer	Yardley	Tayler	Tayler
1759	William	Kimberley	12	William Freeth	Birmingham	Toymaker	Toymaker
1760	William	Terry	11	Charles Freeth	Birmingham	Brass Founder	Brass Founder
1760	Edward	Tayler		Edward Lyndon	Balsal	Shoemaker	Shoemaker
1758	Francis	Aylesbury	8	Thomas Chapman	Wallsal	Snaffle maker	Snaffle maker
1764	Thomas	Shakespear	12	William Sanders	Deritend	Curry comb maker	Curry comb maker
1764	Samuel	Willson	11	Thomas Cooper	Yardley	Sawyer	Sawyer
1766	John	Bayliss	13	Richard Cole	Stoke, Coventry	Worsted weaver	Worsted weaver
1766	John	Kite		Willliam Tayler	Balsall	Weaver	Weaver
1766	Richard	Adams	12	John Adams	Coventry	Butcher	Butcher
1767	Isaac	Bayliss	15	Henry Mould	Birmingham	Toymaker	Toymaker
1768	Michael	Adams		Thomas Shaw	Coventry	Ribband weaver	Ribband weaver
1768	George	Hobday		James Silvester	Wednesbury Staffs	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1770	Thomas	Bowler		Edward Walker	Knowle	Tayler	Tayler
1770	Thomas	Farr		Thomas Bass	Balsall	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1770	Joseph	Johnson		John Chadborn	Knowle	Farmer	Husbandry
1774	Joseph	Burnell		Thomas Kittel	Birmingham	Lapidary	Lapidary
1774	John	Kendrick		Daniel Smith	Birmingham	Bucklemaker	Bucklemaker
1774	Thomas	Cattell	12	William Steel	Kenilworth	Carpenter	Carpenter
1774	William	Fentham	11	Henry Tantum	Birmingham	Staymaker	Staymaker
1776	Robert	Kite		James Sanders	Birmingham	Bucklemaker	Bucklemaker
1783	Thomas	Bishop		Nathan Bushell	Birmingham	Steel-Trap Maker	Steel-Trap Maker
1784	Samuel	Hancox	9	Nathan Bushell younger	Knowle	Yeoman	Husbandry

Mth/Year	Firstname	Surname	Age	Master's name	Place	Masters Trade	"Apprenticed in the trade or business of..."
1784	John	Martin		William Catell	Knowle	Yeoman	Husbandry
1784	Joseph	Shakespear	9	Thomas Arms	Deritend	Wire drawer	Wire drawer
1787	Richard	Overs	9	Wm Hicken	Berkswell	Weaver	Weaver
1788	George	Pardey	16	John Trehern	Birmingham	Toymaker	Toymaker
1788	Thomas	Clarridge	14	John Bragg	Birmingham	Stamper	Stamper
1788	Charles	Adkins	13	Wm Roberts	Knowle	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1791	John	Adams		George Broadway	Coventry	Weaver	Weaver
1800	Thomas	Gumley	12	Wm Stringer	Birmingham	Pistol filer	Pistol filer
1800	William	Clarke		John Carver	Walsall	Thungmaker	Thungmaker
1800	Joseph	Wright		James Waldron	Tipton	Coal miner	Coal miner
1800	William	Arnold		Benjamin Simcox	Tipton	Bricklayer	Bricklayer
1802	Isaac	Overs	12	William Hickin	Haseles	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1802	Joseph	Shakespear	14	Thomas Astley	Aston	Cabinet maker	Cabinet maker
1802	Joseph	Clarke	12	Francis Tabernacle	Birmingham	Letter case and pocket book maker	Letter case and pocket book maker
1803	John	Jennings	12	John Harbidge	Birmingham	Gilt toymaker	Gilt toymaker
1803	Joseph	Mander	14	John Johnson	Aston	Horn button maker	Horn button maker
1805	Thomas	Bindley	13	Daniel Brown	Coventry	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1805	Edward	Arnold	12	Wm Fowley	Enstall	Engine boiler maker	Engine boiler maker
1806	John	Cooper	11	John Carver	Walsall	Thong maker	Thong maker
1806	Sarah	Bentley	10	Martha Bentley	Aston	Millener & Mantua maker	Millener & Mantua maker
1806	William	Brittain		Abraham Lee	Aston Street	Carpenter & Joiner	Carpenter & Joiner
1806	Edward	Titmous	14	John Simmons	Bordesley Street	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1809	James	Cattell	10	James Harris	Aston	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1809	William	Gilbert	13	George Smith	Livery St Bham	Gun barrel borer	Gun barrel borer

Mth/Year	Firstname	Surname	Age	Master's name	Place	Masters Trade	"Apprenticed in the trade or business of..."
1809	Mariah	Watson	10	William Watson	Alcester	Jobbing smith	Housewifery
1810	Thomas	Bentley	11	David Wood	Bloxwich	Awl blade maker	Awl blade maker
1811	John	Gumley	10	Charles Dudley	Birmingham	Brass founder	Brassfounder
1811	Charles	Barlow	11	Joseph King	Knowle	Taylor	Taylor
1811	Matthew	Gumley	13	James Richards	Aston	Clock maker	Clock maker
1812	William	Tidmuss	13	Wm Allison	Birmingham	Wool comber	Wool comber
1817	William	Bayliss	14	Isaac Bayliss	Aston	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1821	Samuel	Smith	13	Thos Checkley	Solihull	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1821	Joseph	Thompson	12	James Glover	Walsall	Ironfounder	Ironfounder
1822	Robert	Hassall	14	Thos Kingerley	Lapworth	Gardener	Gardener
1823	William	Thompson	10	John Whitehouse	Walsall	Curbmaker	Curbmaker
1823	John	Upton Jnr		Eliz Thompson	Church St Bham	Lapidary & glass cutter	Lapidary & glass cutter
1825	Daniel	Dyke	15	Thos Checkley	Aston	Cordwainer	Cordwainer
1824	John	Scarf		John Redley	St Marylebone	Plumber & glazier	Plumber & glazier
1825	Richard	Thorne	15	John Adams	Knowle	Malster & brickmaker	Malster & brickmaker
1830	Thomas	Horton	13	Henry Whiting	Birmingham	Gun finisher	Gun finisher
1833	William	Bant	16	George Lynall	Aston	Plumber & glazier	Plumber & glazier
1833	John	Parsons	13	Thomas Sansom	Coventry	Ribbon weaver	Ribbon weaver
1838	George	Parkes	10	Isiah Skellding	Dudley	Miner	Miner

Source: WCRO, DRB0056/143-144, Knowle Parish Apprenticeship Certificates

Appendix 3

Children's Emigration Home - Entrance Book - Boys

1878-1879

Name	Age	Address	Remarks	Emigrated
Webb Albert	9	Easton St	Father has deserted him	Canada May 1878
Coley Charles	10	Rickard St	Parents living, father very old, mother drunkard, daughter on street. Most wretched and filthy home	Canada May 1878
Maley Michael	12	Allison St	Stepfather, very ragged, stops out at night	no
Maley James	9	Allison St	As above	no
Meredith Richard	6	John St	Stepfather	no
Mills Joseph	8	Dolman St	Father sentenced 14 years penal servitude for attempting the life of the woman with whom he lived	Canada May 1878
Greatrix Charles	7	Bamburn St	Mother deserted, father a drunkard, boy a typical Arab	no
Butler Frank	10	Sparkbrook	Stepmother terrible drunkard, sells childrens clothes for drink, very dissolute	Canada May 1878
Price Amos	8		Mother dead, father summoned five times for childrens truancy	Canada May 1878
Williams Earnest H	6		Illegitimate, father summoned five times for childrens truancy	Canada May 1878
Donaldson Albert William	8	Bridge St West	Parents dead, grandmother nearly blind, uncles great scoundels	Canada May 1878
Mitchell John	11	Wharf St	Truant. Runs away from home a fortnight at a time. Lives in Thomas St Lodging House.	no
Mitchell Frederick	9	Wharf St	As above	no
Owen Joseph	1	London	Mother prostitute	Canada July 1880
Franklin Thomas	8		Parents dead, boy posturant contortionist	Canada June 1879
Collins Edward Charles	9	William St	Boy cursed and swore at his mother when she was apparently on her death bed	Removed Dec 1878

Name	Age	Address	Remarks	Emigrated
Reardon William	5	Wellington st	Illegitimate, father absconded, has been in prison, police are now in search of him	Canada June 1879
Shesby (Shelby?) James	6		Illegitimate, mother drunkard and prostitute	Canada June 1879
Cooke John	10	Tower St	Father dead, stepfather cruel. Arab	Canada June 1879
Cooke Charles	8	Tower St	As above	Canada June 1879
Williams William	13		Mother dead, father drunkard, children truants	Canada June 1879
Williams William Frederick	11		Mother insane, father drunkard, Arab	no
Williams John Ashley	10		As above	no
Williams Charles	8		As above	no
Harris Arthur Wm	10	Ickneild Port Rd	Father drunkard, boy set house on fire, landlords wont have boy in the house	Canada June 1879
Murcott Abraham	11	Wilton St	Father deserted, mother keeps a brothel	Canada June 1879
Gannon William	12	Thomas St	Father deserted, has epileptic fits, drunkard, mother drunkard	Canada June 1879
Colley Frederick	11	Shrewsbury	Father dead, boy slept out at night and ill-treated his mother	Canada June 1879
Nichols Arthur	5	Fordrough St	Father in workhouse, starving	Canada June 1879
Bayliss John	7	Legg St	Father dead, one brother in gaol, been in reformatory, boy a thief	Canada July 1880
Birch James	8	Thomas St	Father dead. Boy got his living by singing in the street	Canada June 1879
Roberts Harry	8	Barford St	Father dead, poisoned himself. Mother gets her living by singing in public houses	Canada June 1879
Hughes Thomas	10	Digbeth	Parents living but starving - found begging at 12 at night	Canada July 1880
Hughes William	8	Digbeth	As above	Canada July 1880
Hughes Walter	8	Digbeth	As above	Canada July 1880

Name	Age	Address	Remarks	Emigrated
Dawson George	12	Highgate St	Mother dead, father drunkard, turns children out of house at night, boys hawks mussels	Canada June 1879
Knight Thomas	12	Bordesley St	Parents living, boy incorrigible truant	Canada June 1879
Jones John	8	Vine St	Father dead, boy illegitimate, mother told F.J.M. She used to be a prostitute	Canada June 1879
Jones Frank	5	Vine St	As above	Canada June 1879
Summerfield Benjamin	11	Deritend	Father dead, mother and children starving	Canada June 1879
Parsons Henry Ch	8	Aston Rd	Father dead, mother neglects them, get their living as best they can	Canada June 1879
Clarke Frederick	10	Henrietta St	Father dead, one brother in reformatory, two in workhouse, mother frightful drunkard, cruel to children	Canada July 1880
Nicholls Thomas E	2	Fordrough St	See Arthur Nicholls	no
Davis Alfred	4	Gt Brook St	Illegitimate, mother turned out by grandmother, mother only a girl	Canada June 1879
Parsons John J	3	Aston Rd	See H C Parsons	Canada June 1879
Evans Henry	6	Thomas St	Mother deserted, father in prison 3 times for drunkenness and desertion	Canada June 1879
Griffiths William	10	Moseley St	Illegitimate, mother used to keep 3 brothels, father deserted children	Canada June 1879
Griffiths Joseph	7	Moseley St	As above	Canada June 1879
Amos Joseph	11		Father been in prison for deserting mother, was away for six years, mother in insane asylum from ill-treatment	Canada July 1880
Wood Robert	7		Father deserted mother and children	no
Skinner Albert Henry	8	Bell Barn Rd	Father dead, mother prostitute and in workhouse. Boy illegitimate	no
Halland James	13	Longmore St	Boy says he has three fathers. One of the fathers, Olivers, has just left prison	no
Perry William	13	Glover St	Parents living. Vile home	no

Name	Age	Address	Remarks	Emigrated
Digg Henry	12		Orphan, supported himself by begging, was turned out of doors seven weeks before entering the home	no
Tranter William James	13	Bath Row	Mother dead, father a cripple and drunkard	Canada July 1880
Littlewood Bertie	7			Canada June 1879
Rawlinson John H	8			Canada June 1879
Yates William	10			Canada June 1879
Hamilton Charles	6	Bishopsgate	Mother dead, father keeps a brothel	Canada 1882
Robinson Alfred	10		Irish reformatory, recommended by a lady from Malvern	Canada July 1880
Harrison John	7		Mother dead, father permanently ill	Canada July 1880
Goodwin Arthur	8		Mother deserted with another man. Most miserable home	Canada July 1880
Goodwin William			As above	no
Rathbone Percy T	10	Washington St	Mother deserted	Canada July 1880
Jones William	7	Sheep St	Mother deserted with another man. Most miserable home	Canada July 1880
Jones Charles	10	Sheep St	As above	Canada July 1880
Carroll George	5		Father dead, mother a prostitute	Canada July 1880

Source: BAH, MS 517/472, Middlemore Emigration Homes, Entrance Book - Boys.

Children's Emigration Home - Entrance Book - Girls

1878-1879

Name	Age	Address	Remarks	Emigrated
Butler Sarah Elizabeth	7	Allison St	Father been in prison upwards of forty times for drunkenness. Child illegitimate	Canada May 1878
Adams Ann Elizabeth	10		Mother in prison. Girl utterly wild and untamed. Springs out of bed, shouts and screams, strikes other girls	Canada May 1878
Thompson Amy	4		Grandmother was a prostitute, so also is aunt. Father watercress man and pedlar, married more than once under assumed names, deserted both his wives, made several indecent assaults on little girls	Canada May 1878
Bateman Annie/Lily	1	Bartholomew St	Child illegitimate, mother prostitute	Canada May 1878
Murray Elizabeth	6	Thomas St	Illegitimate, mother prostitute	Canada May 1878
Murray Catherine	4	Thomas St	as above	Canada May 1878
Bennett Annie	11	Lodgings provided by Miss Ickfield	Mother dead, thoroughly filthy man, details too vile to record	Canada May 1878
Thompson Pauline	1		See Amy Thompson above	Canada May 1878
Deeley Mary Jane	7	Gt Colmore St	Mother has been again and again in prison. Child has been in prison	Canada June 1879
Franklin Emily	6	c/o Mrs Goodwin	No parents or relatives	Canada June 1879
Neal Betsy	7	Washwood Heath	Father deserted, mother prostitute	no
Sturge Elizabeth	11	Wharf St	Father dead, girl runs the street ie Wharf St. Man in jail for committing rape upon her.	Admitted 30 Aug, ran away 31 Aug
Shesby Charlotte	10	Lodging house Digbeth	Father dead, mother prostitute	Canada June 1879

Name	Age	Address	Remarks	Emigrated
Derry Emily Sarah	7	Lodging house Park St	Father in prison for neglecting children, mother drunkard, filthy woman	Canada June 1879
Derry Clara	11	Lodging house Park St	as above	Canada June 1879
Evans Sarah	8	c/o Wm Bislow	Parents dead, lived with uncle who mistreated her. Was present when Baker murdered a woman. Baker her uncle	Canada June 1879
Cook Elizabeth	11		Parents dead, illegitimate. Stepfather maltreated her, beat her frightfully	Canada June 1879
James June	3	Lodging House	Father dead, mother deserted	no
Roberts Alice	6		Father poisoned himself, mother gets living by playing and singing at public house	Canada June 1879
Tasker Sarah	9		Father deserted child, both parents hawkers and tramps. Five illegitimate brothers	Canada June 1879
Tasker Anne	7		as above	Canada June 1879
Tasker Mary	2		as above	Canada June 1879
Heaton Mary Ann	4	Lodging House	Illegitimate. Mother paralised at 27	Canada June 1879
Parsons Ellen	6	Newtown Row	Father dead, mother neglects children, get their living as best they can	Canada June 1879
Parsons Jane	4	Newtown Row	as above	Canada June 1879
Bishop Elizabeth	13	Fordrough St	Parents living, runs the streets, seeking her own ruin	no
Evans Agnes	9	Thomas St	Mother deserted, father in prison three times for drunkenness and desertion	no
Sadler Christine	9	Lancaster St	Mother dead, father drunkard, urgent case	Canada June 1879
Sadler Phoebe	7	Lancaster St	as above	Canada June 1879
Hillman Ann Louisa	12	Winson Green	Parents living. (Newspaper cutting pasted in book: advertising for whereabouts of missing child age 10)	Given up to parents

Name	Age	Address	Remarks	Emigrated
Clarke Alice	11	Henrietta St	Father dead and mother drunkard. One brother in Reformatory and one in workhouse	Canada July 1880
Clarke Florence	8	Henrietta St	as above	Canada July 1880
Derry Annie Amelia	2	Park St	Father in prison, mother described as filthy woman	Canada June 1879
Hamilton Sarah	3		Her mother kicked to death, father keeps a brothel	Canada 1882
Hanson Agnes	5		(no details)	Canada July 1880
Woodhall Ann Sarah	10		(no details)	Canada July 1880
Taylor Annie	10	Thomas St	Father just out of prison, children illegitimate	Canada July 1880
Taylor Blanche	6	Thomas St	as above	Canada July 1880

Source: BAH, MS 517/471, Middlemore Emigration Homes, Entrance Book - Girls.

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