

Entry to the Metropolitan Labour Market in Victorian and Edwardian Britain

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Entry to the Metropolitan Labour Market in Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

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Abstract

In studying the Victorian city, historical geographers have concentrated on defining patterns, structures and form at the expense of processes. It is suggested that it is only via the study of processes and structures within the urban economy that such spatial patterns and developments can be fully understood. It is further advanced that amongst economic structures, the labour market is an area of fundamental importance in reaching any understanding of the Victorian and Edwardian city, and in particular London.

The subject of the late Victorian labour market is approached via a review of modern labour market theory and subsequently of the ideas advanced by the classical economists. This review reveals both the importance of empirical observation in informing contemporary economists' theoretical models of the Victorian labour market and the significant degree to which the debate within the modern theoretical literature derives directly, although largely anonymously, from parallel arguments in the earlier literature.

An attempt is made to establish how far the casual labour problem in late Victorian London, the subject of considerable concern and debate amongst the contemporary commentators, fits into the Dual or Segmented Labour Market paradigms advanced principally by American economists since the 1960s.

The emphasis given by contemporary commentators to boy labour as a source of the casual labour problem is seen to reflect a similar emphasis on the importance of the point of entry to the labour market in the theoretical literature. The social and economic importance of the boy labour problem in Victorian and Edwardian London is explored and explained as in part a consequence of the demographic and economic conditions prevailing in the capital at the close of the century, but also as reflecting a continuing economic imperative and culture of child labour and the impact of legislative intervention in the labour market.

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The opinions expressed in this work are, of course, my own, as is the responsibility for any faults that remain.

DW Gray
January 1991

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Objectives

This thesis is based on a conviction that the study of the labour market and other aspects of the urban economy is vital if any valid insight into the nature of the nineteenth century city is to be achieved. From this conviction it follows that the overriding objective of the thesis is to demonstrate the fundamental importance of the labour market in the lives of the late Victorians and Edwardians.

In the late Victorian City, large portions of the population lived economically marginal existences, living either actually in a state of poverty, or passing through that state for at least some period or periods of their lives. At a purely physical level, the work process and position in the Labour Market were central to the life experience of the population. Given this truism, and the self-evident fact that the bulk of the population spent the greater part of their lives either at their place of work, looking for work, or travelling to and from work, it should not surprise us that the "world of work"¹ should be central to any understanding of the non-physical aspects of nineteenth century urban life, such as politics and class.

Further persuasive evidence to support an argument in favour of a greater commitment to the study of the Labour Market, can be found in the sheer volume of literature produced in the course of the contemporary economic and social debate of the nature of, causes and cures for unemployment, underemployment, and sweated labour.

To date, geographers working on the nineteenth century city have regarded economic structures almost exclusively through the static analysis of occupations as a means of reaching some definition of social class. It is essential that all those concerned with the nineteenth century city assimilate the central role or function of the urban economy, and in particular, the labour market as a dynamic agent within the 'city', as a force that shaped the formation

¹Joyce P, 1980, *Work, society and politics: the culture of the factory in later Victorian England*. Harvester. London. p.xii.

of social groupings both nationally and locally, influenced urban forms and acted as a catalyst for change.

Behind the central objective of the thesis lie a number of other aims, many motivated by the perceived weaknesses, shortcomings or omissions in the existing treatment of the nineteenth century city by historical geographers.

In looking at the importance of the Labour Market I will employ an explicitly theoretical approach. By giving a central role to theoretical labour economics, this thesis is set apart from the vast bulk of research produced by historical geographers on the nineteenth century city, work which has tended to lack any theoretical structure, displaying instead an often spurious empiricism. The thesis will attempt to use the theoretical literature produced by modern labour market economists and their classical or nineteenth century counterparts to illuminate the structures and operation of the labour market in a specific historical and geographical context.

In the course of utilising the classical theoretical economic literature I will also show that that literature is a valuable source of insight into the workings of the contemporary economy. In addition I will highlight the degree to which the debate existing within modern labour economics simply echoes ideas already developed in the classical material. I will show that the modern idea of segmentation within the labour market had already been explored within the nineteenth century literature, and further, I will illustrate that, contrary to the orthodox belief, far from being entirely theoretical in their approach, the nineteenth century economists' ideas can be traced to practical observation of the operation of the contemporary labour market.

A failing that has typified historical geographers to date in their work on the nineteenth century has been an over-reliance on the census as a source. In this thesis emphasis will be placed on the use of non-census material, a subsidiary objective of the research being to avoid the census-bound restrictions of past research. The use of sources other than the census will highlight the value of more difficult, qualitative material in achieving insights into the functioning of the Victorian city, and by implication, illustrate the limitations of purely census based research. Minutes of evidence to parliamentary and charitable committees, biographies, social commentaries, contemporary journalism and other such material should properly be regarded not as

secondary sources as in the past, but as primary material of vital importance in helping us to answer questions about the Victorian city.

The reliability of these sources can of course be questioned. There remains the suspicion that hyperbole, sentimentality or self interest may have coloured the evidence. Nevertheless, I believe that this argument can be exaggerated and that such material must be employed if we are to escape the dogma of census bashing. In fact, the evidence gathered by parliamentary committees and the like, although sometimes enlivened by a choice phrase or anecdote is on the whole rather pedestrian and mundane, not marked either by evident sentimentality or self-interest. If evidence does sometimes appear so grotesque as to be fanciful and sentimental it must be remembered that this may often reflect the reader's inability to grasp how hard and brutal everyday life could indeed be for much of the nations' population even within the last hundred years. In a period when social workers are periodically villified for failing to act upon apparently unbelievable reports of violence and abuse to children, we should perhaps be cautious in dismissing their Victorian counterparts' evidence as overly sentimental, sensationalist and unreliable.

Further, even if not heavily empirical, neither is the so-called secondary material entirely divorced from empiricism. Many of those contributing evidence to committees, or indeed producing pamphlets, or charitable reports, derived their opinions not simply from years of practical experience of the problems or questions they addressed, but also from closely controlled exercises in evidence gathering. The minutes of evidence submitted to the major parliamentary committees touching upon child employment and boy and casual labour, for example, such as those of the 1902 committee on the employment of children, include innumerable examples of surveys gathered by persons from a wide range of backgrounds including local government officials, teachers, the police, clergy and philanthropists. Although the often small scale of many of the surveys or samples places limitations on their use, the number and variety of the reports, together with the often exceptional level of details provided, makes them a source well worth exploring. Here one finds not just examples of household heads' occupations being recorded, but also details of wages, union membership, health and life histories, material well beyond the severely limited scope of the census.

Of course one should not ignore the fact that many of those giving evidence or producing pamphlets had an implicit interest in reform or change. Care is

required in assessing the meaning and value of non-census material. Nevertheless, such material should not be rejected simply for any lack of a supposed detached empiricism, not least because of the limitations of the census and other supposedly solely empirical sources. Reliance on the census carries a number of potential problems, chiefly because of the limitations of the details provided by census returns to age, occupation, birthplace and relationship to head of household. One can question how far the orthodox view that Victorian cities were stratified or divided along socio-economic and ethnic lines reflects the material employed in studying them rather than reality. More worryingly, one can note that the limitations in the source have tended to restrict avenues of research, the source defining what is considered worthy of research rather than being used as a tool, where appropriate, to answer research-worthy questions.

I would strongly question how reliable any interpretation of nineteenth century cities can be, which relies so heavily, as much of the literature produced by historical geographers does, on the stratification of society on the basis of a theoretical hierarchy of occupations. A brief perusal of non-census material relating to the London labour market of the late nineteenth century highlights the dangers of such an approach. To take one obvious example, the census enumerator's use of the phrases 'stevedore' or 'dock labourer' could refer to a man employed full time with aspirations of respectability and a relatively high income, or just as easily to a casually employed worker living on the edge of economic survival. Unless the former employed a live in servant (highly unlikely) the two individuals would be indistinguishable in a census return.

In considering the value of sources other than the census, we should ask ourselves how far anyone could hope to understand modern British society and cities if the only information available was limited to the meagre details of a late nineteenth century census? Even today's census with its mass of additional material can hardly be said to provide a definitive picture of modern British society and life. To suppose that any society can be reconstructed or understood without the aid of so-called secondary sources, the material in which the populace recorded what they did, why they did what they did, what they thought or believed and what they hoped for, is evidently a nonsense.

The value of the sources used in this thesis lies in their ability to answer questions beyond the scope of the census returns, and their potential for helping us towards understanding rather than purely documenting. A further

benefit of this approach is that as this material is not restricted by the official 100 year rule of confidentiality, it has been possible in this thesis to escape the long standing preoccupation with the mid-Victorian period, I will argue that this represents a major benefit as there are clear indications that during the period from 1870 to the first world war, the 'city' was in fact arguably subject to processes of organization and change absent in the earlier, already heavily researched period.

The claims to originality on the part of this thesis lie then not simply in its subject matter, but also in the sources employed, the period studied and the approach adopted.

1.2 The Structure of the Thesis

In seeking a structure for the thesis I have employed the flow of ideas and themes derived from the source material studied. In essence the structure reflects the chronological development of themes over the course of my research; existing research; modern economic theory; nineteenth century theory; the casual labour market; child and boy labour. Each step, as I shall briefly illustrate here, derived either from the conclusions drawn from or questions raised by the preceding phase of the research.

In turning to the nineteenth century city as a topic of research I firstly studied the existing academic literature on the subject produced by historical geographers and social and economic historians. A review of this literature follows this section.(Chapter 1) Out of this review emerged the conviction that the urban economy, and in particular the labour market were areas of research which had been neglected and that the late nineteenth century and Edwardian period offered a particularly rich field for study. Further, the notable absence of any theoretical framework within the historical geography literature encouraged me to seek to adopt such an approach.

In looking for a framework for the thesis I turned first to the ideas found in modern labour economics (chapter 2). In the course of reviewing this material it struck me how closely much of the contemporary neo-classical literature derived from the ideas first expounded by Adam Smith in his seminal treatment

of wage differentials in the "Wealth of Nations". This fact and the lack of any previous close examination of the question, prompted in me the desire to explore how far a review of the theories or treatments of wage differentials employed and developed by nineteenth century 'classical' economists might prove of interest, both in terms of facilitating a greater understanding of the modern literature, and in providing direct insights into the operation of the contemporary labour markets. A review of this literature is set out in chapter 3.

From the material contained in chapters 1 to 3, the casual labour market emerged as an obvious context in which the theoretical literature might be tested against the structures found in the urban labour markets of the late nineteenth century.

Casual labour was a nationwide phenomenon and one that excited considerable debate amongst contemporaries. However, although that phenomenon undoubtedly varied in character according to the specific geographical context, the objectives of this thesis did not extend to a detailed study of those geographical variations. Rather a more limited and geographically defined context for the research was decided upon. Partly out of regard for my own proximity to particularly strong collections of material relating to London, I selected the London labour market as the geographical location within which to explore this theme, and further within the capital's casual sector, I selected the docks, wharves and riparian trades as a field for detailed consideration. (see chapter 4).

Viewed in the context of the earlier exploration of theoretical labour market structures contained in chapters 2 and 3, the analysis of the casual labour problem in London contained in chapter 4 highlighted the primary importance of the point of entry to the labour market. Both of the leading modern schools of economic thought on labour market structure, the classical and segmented or dualist, place great emphasis on the importance of the point of entry to the labour market in determining individuals' prospects within that market. In pursuing the question of whether or not the market for dock labour or the casual sector as a whole in late nineteenth century London represented a secondary sector within a 'segmented' labour market, it was obviously necessary to address the questions of child and boy labour. Both these topics, although entirely neglected by previous modern research on the Victorian city, had been felt worthy of considerable contemporary academic and public debate.

To understand the phenomenon of boy labour in late nineteenth century London, one must first understand the nature of the institutional controls which surrounded or impinged on the individuals in making their entry to the labour market. Before exploring the specific circumstances existing at the close of the nineteenth century in London, I first therefore briefly reviewed the history of child labour in the United Kingdom and the origin of intervention by national and local government (chapter 5). In attempting to understand the motivation, timing and nature of this intervention, I sought to employ the model of government intervention advanced by MacDonagh,² identifying as a consequence important caveats to that widely accepted interpretation.

Chapter 6 is devoted to a study of the development of educational legislation. This legislation, which by the last quarter of the nineteenth century formed the principal form of government intervention in the juvenile labour market, is discussed both at the national level, and in the specific context of London. The actions of the London School Board, in terms of its responses to often voluntary national standard setting and in the conviction with which such standards were applied, formed a key and geographically distinctive component of the local market for juvenile labour.

Proceeding from the material contained in the foregoing chapters, chapter 7 explores the market for boy labour in late Victorian and Edwardian London. This study suggests that the phenomenon of child labour was still widespread in London despite the efforts of the legislators, and that it was both economically and socially important, not least in the implications it had for participants' futures after their graduation to full-time employment. The chapter contains not only detailed research on this market and on the nature of the so-called boy labour problem in London at this time, but in addition draws on the theoretical ideas explored earlier in the thesis to suggest how best the problem and its significance can be interpreted. The chapter advances a strong explanation for the severity of the problem at this time in London, and for its importance in the labour market as a whole.

In chapter 8, as a conclusion to the thesis, the results of the attempt to use theoretical material to structure research on the nineteenth century city are reviewed, and the significance of the labour market and more generally the

²MacDonagh O. 1958. 'Nineteenth Century revolution in government'.

urban economy to any attempt to comprehend the city re-emphasised. Further, I explore potential future avenues for productive research arising from the work completed, and argue strongly that just as modern theoretical literature can be a useful tool in interpreting structures within the Victorian labour market, so can the study of that market bring forth telling evidence of potential structures or problems that might still exist or recur within the contemporary British economy. Casual labour and the boy labour problem can be seen not as a Victorian, historical phenomenon isolated from the current day, but rather as features brought about by certain conditions or circumstances that might well be being reproduced in Britain as it enters the 1990's.

1.3 Historical Geography and the Nineteenth Century City.

Only in the 1970s did geographers turn in large numbers to the nineteenth century towns and cities as a major area for research. At this time the subject achieved a popularity within historical geography only exceeded by the more traditional concern with the nineteenth century countryside.³ That so great a share of research should be devoted to this topic, when by definition the available fields of study are almost boundless, reflects a number of factors, not least the continuing presence of so much that is Victorian in the modern urban landscape.

The most tangible evidence of the Victorians in modern towns and cities lies in the built environment.⁴ At the most prosaic level, much of our housing stock remains Victorian. However, it is probable that of greater importance in our own ideas of urban 'place' are the Victorians' more effusive and domineering contributions. The almost boundless Victorian civic, national and imperial pride was physically expressed in the language and scale of their public architecture and engineering: town halls, court houses, prisons, government offices, parliament houses, bridges, libraries, museums, art galleries, theatres,

³Dennis calculated that one in five of the entries in the 'Register of Research in Historical Geography' compiled in 1976 related at least in part to research on nineteenth century towns and cities. Dennis RJ, 1979, 'Introduction to "The Victorian City".' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 4 pp.125-128.

⁴John Summerson, in discussing the 'architectural languages' of the nineteenth century city has written of London as an artifact; see Summerson J. 1973, 'London, the artifact.' in Dyos HJ and Wolff M, 1973, *The Victorian city: images and realities. Vol. II Shapes on the ground.* Routledge and Kegan Paul. London. pp.311-332.

hospitals, asylums, churches, chapels, and of course, the cathedrals of that age of laissez-faire, the cavernous railway stations. Whilst few may recollect the fate of the fourteen-year-old boy martyred in Rome in AD 304 by the Emperor Diocletian, the name St Pancras instantly brings to mind Sir Gilbert Scott's mighty gothic edifice, hotel and terminus of the Midland railway, 'the most mid-Victorian of all British lines'.⁵

Notwithstanding the importance of these relics of the Victorian age, the legacy of the Victorians in the modern urban landscape goes far beyond individual islands of red brick, slate and granite; it extends to the origins of the suburbs, with their parallel innovation of commuting, to the infrastructure of the railway, sanitation and water supply systems, even to street plans and their nomenclature. More fundamentally still, it extends to the shape of the urban system itself: Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds; all of our greatest cities, with the exception of London, could be said to have been essentially products of the nineteenth century. Even London was transformed in its importance, growing from a city to a metropolis, the hub of the empire on which the sun never set, the greatest city in the world, the first 'world city'.⁶

Beyond the physical, cultural and 'emotional' heritage of the age, the fascination of nineteenth century towns and cities for the geographer has derived from their perceived position as a bridge between the rural society of a largely pre-industrial age and our own heavily urbanized one. Between 1801 and 1901 the population of England and Wales almost quadrupled. However, even that unprecedented rate of growth was outstripped by that of the urban population (Table 1.1). In 1801 only slightly more than 3 million people were living in places with populations in excess of 2,500; by 1901 that number was in excess of 25 millions. In the space of a century the nation was transformed from a rural society where only 34.1% of the population lived in towns, to one in which only 22.0% lived outside them.

⁵Betjeman J. 1978 (1972). "St Pancras". in *The best of Betjeman*. Penguin, Harmondsworth. p.204.

⁶Briggs A. 1968. *Victorian cities*. Pelican Books. Bungay, Suffolk. p.311.

Table 1.1

Urban* and rural population of England and Wales 1801 - 1901

	Total (000's)	Rural (000's)	Urban (000's)	Urban %
1801	8,829	5,820	3,009	34.1
1821	11,999	7,195	4,804	40.0
1841	15,914	8,221	7,693	48.3
1861	20,066	8,282	11,784	58.7
1881	25,924	7,744	18,180	70.1
1901	32,526	7,155	25,371	78.0

*Urban is defined as a settlement with a population in excess of 2,500.
(Source: Law 1967) ⁷.

Reflecting their classification as a transitional stage, a prism through which the traditional was transformed into the modern, a critical debate has emerged as to how 'modern' the Victorian cities actually were; modernity has been judged principally on the basis of the supposed residential structures found in the cities, the degree to which society was divided into distinct classes, and the segregation of one class from another.⁸ Central to much of the debate amongst geographers have been various hypothetical models of urban residential patterns or social structures, derived chiefly from the Chicago school of urban ecology. Although not exempt from challenge or dispute,⁹ a common starting

⁷Law CM, 1967, 'The growth of urban population in England and Wales 1801-1911.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41 pp.125-144.

⁸For two basically opposing viewpoints, see Cannadine D, 1977, 'Victorian cities; how different?' *Social History* 2 pp.457-482.; and Ward D, 1975, 'Victorian cities; how modern?' *Journal of Historical Geography* 1 pp.135-151. Whilst the former stresses the modernity of the Victorian city, the latter suggests that it was only at the very end of the nineteenth century that any 'modernity' could be detected.

⁹See Wheatley P, 1963, ' "What the greatness of a city is said to be"; reflections on Sjoberg's "pre-industrial city".' *Pacific Viewpoint* 4 pp.163-188.; Vance J, 1971, 'Land assignment in pre-capitalist, capitalist and post-capitalist cities.' *Economic Geography* 47 pp.101-120.; Langton J, 1975, 'Residential patterns in pre-industrial cities: some case studies from seventeenth century Britain.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 65 pp.1-28.; Langton J, 1977, 'Late medieval Gloucester: some data from a rental of 1455.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 2 pp.259-277.

point in this debate has been Sjoberg's model of the pre-industrial city.¹⁰ Sjoberg suggested that in the pre-industrial city there was a basic division between rich and poor, with the rich living at the centre of cities and the poor on the periphery. What spatial segregation there was within the ranks of the poor majority tended to be on ethnic and occupational lines, rather than by class.¹¹

If this model is widely adopted, models of the modern city have been both more numerous and less homogeneous, although there has been general agreement that the chief basis of segregation has been social class. Burgess suggested a zonal structure on distribution of classes could be found in the modern city.¹² Hoyt emphasized sectoral patterns¹³ whilst Harris and Ullman stressed the importance of multiple nuclei within the structure of cities.¹⁴ Shevky and Bell postulated three planes or dimensions of differentiation; 'social rank', 'ethnicity', and 'urbanization'.¹⁵ In seeking to identify transitional stages between the pre-industrial and the modern, various models have been suggested for the nineteenth century city, with labels such as 'industrializing'.¹⁶

In fact, I believe that the growing interest in the nineteenth century city, studied in the context of this debate, did not reflect an abandonment of previous fields of interest by historical geographers, but rather an encroachment upon the sphere of historical geographers by those trained and steeped in another methodology, that of urban geography. The emphasis in Harold Carter's textbook, 'An introduction to urban historical geography', cannot be mistaken,¹⁷ his concerns being explicitly 'spatial' rather than 'historical'.¹⁸ The same is true

¹⁰Sjoberg G. 1960, *The pre-industrial city: past and present*. Free Press, New York.

¹¹ibid., pp.91-103.

¹²Burgess EW, 1925, 'The growth of the city.' in Park RE (ed). 1925. *The city*. Chicago University Press. Chicago. pp.47-62.

¹³Hoyt H, 1939. *The structure and growth of residential neighbourhoods in American cities*. Federal Housing Administration, Washington DC.

¹⁴Harris CD and Ullman EL. 1945. 'The nature of cities.' *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 242 pp.7-17.

¹⁵Shevky E and Bell W. 1955. *Social area analysis*. Greenwood Press. Stamford, California.

¹⁶Timms DWG, 1971. *The urban mosaic*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Pritchard identified three periods within nineteenth century Leicester; 'pre-industrial', 'early-industrial' and 'ecological'. Pritchard RM. 1976. *Housing and the spatial structure of the city*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

¹⁷Carter H. 1983. *An introduction to urban historical geography*. Edward Arnold, London.

¹⁸ibid., p.xvii.

of most urban historical geography thought during the 1970s: the emphasis is clearly on historical urban geography rather than urban historical geography.

The graduates of the urban geography of the 1960s found in the nineteenth century city a window of opportunity for the examination of theoretical models of the operation of laissez-faire forces in forming patterns of land use, the application of concepts of social area analysis and retail location, and the employment of newly developed methods of statistical analysis. If the subject afforded a 'window of opportunity', that window was conveniently left open, for the unpublished census enumerator's returns provided the new quantifiers with a classic data source, and one rejuvenated every tenth year thanks to the one hundred years rule. The 'discovery' of this 'goldmine' of data¹⁹ may reasonably be dated to the publication of Richard Lawton's seminal study of the population of Liverpool in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁰ Lawton's work in pioneering the source released something of a 'gold rush' of research; the rush however tended to be in a limited number of directions, and produced, as Lawton himself has subsequently observed, 'rather static spatial analyses of place and space'.²¹

In part, the lack of any theoretical input in the research produced by historical geographers in this period, and its overriding preoccupation with pattern at the expense of process, may reflect the limitations of the key source, the census enumerator's' books. The danger of a marvellous source is that rather than being used as a means of finding answers to questions, it may tend to frame the questions being asked. In common with the other widely available and easily quantified sources such as the rate books, the census material tended to suit the study of social structures, family structure and ethnicity. One can, I believe, legitimately question how far the conclusion that these were the chief determinants of spatial patterns reflected the sources used in the research, rather than any fundamental process. The 'static' nature of the research produced reflected not only the nature of the source but also the preoccupation

¹⁹Dennis RJ, 1984, *English industrial cities of the nineteenth century: a social geography*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.2.

²⁰Lawton R. 1955. 'The population of Liverpool in the mid-nineteenth century.' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 107 pp.89-120.

²¹Lawton R. 1987. p.260. 'Peopling the past.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers New Series* 12 pp.259-283.

of 1960s urban geography with social area analysis, factorial ecology and retail location.

Where both source and research interests were in agreement the results were conclusive. The theme issue of the 'Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers' on the Victorian city, published in 1979 and containing ten articles, may be taken as representative of 1970s research. The papers' concerns lay with social area analysis, ecological correlations, evolutionary models and retail location, and the bulk of the studies were based on the cross-sectional analysis of a single source, the census data then available covering the years 1851 to 1871. The emphasis was therefore firmly on the early and mid-Victorian period. Richard Dennis, in his editor's introduction, acknowledged that there may have been a source-led 'over-emphasis' on the mid-nineteenth century, and wondered whether this might not have led to the neglect of earlier and later periods when perhaps more significant changes may have occurred.²² Dennis in fact highlighted a key weakness in the output of historical geography work on the nineteenth century city in the 1970s, for the crucial period of change, in many aspects of the urban scene, came not in the mid part of the century but in the last two decades, and in the years preceding the First World War.

Ward²³ has argued persuasively that the levels of segregation amongst the population of mid-Victorian cities were exaggerated by contemporaries and subsequently by historians and historical geographers. Disraeli²⁴ and Engels²⁵ observed in mid-Victorian London and Manchester respectively, a dichotomous and implicitly antagonistic class division, the 'two nations' of rich and poor for Disraeli, and a divide between bourgeoisie and proletariat in the case of Engels. However, when such contemporary commentators either observed or condemned the separation of the 'classes', they may simply have been concerned with the removal of a rich urban elite, of relatively insignificant proportions within the total urban population, from the confines of the vast

²²Dennis RJ. 1979. 'Introduction to "The Victorian City".' p.127.

²³Ward D, 1975. 'Victorian cities; how modern?'; Ward D, 1980. 'Environs and neighbours in the "Two Nations"; residential differentiation in mid-nineteenth century Leeds.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 6 pp 132-162.

²⁴Disraeli B. 1845. *Sybil*. London.

²⁵Engels F. 1892 (1845). *The condition of the working class in England in 1844*. Allen and Unwin, London.

majority of the population.²⁶ Garwood's observations on London in his 'The Million Peopled City: or One Half of the People of London made known to the Other Half', of 1853, can certainly be interpreted in this fashion:

I am disposed to consider very important ... the gradual separation of classes which takes place in towns by a custom which has gradually grown up, that every person who can afford it lives out of town. ... Now this was not so formerly; it is a habit which has, practically speaking, grown up within the last half century. The result of the old habit was, that rich and poor lived in proximity, and the superior classes exercised that species of silent but very efficient control over their neighbours ... They are now gone, and the consequence is that large masses of population are gathered together without those wholesome influences which operated upon them when their congregation was more mixed; when they were divided, so to speak, by having persons of a different class of life, better educated, among them.²⁷

Ward²⁸ has emphasized the disorganized nature of society and cities at this time, suggesting that the high levels of both upward social mobility, and internal stratification of the lower socio-economic groups worked against any distinct organization, and resulted in relatively weak levels of social stratification recorded 'in situ'.²⁹

The era of greatest change, segregation and differentiation in social classes, and 'modernization' generally in the Victorian cities would appear to have taken place at the close of the nineteenth century, when the cities became more recognizably modern, and the urban environment more organized. Innovations in the provision of transport, rising levels of income, and the ever-rising populations transformed 'walking cities' of the early part of the century, making significant physical segregation of home from place of work possible for the first time. Even amongst the relatively well paid artisans, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners thought it sufficiently remarkable that members of its Hammersmith branch in the 1880s had jobs all over London for them to draw

²⁶Ward D, 1980. 'Environments and neighbours.' p.150.

²⁷Quoted in Marsden WE, 1977, p.51. 'Education and the social geography of nineteenth century towns and cities'. in Reeder, D, 1977, *Urban education in the nineteenth century*, Taylor & Francis, London. pp.49-73.

²⁸Ward D, 1975. 'Victorian cities: how modern?' p.151.

²⁹Indirect evidence for this process of upward social mobility has been found elsewhere, for example, in the upward filtering of households in the housing stock. Holmes RS, 1974, 'Identifying nineteenth century properties.' *Area* 6 pp.273-277.; Gray DW, 1983, *Household residential persistence and intra-urban mobility in mid-Victorian York*. Unpublished BA dissertation. University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

special attention to it.³⁰ It is clear that in London as elsewhere the habit of taking long journeys to work was only developed by even the best paid artisans in the 1890s, and that the vast majority of workers were still tied to working within a radius of three to four miles of their homes, even at the end of the century.³¹

Furthermore, if improving transport at the end of the nineteenth century was making greater residential segregation possible, the working class was also marked by clearer gradations through the emergence of new kinds of occupations based on new occupational structures.³² The rise of distinct classes of white collar labour, and the challenge of semi-skilled labour to the much discussed 'aristocracy of labour' may have generated considerable debate amongst social historians, but falling chiefly towards the latter part of the nineteenth century as they do, these classes of white collar labour have been little discussed by geographers. The 'new' middle class occupations produced by the growth in government and administration were unlike the 'old' small-scale middle class, in that they had specific entry qualifications rather than a property base. Ward has argued that one result of this was that career advancement became associated with residential mobility and 'accordingly with residential differentiation'.³³

The kind and level of residential differentiation within Victorian cities displayed the 'transitional' attributes that marked so many aspects of the age and only late in the nineteenth century would the appellation 'modern' be appropriate to describe the social geography of nineteenth century cities.³⁴

However, apart from social segregation, the late Victorian and Edwardian city was subject to many other strands of modernizing influences that had been only weakly developed or absent in the earlier part of the century. There was

³⁰Cited in Hobsbawm EJ, p.8. 1964, 'The nineteenth century London labour market', pp.3-28 in Centre for Urban Studies (ed.)/R.Glass et al, *London: Aspects of change*, Macgibbon and Kee, London pp.3-28.

³¹ibid., p.9. In this important article, Hobsbawm discusses the consequences of these patterns for the creation of 'districts' and 'regions' within the London labour market.

³²Edwards RC, 1979. *Contested terrain: the transformation of the workplace in the twentieth century*. Basic Books, New York.

³³Ward D. 1984. 'The progressives and the urban question: British and American responses to the inner city slums, 1880-1920.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 9 pp.299-314.

³⁴Ward D. 1975. 'Victorian cities: how modern?' p.151.

growing 'management' of aspects of the city. These efforts were possibly most notable in the housing market where it took forms such as slum clearance programmes, and council and philanthropic housing projects.³⁵ However, just as significantly, attempts were also being made to produce a more disciplined labour market, most importantly by the introduction of labour exchanges, organized systems of relief work, the efforts to combat the casual labour problem in the docks via reorganization, and the beginnings of statutory wage regulation via the Trade Boards Act of 1909.³⁶ These aspects of intervention or management in the urban economy are principally concentrated in the 1890s and the years up to the First World War, as it was only then that reforms gave greater discretionary powers to the central and local authorities.

Since the publication of 'The Victorian City' in 1979, there has been both a marked decline in the volume of research devoted to the nineteenth century city by historical geographers, and a realignment of the central concerns of that research, reflecting a similar change in emphasis in urban geography that occurred in the early 1970s. Within urban geography there were moves away from the demand-led models of social area differentiation, in which it was assumed that segregation was principally the outcome of the accumulated decisions of individuals moving between and within cities. Greater concern was now devoted to the supply of housing, the importance of the institutional controls over that supply, and consequently the constraints placed on the residential decisions of individual households.³⁷ The literature produced emphasized the role of 'urban managers' or 'gatekeepers'³⁸ such as council

³⁵Yelling JA, 1986. *Slums and slum clearance in Victorian London*. Allen and Unwin, London.

³⁶See Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry*. Longmans, London. Ch.8. For a valuable study of the history of the early intervention in the dock labour market see Phillips G and Whiteside N, 1985, *Casual labour: the unemployment question in the port transport industries, 1880-1970*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. Chs. 2 and 3. For a review of the early attempts at wage regulation, see Bayliss FJ, 1962, *British Wages Councils*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. Ch.1.

³⁷Duncan SS, 1976, 'Research directions in social geography: housing opportunities and constraints.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 1 pp.10-19.; Williams R, 1976, 'The role of institutions in the inner London housing market: the case of Islington.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 1 pp.72-82.; Robson B, 1975. *Urban social areas* Oxford University Press. Oxford.

³⁸Pahl R, 1970. *Whose city?* Longman, London.

housing officials³⁹ and building societies⁴⁰, in forming and preserving 'housing classes' by either selective or discriminatory policies.

In the context of the Victorian cities, historical geographers have considered a wider variety of subjects than previously, but there remains a concentration of research effort in particular areas, most notably retailing⁴¹ and migration⁴². More generally, there is continuing interest in how patterns of social interaction were translated into spatial interaction.⁴³ As in modern urban geography, housing and housing policy have been a key theme. One of the most obvious examples of early intervention of 'urban managers' into British cities were the programs of slum clearance undertaken by local government in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the years up to the First World War. Both Yelling⁴⁴ and Wohl⁴⁵ have studied the problem of London during this period, and discussed the policies adopted by the London County Council (LCC), whilst Pooley has similarly reviewed the slum clearance undertaken between 1890 and 1918 by Liverpool Corporation.⁴⁶ The role of 'gatekeepers' and institutions in the development of nineteenth century cities has also been studied via research on land ownership patterns and landowners' role in shaping

³⁹Gray F. 1976, 'Selection and allocation in council housing.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 1 pp.34-46.

⁴⁰Boddy M. 1976, 'The structure of mortgage finance: building societies and the British social formation.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 1 pp.58-71.

⁴¹Shaw G, 1982, 'The role of retailing in the urban economy.' in Johnson JH and Pooley CG (eds), 1982, *The structure of nineteenth century cities*. Croom Helm, London.; Shaw G, 1985, 'Changes in consumer demand and food supply in nineteenth century British cities.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 11 pp.280-296.; Shaw G and Wild MT, 1979, 'Retail patterns in the Victorian city.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 4 pp.278-291.; Green DR, 1982, 'Street trading in London: a case study of casual labour, 1830-1860.' in Johnson JH and Pooley CG (eds), 1982, *The structure of nineteenth century cities*.

⁴²Jackson JT, 1982, 'Long-distance migrant workers in nineteenth century Britain: a case study of the St Helens' glass makers.' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 131 pp.113-137.; Pooley CG, 1983, 'Welsh migration to England in the mid-nineteenth century.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 9 pp.287-306.

⁴³Dennis R, 1984, *English industrial cities of the nineteenth century: a social geography*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁴⁴Yelling JA, 1981, 'The selection of sites for slum clearance in London, 1875-1888.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 7 pp.155-165.; Yelling JA, 1982, 'LCC slum clearance policies, 1889-1907.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 7 pp.292-303.; Yelling JA. 1986. *Slums and slum clearance in Victorian London*. Allen and Unwin, London.

⁴⁵Wohl A. 1977. *The eternal slum: housing and social policy in Victorian London*. Arnold, London.

⁴⁶Pooley CG. 1985. 'Housing for the poorest poor: slum-clearance and rehousing in Liverpool, 1890-1918.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 11 pp.70-88.

residential development⁴⁷, the early council housing schemes⁴⁸ and home ownership.⁴⁹

There have been moves within historical geography towards more 'qualitative' approaches to the nineteenth century city, which give greater emphasis to various concepts of 'community'⁵⁰ and social and political conflict, to understanding 'shapes in society' rather than simply 'shapes on the ground'⁵¹. Billinge has suggested that our concerns should be with the sociological processes at work in the Victorian city, and indeed within the Victorians, with ideas of 'class, hegemony and power'⁵², an approach deriving its structure from the literature produced by a generation of Marxist and socialist historians. One means of approaching such processes is via the technique of 'collective biography': the study of the mix of people found in literary, medical and scientific societies that proliferated in the Victorian era.⁵³

There are signs then that historical geography may be moving away from a concentration on spatial contrasts in the 'middle range' of the geographer's scale of analysis⁵⁴, towards 'peopling' the streets, shops and workplaces of the large nineteenth century cities that earlier work had left 'curiously

⁴⁷Cannadine D. 1980. *Lords and landlords: the aristocracy and the towns 1774 -1967*. Leicester University Press, Leicester.; Bedale C, 1980, 'Property relations and housing policy.' in Melling J (ed). 1980, *Housing, social policy and the state*. Croom Helm, London.; Springett J, 1982, 'Landowners and urban development: the Ramsden estate and nineteenth century Huddersfield.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 8 pp.129-144.

⁴⁸Pooley CG. 1985. 'Housing for the poorest poor.'

⁴⁹Pritchard RM. 1976. *Housing and the spatial structure of the city*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁵⁰For a useful discussion of the literature concerned with this subject. see Dennis R. 1984. *English industrial cities of the nineteenth century*.

⁵¹Cannadine D. 1982. 'Residential differentiation in nineteenth century towns: from shapes on the ground to shapes in society.' in Johnson JH and Pooley CG, (eds). 1982, *The structure of nineteenth century cities*. pp.235-252.

⁵²Billinge M. 1984. 'Hegemony, class and power in late Georgian and early Victorian England.' in Baker ARH and Gregory D (eds) 1984, *Explanations in historical geography: interpretative essays*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. pp.28-67.

⁵³Billinge M. 1982. 'Restructuring societies in the past: the collective biography of local communities.' in Baker ARH and Billinge M (eds). 1982. *Period and place: research methods in historical geography*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. pp.19-32.; Billinge M, 1984, 'Hegemony, class and power.'

⁵⁴Lawton R. 1987. 'Peopling the past.'

anonymous.'⁵⁵ Perhaps David Brindley, the celebrated denizen of late Victorian Liverpool, whose life as described in his diaries has been subject to such close analysis by Lawton and Pooley,⁵⁶ may yet come to be a single face amongst many. If so, this is to be welcomed, as is the evidence that geographers may be employing theoretical ideas to enlighten their approaches to the nineteenth century cities, replacing the earlier barren empiricism.

However, even if we have escaped the overriding preoccupation with 'patterns on the ground' there remain fundamental gaps in geographical research on the nineteenth century city. Whereas the interpretations provided of the social geography of the city have stressed change, the processes underlying that change have largely been ignored. This importance of shifting occupational and industrial structures in the city have explicitly or implicitly been recognized as forces underlying the changes studied, yet these subjects themselves and the mechanisms through which they gave rise to geographical consequences have received little attention.

One 'process', that of residential mobility, might be said to represent an exception to this generalisation, in so far as a number of studies have devoted attention to it. However, even here the coverage may be partial. It is no doubt a truism that changes in the social status of areas within cities can be broken down into two principal forces, those of geographical and social mobility.⁵⁷ Early work on residential mobility and persistence in nineteenth century cities concerned itself simply with the calculation of inter-censal persistence rates, and the consistently low rates of persistence found, ranging between 10 and

⁵⁵Lawton R, 1982, p.260. 'Questions of scale in the study of population in nineteenth century Britain.' in Baker ARH and Billinge M, 1982, *Period and place: research methods in historical geography*. Cambridge University Publications, Cambridge. pp.250-271.

⁵⁶Lawton R and Pooley CG, 1975(a), 'David Brindley's Liverpool: an aspect of urban society in the 1880s.' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 125 pp.149-168.

⁵⁷Anderson has pointed out that although the differences in the make-up of the 'in' and 'out' migration of population of an urban area will play an important part in the process of change in the area, 'life-cycle' effects can also significantly affect that process. However, these effects are likely to have been subsumed in the Victorian context, given the strong evidence of high levels of mobility amongst households. See Anderson M, 1982, 'Indicators of population change and stability in nineteenth century cities: some sceptical comments.' in Johnson JH and Pooley CG (eds), 1982. *The structure of nineteenth century cities* Croom Helm, London. pp.283-298.; Pooley CG, 1979. 'Residential mobility in the Victorian city.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 4 pp.258-277.; Dennis RJ, 1977, 'Intercensal mobility in a Victorian city.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 2 pp.349-363.

12%,⁵⁸ further illustrated the volatility of Victorian society in the middle part of the century, although the often remarkably short distances over which much of this movement took place hinted at possible ties of 'communities' or 'localities'.⁵⁹ It is worth observing that these findings on persistence rates, as with so much of the work dependent on the censuses as sources, may have actually given a misleading impression of the stability of the Victorian population. Lawton and Pooley's analysis of the manuscript diaries of David Brindley written in Liverpool between January 1882 and January 1891 revealed that Brindley had moved no less than twelve times within the nine years covered by the diaries.⁶⁰

If residential mobility was so common and frequent an experience for the Victorians as these findings suggest, that mobility was no doubt eased by the highly fragmented nature of the supply of housing, with its preponderance of small scale private landlords and high vacancy rates.⁶¹ However, of more value than those studies that have simply calculated persistence rates have been those that have investigated the nature of those households moving, and by implication, their motives for doing so.⁶² Persistence rates have been found to vary according to the socio-economic class and age of the head of household, as have the distances moved: the lower classes and young moved more frequently and the upper classes moved further. However, even if the process of residential mobility has received some degree of attention, within the research produced one can find the same failings that beset the output of historical geographers' work on the nineteenth century city as a whole.

⁵⁸Knights PR, 1971, *The plain people of Boston, 1830-1860*. Oxford University Press, New York.; Thernstrom S, 1970. *Poverty and progress*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

⁵⁹Anderson M, 1971. *Family structure in nineteenth century Lancashire*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁶⁰Lawton R and Pooley CG. 1975(a). 'David Brindley's Liverpool.'; Lawton R and Pooley CG, 1985(b), *Individual appraisals of nineteenth century Liverpool*. Social Geography of Nineteenth Century Merseyside Project. Working Paper 3. University of Liverpool.

⁶¹Holmes RS, 1974, 'Identifying nineteenth century properties.'; Pritchard RM, 1976, *Housing and the spatial structure of the city*.

⁶²For a review of this literature, see Dennis R, 1984, *English industrial cities of the nineteenth century*.

1.4 The Urban Economy and the Labour Market

To highlight a major failing of the existing research, we need look no further than two widely cited contemporary studies, those produced by Booth and Rowntree respectively.

In his monumental study of poverty in late Victorian London, Charles Booth⁶³ estimated that 38% of the working class, or 30% of the city's entire population, lived below the poverty line. Similarly, Seebohm Rowntree, in his extensive study of York at the close of the century, categorised 15% of the town's working class as living in primary poverty and a further 28% as living in secondary poverty, the former being entirely beyond the control of the individual household and the latter the consequence, at least in part, of inefficient expenditure.⁶⁴ Even if at any given time not in a state of absolute poverty, large portions of the cities' populations hung on the brink of 'the abyss', or spent some period of their lives in that state.⁶⁵ The lot of the bulk of the labouring classes was to live lives where choice was severely limited by economic circumstances.

For those who marginally avoided classification as living beneath the poverty line, living in what Rowntree termed a state of 'merely physical efficiency' there was neither security nor comfort, as Rowntree's delineation of that state illustrates:

And let us clearly understand what 'merely physical efficiency' means. A family living upon the scale allowed for in this estimate must never spend a penny on railway fare or omnibus. They must never go into the country unless they walk. They must never purchase a halfpenny newspaper or spend a penny to buy a ticket for a popular concert. ...

⁶³Booth C, 1902, *Life and Labour of the People in London*. Augustus Kelloy, New York.

⁶⁴Rowntree BS, 1901, *Poverty: a study of town life*. Macmillan, London. For additional evidence of the economic marginality of much of the urban populations' existence, see Bowley AL and Hurst ARB, 1915, *Livelihood and poverty: a study in the economic conditions of working class households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading*. G Bell and Sons Ltd., London.

⁶⁵'Since the main incidence of poverty is among families where there are three or more children below school age and no subsidiary earners, it follows that many other families have passed through this stage and only risen out of it when the children began to earn...' Bowley AL and Hurst ARB, 1915, *Livelihood and poverty: a study in the economic conditions of working-class households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading*. G Bell and Sons Ltd., London. p.47.

They cannot save, nor can they join sick club or Trade Union, because they cannot pay the necessary subscriptions.⁶⁶

Despite the general recognition of the scale of poverty and the marginality of the existence of so much of the population, geographers have almost universally ignored the subject of the nineteenth century urban economy. Almost the only area where the effect of the economy and its vicissitudes has been discussed within historical geography is in relation to building cycles. Whitehand suggested that during slumps in the building trade, land prices fell and that the demand for land for institutional purposes was less affected than that for house building. Consequently he argued that it was during such periods that institutional uses, such as parks, colleges and hospitals tended to occupy sites closer to the centre of towns, whilst during periods of boom such land uses were out-bid by housing and commercial developments and pushed out to the urban fringes.⁶⁷

However, building cycles were only one manifestation of the volatility of the Victorian economy. The broad fluctuations of economic activity had repercussions throughout the social and economic fabric, affecting everything from marriage rates to beer consumption. Notwithstanding the impact of more than a century of rapid industrial change, Victorian industry remained labour intensive. Faced by falling demand, the modern employer may tend to continue to produce for stock, utilizing his heavy investments in both technology and workforce training, spreading his fixed costs. Fixed costs were lower for his Victorian counterpart, labour costs more significant, and consequently employers were more ready to meet falling demand by laying men off, cutting wage rates or reducing hours. It was via the volatility in levels of unemployment, hours and pay that broader economic forces were transmitted to the bulk of the population.

If grasping this fundamental dynamism within the Victorian economy is important, we should not overlook the fact that it was not only at this broad level that volatility existed within that Victorian economy. Unemployment rates in many trades moved seasonally, reflecting annual variations in the demand for

⁶⁶Rowntree *ibid*

⁶⁷Whitehand 1972, '*Urban rent theory, time series and morphogenesis: an example of eclecticism in geographical research.*' *Area* 4 pp. 215-222. For further criticism of Whitehand's suggested model of location and land use, see Dennis R, 1984, *English industrial cities of the nineteenth century.* pp.146-154.

products or in the supply of raw materials, and this pattern was particularly prevalent in the capital with its fashionable season.⁶⁸ Further, at an individual level lack of job security introduced a third tier of uncertainty, an uncertainty and volatility that reached chronic levels amongst the ranks of the casual workforce. The lot of many at the docks of Liverpool and London was to be engaged from 'hour to hour or day to day', and to face the constant prospect of a return to the ranks outside the dock gates.

If the fluctuations of economic activity were, in Beveridge's classic phraseology the 'pulse of the nation', how is it that the economy, and in particular the labour market, has found only a marginal place in the existing literature produced by historical geography? Green's doctoral study of the developments in the metropolitan labour market in the first half of the nineteenth century⁶⁹, together with Southall's consideration of spatial and temporal variations in unemployment rates amongst trade unionists⁷⁰, remain the only substantial contributions by historical geographers to the study of nineteenth century labour markets. To study any aspect of the geography of nineteenth century Britain whilst ignoring the 'pulse of the nation' seems a fundamentally unbalanced and unsound approach. Residential mobility and persistence may have been analysed in their variation between households by age, class and ethnic origin, but virtually no attention has been given to the role of the labour market, unemployment and occupational change. The few studies by historical geographers relating individual experience to the labour market are largely restricted to investigations of the distances workers lived from their place of work.⁷¹ Movement must have often been the direct consequence of personal

⁶⁸Stedman Jones has usefully brought together Booth's evidence on these characteristics of so much of the metropolitan labour market. Stedman Jones G, 1971. *Outcast London*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

⁶⁹Green DR, 1984, *From artisans to paupers: the manufacture of poverty in mid-nineteenth century London*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge.

⁷⁰Southall HR, 1984, *Regional unemployment patterns in Britain, 1851-1914: a study of the 'trade union percentages of unemployment', with special reference to engineering workers*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge.; Southall HR, 1988, 'The origins of the depressed areas; unemployment, growth and regional economic structure in Britain before 1914.' *Economic History Review* Second Series 91 pp.236-258.; Southall HR, 1986, 'Regional unemployment patterns among skilled engineers in Britain, 1851-1914.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 12 pp.268-286.

⁷¹See, for example, Dennis R and Daniels S, 1981, p.13. 'Community and the social geography of Victorian cities', *Urban History Yearbook*, Leicester University Press, pp.7-23. A more wide-ranging review of the role of workplace in shaping cities may be found in Vance JE, 1966. 'Housing the worker: determinative and contingent ties in nineteenth century Birmingham',

boom or slump, the winning or losing of a secure post, yet the importance of such factors finds no place in the geographical literature.⁷² Decisions about movement may well have been taken within the context of 'communal' or 'class' frameworks, but I would suggest they would more directly have been influenced by geographical availability of work, coupled with the need to remain within walking distance of places of work or sources of information about work.

Given geography's failure to address the operation of the labour market in Victorian and Edwardian cities, for some insights into this subject we must look to the work of economists and social historians.

1.5 Economic and Social Historians and the Urban Victorian Labour Market

Economic historians' concern with labour markets prior to the First World War has tended to concentrate on a somewhat barren debate on trends in real wages.⁷³ The most interesting research touching upon the labour market during this period has therefore tended to come from social historians, and in particular from those concerned with the concept of a 'labour aristocracy'. This notion, although not associated solely with the second half of the nineteenth century, has been principally studied as an explanation for the decline in militancy of working class movements after the Chartist era, a period which has been interpreted in terms of a greater class awareness amongst the working class, and a momentum for social protest and revolution. Indeed it was in this fashion that Lenin employed the term in explaining the splits within the 'working class movement'. Capitalism, he argued, had now singled out a handful of exceptionally rich and powerful states, able to exist on the plunder of imperialism:

Economic Geography 43, pp.95-127, and Vance JE, 1967, 'Housing the worker: the employment linkage as a force in urban structure', *Economic Geography* 44, pp.294-325.

⁷²In a limited study of labour mobility, I found some indications of the potential importance of occupational factors in the determination of when and where to move. See Gray DW, 1983, Household residential persistence and intra-urban mobility in mid Victorian York.

⁷³See Flinn MW, 1974, 'Trends in real wages, 1750-1850.' *Economic History Review* Second Series 27 pp.395-413.; Lindert PH and Williamson JG, 1983, 'English workers' living standards during the industrial revolution: a new look.' *Economic History Review* Second Series 36 pp.1-25.; Schwarz LD, 1985, 'The standard of living in the long run: London, 1700-1860.' *Economic History Review* Second Series 38 pp.24-41.

Obviously out of such superprofits it is possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper strata of the labour aristocracy. And this is precisely what the capitalists of the 'advanced' countries are doing; they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert...⁷⁴

Hobsbawm in his seminal discussion of the idea of a labour aristocracy clearly defined the features that distinguished such a class from the bulk of the working class.

First, the level and regularity of a worker's earnings; second, his prospects of social security; third, his conditions of work, including the way he was treated by foremen and masters; fourth, his relations with the social strata above and below him; fifth, his general conditions of living; lastly, his prospects of future advancement and those of his children.⁷⁵

Since the publication of Hobsbawm's work there has been much discussion of every aspect of the idea, from the origins and incidence of the term in contemporary literature,⁷⁶ to the importance of the class in particular contexts.⁷⁷ Foster, in his influential discussion of the development of working class consciousness in nineteenth century Oldham, Northampton and South Shields, sought to explain the decline of the working class vanguard that had promised so much in the first half of the century. Foster dismisses 'economic recovery' as a potential explanation in favour of explanations couched in terms of the 'deliberate attempts' by the bourgeoisie to 'isolate the working-class vanguard, and obvious use of imperialism and racism to do so.'⁷⁸ Foster's is a classically

⁷⁴Lenin VI, 1920, p.203. Preface to the French edition of *Imperialism*. Quoted in Foster J, 1974, *Class struggle and the industrial revolution: early industrial capitalism in three English towns*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

⁷⁵Hobsbawm E, 1964. *Labouring men*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London. p.273.

⁷⁶Shepherd MA, 1978, 'The origins and incidence of the term "labour aristocracy"'. *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* 37 pp.51-67.; Baxter J, 1980. 'Chartist notions of 'labour aristocracy' in 1839.' *Bulletin for the Society for the Study of Labour History* 40 pp.13-16.; Hobsbawm EJ, 1984, 'Artisan or labour aristocrat.' *Economic History Review* Second Series 37 pp.355-372.

⁷⁷Foster J, 1974, *Class struggle and the industrial revolution; early industrial capitalism in three English towns*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.; Gray F, 1976, 'Selection and allocation in council housing.'; Crossick G, 1978, *An artisan elite in Victorian society; Kentish London 1840-1880*. Croom Helm, London.; Kirk N, 1985, *The growth of working class reformism in mid-Victorian England*. Croom Helm, London.; Brevilly J, 1984, 'The labour aristocracy in Britain and Germany: a comparison.' *Bulletin for the Society for the Study of Labour History* 48 pp.58-71. For a review of much of this literature and the debate on labour aristocracy, see Gray RQ, 1981, *The aristocracy of labour in nineteenth century Britain. 1850-1914*. Macmillan, London.

⁷⁸Foster J, 1974, *Class struggle and the industrial revolution*. p.250.

Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the place of the 'labour aristocracy', one in which the crisis of capitalism predicted by Marx and Engels, and the inevitable subsequent revolution in the industrial north of England, was staved off by the class 'collaboration' of the potential leadership of the working class, bought off with the fruits of the exports of machinery to the empire, their identity invaded and usurped by the values of a social elite: temperance, church, and respectability.

In his study of Kentish London, Crossick rejects Foster's cynical attribution of motives to contacts between the aristocracy of labour and social elites, arguing that the ideology of the labour aristocracy may have been constructed by the local social elites, but that this was done in a way which was 'neither aggressive nor, of course, conspiratorial.'⁷⁹ Further, Crossick emphasizes that much of the ideology that is recognized as being that of the labour aristocracy was not an 'external imposition',

...but rather [a] drawing out in a changed situation of strands within the working class tradition.⁸⁰

Another major contribution to the study of the labour market has come from Joyce in a study equally rooted in its location, in this case the textile districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire.⁸¹ In suggesting the origins of the social stability in mid-Victorian society, Joyce largely rejects the thesis of the labour aristocracy as a key factor, at least in the context of the northern textile districts, in favour of ideas of employers' domination and paternalism, and workers' deference. However, even if Joyce's ideas may be regarded as a radical challenge to those advocating the importance of the labour aristocracy, he shares with the supporters of that concept an emphasis on the role of work and place of work as a key to understanding questions of class, politics and culture.

The history of politics was in the end indistinguishable from the history of work and its cultures.... No single area of experience defined all of experience but when the business of reconstructing the society of the northern factory had been entered upon it became clear that so much of what had seemed to lie outside the purview of work was in truth an expression of the experience of work.⁸²

⁷⁹Crossick G, 1978. *An artisan elite in Victorian society: Kentish London 1840-1880.* p.253.

⁸⁰ibid.. p.252.

⁸¹Joyce P, 1980. *Work, society and politics.*

⁸²ibid.. p.xii.

If the labour aristocracy represented an elite in the market for working class labour, the other extreme could be said to have been occupied by the casual labouring class, who contrasted markedly with the labour aristocracy in all of Hobsbawm's criteria for defining a labour aristocracy.⁸³ Again it has been a social historian who has offered the most valuable exploration of this important aspect of the Victorian urban economy, and again to that extent the theoretical approach of the study dictated its chief concerns. Stedman Jones' objective in studying the casual labour problem in London was to explain the social crisis of the 1880s when 'Victorian civilization' ran scared of the 'outcast London' of the East End.⁸⁴ Stedman Jones in fact devoted only a third of his book to the exploration of the casual labour sector in London, the remaining two-thirds examining bourgeois society's response to the perceived threat. In his analysis of casual labour, Stedman Jones' achievement lies in the coherent way in which he arranged and presented the economic and structural explanations for the size and complexity of the casual labour market, and in particular those advanced by Charles Booth.

1.6 Conclusions

Out of a review of the writings of social historians on the labour market what emerges is the strong contrast between the casual sector of the labour market and the labour aristocracy. Such a dichotomy in the labour market has a striking resemblance to the literature produced by a succession of labour economists in the United States since the 1960s, who have modelled the labour market in terms of a duality: a primary sector of secure, well-paid employment and a secondary sector of lowly-paid insecure employment.⁸⁵ The workers in the secondary sector, it has been argued, are excluded from the primary sector not by ability but by prejudice and disadvantage. There would seem to be obvious parallels between these ideas and social historians' interpretations of the nineteenth century labour market. Yet there has been no direct attempt to assess the nineteenth century urban labour market within such a theoretical framework. The most significant research produced on nineteenth century labour markets has been by Marxist historians whose concerns have been with

⁸³Hobsbawm EJ. 1964. *Labouring men*.

⁸⁴Stedman Jones G. 1971. *Outcast London*. p.1

⁸⁵This literature is covered in Chapter 2.

ideas of ideological hegemony and class relations. Historical geographers have virtually ignored the subject. As stated in the first paragraph of the thesis, one of the principal objectives of my research is to rectify this omission.

As a reaction against the theoretically barren nature of so much historical geography, this work will approach the study of the neglected topic of the nineteenth century urban labour market via a review of modern and contemporary economic theory of the structure of those markets. Through a review of this theoretical literature, observations will be made on both the relevance of nineteenth century economic theorists as a source of insight, and on the degree to which current thinking in theoretical labour market economics was foreshadowed in the nineteenth century literature. Specifically, this work will seek to assess how far the casual labour sector of the late Victorian and Edwardian labour market can be recognized as a secondary sector in the sense implied by the segmented labour market literature, and to evaluate how far similar processes to those described in that literature underlay the sector's structure.

In exploring such areas, the sources employed will be of a wider-ranging nature than those employed in all but a tiny fraction of historical geography concerned with the nineteenth century cities, which has tended to rely so heavily on large and convenient data sources and in particular the census enumerator's' books. Government commission papers, biography, journalism, social commentary and the literature produced by various independent investigators represent source material largely ignored within historical geography, and yet material which, as this thesis will demonstrate, can offer vivid insights into the operation of the urban economy and the life experiences of the inhabitants of the Victorian cities.

Central to the choice of these topics for consideration has been the certainty that it is impossible for geographers to continue to ignore the urban economy if they wish to consider any aspect of the Victorian city. It is important to recognise that this assertion can be made from any theoretical perspective; to ignore the 'pulse of the nation' is to ignore a primary source of change and dynamism within the urban system and peoples' lives. This thesis will be fundamentally concerned with discussing the structures and importance of particular aspects of the metropolitan labour market, and not with the directly 'geographical' issues arising out of that discussion. Nevertheless, obvious opportunities exist for studying more directly how those structures tied into the more traditional

geographical concern with spatial patterns. Some examples may suffice to illustrate this point.

The nature of the casual labour system operating in the London docks, and indeed in those of Liverpool and elsewhere, dictated that the successful man was likely to be one who was permanently available, well known and able to tap into local sources or circuits of knowledge and favour. Equally the lot of the casual labourer, determined as it was by the system of employment, was one of insecure and often chronically inadequate income, and these facts dictated that many of the wives and children of these labourers were forced to seek work. The implications of these systems and conditions were that the docks constrained the movement of all but the most permanent of men to within short distances of the gates, and created within those geographical confines supplies of secondary labour, labour forced onto the market to pick up whatever extra income was available. This source of labour attracted in its turn sweating shops and other low paid sources of employment, emphasizing the role of the docks in the creation of localized ghettos. The phenomenon is worth further study, as is the role of access to information as a constraint on movement; it may well have been this need, rather than ethnic solidarity, which was the principal motivation for ethnic clusterings. Certainly, as this thesis will show, the vital importance of work and the labour market in people's lives will undermine the credibility of literature devoted to the blind consideration of ethnic and social factors' role in shaping decisions, and consequently urban patterns and structures.

At a grander scale it would be interesting to attempt to relate levels of residential mobility to fluctuations in the economy, and hence to establish how far such activity was related to economic circumstances, and further, to assess how far greater regularization of employment patterns towards the end of the century and in the early part of the twentieth century contributed to more stable patterns of residence. What impact, for example, did the arrival of labour exchanges as centres of information have on the role of unemployment in dictating residential location, itself a poorly studied phenomenon? Neither can the relevance of much that will be discussed here be ignored in a contemporary context, for if the application of modern theory to the nineteenth century can throw light on some of the structures of the nineteenth century urban economy, so can the results of that approach throw up illuminating parallels with the urban economy of the twentieth century. A consideration of the problems of the nineteenth century labour market may raise the possibility of many of those problems recurring. Mrs. Thatcher's celebrated fondness for a return to Victorian

values in society may yet bring in its train a return to some of the structures and problems of its urban labour markets.

Chapter 2

Modern Theoretical Explanations For Wage Differentials

2.1 Introduction

Although by no means modern in its conception, the development of interest in wage differentials, as distinct from that in wage's share of output, has only really achieved significant proportions within the last thirty years. The increasing volume of economic literature devoted to the subject reflects a number of changes which have taken place over the period, changes which have substantially increased the importance of the subject. Chief among these changes has been the decline of income from property relative to that derived from waged employment. At the same time, what property there is has tended to be more widely distributed within society, a feature hastened by the growth of the great institutional shareholders such as the pension funds. Such trends have changed the contrast between the 'rich' and 'poor' from one of property ownership to one predominantly defined by wage differentials.

The perceived importance of wage differentials is reflected in the great volume and breadth of literature on the subject. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to distinguish within modern economic literature just two main paradigms of explanation for the working of the labour market: the 'Neoclassical' and the 'Segmented Labour Market' (SLM) paradigms. The SLM school of thought has come to the fore only relatively recently, emerging from the perceived failure of the neoclassical school to provide an adequate explanation for the persistence of poverty and low wages among certain groups in the population. The continued poor economic standing of women and of ethnic minority groups, most importantly blacks, in the U.S.A. has been of particular importance in stimulating the development and use of SLM theories, and indeed it is from the U.S.A. that the vast majority of the SLM literature has emerged.

When reviewing alternatives to neoclassical labour market theory, a distinction is commonly made between two schools of economists making use of the SLM paradigm, a 'radical' or 'marxist' school, and a 'non-radical' school,

a school deriving from a 'neo-institutionalist' view of the labour market.¹ However, at the most fundamental level the two schools can be seen as constituting a single format, for whereas neoclassical economists stress the existence of a single labour market, a labour market in which wage structures are determined by competitive forces, both schools of SLM writers emphasize the activities of non-competing groups, and the division of the labour market into a number of distinct segments. The differences between the two schools within the SLM literature lie principally in the contrasting accounts they offer of the genesis of these structures, and in the policies they suggest to alleviate their consequences, and not in their views of either the structures themselves or the consequences of the structures for the individual within the market. With regard to policies, both schools stress that if inequalities are to be reduced, there needs to be a shift away from the neoclassical policies which concentrate upon the supply side of the labour market. However, where the radicals stress the need for change through the development of a class consciousness among the working class, the non-radicals argue for change through policies aimed at reducing institutional barriers to mobility between segments.

Space precludes anything but the most perfunctory of outlines of the two broad paradigms. Allowing for its arguable orthodoxy, both in academic and policy spheres, and more certainly its chronological precedence, in the first of three sections I will outline a simple neoclassical explanation of wage differentials. In a second section I will present a brief review of the radical/SLM literature, and in a third make some effort to assess the magnitude of the challenge that literature poses to the neoclassical orthodoxy and the nature of the neoclassical response to the SLM literature.

2.2 The Neoclassical Paradigm

The basis of the most simplistic neoclassical approach to the labour market lies in a number of assumptions. It should be noted that no neoclassical economist would regard these assumptions as being perfectly met in reality; rather these assumptions are seen as forming the basis of a powerful model of the labour market, a model capable of predicting the consequences of various non-competitive forces operating within the market. With regard to the determination of wage-rates in the labour market, it is assumed that all employees attempt to maximize their utility, and that all employers endeavour

¹Psacharopoulos G, 1978. 'Labour duality and income distribution: the case of the UK.' in Shorrocks A and Knelle W (eds), 1978. *The economics of income distribution*. University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam.

to maximize their profits. Further it is assumed that no employer is so large as to have any power of monopsony, and that the sellers of labour equally lack any power of monopoly. Two final assumptions are that within the labour market there exists a perfect field of information and that mobility has no costs.

Following from these assumptions, the wage-rate of any occupation is regarded as being determined by the relative levels of supply and demand for that occupation. In conditions of perfect competition the demand curve for any occupation is defined as the Marginal Value Product curve. In the short-term the supply of labour to all but the most unskilled of occupations is fairly inelastic. Consequently, on this time scale, wage levels in an occupation will tend to reflect changes in the level of demand. In the long-term the supply of labour to any occupation is more elastic and will adapt to any change in relative wage-rates. In the case of a rise in the relative wage of an occupation, ceteris paribus, extra labour will be attracted into the occupation reducing the wage until it returns to a point of equilibrium, a point where no extra labour is attracted into the occupation. Thus we can already see the neoclassical model predicting possible sources of wage differentials; we can predict that as a consequence of the short-term inelasticity of supply to skilled occupations, any marked change in demand for such an occupation, arising perhaps from the introduction of new technology, will in the short term produce a disequilibrium in wage-rates.

However, even in the long term equilibrium position, the neoclassical model does not predict a uniform wage-rate for all occupations and individuals. With regard to the principles employed in explanations for long term levels of wage differentials, the modern neoclassical school of economists, as with the majority of modern labour economists, owes a heavy debt to the writings of earlier economists, a debt which often goes unmentioned. In the case of the neoclassical school the debt is particularly heavy to Adam Smith, who, in the famous tenth chapter of the first volume of 'The Wealth Of Nations'², put forward an explanation for wage differentials which is still fundamental to the modern neoclassical theories.

For Smith there were five 'principal circumstances' within different occupations which counter-balanced the differences in wages offered by the employments, and ensured that, where things were left to follow their 'natural course', the net advantages of different occupations would always be in equilibrium, or tending to equilibrium.

²Smith A. 1961 (1776). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Vols I and II. Sixth edition, edited by E Cannan. University Paperbacks. Methuen. London.

If in the same neighbourhood, there was any employment either evidently more or less advantageous than the rest, so many people would crowd into it in the one case, and so many would desert it in the other, that its advantages would soon return to the level of other employments.³

The five counter-balancing factors which Smith noted were:

..first, the agreeableness or disagreeableness of the employments themselves; secondly, the easiness and cheapness, or the difficulty and expense of learning them; thirdly, the constancy or inconstancy of employment in them; fourthly, the small or great trust which must be reposed in those who exercise them; and fifthly, the probability or improbability of success in them.⁴

Of these five factors Smith regarded the second as the principle on which differences in wages between skilled and unskilled occupations were founded; a belief in which he was joined by Marx. It is surprising that such an influential economist as Marx should give such scant regard to a question that occupies so central a place in modern labour economics. Yet in the whole of 'Das Kapital', the only attempt which I could find to explain wage differentials lay in a simplistic re-working of Smith's second principle.

All labour of a higher or more complicated character than average labour is expenditure of labour-power of a more costly kind, labour-power whose production has cost more time and labour, and which therefore has a higher value, its consumption is labour of a higher class, labour that creates in equal times proportionately higher values than unskilled labour does.⁵

Nevertheless, it is the principle that wages should vary with the costs of production of the labour that forms the kernel of human capital theory, a theory which plays a central role in all neoclassical explanations of wage differentials.

As the individual's wage-rate is held to reflect his productivity, anything which influences his productivity will also affect his income. We can distinguish two fundamental influences upon the individual's productivity; the degree to which he possesses natural ability or skill, and the amount of skill acquired through training (a phrase which we will take to cover both general schooling and more applied forms of training). It is the later form of skill which has been

³ibid., Vol. I, p.111.

⁴ibid., p.112.

⁵Marx K. 1961 (1867). *Capital*. Vol. I. Foreign Language Publishing House. Moscow. p.197.

the basis of the theory of 'Human Capital', a theory strongly associated with the work of Theodore Schultz,⁶ Gary Becker,⁷ and Jacob Mincer.⁸

In his seminal work on human capital Becker put flesh on what had been an imperfectly explored aspect of classical economics. He defined investment in human capital as 'activities that influence future monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people'.⁹ Although training is the most obvious example of such an activity, the assumption being made that people will act rationally and not knowingly invest in training which will not yield such benefits, it is by no means the only one. Taking Becker's now orthodox definition we can, for example, classify expenditure upon health education or polio vaccinations by governments as investment in human capital. A healthier workforce will not only be a more productive one, and consequently in real terms a wealthier one, but will also be a happier one. Theodore Schultz, in one of the most significant contributions to the modern concept of human capital, distinguished five forms that such investment could take: health facilities and services; formal education; adult education; on the job training of the workforce by their employers; and migration.¹⁰

To the individual or society, there are of course costs involved in making such investments, indeed it is the cost that represents the investment. To take the case of an individual, the time he spends in education, be it at a primary or higher level, is time spent outside the workforce. During this time he incurs two types of costs; a direct cost, a cost made up of such things as tuition fees and money spent on stationery and books, and an indirect or opportunity cost.¹¹ It is this second element which invariably constitutes the greater part of the cost of investment in training. The indirect cost consists of the income foregone in order to undertake training, a reasonable assumption being that the trainee's productivity and therefore income is lower than it would be if he was not undergoing training. As with physical capital, the investment is made in the

⁶Schultz TW, 1961, 'Investments in human capital.' *American Economic Review* 51

⁷Becker GS, 1964, *Human capital*, National Bureau of Economic Research, New York.

⁸Mincer J, 1962(a), 'Labor force participation of married women; a study of labor supply.' in Mincer J, 1962(b), *Aspects of labor economics*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.; Mincer J, 1962(c), 'On-the-job training: costs, returns and some implications.' *Journal of Political Economy* 70 pp.50-79.; Mincer J, 1970, 'The distribution of labor incomes: a survey.' *Journal of Economic Literature* 8 pp.1-26.; Mincer J, 1974, *Schooling, experience and earnings*. National Bureau of Economic Research. New York.

⁹Becker GS, 1964, *Human capital*. p.1.

¹⁰Schultz TW, 1961, 'Investments in human capital.'

¹¹Becker GS, 1964, *Human capital*. pp.169-177.

expectation of benefits which will accrue in the future. The return to an individual's investment in training can be seen as the margin between the wage he can earn after training, and that which he would have been capable of earning had he not made the investment.

The role human capital theory has to play in accounting for wage differentials can best be illustrated by reference to a simple model proposed by Rees.¹² The model assumes that there are only two occupations in the labour market, an unskilled occupation (U), and a skilled one (S). The former can be entered at the age of sixteen without any need for training, the later only after four years training beyond the age of sixteen.

If all workers had both the same tastes and the same expectations about future earnings in the two occupations, and if all workers discounted future earnings at the same rate of discount, the supply of labor to S in the long run would be perfectly elastic at some constant differential above compensation in U.¹³

Figure 2.1 depicts the career earnings pattern of individuals in the two occupations, U and S. The 'constant differential' between the income of the skilled worker and that of the unskilled worker ($Y_S - Y_U$) represents the return on the investment made in education (area A), by those who chose to pursue a career in occupation S. When discounted back to the age of sixteen at the accepted rate of interest, the differential will be just sufficient to cover the cost of training. Much time and energy has been devoted to the study of the levels of returns to individuals in education, and a clear positive correlation between such investments and income has been established.¹⁴ Interestingly, the rate of return to higher levels of education seems to have declined from the levels found in the 1960s,¹⁵ although whether this decline is a consequence of a growth in the supply of such labour or a decline in the demand for it is debatable.

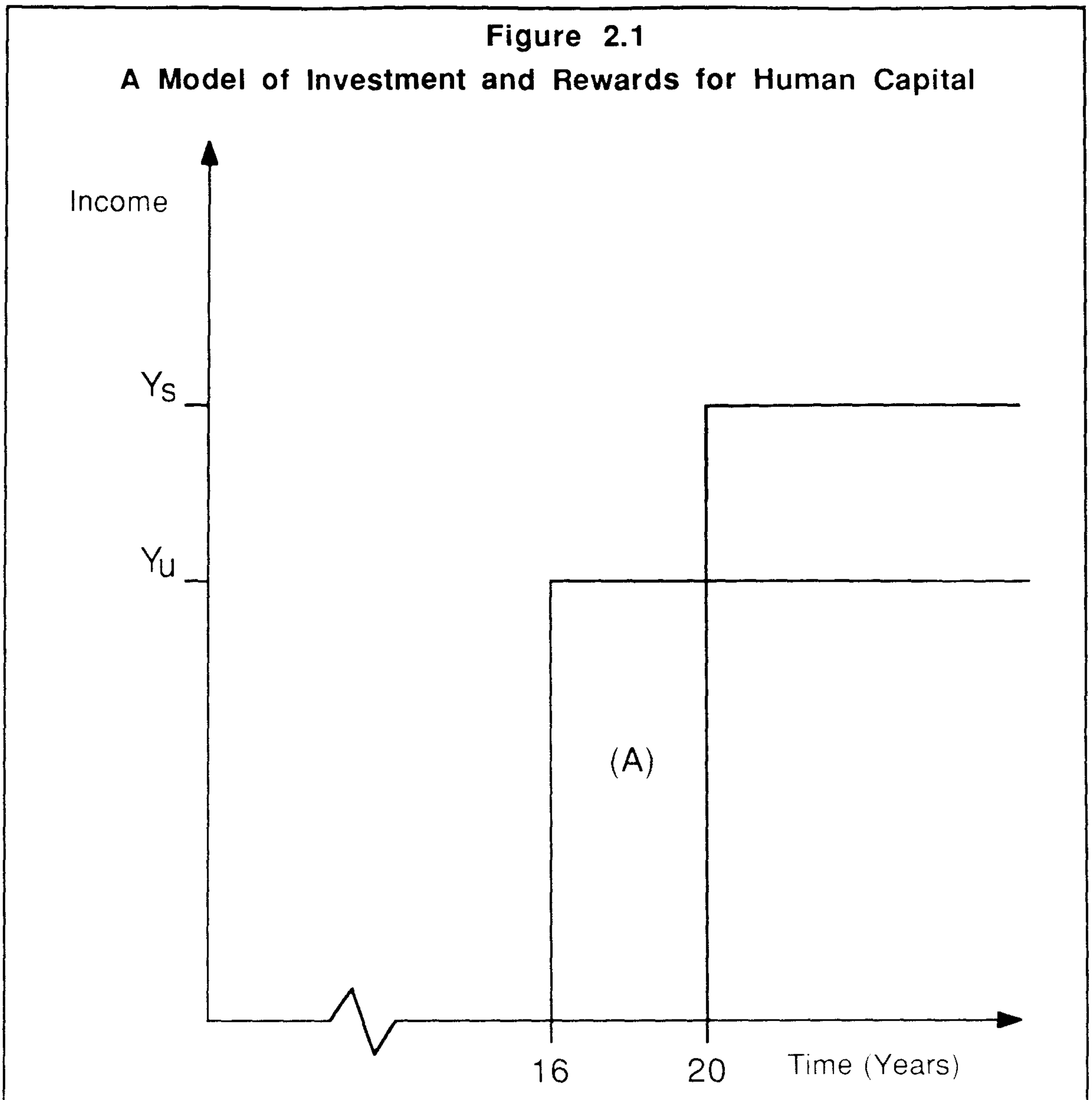
¹² Rees A, 1979. *The economics of work and pay*. Second Edition, Harper and Row, New York. pp.166-167.

¹³ibid.

¹⁴Psacharopoulos G and Layard R, 1979. 'Human capital and earnings: British evidence and a critique.' *Review of Economic Studies* 11 pp.485-503.; Psacharopoulos G, 1985, 'Returns to education: a further international update and implications.' *Journal of Human Resources* 20 pp.538-604.

¹⁵ Freeman RB, 1976. *The over-educated American*. Academic Press, New York; Dooley MD, 1986. 'The over-educated Canadian? Changes in the relationship among earnings, education, and age for Canadian men: 1971-1981.' *Canadian Journal of Economics* 19 pp.142-159.; Psacharopoulos G, 1985. 'Returns to education.'

Figure 2.1
A Model of Investment and Rewards for Human Capital



The theory of human capital outlined above yields not only an explanation for wage differential between occupations, but also a possible source for differentials between industries. As different industries will have different mixes of skilled and unskilled occupations, and as the amount of training required to acquire the skills used in different industries will vary, one can predict from the model outlined above that there will be differentials in wage-rates between the industries. Most simply, those industries which use mostly unskilled labour will be expected to have lower wage-rates than those which have a highly skilled workforce.

That training is most commonly undertaken either prior to entry to the workforce, or in the early stages of the work-life, can be seen as simply a

method of maximizing the returns to such investment.¹⁶ Undertaking training at the earliest possible stage maximizes the period over which the costs of the training can be recouped; the shorter the remaining work-life of the individual is, the greater the internal rate of return from the training has to be in order to justify the costs incurred. Nevertheless, training is often undergone at several periods in many individual's careers, and often takes the form of on-the-job training. These patterns of periodic bouts of training throughout the career of any individual, even if tending to be concentrated in the early stages of his work-life, will result in his life-earnings profile taking on a stepped appearance; a new and higher step is reached after every batch of training as each batch augments his productivity. Equally, without the need for explicit training to take place, an individual's productivity is likely to increase over time thanks to the benefits of experience, once more tending to result in earnings rising over his work-life.¹⁷

However there are factors which tend to result in earnings falling in the latter stages of the work-life, just as the returns from investment in physical capital tend to decline over time. There are many occupations which require skills or abilities which are likely to decline towards the end of the work-life. In particular, of course, the productivity of people in occupations which require great physical strength or dexterity is likely to decline in this way. Further, and once more in a similar manner to physical capital, investments made in human capital can become outmoded or obsolete, and consequently lose much or all of their value. The introduction of new technology is an obvious example of a possible source of such a change.¹⁸

Another complication to the very simple model of human capital theory outlined above is that there exist two distinct forms of training, 'specific' and 'general' training. Becker¹⁹ defines completely general training as that which 'increases the marginal productivity of trainees by exactly the same amount in the firms providing the training as in other firms.' Completely specific training is that which has no value outside the firm which provides it. Obviously there are very few examples of either wholly specific or wholly general training being provided by firms, but the degree to which the skills acquired are specific to the firm employing an individual is extremely important. The importance of the

¹⁶Becker GS, 1964. *Human capital*. pp.48-50.

¹⁷Rees A. 1979. *The economics of work and pay*. p.37.

¹⁸ibid., p.41.

¹⁹Becker GS, 1964. *Human capital* p.18. See also Mincer J, 1962(c). 'On-the-job training: costs, returns and some implications.'

distinction lies in the source of funding for training; who will bear the cost of the training, the worker or his employer?

Becker argues that the more general the skill, the greater the role of the individual in financing his own training, something which will be reflected by low wage-rates for trainees acquiring general skills, their wages being closely linked to their productivity during training.²⁰ The employers are unwilling to bear the cost of training because they lack any hold over the trained worker.

The degree to which a firm will be willing to bear the costs of relatively specific training for its employees will depend both on the level of labour turnover the firm expects and on the degree of specificity, the former to some degree being a function of the latter. The more specific the training, or the lower the level of employee turnover, the greater will be the company's willingness to invest in the training of its employees.²¹

Any company will attempt to find an equilibrium point where its investments in the trainees are recouped, by paying those who it retains a wage below their marginal value product. The margin taken thus represents a return upon the company's share of the costs incurred in training. Consequently individuals who have undergone similar amounts of training may have different wages as a result of variations in the level of generality or specificity of the training received; one would expect a worker being trained in a general skill to receive a lower wage during training than one receiving a training in a specific skill, but to receive a higher one once both have completed their training.

However, even individuals who are the same age and have undergone identical training could receive different wages, the consequence of two further factors: differing externalities within or between occupations (Smith's second principle), and differing levels of natural ability between workers. The latter is a fairly obvious point as, after any given amount of training, a naturally gifted individual will be more productive than a less gifted counterpart, a difference in productivity which will be rewarded with a higher wage.²²

The role of externalities, or as Smith termed it the 'agreeableness or disagreeableness' of occupations, in producing wage differentials, even amongst workers with exactly similar histories and levels of natural ability, is

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp.11-29.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp.7-36.

²² *ibid.*, pp.61-66.

equally fairly obvious. Smith argued that the wages of labour would vary with the ease of the labour, the cleanliness or dirtiness of the labour, and even the honourableness or dishonourableness of the employment. As an example of the tendency for high wages to compensate for negative externalities, Smith pointed to the highly profitable nature of the occupation of butcher, a compensation for the 'brutal and odious' nature of the employment. A contemporary example of the operation of the same principle is the extremely high wage rates of all types of labour employed on the oil rigs in the North Sea.

So far we have only dealt with two of Smith's five principles. Of the remaining three the most important is that relating to the constancy of employment. Smith argued that whereas in some trades journeymen might be fairly certain of year-round employment, in others there was an equal certainty of periods without employment. As an example of the latter, Smith mentioned the masons and bricklayers who could work 'neither in hard frost nor in foul weather', and whose employment was at all other times dependent 'upon the occasional calls of his customers'.²³ For Smith, it was this principle of compensation for irregularity which explained why masons and bricklayers received higher wages than carpenters, who, although subject to some disruption, in aggregate enjoyed a greater regularity of employment. A further illuminating example of the operation of this principle provided by Smith, related to 'journeymen taylors'; Smith observed that, whereas in the provinces journeymen taylors wages were 'scarce equal' to those of the common labourers, in London, where their work was more irregular and they were often 'many weeks without employment, particularly during the summer', their wages included a significant premium.²⁴ In Smith's opinion, the wages in irregular forms of employment had to be sufficient not only to maintain the journeyman whilst idle, but sufficient also to make some compensation to offset the anxiety engendered by such a precarious situation.²⁵ The anxiety during the periods of unemployment derives, of course, from the fear that one might never regain employment, the differential compensating for this being in effect a compensation for a risk taken.

Risk in a slightly different sense was another of Smith's five principles. Smith noted that the probability of any person educated for an occupation becoming qualified and entering that occupation varied significantly between different

²³Smith A. 1961 (1776). *The wealth of nations*. p.115.

²⁴ibid.. p.116.

²⁵ibid.. pp.115-166.

occupations.²⁶ Specifically, he noted that whereas success was almost certain for those training in the mechanical trades, such as shoemaking, quite the reverse was true of those training for the 'liberal professions'. Smith argued that the high wages of the counsellor at law ought not only to have repaid him for his own costly and tedious education, but should also have included compensation for the twenty others who had failed to achieve success in the occupation; in effect the successful counsellor should have recouped the interest on the wasted investment made in pursuit of the occupation by the unsuccessful candidates. However, Smith noted that, although counsellors' fees were large, they nowhere met this case, and reasoned that this reflected the over-supply of labour to the occupation engendered by man's willingness to accept lower odds of success when faced with the opportunity of extremely large reward.

The soberest people scarce look upon it as folly to pay a small sum for the chance of gaining ten or twenty thousand pounds; though they know that even that small sum is perhaps twenty or thirty per cent more than the chance is worth.²⁷

In fact Smith explained the high charges of the lawyer or attorney in part by employing the fourth of his principles, that stating that wages would vary with regard to the degree of trust reposed in the occupation.²⁸ He suggested that as one would only trust something one valued highly, such as one's health, fortune, or reputation, to an individual of high rank and character, the rewards of occupations requiring a high degree of trust had to be great enough to give individuals employed in the occupation the 'rank in society which so important a trust required'.²⁹ This appears to be a form of circular logic or blackmail, whereby one pays large sums to a person so that they can appear as the kind of person one could trust with large sums. However, as with many of Smith's theories on wage differentials it was based on observations of human nature; given the choice most people might be willing to buy fruit from a man trading from the back of a van but would rather their solicitor appeared more secure, even if they have to pay for that appearance.

Thus far the assumption has been made that a perfect field of information exists in the labour market. Working with this assumption we cannot explain why people should be voluntarily unemployed, or why workers with exactly similar histories can be observed to earn different wages for performing the

²⁶ibid.. pp.118-123.

²⁷ibid.. pp.120-121.

²⁸ibid.. pp.117-118.

²⁹ibid.. p.118.



same tasks in different companies, even if all 'conditions' of employment other than wages are identical. If we drop the assumption of perfect information an explanation for these phenomena becomes possible.

In the absence of perfect information for both workers and employers, the employee will be uncertain of the wages available to him, and the employer of the wage offers against which he is competing for workers. If all workers searched the employment market until they found the firm offering the highest wage, and if we assume for the sake of simplicity that all firms offer identical conditions aside of wages, the firm offering the highest wage would be the only one to receive any applications. If faced by an excess of applicants this firm would lower its wage offer, whilst the other companies which have received no applicants would be forced to raise their wage offers in order to fill vacancies. In the long term the wage rate would settle at a uniform level throughout the industry. Why then does this not occur?

The simple answer is that, in the absence of perfect information, searching the labour market is not a cost-free activity. The costs involved can, as with the costs of training, be divided into two types: firstly the physical costs of searching, such as bus fares to interviews and expenditure on posting applications to employers; and secondly, and most importantly, the 'opportunity costs' of searching. Obviously for the unemployed worker the opportunity cost of searching is made up of the income foregone in order to continue to search. Thus if the worker believes that a wage offer he has received is too low, and he decides to continue his search, the opportunity cost of the search is the rejected wage. Balanced against these costs are the expected benefits of searching, i.e. the longer one searches, the greater is the probability that one will come across a higher wage offer, the benefit being equal to the margin between this wage and that which you have rejected in order to continue searching. In practise workers will attempt to maximize their expected benefits net of costs, making use of that information which they possess on available wages to determine whether to accept any given wage offer. Not only will different individuals have different amounts of information on the prevailing wage rate in the labour market, and consequently reach different decisions on how long to spend searching and on what they consider a satisfactory wage, they will also discount future earnings at different rates. A person with a low preference for present

income will be willing to spend longer searching for a high wage post than someone with a high rate of discount upon future income.³⁰

As with the theory of human capital, this theory of search behaviour not only helps to explain wage differentials, it can also be used to make predictions. We can for example predict that anything which lowers the costs of search, such as free travel facilities for the unemployed or unemployment benefit, which in effect lowers the opportunity cost of searching, will result in an increase in the time devoted to search, and consequently a lowering of the margins between the wages offered by different firms.

To summarize the above skeletal outline of a neoclassical model of wage determination, we can note that the model predicts that wage differentials will exist between workers in different occupations, industries and firms, between workers of different ages, and between workers within the same occupation. Perhaps we can reduce this model still further and identify just three central concepts:

- 1) Human capital theory: part of a wage is a return to investment made in the past.
- 2) Natural ability: part of a wage is a rent on the natural ability of the worker.
- 3) The concept of equilibrium of advantages: the idea that the wage acts as an equalizing factor, compensating for net negative externalities and penalizing net positive externalities.

2.3 The Segmented Labour Market Paradigm

The generic term 'SLM models', covers a broad body of work. Whilst some who have used it have seen segmentation largely as a consequence of imperfections in the availability of information and the ability to move, the more radical economists within the SLM school have sought to explain political as well as economic divisions among workers, and, employing a historical materialist framework, have argued that political-economic forces have systematically encouraged the division of the labour market.³¹ However, all

³⁰For a fuller discussion of the so-called 'worker search model', see Joll C, McKenna C, McNabb R and Shorey J. 1983. *Developments in labour market analysis*. Allen and Unwin, London. Ch.4.

³¹For a contrast in approaches, compare Doeringer PB and Piore MJ, 1971, *Internal labour markets and manpower analysis*. Heath, Lexington, Mass.; and Berger S and Piore MJ, 1980, *Dualism and discontinuity in industrial societies*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; with Edwards RC, Reich D and Gordon DM (eds). 1975. *Labour market segmentation*. Lexington

SLM and radical labour economists are broadly united in the emphasis they place upon the existence of 'non-competing groups' within the labour market, groups whose activities tend to divide the market into isolated segments, within which differing processes of wage determination are held to operate. Fundamentally, the SLM economists criticise the neoclassical models of the labour market for their failure to recognize the importance of social and institutional forces in constraining the options available to many workers. They argue that the assumption of universal competitive behaviour is so far abstracted from reality as to make neoclassical models based on this assumption dangerous tools for shaping policy. Indeed the origins of the SLM theories can be found in the growing concern in the 1960s with the persistence of urban poverty and disadvantaged groups, and the apparent failure of both policies based upon neoclassical models of the labour market, and the large expansions of aggregate demand invoked by Keynesian policies, to have any great beneficial impact upon these problems. That practical 'observation' of the operation of the market was of major importance in stimulating the development of SLM theories, as illustrated by the comments of one of the SLM school's leading lights, Michael Piore.

The notion of labour market stratification emerged through 'participant observation'. The ideas were originally put forward by a group of us who encountered the labour market through participation in civil rights movements and as advocates for the community based groups which grew up around that movement and President Johnson's War on Poverty.³²

The policies derived from modern neoclassical theory have generally involved the establishment of education and retraining programmes. However, there is little evidence that such programmes have produced any marked amelioration of the problems. The SLM economists have used the lack of such evidence to argue that the basic principles of the theory of human capital do not operate in the market, and that levels of education fail to provide an adequate explanation for observed wage differentials. In particular, strong evidence has been found of discrimination against black, hispanic and female workers, evidence which suggests that discrimination results in the rates of

Books, Lexington, Mass.; and Gordon DM, Edwards R and Reich M, 1983. *Segmented work, divided markets: the industrial transformation of labor in the United States*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

³² Piore MJ, 1983. p.250. 'Labour market segmentation: to what paradigm does it belong?' *Annual Economic Review* 73 pp.249-253.

return to investment in human capital being lower for these groups than for the population as a whole.³³

Reich, Gordon and Edwards (1973) have offered a useful and generally representative outline of the perceived major planes of segmentation within the modern labour market. They suggest four key processes of segmentation: segmentation into primary and secondary markets, segmentation within the primary labour market, segmentation by race, and segmentation by sex. Of these four, the first can be regarded as the most significant; the idea of a 'Dual Labour Market' is a particularly well established one within the SLM literature, the other forms of segmentation generally being thought of as operating within this fundamental dichotomy.³⁴

The primary and secondary labour markets are held to be distinct in a number of ways. Jobs in the primary sector tend to be relatively stable, carry high wages and offer good working conditions. In the SLM literature there has been a particular emphasis on the importance of structured 'internal labour markets' in the sector, some SLM economists almost taking internal labour markets as the definition of the primary sector.³⁵ Individuals usually join companies with internal labour markets at the bottom of the so-called 'job ladders', most vacancies above this level being filled by individuals already working within the company. The companies in the primary sector thus offer reasonable opportunities for promotion, with good access to further training within the companies. The sector is dominated by large companies, with significant levels of market power. The workforce is relatively heavily unionized, and labour management operated through a well established system of rules and procedures.

Conditions in the secondary sector are held to be the mirror-image of those in the primary sector. Production in the sector is largely labour intensive by comparison to that in the primary sector, and most of the labour is of a more menial and repetitive nature; the workforce is less skilled, subject to greater

³³Gwartney JD and Long JE, 1978, 'The relative earnings of blacks and other minorities.' *Industrial and Labour Relations Review* 31 pp.545-560.; Beller A, 1982, 'Occupational segregation by sex: determinants and changes.' *Journal of Human Resources* 17 pp.371-392.; Reimers CW, 1983, 'Labour market discrimination against Hispanic and Black men.' *Review of Economics and Statistics* 65 pp.570-579.; Dolton PJ and Makepeace GH, 1986, 'Sample selection and male-female earnings differentials in the graduate labour market.' *Oxford Economic Papers* 38 pp.317-341.

³⁴ Doeringer PB and Piore MJ, 1971, *Internal labour markets*.

³⁵Hunter LC, Reizl GL and Boddy D, 1970, *Labour problems of technological change*. Allen and Unwin, London; Doeringer PB and Piore MJ, 1971, *Internal labour markets*.; Thurow LC, 1975, *Generating inequality*. Basic Books, New York.

levels of supervision, lowly unionized and poorly paid, the fringe benefits enjoyed by the secondary sector workforce being negligible compared to those offered in the primary sector. The sector is dominated by small, private, often family run firms, with little market control and only weakly developed internal labour markets and job ladders. Unlike their primary sector counterparts, 'points of entry' are of little significance in the secondary sector; firms and individuals enter the firms at all levels. The opportunities offered for training and promotion within the secondary sector firms are more restricted than in the primary sector, and the career earning profiles of the sector's workforce flatter than those of the primary sector workforce.³⁶ The levels of job stability in the sector are low and the rates of absenteeism and turnover in personnel high; the vast majority of movement in the sector is of a horizontal rather than a vertical nature.

Movement between the two sectors is held to be rare, a vital point if the SLM model is to have any significance. However, a common observation advanced by the proponents of SLM models is that the segments or sectors hypothesized are not entirely distinct. Although the secondary sector tends to be depicted as more labour intensive than the primary, the division between the sectors by no means follows rigidly the technology used. Neither are the sectors entirely mutually exclusive; primary and secondary sector firms may exist within the same industry, and primary and secondary sector jobs within single firms.

A central feature of SLM/radical literature is the emphasis placed on the importance of inefficient, non-competitive, discriminatory factors in determining the chances of individual workers securing primary sector jobs.

..many of those who suffer from low wages and unemployment have a considerable amount of human capital. They fail to find jobs which pay a living wage because of racism, sexism, economic depression, and uneven economic development of industries and regions.³⁷

Secondary sector, 'low-waged' workers are potentially, according to this argument, no less productive than their 'high-waged' counterparts, and, given the opportunity would perform admirably in the 'high-waged' sector.³⁸ Once in the secondary sector, the workers' chances of moving out of the sector into primary sector jobs are restricted in part by their lack of skills, arguably as a

³⁶ Osberg L, Mazany RL, Apostle R and Clairmont D, 1986. 'Job mobility, wage determination and market segmentation in the presence of sample selection bias.' *Canadian Journal of Economics* 19 pp.319-346.

³⁷Bluestone BF, 1972. 'Economic theory, economic reality, and the fate of the poor.' p.121. in Sheppard et. al.. *The political economy of public service employment*. Heath, Lexington, Mass. pp.117-128.

³⁸ibid.. p.123.

consequence of the lack of training available in the secondary sector and not any inability or reluctance to train on the part of the workers, but chiefly by the same institutional and social barriers whose operation had been significant in the original allocation of jobs.

Most SLM and radical theorists suggest that the number of primary, 'core' sector jobs is determined by demand side factors and thereby reject the emphasis placed on the supply side of the labour market by the proponents of human capital models. Thurow,³⁹ whose 'job competition' model although sharing little of the nomenclature of the SLM literature posits similar divisions and processes within the labour market, has argued that the number and type of jobs offered in the market is determined by the technology available, and further that the relative wages of different employments tend to be inflexible, the structure of wages being determined more by social convention than current economic factors. Thurow suggests that labour supply should be seen as a queue, or rather a series of queues, the position of the individual in a queue dictating his chances of gaining access to the internal job ladder of a primary or 'core' firm, his success or failure in this respect being the chief determinant of his career earnings. The position of individuals in a queue is determined by a number of factors, including education. However, in an argument found widely in the SLM and radical literature, Thurow suggests that most job skills are actually acquired through on-the-job training, and that the function of 'education' in its formal sense is not to confer skills and therefore increase productivity, but rather to certify 'trainability', to 'confer ...a certain status'.⁴⁰

..the labour market is not primarily a market for matching the demands and supplies of different job skills, but a matter for matching trainable individuals with training ladders.⁴¹

The function attributed to education by the basic human capital model is here directly challenged. The so-called 'credentialist' perspective suggests that education is used by employers as a 'screening' device, and by prospective employees as a means of 'signalling' their suitability.⁴² Bowles and Gintis,⁴³ writing from a socialist/marxist perspective, follow Thurow in questioning the

³⁹Thurow LC and Lucas REB. 1972. *American distribution of income: a structural problem*. Joint Economic Committee, US Congress, Washington DC; Thurow LC. 1975. *Generating inequality*.

⁴⁰Thurow LC and Lucas REB. 1972. *American distribution of income*. p.21.

⁴¹ibid.

⁴²Spence M, 1974. *Market signaling*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

⁴³ Bowles S and Gintis H. 1976. *Schooling in capitalist America*. Basic Books, New York.

economic value of education. However, reflecting their ideological perspective, they regard the use of educational background in assessing applicants as not simply a means of assessing ability, but rather as a method of 'legitimizing' existing divisions within the workforce and society.

....the major aspects of the structure of schooling can be understood in terms of the systematic needs for producing reserve armies of skilled labor, legitimating the technocratic-meritocratic perspective, reinforcing the fragmentation of groups of workers into stratified status groups, and accustoming youth to the social relationships of dominance and subordinacy in the economic system.⁴⁴

For the individual the outcome of the 'screening' process is held to be crucial, for the point at which a worker enters the labour market is regarded as vital to his or her prospects, as the bad characteristics associated with the workforce of the secondary sector, such as absenteeism and poor time-keeping, are in fact, it is argued, characteristics of the jobs and not the workers. The boring and repetitive nature of the work, the low level of job security and lack of opportunity for training or promotion tend to 'foster' these poor work habits or 'behavioural traits', and hence exclude the workforce from entry to the primary sector.⁴⁵ The problem is bad jobs, not bad workers. If offered a good job the secondary workers would prove to be of a similar calibre to the existing primary workers, their work habits equally good. The fact that secondary jobs encourage poor work habits reinforces, through a sociological process sometimes termed 'feedback', the barriers to mobility upwards into the primary sector, as employers will use work histories in assessing applicants for jobs.

Thus the institutional and social barriers to a secondary sector worker entering the primary sector are self-perpetuating. If a worker fails to negotiate the barriers which are based on perceptions of the type of person who makes a good employee, then he is forced into the secondary sector where he acquires the poor work habits which make him a bad employee.⁴⁶ Similarly, it follows that if women or ethnic minority workers are thought to possess poor work habits, such as high rates of absenteeism or quits, they will fail to gain employment in the primary sector on entering the labour market, and consequently will acquire these characteristics through working in the secondary sector, and consequently reinforce the original impression. But why,

⁴⁴ibid., p.56.

⁴⁵Piore MJ, 1970, 'Jobs and training,' p.58., in Beer SH and Barringer RE (eds) 1970, *The state and the poor*. Winthrop Press, Cambridge, Mass., pp.53-83.

⁴⁶Vietorisz T and Hamilton B, 1973, 'Labour market segmentation: positive feedback and divergent development.' *Annual Economic Review* 63 pp.366-376.

to pose an obvious question, should the dichotomy between the primary and secondary sectors exist in the first place? What is it which allows the primary sector to operate apparently discriminatory, and consequently inefficient, practices within the labour market? Why doesn't the secondary sector, which SLM economists hold to be governed by competitive forces, undercut the non-competitive primary sector ?

To answer these questions, one has to look at the sources of non-competitive behaviour in the primary sector. The privileged position of the workers in this sector is associated in part with the sector's high level of unionization, but perhaps most fundamentally the ability of the workforce to gain such favourable conditions stems from the level of market power which the firms in this sector hold.⁴⁷ Good jobs are those in non-competitive areas of the market, because non-competitive forces tend to produce favourable conditions and formalized structures.

Recent debate amongst radical labour economists stressing the role of labour itself in exploiting the advantages of 'monopoly capitalism', and in encouraging and cooperating in the creation of internal, structured labour markets, can be seen as a challenge and reaction to the previously orthodox radical interpretation of developments in the labour market in the last hundred years. The previously orthodox radical interpretation of those changes was fundamentally Marxian, stressing the increasing homogenization of the labour force and the usurping of labour's 'control' over the productive process. Perhaps the most expansive and influential of such interpretations of the development of monopoly capital in the twentieth century, has been that offered by the American Harry Braverman in his magnum opus, 'Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century'.⁴⁸ Braverman suggests that professional, technical and clerical jobs have increasingly been undergoing a process of degradation and de-skilling similar to that suffered at an earlier stage in the development of monopoly capital by manual labour, and that the outcome of this process has been the greater homogenization of the labour force. To Braverman, technology such as the conveyor belt, typewriter, and now computer, has been used by management as tools to remove the element of 'control' in production from the workforce. According to this interpretation, the greater productivity that the conveyor belt offered was in

⁴⁷Edwards R. 1979, *Contested terrain: the transformation of the workplace in the twentieth century*. Basic Books. New York. Ch.5.

⁴⁸ Braverman H. 1974. *Labour and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century*. Monthly Review Press. New York.

some ways subsidiary to the 'opportunity' it gave management to 'seize upon the single essential control element' of production, pace.⁴⁹

Although challenging, Braverman's interpretation of recent developments in the labour market remains simplistic; it strikingly fails to provide an adequate description or explanation for the conditions prevailing in the labour market in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Perhaps its most significant failing lies in its making no allowance for labour in producing those conditions and structures, to Braverman such things are solely the domain of management, and are inflicted from 'on high' upon the workforce.⁵⁰ For a suitably thorough working through of the historical development of these structures in the U.S.A., we can turn to a study made by three of America's leading radical labour economists, David Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich.⁵¹

In their historical survey the authors argue that the advance of the multi-site, multi-product corporation in the 1930s was closely followed by the growth of the great industrial unions, and that the growth of these unions should be seen as essentially a defensive response on the part of the workforce to the development of the 'corporation'.⁵² The corporations responded to the challenge posed by an organized workforce by encouraging the integration of the unions into a new bargaining structure, a process with which the unions generally cooperated. This move towards cooperation on the part of the unions was particularly rapid in the period immediately after the Second World War, when the tremendous growth in corporate profits allowed unions to obtain both real economic gains and consolidate earlier victories. However, the unions' gains were not made without cost, for the corporations during this period succeeded in introducing new structures of labour management. Although concurring with Braverman in finding a trend towards homogenization of the labour force between the 1870s and 1920s, Gordon Edwards and Reich argue that the outcome of the growth of large corporations and the cooperation between management and unions from the 1930s onwards, has been a partial breaking up of that homogeneity. The workforce has been divided by the development of the structured internal job ladder, each job on such ladders being well defined and distinct. Rather than homogenization being the key to control over the workforce, Gordon, Edwards and Reich, argue that it has been

⁴⁹ibid., p.195.

⁵⁰Littler CR and Salaman G. 1982, p.257. 'Bravermania and beyond: recent theories of the labour process.' *Sociology* 16 pp.251-270.

⁵¹ Gordon DM, Edwards R and Reich M. 1982, *Segmented work, divided markets*.

⁵² ibid., Ch.5., passim.

this process of segmentation which, by dividing the workforce, has allowed capital to retain 'control' of the work process, and curb the growth of unionism and union control over the workplace.

Rather than being exercised openly by the foreman or supervisor, power was made invisible in the structure of work. Thus structural control became the modern-day manifestation of a more ancient but enduring capitalist phenomenon, the yoking of alienated labor to the pursuit of profits.⁵³

Support for the contention that internal labour job ladders have been developed as a means to control the workforce has been provided by Stone in a study of the development of such structures in the U.S. steel industry.⁵⁴ However, even amongst radicals a consensus now stresses the importance of recognizing the degree to which the development of the 'new systems of labor management' reflects a 'compromise' between labour and capital.⁵⁵ Pressures from unions, for example, have played a major part in persuading management to concede regularized systems for wage bargaining, hiring, dealing with disputes and complaints, and handling promotion and seniority, all aspects of the new structures which can in some way be said to benefit the workforce. Indeed the breaking down of the labour force by the introduction of job ladders could be said to have improved the bargaining position of labour by giving it firmer positions from which to bargain.⁵⁶

To a significant extent the unions of the primary, core sector can be said to have used the internal labour market to secure their own members' positions at the expense of the workforce of the secondary sector. Blackburn and Mann, on the basis of their major study of internal labour markets in the U.K., suggest that the internal labour market and other defences against insecurity exist primarily at the expense of women.⁵⁷ Similarly, Brown and Philips in a study of the U.S.A. canning industry, itself chiefly a secondary industry, found that job ladders did exist but were dominated by males, who actively excluded female

⁵³Edwards R. 1979. *Contested terrain*. p.10.

⁵⁴Stone K. 1975. 'The origins of job structures in the steel industry.' *Review of Radical Political Economics* 6 pp.61-97.

⁵⁵Gordon DM, Edwards R and Reich M, 1982. *Segmented work, divided workers*. p.189.

⁵⁶Rubery J, 1978. 'Structured labour markets, worker organization and low pay.' *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 2 pp.17-36.

⁵⁷Blackburn RM and Mann M. 1979. *The working class in the labour market*. Macmillan, London. p.284.

workers.⁵⁸ Essentially, recent SLM literature has emphasized that the position of both labour and capital within the primary sector rests on cooperative mutual exploitation of the benefits which 'monopoly capitalism' has brought to the core firms, the few hundred corporations with tens or hundreds of thousands of employees, significant levels of control over their markets and, consequently, extensive control of production, profit making, and accumulation in the economies within which they operate.⁵⁹

The small secondary sector companies are unable to compete against the larger 'core' companies because of the latter's market dominance which allows them to exploit various economies of scale, the growth of product identification, and the core companies' control of the sources of finance and distribution. Equally, the primary sector companies do not eliminate the secondary companies because these companies generally operate in highly unstable markets, markets which the core firms find unattractive. Indeed the prosperity of the core firms is seen as deriving from their 'success in combining two quite different (and especially in the peripheral firm, antagonistic) elements of investment: high return and low risk'.⁶⁰

Piore, in a less radical interpretation of the basis of duality in the labour market, draws a finer distinction between stable and unstable markets.⁶¹ Piore links the duality to the organizational foundation of modern industrial economies, the division of labour.

The benefits in productive efficiency which are generated by the division of labor can be appropriated only if the specialized productive resources are fully employed.⁶²

Piore argues that where a product is subject to unstable market conditions, instability being to Piore endemic in industrial economies, one should make a distinction between two markets for the product: the stable component of demand which will be met by using highly specialized resources, and the unstable component which less specialized capital and labour resources will serve, resources which move between different activities according to the

⁵⁸Brown M and Philips P. 1986. 'The historical origin of job ladders in the US canning industry and their effects on the gender division of labour.' *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 10 pp.129-145.

⁵⁹Edwards R. 1979. *Contested terrain*. p.72.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.74.

⁶¹Piore in Berger S and Piore MJ, 1980. *Dualism and discontinuity in industrial societies*. pp.78-81.

⁶²*ibid.*, p.78.

fluctuations in demand for products. To Piore, the internal labour market is a structure of the primary sector, a structure which represents a compromise between managers' concern with efficiency and workers' concern with ensuring job security and opportunities for advancement.⁶³

The SLM economists' views upon the existence and role of internal labour markets pose several problems to strict neoclassical models of wage determination. Most obviously, the question of how far wages reflect productivity can be posed: are workers paid according to their marginal value product? At the most basic level, although allowing for some variation, most wages within companies tend to be fixed across occupations. More significantly perhaps, the wage structures appear to be rigid, allowing for little change as a result of changing supply or demand for workers in any particular occupation. A Keynesian school of writing has emerged which argues that the rigidity of the wage structure is especially encouraged by the bargaining methods of modern trade unions. Unions have adopted the concept of 'established differentials' in their negotiations, a concept which will inevitably bar change in the structure of wages.⁶⁴ Such factors are reflected in the maintenance of old wage structures in the face of forces for change in the product market, such as new technology.

SLM theorists suggest that concepts of what is 'fair' will even permeate the system of promotion within companies with internal labour markets. Not only do internal markets exclude potentially more able recruits, the semi-formal rules governing promotion in such companies, rules in whose construction unions will have played a part, will tend to promote the use of non-economic variables, such as seniority, in determining promotions.

These structures are designed to accommodate predictable changes in the product demand, in technology, and in the availability of skills on the external market. Where such change threatens the security of the internal workforce, allocative procedures involving seniority, wide mobility clusters, and other arrangements favouring the protection of employment rights tend to take precedence over efficiency considerations in determining the internal allocative structure.⁶⁵

Radical SLM economists suggest that the use of seniority as a basis for promotion reflects not the economic value of experience, but the use of promotion as a device to give individuals a stake in the system, and consequently limit their willingness to question it. Indeed, the whole concept of

⁶³Doeringer PB and Piore MJ, 1971, *Internal labour markets*. p.63.

⁶⁴Wood A, 1978, *A theory of pay*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.26.

⁶⁵Doeringer PB and Piore MJ, 1971, *Internal labour markets*. p.63.

job ladders reflecting ability has been questioned. On the basis of a detailed study of the market for male manual labour in Peterborough in the late 1970s, Blackburn and Mann argued that the hierarchical organization of jobs in that market had relatively little to do with any similar stratification in the labour itself.⁶⁶ They concluded that the class was a remarkably homogeneous one, and that the stratification of individuals at work had little or nothing to do with ability.⁶⁷ In fact they argued that the level of ability required to perform the vast majority of manual jobs was so low that considerations of ability were superfluous. They estimated that 85% of male manual labourers were capable of doing 95% of the manual jobs available, adding that 87% of all manual jobs involved less skill than was necessary to drive a car to work.⁶⁸

2.4 The Neoclassical Response

Having outlined in a rather rudimentary manner the two most important competing paradigms within modern labour market theory, there is a need to draw together some threads. Where do the assaults of SLM economists upon the neoclassical 'orthodoxy' leave us? Do they constitute a body of criticism capable of forcing the neoclassical models from the high ground of orthodoxy, or can the neoclassical models adapt to the criticisms and construct a convincing defence?

Many aspects of the SLM models have been concerned with what neoclassical economists term 'imperfections' or 'irregularities' in the operation of the labour market. These imperfections, such as discrimination and imperfect information, have not only been recognized in the neoclassical literature, but have been the subject of considerable debate and research. Whether the sub-theories devised and expounded in that literature to accommodate the imperfections constitute a valid defence of the basic theory, or leave it so changed as to invalidate it, is of course a matter of opinion. However, it is important to recognize at once that neoclassical theory has long recognized the existence of segmentation within the labour market, and that evidence of this fact alone does not in itself undermine the neoclassical theory. As we shall see there is a considerable body of theory suggesting that apparent discrimination and inefficient methods of organization in the market are based on extra-market decisions, tastes and forces.

⁶⁶Blackburn RM and Mann M, 1979, *Working class in the labour market*.

⁶⁷*ibid.*, Ch.4.

⁶⁸*ibid.*, p.100, p.280.

The quantity of evidence concerning such topics as the rate of returns to education and experience, or indeed the existence or otherwise of the segments hypothesized in the SLM literature, is so vast as to render any attempt to cover it thoroughly impracticable. Instead of this some attempt will be made to illustrate the broad theoretical responses of the neoclassical school to the challenge of the SLM theory. Adopting such an approach, the fact that Elliot and Murphy should conclude that their study of wage differentials in the U.K. lends support to the 'equalizing differences' hypothesis first expounded by Adam Smith, will be regarded as less important than their observation that trade unions, one of the sources of support for segmentation according to the SLM literature, in negotiating pay conditions have been keen to link reward to such factors as might easily fall into Smith's model: anti-social hours, harshness of conditions, length of training, risk etc.⁶⁹

Perhaps the most fundamental criticism which can be leveled at the SLM theory is one which its advocates have used to attack the neoclassical model; the charge of over-simplification. To view the labour market as being divided into two or three heterogeneous sectors, as the SLM theorists propose, is surely too simplistic a view; yet increasing the number of segments, and allowing for variety within them, only erodes any significance which can be attached to the initial idea of segmentation. There is much evidence that if the segments do exist, the divisions are far less rigid than the early SLM writings suggested, with movement between them being much more common than anticipated.⁷⁰ Given such evidence, it might be better to regard companies and jobs as existing within a continuum of characteristics, the position or character of a company, for example, varying across a number of planes such as the strength of their internal labour markets and the degree of market control possessed.

With regard to the SLM arguments about the role the internal labour market plays in distorting neoclassical processes of labour market operation, Wachter has argued that rather than harbouring inefficient, non-competitive behaviour, these structures represent profit maximizing efficient behaviour on the part of companies.⁷¹ The process of recruiting from within the company's existing workforce can be seen as efficient behaviour in that the company has a clearer

⁶⁹Elliot RF and Murphy PD, 1986, 'The theory of net advantages.' p.57. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 33 pp.46-57.

⁷⁰Mayhew R and Rosewell B, 1979, 'Labour market segmentation in Britain.' *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 14 pp.81-115.

⁷¹Wachter M, 1974, 'The primary and secondary labour market mechanism; a critique of the dual approach.' *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* 3 pp.637-680. passim.

knowledge of such individuals' abilities than it can easily gain for outside applicants. Thus the company is to a certain extent overcoming the lack of reliability of the traditional methods of screening candidates, which rely on the relatively inaccurate indices of ability such as years of education or social background, something highlighted in the SLM critiques of the screening methods. In effect, the field of information in the internal labour market is more perfect than that found in the external market, allowing more accurate choice of personnel, and in addition reducing the costs of search. Further, as the individual already within the company is likely to acquire a certain amount of knowledge of their prospective job purely through physical proximity, the costs of training the individual for the post, and the amount of disruption caused by their taking up the post, are likely to be lower than those generated by an external recruit.

Moreover, it could be argued that the increasingly fine divisions of internal job ladders offer the company the ability to better match the individual's value to his salary. Even if there is an element of promotion reflecting non-economic factors such as seniority, and not actual economic value, such features of the job ladder will encourage stability of employment. Given the costs of searching for new personnel, and more significantly, the investments made in the specific skills of the workforce, this greater stability will reduce costs. The SLM literature has been unwilling to accept that, to the employer, many behavioural traits, such as stability and trustworthiness, are just as valuable as any 'skill' in the traditional sense of the word. Far from being an inefficient structure where merit is subsumed to institutional forces, one can thus argue that the internal labour market is a profit-maximizing innovation capable of matching salary more accurately to ability, be it natural or acquired. Even the fixing of wages to jobs, and the rigidity of wage structures, can be seen as in part a method of reducing costs by reducing the time spent in negotiating wage agreements and monitoring individual productivity.

It is important to note that, in terms of both the stability of employment and mobility of the workforce human capital theories would suggest that a duality should exist within the workforce. Assuming that Becker's ideas on the sources of funding for training are correct, any 'efficient' employer faced by a fall in demand, which he believes is only a short term one, will, when cutting his workforce in line with reduced production, distinguish between those in his workforce who possess specific skills and those who possess either general or

no skills.⁷² The employer will be anxious to avoid writing-off the investment he has made in those employees with specific skills, and will therefore retain these employees in the workforce even if they are underemployed. He will however be willing to shed workers without such skills, as he has made no such investment in these workers. In fact, labour as a whole is regarded as a 'quasi-fixed' variable because of the high costs involved with hiring and firing people.⁷³ So the distinction is rather a matter of degree, workers with specific skills being more fixed than those with only general skills, or no skills at all. Obviously the importance of specific skills is a two way one, they are important to both firm and employee. The extension and development of firm specific or industry specific skills is by its nature likely to limit the mobility of the workforce, and consequently in this sense segment the workforce. However this process can easily be fitted within a neoclassical model of the operation of the labour market.

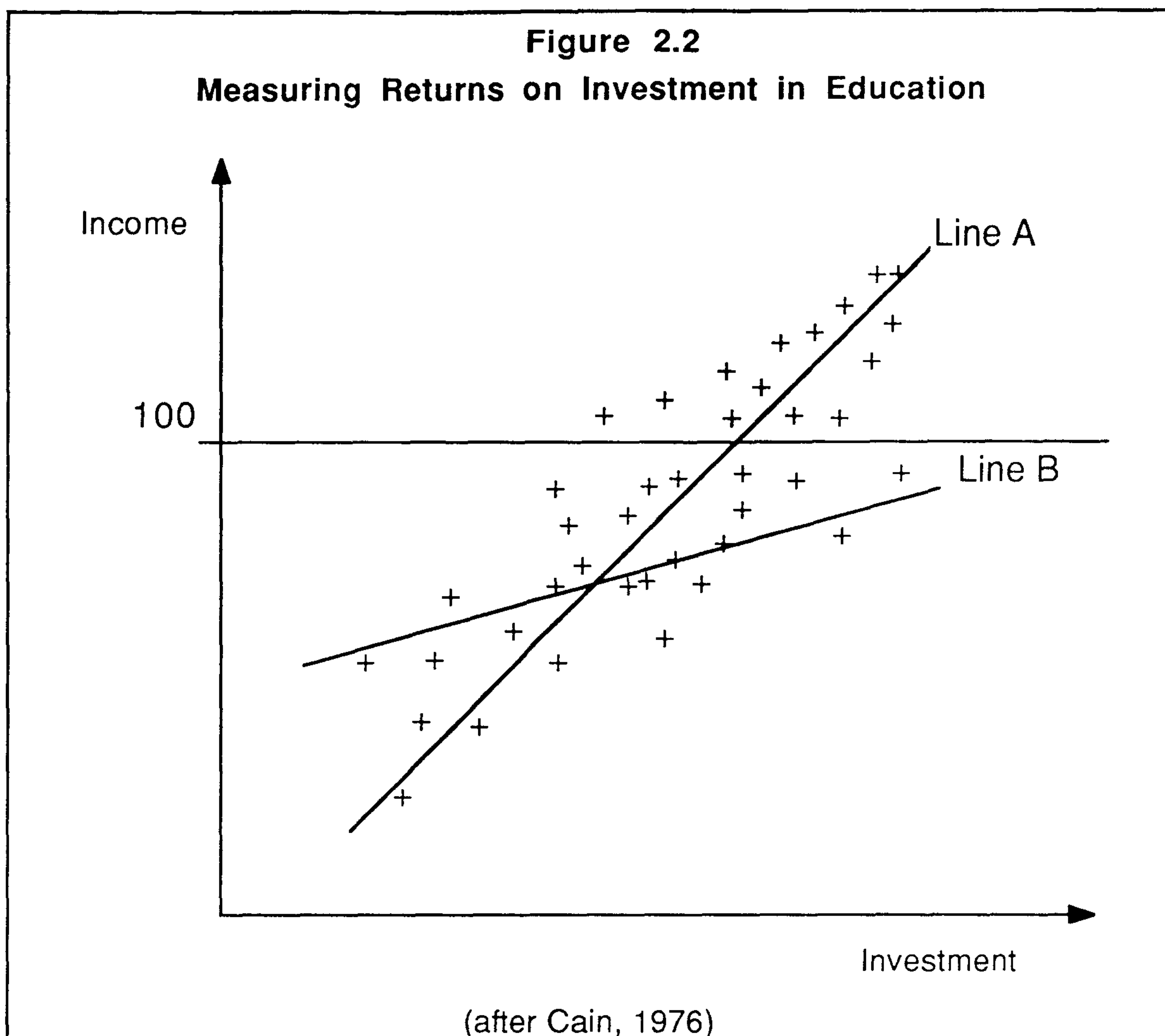
What of the SLM school's broader argument that human capital theory is ill-founded, and that institutional and social forces are of far greater importance in determining individuals' wages? Cain makes an important methodological criticism of much of the SLM economists' evidence that incomes are only loosely connected to levels of education.⁷⁴ He notes that the returns on investment made in human capital by various 'disadvantaged' groups have generally been calculated in isolation. The fault lies in fitting the regression line to a sample which is truncated on one of the dependent variables, namely income, a fault that in this case gives an underestimation of the rate of return on the investment made. This situation is outlined in Figure 2.2. If the regression line is fitted to the entire population a healthy rate of return is found (line a), but if a line is fixed to a sub-population, those with an income of below 100, then a much lower rate of return is found (line b). As Cain points out, the results obtained from these methodologically unsound tests of rate of return, are not incompatible with a standard neoclassical interpretation. The dispersion around the regression line on which Cain's criticism relies can be seen to reflect such factors as the influence of natural ability and chance in producing differing returns to a fixed amount of investment. In the light of this point, in comparison with primary sector workers, the lower but nonetheless positive rates of return to schooling and experience found for secondary sector workers by McNabb and

⁷²Becker GS, 1964, *Human capital*. pp.24-25.

⁷³Creedy J, 1981, *The economics of unemployment in Britain*. Butterworth, London. Chs. 2-3.

⁷⁴Cain G, 1976, 'The challenge of segmented labour market theories to orthodox theory; a survey.' *Journal of Economic Literature* 14 pp.1215-1257.

Psacharopoulos, may actually be regarded as casting doubt upon the dual labour market theory rather than supporting it.⁷⁵



Discrimination in the U.S.A. labour market against women and racial minorities such as blacks and hispanics, has been a keystone in SLM arguments that the neoclassical models, with their assumptions of profit-maximizing behaviour, are far removed from reality. The SLM economists hold that the secondary sector workers as a whole are barred from entry to the primary sector by institutional and social forces, but lay particular emphasis on the exclusion of racial minorities and women, their exclusion being reinforced by an element of discrimination based on their race or sex.

⁷⁵ McNabb R and Psacharopoulos G, 1981, 'Further evidence of the relevance of the dual labour market hypothesis for the UK.' *Journal of Human Resources* 16 pp.442-458.

Racist, sexist, and credentialist distinctions, and class differences, are systematically used and thus reinforced by employers in their efforts to reproduce the hierarchical division of labor within the enterprise.⁷⁶

Becker defines a discriminatory employer as one who, if able to hire a particular type of worker at wage rate W , will behave as if the wage rate were $W(1+d)$, where d is the employer's coefficient of discrimination.⁷⁷ This is the so-called 'tastes' model of discrimination. Where d is positive the employer demands a margin in performance or qualifications from a person to compensate him for the dis-utility he suffers by employing him. If d is negative, the employer is discriminating in favour of the type of worker concerned; if the employer is a member of the ethnic, social or racial group in favour of which he is discriminating then his behaviour can be labeled nepotistic. There are in fact several forms of discrimination, but the assumption will be made here that the discrimination takes the form of requiring higher qualifications from candidates for jobs from the group being discriminated against than are required from other candidates, or simply barring their entry.⁷⁸

A simple neoclassical model of the labour market would appear to be unable to encompass the existence of discriminatory behaviour by employers, as discrimination is not compatible with profit maximization. The model's logic dictates that even if such an employer did exist, assuming a normal distribution of skills, in order to indulge in discrimination the employer would have to pay higher wages to attract a sufficient number of workers from the group he discriminates in favour of, or accept workers of a lower quality. In the long run such an employer would be unable to compete with his non-discriminating rivals and would be forced either to change his attitudes or close his business. In dealing with discrimination in the labour market neoclassical economists have adopted two complementary strategies. The first of these strategies, and that illustrated by Becker's theory of 'tastes',⁷⁹ is to create sub-theories with the aim of accommodating discrimination within a broadly unchanged, competitive

⁷⁶Bowles S, 1973, p.355, 'Understanding unequal economic opportunities.' *American Economic Review* 63 pp.346-356.

⁷⁷ Becker GS, 1957, *The economics of discrimination*. University of Chicago, Chicago.

⁷⁸For a detailed discussion of the numerous types and theoretical models of discrimination see: Hunter LC and Mulvey C, 1981, *Economics of wages and labour*. Second Edition, Macmillan, London, Ch.13.2.; Addison JP and Siebert WS, 1983, *The market for labor*. Goodyear, Santa Monica, California, Ch.6.; and Sloane PJ, 1985, 'Discrimination in the labour market.' in Carline D, Pissarides CA, Siebert WS and Sloane PJ, *Labour economics*. Longman, Harlow, Essex. pp.77-158.

⁷⁹Becker GS, 1957, *The economics of discrimination*.

neoclassical model of the labour market.⁸⁰ The second is to suggest that discrimination within the market is relatively insignificant, and that wage differentials apparently originating in discrimination, actually have their origins outside the labour market in the supply habits of the supposed discriminatees. To acknowledge that a perfectly rational employer will not discriminate against female or racial minority workers, does not, the neo-classicists argue imply that all ethnic, social and sexual groupings will receive equal wages.

Differentials in the earnings of different sexual and racial groups can in part be explained by differing propensities to invest in human capital. It is certainly true that the groups held to be discriminated against in the labour market have generally invested less in education. In the U.S.A., for example, black adult males have spent on average eleven years in education, their white counterparts thirteen.⁸¹ Nonetheless, differences in the quantity of education has evidently not been the sole explanation for the poor position of non-whites and women in the labour market.⁸² Evidence that, even after standardizing for educational background, strong wage differentials exist between whites and blacks in the U.S.A.,⁸³ and that significant differentials exist between the rewards to male and female graduates with similar qualifications,⁸⁴ would seem to make this point particularly strongly.

However, too simple a view has been taken of the theory of human capital, and of neoclassical theories of wage determination in general. For example, it is not sufficient in itself to take the amount of education completed as a measure of the value of investment in human capital. Simply standardizing for years of education completed is too crude a process to offer a true reflection of how far apparent discrimination is actually the result of irrational tastes. An obvious factor which needs to be considered is the quality of the education received.⁸⁵ How far does the 'old boy' network in the United Kingdom reflect higher

⁸⁰For a broad review of this literature, see Aigner DJ and Cain CG, 1977, 'Statistical theories of discrimination in labour markets.' *Industrial Labour Relations Review* 30 pp.175-187.

⁸¹Corocan M and Duncan GJ, 1979, 'Work history, labour force attachment and earnings differences between races and sexes.' *Journal of Human Resources* 14 pp.3-20.

⁸²Gordon DM, Edwards R and Reich M, 1982, *Segmented work, divided workers.* pp.204-210.

⁸³Hanoch G, 1967, 'An economic analysis of earnings and schools.' *Journal of Human Resources* 2 pp.310-329; Reimers CW, 1983, 'Labour market discrimination against Hispanic and Black men.'

⁸⁴Dolton PJ and Makepeace GH, 1986, 'Sample selection and male-female earnings differentials in the graduate labour market.'

⁸⁵Welch F, 1973 'Black-white wage differences in the returns to schooling.' *American Economic Review* 63 pp.893-907.

academic standards in the 'old schools' rather than nepotism? How far can the poor standards of the large city centre schools of the U.S.A. be blamed for the poor performance of their graduates?

A particularly important factor in neoclassical explanations for the low earnings of women as a group is the idea of 'role differentiation'. Briefly, it is suggested that the apparently poor performance of women in the labour market should be interpreted in the context of the division of time within the household, and their 'role' as homemakers and mothers; women's decisions on the level of investment to undertake in human capital and the level of commitment to the labour market, both factors which influence earnings, should be studied, it is argued, at the level of the family unit rather than at the level of the individual and seen in the context of time allocation and utility maximization within the family.⁸⁶

Optimal investments in human capital of any family member demands attention to not only the human and financial capacities in the family, but also to the prospective utilization of the capital which is being accumulated. Expectations of future family and market activities of individuals are, therefore, important determinants of levels and forms of investment in human capital.⁸⁷

...foregone market-orientated human capital of mothers is a part of the price of acquiring human capital in children, and more generally, a price exacted by family life.⁸⁸

Whereas males have tended to be full-time members of the labour-force, women's careers have generally been interrupted by periods outside the workforce, for example during child rearing.⁸⁹ This traditional lack of commitment to the labour market is reflected both in higher levels of absenteeism and, more importantly, higher rates of quits.⁹⁰

These characteristics have very important implications for any attempt to interpret wage differentials between men and women as deriving from discrimination. The young woman entering the labour market will perhaps not

⁸⁶ Mincer J, 1962(a), 'Labour force participation of married women.'; Mincer J and Polanchek S, 1974, p.77., 'Family investments in human capital; earnings of women.' *Journal of Political Economy* 88 pp.76-108.; Becker GS, 1965, 'A theory of the allocation of time.' *Economic Journal* 75 pp.493-517.

⁸⁷ Mincer J and Polanchek S, 1974, 'Family investments in human capital: earnings of women,' p.77.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.107.

⁸⁹ Sawhill IV, 1973, 'The economics of discrimination against women: some new findings.' *Journal of Human Resources* 8 pp.383-396.

⁹⁰ Lewis DE, 1979, 'Comparative quit rates of men and women.' *Journal of Industrial Relations* 21 pp.331-350.

consider taking a low paying job which offers a training because she foresees only a short term or intermittent commitment to the market. She in effect segregates herself, although for sound human capital reasons, as her anticipated short term devotion to the labour market means that the period over which she can recoup the costs of the 'investment' is shorter, and therefore a return on the investment less certain, especially as periods spent outside the labour market lead to a considerable depreciation in the value of investments. This factor is reinforced by the tendency amongst young women to overestimate the amount of time they will actually spend outside the labour market.⁹¹

A development of this idea can be found in the work of Polachek, who has suggested that women, anticipating periods outside the workforce for child-bearing and rearing, choose to enter occupations which offer low levels of obsolescence, that is those where periods spent outside the workforce do not result in a sharp decline in potential earnings.⁹² This again leads women, through a process of self-selection, to segregate themselves out of many of the primary sector occupations, which suffer on the whole from higher rates of obsolescence. Blakemore and Low have tested this theory by studying the relationship between the subjects chosen by women at college and their expressed intentions with regard to fertility.⁹³ Their study revealed that women with high levels of fertility expectation chose to major in subjects such as history where levels of atrophy were low more often than women expecting low levels of fertility, and likewise, that individuals in the second group chose more often than those from the first to major in subjects with higher levels of obsolescence such as physics.⁹⁴

Although far from unchallenged,⁹⁵ such approaches suggest that substantial explanations for differentials in the earnings of men and women can be found in the nature of decisions taken outside the labour market, on the supply side of the labour market equation, and that discrimination is of relatively

⁹¹Sandell SH and Shapiro D, 1980, 'Work expectations, human capital, accumulation, and the wages of young men.' p.351. *Journal of Human Resources* 15 pp.335-353; Mincer J and Ofek H, 1982, 'Interrupted work census: depreciation and restoration of human capital.' *Journal of Human Resources* 17 pp.3-24.

⁹²Polanchek SW, 1981, 'Occupational self-selection: a human capital approach to sex differences in occupational structure.' *Review of Economics and Statistics* 63 pp.60-69.

⁹³Blakemore AE and Low SA, 1984, 'Sex differences in occupational selection: the case of college majors.' *Review of Economics and Statistics* 66 pp.157-162.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.162.

⁹⁵See England, example, for an attack on Polachek's work; England P, 1982, 'The failure of human capital theory to explain occupational sex segregation.' *Journal of Human Resources* 17 pp.358-370.

minor importance. Polachek has calculated, for example, that if the female population was as committed to the labour force as the male, the number of women in the managerial professions would more than double.⁹⁶ In fact recent research suggests that the gap between women and men in earnings may be starting to narrow as a result of changing attitudes towards the 'role' of women and women's expectations of labour market participation, and a corresponding growth in the proportion of women entering careers with training potential.⁹⁷

However, even if married women do decide to devote themselves totally to the labour market there remain important extra-labour market constraints on their career prospects, which will tend to produce a differential in their earnings compared to those of their spouses. A particularly important constraint upon the careers of married women is established by the tendency for the location of the marital home to be chiefly determined by the location of the workplace of the husband.⁹⁸ Three consequences can perhaps be distinguished here; firstly, the woman's choice of occupation will be limited to those accessible from the marital home; secondly, she will be unable to take advantage of opportunities for career advancement which involve a change in workplace to somewhere inaccessible from the marital home; and finally, if the husband's career or occupation is one which involves frequent changes in his workplace, the wife's career will be subject to frequent disruptions.

In fact, the importance of women's perceived 'role' in society, and its impact on the commitment of the sex to the labour market, extends beyond the decisions taken by women, having significant implications for the way in which employers will treat female job applicants, implications which reinforce the differentials set up by the aggregate supply side decisions of the women, but which cannot be regarded as inefficient as such. Given that the primary sector is dominated by highly capital intensive production and a workforce with high levels of firm-specific skills acquired at some cost to the employer, primary sector employers naturally place a high premium on stability in their workforce. Evidently, time spent outside the workforce by an employee shortens the period over which the employer can recover the investment made in the acquisition of specific skills by the employee, and if the employee quits altogether or fails to return to the initial employer, the investment is completely lost. Although an individual may be fully committed to the market, because women as a whole

⁹⁶Polanchek SW, 1981, 'Occupational self-selection.' p.68.

⁹⁷Sandell SH and Shapiro D, 1980, 'Work expectations.'

⁹⁸Turnball P and Williams G, 1974, 'Sex differences in teachers' pay.' *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A* 37 pp.245-258.

lack such a commitment the rational primary sector employer will understandably be reluctant to employ female applicants in vacancies that entail any great amount of training for specific skill.

Where promotion depends on work-experience employers are likely to treat young women as having less potential for advancement than young men of no greater ability, and will therefore be less willing to place them on the lower rungs of ladders of advancement, or to invest in their training on the job.⁹⁹

Obviously women's lack of commitment to the labour market, and the impact of marriage in circumscribing their career opportunities, should be regarded as significant factors in any explanation of the concentration of women in secondary jobs. Yet on the whole such behavioural explanations for wage differentials have been little explored. In the case of women, the employer is acting in a logical manner when excluding them from primary sector jobs which involve the acquisition of firm-specific skills at his expense, and the women in a profit-maximizing fashion when choosing either not to invest, or to invest in more durable, less specific skills, and thereby segregate themselves.

In a broader sense, support can be found even amongst the non-radical SLM economists for the contention that the segregation of the secondary workers derives at least in part from negative characteristics possessed by these workers. Piore, for example, suggests that the secondary workers do possess negative behavioural characteristics, even if he qualifies his conclusions by placing them in brackets.

...the most important characteristic distinguishing primary from secondary jobs appears to be the behavioural requirements they impose upon the work force, particularly that of employment stability. Insofar as secondary workers are barred from primary jobs by a real qualification, it is generally their inability to show up for work regularly and on time. Secondary employers are far more tolerant of lateness and absenteeism, and many secondary jobs are of such short duration that these do not matter. Work skills, which receive considerable emphasis in most discussions of poverty and employment, do not appear a major barrier to primary employment (although, because regularity and punctuality are important to successful learning in school and on the job, such behaviour traits tend to be highly correlated with skills).¹⁰⁰

Piore goes on to discuss the problem of workers who do not possess these characteristics being discriminated against because they belong to groups

⁹⁹Phelps-Brown H, 1977, *The inequality of pay*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. pp.149-150.

¹⁰⁰Piore MJ, 1970, 'Jobs and training.' in Beer SH and Barringer RC, 1970, *The state and the poor*. pp.55-56.

statistically associated with the characteristics, even though no causal link may exist. This behaviour Piore terms 'statistical discrimination'. We have already observed such behaviour on the part of primary sector employers when they consider female applicants. One can argue that, in the absence of information, the employer is acting in a risk averting, profit maximizing manner.

The importance of a child's background environment in determining their future earnings has been highlighted in a number of studies. Although there is substantial evidence that the I.Q. of a child is in part determined genetically, the nature of childhood environment appears to be of overwhelmingly greater importance in determining the development of I.Q. than any genetic factor¹⁰¹. As Freeman noted in a study of the decline in black-white income differentials, young blacks suffer from the disadvantage of coming from 'families and neighbourhoods of low socio-economic conditions which fail to provide the background resources that facilitate economic success...'.¹⁰² In fact Freeman concludes that, discrimination aside, the superior background resources of white youngsters in the 1970s can be expected to produce a black-white labour market difference of 10-20%. Thus, what might be termed a generational feedback process is operating and producing segmentation within the labour market not via demand side characteristics, but via the variety in the quality of labour being offered on the market.

Secondary workers, designated as such in the past perhaps by some non-economic factor, such as skin colour, adopt a secondary culture; their poor work environment, lack of job security and low wages encourage poor work habits. Future generations of the secondary sector workers may, through the environment in which they grow-up, inherit these characteristics. Mothers on welfare, for example, have been found to communicate a sense of inadequacy to their children, a characteristic likely to hamper performance in the labour market.¹⁰³ Fraser, in a study of 12-year-old Aberdeen school children, found that, of a number of environmental factors tested, the strongest influence upon a child's I.Q. was the degree of parental encouragement received in education.¹⁰⁴ Even where individuals do not inherit the characteristics, they are likely to be

¹⁰¹Phelps-Brown H, 1977, *Inequality of pay*. Ch.7., passim.; Goldberger AS, 1979, 'Heritability.' *Economica* 46 pp.327-347.

¹⁰²Freeman RB, 1981, 'Black economic progress after 1964: who has gained and why?' p.283, in Rosen S, 1981, *Studies in labour markets*. National Bureau of Economic Research, Chicago, pp.247-294.

¹⁰³Goodwin, reported in Wachter M, 1974, 'The primary and secondary labor market mechanism.'

¹⁰⁴Reported in Phelps-Brown H, 1977, *Inequality of pay*. Ch.7.

stereotyped as possessing them by risk-averting employers, and offered only secondary jobs. Further it could be argued that, faced by the statistical discrimination of the employers, the individual will be offered a lower return on any investment made in human capital, and that consequently he will invest less, thus reinforcing the stereotypes on which the statistical discrimination is based. However, on this last point it is important to note that if discrimination affects all discriminatees equally, no matter what amount of education they possess, then its existence may have no effect upon the rate of return to their investment.¹⁰⁵ Only if the degree of discrimination increases with the level of education will the rate of return fall below that offered to those facing no discrimination in the labour market.

Besides the margin in incomes between men and women, and between minority ethnic group workers and the rest of the workforce, which can be explained by the 'objective' factors outlined above, there remains a residue which can only be regarded as the result of pure, or non-statistical discrimination. In effect workers in these categories are given a lower 'status' than the rest of the workforce, and they are paid according to their perceived value and not their actual value.¹⁰⁶ The low status of certain groups is enforced by restricting their opportunities, by only allowing them access to 'low status' jobs, jobs which offer only poor remuneration because they are filled by 'low status' workers. This form of discrimination overcomes the problem of allowing the group discriminated against to receive a lower wage whilst not threatening to undercut the higher status groups' wage-rates. Evidently, unless a form of closed-shop operated, an employer faced by lower labour costs for employing for example women in preference to men, would substitute the former for the latter in his workforce. In the case of women the lower status attached to them as workers, one which male dominated trade unions have been keen to maintain, can perhaps be seen to reflect the lower status which families and individuals have attached to women's employment. It is argued that whereas the majority of men are the chief or sole breadwinners of their families, most women are simply working in order to supplement the family income, working in effect for 'pin-money'.¹⁰⁷ Of course this argument has a degree of circularity within it for if women were offered higher wages, the status of women's work would no doubt rise. This argument for giving females lower status than men

¹⁰⁵Hanoch G, 1967, 'Economic analysis of earnings and schools.'

¹⁰⁶These ideas relate closely to Becker's theory of 'tastes'; Becker GS, 1957, *The economics of discrimination*.

¹⁰⁷Phelps-Brown H, 1977, *Inequality of pay*. p.158.

cannot in any way be extended to explain the lower status attached to ethnic minority workers, or indeed handicapped workers. Interestingly female handicapped workers seem to suffer from both discrimination against their condition and their sex; Johnson and Lambring have estimated that only a third of the wage differentials suffered by handicapped men derives from discrimination, two thirds originating in their handicaps; by comparison they estimate that only half of the wage differential suffered by handicapped women derives from that source, the implication being that handicapped women suffer a double dose of discrimination, once on the basis of their handicap, and once on the basis of their sex.¹⁰⁸

2.5 Conclusion

The SLM school of economists have based their criticisms of neoclassical models of the labour market on empirical evidence of the operation of the market which seems to cast doubt upon many of the basic tenets of such models. It is obvious that crude neoclassical models of the labour market, making no allowance for either non-competitive behaviour within the market or for the existence of various imperfections in its operation, are of limited value. SLM authors have tended to set up such models as targets for their criticisms of the neoclassical approach; basically they have discredited straw-men whom few would attempt to defend. However, it is possible to take such simplistic neoclassical models and, by gradually relaxing their assumptions and building in various sub-theories to accommodate imperfections in the market highlighted by empirical research, refine and boost their predictive power.¹⁰⁹ Such approaches can yield flexible and comprehensive models capable of predicting the consequences of factors such as restrictive union activities or oligopolistic behaviour by companies, factors which can themselves be built into the models; such models have perhaps closer parallels with the work of the mid-century 'neo-institutionalist' labour economists than with that of either the modern neoclassical or SLM schools. Using such approaches to the labour market, one can predict that where market power has been gained either by unions or by companies, the result will be an under-supply of 'good jobs'. Further, the restriction of entry to good jobs is likely to produce a glut of labour competing for bad jobs, a factor which will work through the market and produce artificially low wages for these jobs.

¹⁰⁸Johnson WG and Lambring J, 1985, 'Wage discrimination against handicapped men and women.' *Journal of Human Resources* 20 pp.264-277.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Joll et. al., 1983, *Developments in labour market analysis*.

We should be careful never to reject any approach to the labour market simply because of the failure of a simplistic model based on the approach to yield convincing results. This principle applies just as strictly to the SLM approach as it does to the neoclassical. Interesting and valuable refinements have been made to the basic SLM approach, refinements which place less emphasis on the idea of segments in the labour market, and more on the existence of 'discontinuities'.¹¹⁰

Kreckel, for example, identifies five processes or mechanisms responsible for producing such discontinuities: 'solidarism', 'demarcation', 'exclusion', 'inclusion' and 'exposure'.¹¹¹ Solidarism refers simply to the ability of labour to constrain the power of capital, an ability achieved either through strength of organization, or via powers conferred by legislation. Demarcation tends to break down this greater strength, generally concentrating power within smaller cells. Although demarcation can be used by management to divide the workforce, it is craft unions that are chiefly associated with the use of this mechanism. Similarly, but on a broader scale, one section of labour may attempt to exclude another in order to gain some market advantage; the most obvious case of such behaviour is the exclusion of women from certain classes of labour, a process in which male unions have played a major part. Inclusion refers to a deliberate fostering of firm specific skills amongst a section of the workforce, to the point where the workers become vulnerable in wage bargaining as their skills are of limited value outside their present employment. Exposure is the reverse, workers being made aware of their lack of specific appeal to their employers, of their dispensibility. Obviously it is generally those at the very bottom of job ladders that tend to run the risk of exposure, those higher up of inclusion.

Using this finer distinction of the mechanisms producing 'discontinuity' in the labour market, Kreckel suggests that eight levels or grades of labour can be identified, all distinguished by a peculiar mixture of mechanisms working to produce them. For example, he proposes that the very lowest grade of labour consists of those who are both highly exposed and excluded; illegal immigrants are an obvious example of such a grade of labour. In such ideas we can

¹¹⁰ For a brief review, see Cooke P, 1983, *Theories of planning and spatial development*. Hutchinson, London. pp.221-217.

¹¹¹ Kreckel R, 1980, 'Unequal opportunity structure and labour market segmentation.' *Sociology* 14 pp.525-550.

perhaps see a stronger approach to the labour market than that of the older SLM models. These new approaches seem more aware of the heterogeneity of labour markets, they recognize that the structures found in most SLM models have been too rigid. They also appear to show signs of movement away from the SLM literature's preoccupation with structure, to the exclusion of process.

The bulk of SLM economists have in fact suggested the existence of rigid structures within the labour market, but ones produced by familiar non-competitive forces. Indeed as we shall see in the next chapter, although the internal labour market has only really developed within the last hundred years, the importance of 'non-competitive' groups in structuring wage differentials has been recognized for a great deal longer. Nevertheless, even if their model is something of a chimera concocted from the parts of well known non-competitive beasts, we should not dismiss the SLM economists and their writings. The SLM models have served a useful function in highlighting the importance of these non-competitive forces in the labour market. Further the emphasis placed on the individual by many SLM economists, on how he is restricted and influenced by the institutional structures of the modern labour market, and on the importance of 'feedback' in trapping individuals in bad jobs has been most valuable. Equally the work carried out by SLM economists on the role of technology and management techniques in shaping job structures, and on theories of job competition have added depth to our comprehension of the workings of the modern labour market.

In terms of the aims of this thesis, the modern labour economic literature presents two clearly contrasting sets of ideas on market structure. The object of Chapter 4 will be to assess how valuable the ideas of the SLM school of economists, and the concept of a secondary sector, are to the understanding of the casual labour market in late Victorian and Edwardian London. However, before considering this question, in the next chapter I will first explore both the nature of explanations for wage differentials employed by the classical economists and, further, how far the current dichotomy within labour economists between SLM and neoclassical paradigms of explanation was present within that earlier literature.

Chapter 3

Wage Differentials and the Classical Economists

3.1 Introduction

Although the writings of Adam Smith were referred to in the first chapter as the foundation of modern neo-classical theoretical explanations for wage differentials, no attempt was made to analyse the contribution they made. The primary objective of this chapter will be to explore Smith's ideas in greater detail, and review the subsequent evolution of theoretical explanations for wage differentials up to the close of the nineteenth century. Besides the intrinsic value of such an exercise, it is hoped that such a review will also provide a useful backdrop for the subsequent consideration of various aspects of the labour market in the nineteenth century, and indeed, suggest which aspects of that market might be worth considering. In addition, it is to be hoped that the review will permit us to reach some conclusion as to how far the SLM/neoclassical debate, discussed in the last chapter, was anticipated in the economic literature of the nineteenth century. We might very broadly describe this as the period dominated by the so-called classical school of economics, and therefore label the economists whose work we shall touch upon the classical economists, especially as particular attention will be devoted to the ideas of J.S. Mill and Alfred Marshall, both of whom Keynes mentioned by name when offering a definition of the term.¹

This chapter is solely concerned with explanations for wage differentials. No attempt will be made to explore the wider ramifications of labour economics over this considerable period, and for that reason no direct reference will be made to the 'wages fund theory', the origins and evolution of the concept of 'marginal utility', or indeed to any other literature or theory concerned with the absolute level of wages rather than differentials.² Similarly, no attempt will be made in this chapter to cover the literature produced in increasing quantities towards the close of the century by social commentators and historians, such as Sydney and Beatrice Webb, and Charles Booth, dealing in a more practical,

¹Keynes in fact defined 'classical economists', a term first used by Marx, as the 'followers of Ricardo, those who adopted and perfected the theory of Ricardian Economics.' Keynes JM, 1936, *The general theory of employment, interest and money*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, New York. p.3.

²For a useful over-view of these other topics, see MacNulty PJ, 1980, *The origins and developments of labour economics*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London.

narrative fashion with topics such as working conditions, wage rates, living standards and trade unionism. The effects of trade unionism on wage rates were considered by the classical economists, most commonly in terms of the concept of 'indeterminacy'.³ However, this treatment was generally marginal to their analysis of wage differentials and will not be discussed here.⁴

Traditionally the classical economists have been depicted as having been preoccupied with 'logic' and 'economic theory' to the exclusion of the reality with which this second body of literature deals in depth.⁵ However, whilst acknowledging the greater detail and quantity of the literature produced by non-economists on trade-unionism and various other topics, another goal of this chapter will be to demonstrate that, at least with regard to their treatment of wage differentials, the classical economists were in fact rather less removed from contemporary reality than has commonly been supposed, and indeed, that observation of this reality was a major source of developments in their treatment of wage differentials.

3.2 Human Capital and the Classical Economists

Within the substantial body of literature devoted to the study of the classical economists only a fraction has concerned itself with their treatment of wage differentials. Only one article out of one hundred and fifty contained in a four volume collection of articles concerned with Adam Smith, for example, addressed this aspect of his work.⁶ Even within the literature that does exist the almost universal subject matter has been the single question of how far Smith and his successors developed a, or the, theory of human capital.⁷ The dispute largely revolves around the definition given to the term human capital, something which the authors of the pieces rarely state explicitly, rather than over any disagreement about what it was exactly that the economists said. We might usefully begin our review by looking at that debate, and in particular at

³There is no longer competition among men and among employers ... The existence of combinations in trade disputes usually reduces them to a single contract bargain of some indeterminate kind.' Jevons WS, 1882, *The State in relation to labour*, Macmillan, London, p.155.

⁴For an introduction to this literature, see MacNulty PJ, 1980, *The origins and developments of labour economics*. pp.80-85.

⁵See, for example, *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁶Wood JC, (ed) 1984, *Adam Smith: critical assessments*. Croom Helm, London.

⁷See for example, Spengler JJ, 1977, 'Adam Smith on human capital.' *American Economic Review* 67 pp.32-36; Kiker BF, 1968, *Human capital: in retrospect*. Essays in Economics No.16, Bureau of Business and Economic Research, College of Business Administration, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Blaug M, 1986(b) 'The economics of education in English classical political economy: a re-examination.' in Blaug M, 1986(a), *Economic history and the history of economics*. Wheatsheaf Books, Brighton. pp.150-183.

two articles, one by Kiker and the other by Blaug, which represent the poles in the debate.

Kiker regards as evidence of the development of a theory of human capital that economists included in their calculations of a nation's wealth the cost of rearing its population, the proportion of its income attributable to the efforts of the population as distinct from that portion attributable to land, machinery etc., or the costs incurred in the acquisition of the skills and abilities of its population. Taking such a broad definition the roots of the theory of human capital can be traced back at least as far as the writings of the English mercantilist Sir William Petty. To Petty labour was 'the Father and active principle of wealth', and consequently he not only included it in his calculations of the nation's wealth, but speculated upon the monetary losses consequent upon war and death, and the economic effects of migration and labour mobility.⁸ By the close of the nineteenth century such calculations had become fairly sophisticated. In his article entitled 'The Living Capital Of The United Kingdom', published in 1891, J.S.Nicholson estimated that the 'living capital' of the United Kingdom - that is to say the capital 'fixed and embodied in the people', was worth £47,000 millions, whilst the 'dead capital', that made up of 'lands, houses, machinery and the like', was worth only £10,000 millions.⁹ However Nicholson's wide ranging definition of human capital was not one accepted by the majority of classical economists.

Neither Adam Smith nor J.S.Mill defined human beings as capital, but both included acquired skills and abilities in such a definition. As far as Mill was concerned a human being was the purpose for which wealth existed, and not wealth itself.

But his acquired capacities, which exist only as means, and have been called into existence by labour, fall rightly it seems to me within that designation.¹⁰

It is in the ruminations upon the subject of these acquired abilities that Smith, Mill, and the many other classical economists who addressed the subject came closest to the heart of the modern theory of human capital. Smith clearly

⁸Kiker, 1968, *ibid.*, pp. 1-5.

⁹Nicholson JS, 1891, p.105 'The living capital of the United Kingdom.' *Economics Journal* 1 pp.95-107.

¹⁰Mill JS, 1965, (1848), *Principles of political economy: with some of their applications to social philosophy.* edited by JM Robson, 1965, University of Toronto Press, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Canada. p.48.

realized that the 'real expense' involved in acquiring a skill or ability was a 'capital fixed and realized' in the acquirer:

Those talents, as they make a part of his fortune, so do they likewise of that of the society to which he belongs. The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or instrument of trade which, facilitates and abridges labour, and which, though it costs a certain expense repays that expense with profit.¹¹

when any expensive machine is erected, the extraordinary work to be performed by it before it is worn out, it must be expected, will replace the capital laid out upon it, with at least the ordinary profits. A man educated at the expense of much labour and time to any of those employments which require extraordinary dexterity and skill, may be compared to one of those expensive machines. The work which he learns to perform, it must be expected, over and above the usual wages of common labour, will replace to him the whole expense of his education, with at least the ordinary profits of an equally valuable capital.¹²

Such statements were reproduced in almost every major tract written by classical economists, only the details generally varying. However Smith went further than this, stating on the first page of the introduction to the first edition of the 'Wealth of Nations' that the prosperity of a nation depended upon 'the degree of skill, dexterity, and judgement with which labour is generally applied in it'.¹³ This statement was supported by his later comment that one of only two ways in which the annual produce of the land and labour of any society could be augmented was by the 'improvement in the productive powers of the useful labour', something relying on either an improvement in machinery with which it worked, or an 'improvement in the ability of the workmen'.¹⁴ However, it should be noted that, as with many other subjects, Smith was not entirely consistent in his treatment of this matter; elsewhere in 'Wealth of Nations' he asserted that it was only as a 'consequence either of some addition and improvement to those machines and instruments which facilitate and abridge labour; or of a more proper division and distribution of employment', that the productive powers of the same number of workmen could be increased.¹⁵ Writing in an age when mechanical innovation was beginning to transform levels of productivity, it is perhaps not surprising that Smith should seem to emphasize the importance of

¹¹Smith A, 1961 (1776). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Edited by E Cannan, 1961. University Paperbacks. Methuen. London. Vol. I. p.298.

¹²ibid., pp.113-114.

¹³ibid., p.1.

¹⁴ibid., Vol. II. p.197.

¹⁵ibid., Vol.I. pp.364-5.

improvements in machinery as sources of increased productivity, ahead of improvements in the 'skill and dexterity' of the workforce.

Nevertheless, assertions of the importance of 'skill and knowledge' possessed by a population in determining the productivity of a country, can be found throughout the classical literature, and not least in the work of another central figure of that school of economists, John Stuart Mill. Mill not only recognized the importance of 'skill and dexterity', but went further and specifically mentioned the value of the general level of intelligence of the population in determining national productivity.

That the productiveness of the labour of a people is limited by their knowledge of the arts of life, is self-evident; ... A thing not as yet, perhaps, so well understood and recognized, is the economical value of the general diffusion of intelligence among the people... The deficiency of practical good sense, which renders the majority of the labouring class, in this and many other countries, such bad calculators... must disqualify them from any but a low grade of intelligent labour, and render their industry far less productive than with equal energy it otherwise might be.¹⁶

Nassau Senior, who judged the study of wages 'the most important of all branches of political economy',¹⁷ and probably devoted more time to the subject than any other classical economist, was equally forthright in asserting the importance of what he termed 'personal capital, or, in other words education', in determining a nation's revenue. In Senior's opinion the wealth of a country depended more on the 'quantity and diffusion of that immaterial capital' than on any consideration of the existing material capital or 'accidents of soil or climate'.¹⁸

From such statements it would seem an unavoidable step to proceed to outline the advantages to be reaped by society from investing in the education of the workforce, yet Smith, Senior and Mill, and indeed all the classical economists, fail to make such a statement. It is undoubtedly because of this failure to follow through the train of thought and directly and explicitly draw a connection between education and economic growth that Blaug feels justified in stating that the theory of human capital remained 'more or less in the embryonic form', only 'a suggestion of a theory rather than a theory properly so-called'

¹⁶Mill JS, 1965, (1848), *Principles of political economy*. pp.106-107.

¹⁷Senior NW, 1930, *Three lectures on the rate of wages*. John Murray, London. p.iii.

¹⁸Senior NW, 1938 (1836), *An outline of the science of political economy*. Library of Economics Reprint, London. pp.134-135.

throughout the period of dominance of the classical school of economics.¹⁹ The connection between education and economic growth lies at the heart of the modern human capital theory, and provides the foundation for innumerable policy decisions. Yet the classical economists found little place for mass education as a strictly economic investment.²⁰ This is not to say that they didn't approve of 'mass education' as such. Mill in particular was quite outspoken in his support of the principle of universal and compulsory education, and particularly in his famous essay on 'Liberty'.

Is it not almost a self-evident axiom, that the state should require and compel the education, up to a certain standard, of every human being who is born its citizen? ...if the parent does not fulfil this obligation, the state ought to see it fulfilled, at the charge as far as possible, of the parent.²¹

Mill was not here advocating government support for education as such, only insisting that every child should be educated, and that where private means failed government was justified in intervening to compel or insure that this goal was reached.²² To many of Mill's contemporaries even the partial support he gave to the idea that the State should concern itself with such matters was anathema.²³ Nevertheless, even Herbert Spencer, one of Mill's critics on the point, was willing to admit that there was one 'excuse' for attempts to spread education by 'artificial means': 'namely, the anxiety to diminish crime, of which education is supposed to be a preventative'.²⁴

It was in such presumed social benefits of educating the working classes, and not in any direct economic ones, that the classical economists saw the value of promoting mass education; the emphasis was always on the higher level of morals and greater control that an educated population would show, on the value of education in the creation of better citizens rather than better workers. So strong was the support for this line of thinking, that even the archly

¹⁹Blaug M, 1986(b), 'The economics of education.' p.160.

²⁰Blitz RC, 1968, p.167. 'Some classical economists and their views on education.' in Bowman MJ, (ed) 1968, *Readings in the economics of education*. UNESCO, London.

²¹Mill JS, 1975, (1859), *Three essays including 'On liberty'*. Oxford University Press, London. p.129.

²²The objections which are urged with reason against State education, do not apply to the enforcement of education by the State, but to the State's taking upon itself to direct that education: which is a totally different thing.' *ibid.*, pp.129-130.

²³See, for example, the comments of Spencer H, 1851, *Social statistics: or the conditions essential to human happiness specified, and the first of them developed*. John Chapman, London. p.336.

²⁴*ibid.*, p.346.

laissez faire Whig politician, orator and historian, T.B. Macaulay was willing to sanction limited government intervention. In what, paradoxically, might have been an anthem for those supporting state intervention to ensure the universal provision of education, Macaulay told an assembly in Edinburgh that 'whoever has the right to hang has the right to educate.'²⁵

The tone for the treatment of the value of educating the poor adopted by all the classical economists can, in fact, be traced back to some comments made by Smith in the *Wealth of Nations*.

The more they are instructed, the less liable they are to delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people besides are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one... They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government.²⁶

Interestingly Smith seems to have believed that one major factor destabilizing the 'intellectual social and marital values' of the labouring poor, and by so doing creating a need for 'antidotes' such as publicly subsidized education for the masses, was the division of labour.²⁷

The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations... has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding expedients for removing difficulties which never occur... The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgement concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life.²⁸

To Blaug the failure of the classical economists to mention or stress the direct economic rather than social benefits to be derived from the education of

²⁵Quoted in Spencer, *ibid.*, p.346.

²⁶Smith A, 1961 (1776), *Wealth of nations*. Vol.II, p.309. For broadly similar arguments concerning the value of educating the working classes advanced by Mill, see Mill JS, 1965, (1848), *Principles of political economy*. pp.374-375, pp.763-765.

²⁷West EG, 1975, p.540 'Adam Smith and alienation: wealth increases, men decay?' in Skinner AS and Wilson T (eds) 1975, *Essays on Adam Smith*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. pp.540-552.

²⁸Smith A, 1961 (1776), *Wealth of nations*. Vol.II, pp.302-303. As with his comments on the sources of increased productivity Smith is not entirely consistent in his attitude towards the consequences of the division of labour on the character of the workforce, having suggested that without it workmen were 'slothful and lazy'. For a review of the debate concerning Smith's handling of this question, see McNulty PJ, 1980, *Origins and developments of labour economics*. pp.56-59.

the poor, stands as an insurmountable obstacle to any recognition of their having done anything more than 'open the door' to Becker's 'Human Capital', which he credits with having laid the foundations of the subject.²⁹ Certainly Blaug's case is a strong one, apparently supported not least by Smith's classification of 'lawyers, physicians, (and) men of letters of all kinds' as 'unproductive' labour.³⁰ To anyone attempting to prove the recognition of an investment motive for education the classical economists' texts make frustrating reading. Indeed Senior actually seems to dismiss the idea, stating that the obtaining of 'future profit' was not the principal reason why the son of a gentleman was willing to labour at his education, or his parents bear the expense.³¹

The boy works under the stimulus of immediate praise or immediate punishment. It never occurs to the father that it would be cheaper to have his child reared in the country at 2s. a-week till he is eight years old, and then removed to a farm-yard or cotton-mill; and that in giving him a more expensive education he is engaging in a speculation that is likely to be unprofitable. To witness a son's daily improvement is, with all well disposed men, or rather with all men, except a few outcasts, one of the greatest sources of immediate gratification. The expense incurred for this purpose is as much repaid by immediate enjoyment as that which is incurred to obtain the most transitory pleasures. It is true that a further object may also be obtained, but the immediate motive is ample.³²

Yet Senior, as with so many of the classical economists clearly did perceive certain types of education as capital, indeed, and unlike Smith, he advised that the surplus income of skilled workers over the unskilled should be treated as 'profit on a capital' rather than as wages.³³

How can the central paradox to the debate, the explicit recognition by Smith and the other classical economists that wage differentials were in part a reward for past abstinence on the part of skilled workers or their families, and yet their failure to recommend mass education as a valuable economic investment, be reconciled? A solution may well lie with the nature of both the education that the reformers were suggesting should be provided, and the nature of the labour market at the time at which the classical economists were writing. The education mooted by various religious bodies and activists was always of a fairly rudimentary nature, generally combining reading, writing and arithmetic with a

²⁹Blaug M, 1986(b), 'The economics of education.' p.155.

³⁰Smith A, 1961 (1776), *Wealth of nations*. Vol.I, p.352.

³¹Senior NW, 1938 (1836), *Outline of the science of political economy*. p.205.

³²ibid., pp.205-6.

³³ibid., p.204.

little religion. What value could this kind of subject matter have to the masses of the working classes? It should be remembered that only a tiny fraction of the workforce found employment in clerical positions, the bulk relying rather on unskilled or semi-skilled manual labour. The mass of skills employed in this manual labour were best acquired whilst at work, and with the exception of the more skilled trades where apprenticeship prevailed, were quickly learnt. Set in this context it is perhaps easy to see why the classical economists writing in the first half of the nineteenth century should have failed to see any great direct economic advantage to be gained from the provision of education to the poor. The working classes had shown themselves perfectly capable of fulfilling the requirements made of them by employers; indeed on the quality of their largely uneducated labour Britain had risen to a position of industrial dominance. Where then was the need for more education?

For evidence that education for the class did produce benefits the most obvious model could be found in the contrast between Scotland with its long history of greater educational provision, and England. What this contrast would have, and indeed did reveal to the classical economists was not a contrast in the economic success of the two regions, but one in terms of the 'law-abiding Scots and unruly English'.³⁴ The classical economists thus saw the investment of time and effort by an individual in the acquisition of a skill as an investment that would yield a reward. However they saw the investment of the nation in the education of the poor, or in the case of Senior in the classical education of a gentleman's son, as primarily the 'consumption' rather than the creation of wealth. In the context in which he wrote, where the few skilled occupations were learnt by apprenticeship, it made sense for Smith to class teachers as 'unproductive'; the ability of the spinner to recite passages of the bible verbatim, or compose a rudimentary letter, added little to his ability as a spinner.

Indeed, although the rudimentary skills taught in elementary education are now essential to a predominantly non-manual workforce, formal education remains to a significant degree purely a consumption of wealth. If we think of Blackburn and Mann's conclusion, on the basis of an extensive study of manual labour in the 1970s, that the vast majority of manual workers' employments involved less skill than driving to work,³⁵ the relevance of formal education for the masses as a direct economic investment might still be questioned. It is certainly understandable that it was only into the second half of the nineteenth

³⁴Blaug M, 1986(b), 'The economics of education.' p.157.

³⁵Blackburn RM and Mann M, 1979, *The working class in the labour market*. Macmillan London. p.280.

century that universal elementary education began to be seen as important to the better performance of the nation's economy.

A single quotation from Mill's 'Principles of Political Economy' published in 1848 should dispel all doubt that the concept of investing in human capital to reap future rewards, the concept which surely lies at the heart of the neoclassical theory of wage differentials, had been most securely grasped by the classical economists.

..the technical or industrial education of the community; the labour employed in learning and in teaching the arts of production, in acquiring and communicating skill in those arts; this labour is really, and in general, solely undergone for the sake of the greater or more valuable produce thereby attained, and in order that a remuneration, equivalent or more than equivalent, may be reaped by the learner, besides an adequate remuneration for the labour of the teacher, when a teacher has been employed.³⁶

3.3 Cantillon, Adam Smith and Wage Differentials

Too often the tenth chapter of Smith's 'Wealth of Nations' is treated as if it were the first word written on the subject of wage differentials. In fact although the subject never commanded the degree of attention that had been devoted to the study of currency or taxation, it had always been the subject of some interesting observations. With regard to the five principles, Smith should be seen as the most eloquent and persuasive exponent of those principles rather than as their inventor. Amongst the most important antecedents to Smith's handling of wage differentials was an essay published in 1755 under the name of Philip Cantillon.

The details of Cantillon's life remain clouded in mystery. Born in Ireland, he made a fortune as a merchant in France, only to be murdered in London in 1734, supposedly by a cook he had dismissed.³⁷ The essay, which is the sole work ascribed to Cantillon, was published posthumously, initially in France in 1755 and subsequently in London in 1799. Thus whilst the book pre-dated Smith's *Wealth of Nations* by only twenty-one years, the death of the author and therefore the conception of the book pre-dated it by at least another twenty-one years. Despite its author's death, Cantillon's 'Essay' appears to have been widely read throughout Europe³⁸, and indeed, some of Cantillon's ideas were

³⁶Mill JS, 1965, (1848), *Principles of political economy*. p.41.

³⁷Spiegel HW, 1983, *The growth of economic thought*. Second Edition. Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina. p.177.

³⁸Higgs H, 1891, 'Richard Cantillon.' *Economic Journal* 1 pp.262-291.

cited and discussed by Smith in 'The wealth of Nations'.³⁹ Bearing this in mind, anyone reading both the portions of Cantillon's 'Essay' dealing with wage differentials and Smith's tenth chapter must acknowledge a marked similarity in the treatments of the subject. A brief selection of quotations from the 'Essay' will be sufficient to illustrate the strength of Cantillon's claim to recognition as having provided the foundations for Smith's more famous treatment of wage differentials.

.... the Handicrafts-Man ought, and in fact does earn more than the Country Ploughman and Labourer: Money and Time must be had to learn a Trade..... Trades which require more Ingenuity and Time in attaining, earn in proportion more wages.⁴⁰

.... that Labour which is attended with great Risk, such as Mariners, Bell-Founders, Powder-Makers, Miners, ought to earn more than other Labourers; and in like manner those Professions, when Ingenuity, Genius, Science, and Parts are necessary, have a right to a proportionable Reward; as also such Persons of Education, where Trust and Confidence must be reposed, such as Lawyers and Accountants.⁴¹

The great contribution of Smith lay not in defining the five principles, but in the theory of 'balancing advantages'. Cantillon believed that if there was an excess of educated people the consequence was not that the wages of those occupations which required education would fall, but that some of the educated people would have to 'leave'.⁴² Cantillon's analysis was a thing rooted in the past, in societies with fixed numbers of openings where pay from an occupation was established by custom rather than market forces. Smith's model was one designed to allow for flexibility, one that looked forward rather than backwards. Where Cantillon believed sailors earned more than common labourers because they 'ought to', Smith stated that they would because only by paying people more could they be persuaded to follow the more risky trade.

After the publication of Smith's 'Wealth of Nations', the tenth chapter of the first book, that in which Smith outlined his theory of wage differentials, was quoted heavily by almost all economists writing upon the subject. Often, as in

³⁹Smith A, 1961 (1776), *Wealth of nations*. p.76.

⁴⁰Cantillon P, 1759, *The analysis of trade, commerce, coin, bullion, banks and foreign exchanges. Wherein, the true principles of this useful knowledge are fully but briefly laid down and explained, to give a clear idea of their happy consequences to society, when well regulated.* Printed by the author, London. pp.16-17.

⁴¹ibid., p.19.

⁴²ibid., pp.20-21.

the cases of McCulloch,⁴³ Senior,⁴⁴ and to a significant degree Mill,⁴⁵ the five principles or counter-balancing circumstances, and Smith's illustrations of their operation, were recounted almost verbatim. However, these later authors' presentations of Smith's work on wage differentials, by the overriding emphasis they gave to his five principles, tended to give the impression that the principles contained all that Smith had to say on the subject, an impression which could only be gained from the most shallow reading of his text. Interestingly, Smith emphasized that the five circumstances would counter-balance the pecuniary gains of occupations only where there existed 'perfect freedom', and even then only as long as three other conditions pertained. Indeed, two-thirds of the much quoted tenth chapter are devoted to a consideration of factors other than the five circumstances, factors which Smith saw as crucially important in accounting for wage differentials.

The three factors, or conditions which Smith held to be necessary for equality in the advantages of different employments, even when there was the 'most perfect freedom' were:

First, the employments must be well known and long established in the neighbourhood; secondly, they must be in their ordinary, or what may be called their natural state; and, thirdly, they must be the sole or principal employments of those who occupy them.⁴⁶

In discussing the first of the three 'requisite' conditions, Smith argued that wages tended to be higher in newer trades, as a 'projector' attempting to establish a 'new manufacture' would have to offer higher wages than those offered for similar work in older trades in order to entice workmen from their existing employments. As an example of the operation of this principle, Smith pointed to the fact that higher wages were offered to labour in Birmingham than were offered in Sheffield. This was the result, he suggested, of the former's predominance in the manufacture of goods 'for which the demand arises altogether from fashion and fancy', a market whose structure dictated that demand for any particular product seldom lasted long enough to enable a manufacture to become established. One could argue that in the example Smith provided, he is confusing the operation of some of his earlier principles for a new factor. The higher wages of the Birmingham operatives could have

⁴³McCulloch JR, 1825, *The principles of political economy: with a sketch of the role and progress of the science*. Edinburgh.

⁴⁴Senior NW, 1836, *Outline of the science of political economy*.

⁴⁵Mill JS, 1965 (1848), *Principles of political economy*.

⁴⁶Smith A, 1961 (1776), *Wealth of nations*. pp.127-128.

reflected simply the irregularity of their employment, an irregularity born of the volatile nature of the markets they produced for. However the observation that the wages offered in a trade tended to fall as it became more established is a valuable one.

Broadly, the second of Smith's three conditions necessary for equality of advantages between employments, that which stated that such equality could only take place in the 'ordinary' or 'natural' state of employments, was designed to cover the fluctuations in an employment's earnings which reflected short-run shifts in the demand for any 'species of labour'. Smith argued that in the case of a peculiarly high level of demand, such as that for agricultural labour at hay-time, the net advantages of the employment could rise above the common level. However in addition to noting the effects of essentially ephemeral, perhaps seasonal fluctuations in demand, Smith made an important observation upon the consequences of permanent decline in the demand for a trade's produce.

In a decaying manufacture.. many workmen, rather than quit their old trade, are contented with smaller wages than would otherwise be suitable to the nature of their employment.⁴⁷

The final condition which Smith believed had to hold in order to allow equality of advantages between employments, was that the employments must be the sole or principal employments of those who occupy them. As an example of the willingness of people to accept lower returns from an employment when it was not their chief employment, Smith pointed to the stocking knitters of Scotland, and in particular Shetland. The Scottish knitters in many parts produced the stockings more cheaply than they could anywhere be produced on a loom. They were able to produce the product so cheaply because they derived the principal part of their 'subsistence' from other work, usually as either servants or labourers.

We can now move onto consider what Smith termed the inequalities in the whole of the advantages and disadvantages of different occupations 'occasioned by the policy of Europe', inequalities which he held to be of much greater importance than those engendered by the defect of any of the 'three requisites' outlined above. In short, Smith concluded that the policy of Europe, by which he meant the activities of government, by not leaving things at 'perfect liberty', occasioned inequalities in the advantages of employments in three ways:

⁴⁷ibid., pp.129.

First, by restraining the competition in some employments to a smaller number than would otherwise be disposed to enter into them; secondly, by increasing it in others beyond what it naturally would be; and, thirdly, by obstructing the free circulation of labour and stock, both from employment to employment and from place to place.⁴⁸

As an illustration of the third way in which the 'policy of Europe' obstructed the achievement of equality in the advantages of employments, and a means peculiar as far as he was aware to England, Smith pointed to the operation of the Poor Law. He believed that the Poor Law restricted the mobility of labour throughout the country, by making it extremely difficult for a poor man to obtain a 'settlement', or even permission to exercise his particular trade in any parish other than his own.

The very unequal price of labour which we frequently find in England in places at no distance from one another, is probably owing to the obstruction which the law of settlement gives to a poor man who would carry his industry from one parish to another without a certificate... The scarcity of hands in one parish, therefore, cannot always be relieved by their super-abundance in another, as it is constantly in Scotland, and, I believe, in all other countries where there is no difficulty of settlement.⁴⁹

However, although Smith believed the Poor Law system to be peculiar to England, he held that throughout Europe there existed systems of apprenticeship which obstructed the free circulation of labour from one employment to another, and privileges of corporations, which limited the movement of labour from place to place.⁵⁰ Whilst recognizing that in many employments the movement of individuals from one employment to another was restricted by the difference in the skills employed, he argued that this was often far from being the case.

In many different manufactures, however, the operations are so much alike, that the workmen could easily change trades with one another, if those absurd laws did not hinder them. The arts of weaving plain linen and plain silk, for example, are almost entirely the same. That of weaving plain woollen is somewhat different; but the difference is so insignificant, that either a linen or a silk weaver might become a tolerable workman in a very few days.⁵¹

Smith suggested that the consequences of the restrictive apprenticeship systems, and privileged corporations, were that it was common for workmen in

⁴⁸ibid., p.132.

⁴⁹ibid., p.157.

⁵⁰ibid., p.150.

⁵¹ibid., pp.150-151.

one manufacture to receive high wages whilst those in another had to accept wages commensurate only with 'bare subsistence'.⁵²

As an example of a class of employment where the level of remuneration had been reduced by the 'unnatural' level of competition, Smith pointed to the clergy. Smith noted that the public, and occasionally private individuals, believing certain professions to be particularly important, had established many benefits, such as scholarships, bursaries and exhibitions, with the aim of ensuring that enough young people entered the professions concerned; Smith believed that these benefits had in fact encouraged more people to enter the professions than would otherwise have done so. In considering the many scholarships and other forms of subsidy offered for the education of churchmen, Smith made a particularly important observation.

Very few of them are educated entirely at their own expense. The long, tedious, and expensive education, therefore, of those who are, will not always procure them a suitable reward, the church being crowded with people who, in order to get employment, are willing to accept of a much smaller recompense than what such an education would otherwise have entitled them to; and in this manner the competition of the poor takes away the reward of the rich.⁵³

Here we find Smith acknowledging that it was only through the availability of scholarships that the poor were enabled to compete with the rich in a profession. However, the ability of the expense of education or training to restrict entry into an occupation, and its effects upon wages, is more directly observed by Smith in his treatment of the ways in which the policy of Europe restricted entry to certain employments.

Smith believed that the principal method by which competition for employment was restricted was through the giving of exclusive privileges to corporations. Within the towns where the corporations were established, access to the trade was restricted by established regulations or bye-laws. Among other things, these regulations usually required that anyone entering a trade should serve a long apprenticeship, and restricted the number of apprentices any master might have at any one time. Whilst noting the efficacy of the limitation of the number of apprentices a master could have, as a method of limiting the competition within a trade to a smaller number of individuals than might otherwise be the case, Smith suggested that a 'long term of apprenticeship restrains it more indirectly, but as effectually, by increasing the expense of

⁵²ibid., p.150.

⁵³ibid., p.145.

education'.⁵⁴ So here again Smith is recognizing that, no matter what the rewards offered by an employment, the cost of training or education required to enter the employment were extremely important in determining the number of people capable of entering it. However, Smith never developed this point or made any deep inquiry into its consequences. The first man to take such ideas and observations, pursue their consequences further, and encompass them within a model of the labour market was John Stuart Mill; and in so doing he produced the first clear suggestion of systematic segmentation within the market.

However, before commenting on Mill's analysis of wage differentials, some mention must be made of David Ricardo, arguably the most influential of all the economists of the first half of the nineteenth century. Besides its significance in other respects, Ricardo's 'Principles' (1817), written at the behest of James Mill after the author's retirement from his successful career as a stockbroker, has been accorded a uniquely important place in the evolution of the methodology of economics. Although himself a practical man, Ricardo had no great interest in the empirical study of economics and instead of producing, as Smith had done in the 'Wealth of Nations', an amalgam of theory and practical observation, Ricardo based his analysis on pure logic.⁵⁵ Where Smith had devoted a great deal of time to the consideration of political and institutional interference in markets, Ricardo was interested only in the construction of a rigorously logical model of the 'laws' of distribution, within which competition was the sole determinant of prices and wages. It has been commonly suggested that it was the approach of the essentially amateur economist Ricardo that was to dominate the methodology of academic economics for the rest of the century.

..... classical economics after Ricardo became increasingly abstract and rigorously logical. Nineteenth-century economics was to be Ricardian economics in this respect, and Ricardo's economics was altogether economic theory.⁵⁶

However, this traditional interpretation of Ricardo's impact on the methodology of the classical economists is worthy of closer examination. Although Ricardian economics may have been popularly depicted as having

⁵⁴ibid., p.133.

⁵⁵Baumol WJ and Blinder AS, 1979, *Economics: principles and policy*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, New York. p.716.

⁵⁶MacNulty PJ, 1980, *Origins and developments of labour economics*. p.64.

evolved in a state of 'complete factual ignorance',⁵⁷ we will find that a central thread running through the development of theory concerning wage differentials in the classical literature, was the testing of theory against observed reality; the classical economists may have seen economics as a 'deductive science', but it was one based not only on logic but also on experience. This methodological point was made explicitly by Mill, who in his 'On the Definition of Political Economy' argued for the verification of theory by comparing predicted results with those 'actually realized':

The discrepancy between our anticipations and the actual fact is often the only circumstance which would have drawn our attention to some important disturbing cause which we have overlooked.⁵⁸

No one who attempts to lay down propositions for the guidance of mankind, however perfect his scientific acquirements, can dispense with practical knowledge of the actual modes in which the affairs of the world are carried on, and an extensive personal experience of the actual ideas, feelings, and intellectual and moral tendencies in his own country and of his own age.⁵⁹

3.4 Mill: The Theory of 'Non-Competing Groups'

Although in many ways highly influential, Ricardo does not appear to have made any direct contribution to the analysis of wage differentials; the pattern for the handling of the subject remained Smith's five balancing principles. Before we consider Mill's challenge to that orthodoxy, it is perhaps worth mentioning an earlier refinement to Smith's concept, one elucidated by Mountfort Longfield in the course of a lecture given at Trinity College Dublin in 1833. Longfield simply observed that it might be questioned whether, where one trade was more advantageous than another it would always result, as Smith had said it should, in a movement of people from the later into the former. What would happen, he asked, if the trades were filled by persons from 'a different rank or situation in life'.

Increased profits of bricklayers, or the diminished gains of barristers, will not induce any person to become a bricklayer who would otherwise have become a barrister. Neither will the diminished profits of the bricklayer, or the increased gains of barristers, enable a man who would

⁵⁷Blaug M, 1986(c) (1958), p.91. 'The classical economists and the Factory Acts: a re-examination.' *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Reprinted in Blaug M, 1986(a), *Economic history or the history of economics*.

⁵⁸Mill, 1965 (1836), *Principles of political economy*. p.332.

⁵⁹ibid, (1844), pp.333.

otherwise become a bricklayer to pursue the profession of the bar, and by competition reduce the gains of the profession to their proper level.⁶⁰

Longfield argued that the due proportions between the gains of such distinct professions would be preserved not by direct contact but by means of the intermediate professions, in the process depicting the labour market as a hierarchical and stratified one.

The effects of competition will reduce or raise the advantages of the trade of the bricklayer to the level of other employments which are filled by the same class of persons. It will moreover exert an immediate influence over the trades of a rank one degree higher, that is, in those trades that require a somewhat more tedious or expensive education, and therefore on average receive higher emoluments, and are filled by a wealthier class of persons. For there are always some who would be influenced in the choice of trades approaching each other in expenses and emoluments, by slight additional circumstances of relative advantages or disadvantages in either.⁶¹

Longfield clearly regarded this process of the equalisation of advantages between trades in contiguous ranks as fairly smooth, and added that it was by this means 'mounting step by step' that even the most 'distant professions' would preserve the 'natural proportion between their emoluments.'⁶² Thus although Longfield recognized a certain structuring in society, and that movements between distant ranks was unlikely, he basically left Smith's analysis unaltered. Mill was to take the question of the ranking of trades far further, and in the process fundamentally challenge Smith's analysis.

As we have noted, a key concept in Smith's theory of wage differentials was that differences in remuneration between different employments counter-balanced the different degrees of attractiveness of the employments, and so balanced the net advantages. Indeed Smith's first principle could hardly be clearer, and on first reading seems entirely reasonable.

The wages of labour vary with the ease or hardship, the cleanliness or dirtiness, the honourableness or dishonourableness of the employment... The most detestable of all employments, that of public executioner, is, in proportion to the quantity of work done, better paid than any common trade whatever.⁶³

⁶⁰Longfield M, 1834, *Lectures on political economy*. Delivered in Trinity and Michaelmas terms, 1833. William Curry, Dublin. p.84.

⁶¹ibid.

⁶²ibid., p.85.

⁶³Smith A, 1961 (1776), *Wealth of nations*. pp.112-113.

The principle appears reasonable, indeed obvious, because in looking at it one instinctively tends to contemplate its operation at the level of the individual; as an individual one would naturally demand a higher level of remuneration for undertaking an occupation less pleasant than the one currently undertaken. However, as soon as one looks for the operation of the principle at an aggregate scale, it becomes apparent that exactly the opposite conditions to those which the principle's operation would produce appear to be normal. Indeed so clearly is this the case, it seems remarkable that Mill in his 'Principles of Political Economy' was the first economist to really challenge the principle.⁶⁴ Mill observed that, far from offering the highest levels of remuneration, the hardest, most dirty, and least honourable employments invariably received the lowest.

...the inequalities of wages are generally in an opposite direction to the equitable principle of compensation erroneously represented by Adam Smith as the general law of the remuneration of labour. The hardships and the earnings, instead of being directly proportional, as in any just arrangement of society they would be, are generally in an inverse ratio to one another.⁶⁵

Further, Mill suggested that the explanations for this apparent paradox lay partly in the existence of natural or artificial monopolies, and partly in the excessive supply of labour to the market. A consequence of this excessive supply was that, whereas 'desirable' labourers, those whom employers were keen to employ, could still exercise a degree of choice, the 'undesirable' had to take whatever they could get.

The more revolting the occupation, the more certain it is to receive the minimum of remuneration, because it devolves on the most helpless and degraded, on those who from squalid poverty, or from want of skill and education, are rejected from all other employments... The really exhausting and the really repulsive labours, instead of being better paid than others, are almost invariably paid the worst of all, because performed by those who have no choice.⁶⁶

This suggestion of a class of workers unable to compete for any but the lowest forms of employment forms the basis of the theory of 'non-competing groups', a term first coined by Cairnes (1874). We have already noted Longfield's observation of the inability of all classes to compete directly with one

⁶⁴Mill JS, 1965 (1848), *Principles of Political Economy*.

⁶⁵ibid., (1852), p.383.

⁶⁶ibid., p.383.

another, and we can perhaps find a brief earlier reference to a similar idea in a comment made by Nassau Senior.

As a general rule, we fear it must be admitted that the occupations open to those who are not possessed of capital differ only in the degree in which they are disagreeable.⁶⁷

However, despite such earlier comments, it is Mill who can be credited with the first systematic development of the idea of non-competing groups. It is important to recognize that this in no way means that Mill did not fundamentally believe in the role of competition in determining wage rates. Indeed although acknowledging 'custom' as a modifying circumstance, Mill argued that competition was the principal regulator of wages, and that the level of wages was essentially determined by the demand for and supply of labour.⁶⁸ Even where, for special reasons, custom did fix a wage rate, Mill argued that the wage could not long remain in force.

An increase or a falling off in the demand for labour, an increase or diminution of the labouring population, could hardly fail to engender a competition which would break down any custom respecting wages, by giving either to one side or the other a strong direct interest in infringing it.⁶⁹

Mill observed that entry into a skilled occupation entailed either direct costs, such as fees for a course of instruction, or indirect costs, such as the cost of maintaining the trainee over a perhaps not inconsiderable period of education. He argued that even where these costs were relatively small, they would prove great enough to exclude the bulk of the labouring people from competition. This point was perhaps most succinctly made by Henry Fawcett, who, whilst expanding upon Mill's observations, did not add significantly to them when he concluded that:

The difference in the wages of skilled and unskilled labour represents a large return to the capital which has been spent in the skilled workman's education. This must be so whilst so few of our workmen have either the foresight or the means to bring their children up to some skilled employment. Skilled workmen therefore possess, as it were, the advantages of monopoly.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Senior NW, 1938, (1836), *Outline of the science of political economy*. p.201.

⁶⁸Mill JS, 1965 (1848), *Principles of political economy*. p.337.

⁶⁹ibid.

⁷⁰Fawcett H, 1863, *Manual of political economy*. Macmillan, London. p.163.

As an illustration of how the costs of training for an occupation produced 'natural' monopolies, Mill pointed to the relative decline in the remuneration of posts requiring only a low level of education following the extension of this provision to the majority of the population.

Until lately, all employments which required even the humble education of reading and writing, could be recruited only from a select class, the majority having no opportunity of acquiring those attainments. All such employments, accordingly, were immensely overpaid, as measured by the ordinary remuneration of labour.⁷¹

However, he noted that the level of remuneration offered to people employed in such occupations was still higher than the principle of competition dictated.

A clerk from whom nothing is required but the mechanical labour of copying, gains more than an equivalent for his mere exertion if he receives the wages of a bricklayer's labourer. His work is not a tenth part as hard, it is quite as easy to learn, and his condition is less precarious, a clerk's place being generally a place for life.⁷²

Bearing this in mind, Mill argued that the higher rate of remuneration offered in such occupations was the result partly of a remaining element of monopoly, the small quantity of education required still being not as yet universal, and partly to the influence of the 'custom' which required that clerks should maintain 'the dress and appearance of a more highly paid class'.⁷³ Mill argued that for certain kinds of labour it was 'custom' rather than competition which determined wage-rates. He suggested, for example, that the fees or charges of professional persons, such as physicians or barristers, were established by custom. However, Mill further observed that competition did operate within such professions, but via the division of the available business rather than by fluctuations in the rate at which they were paid.⁷⁴

However, Mill noted a further way in which custom played a significant role within the labour market, and that was by restricting access to certain occupations to certain groups of people, groups generally defined by class or sex. With regard to the former it is fairly obvious that the class from which an individual came would have played an important part in determining his access to funds, and consequently his ability to enter occupations requiring either an

⁷¹Mill JS, 1965 (1848), *Principles of political economy*. p.386.

⁷²ibid., p.387.

⁷³ibid.

⁷⁴ibid., p.398.

education or training. Yet Mill, by drawing attention to examples of careers where the social class of the individual played a significant part in determining their career prospects, highlighted the distinction between these purely financial considerations and those concerned with rank or status. As an example of a class of occupations in which some attempt was made to confine employment to persons of a certain social rank, Mill cited the 'liberal professions', noting that a person from 'too low a class of society,' could not easily gain admittance to such professions, and even if admitted 'did not easily succeed'.⁷⁵

Importantly, Mill also used custom as an explanation of the low wages offered to women, a subject on which Smith was particularly reticent, but on which Mill made several interesting observations. He argued that where women were employed in the same occupation as men, were equally efficient, and yet still received unequal pay, the only explanation available was custom 'grounded either in a prejudice, or in the present constitution of society, which, making almost every woman, socially speaking, an appendage of some man, enables men to take systematically the lion's share of whatever belongs to both'.⁷⁶ In the case of those employments peculiar to women, Mill suggested that an explanation for the low wages offered, low when compared to those offered to males employed in occupations of equal disagreeableness, lay in another quarter, in the overstocking of the employments. Mill noted that the number of occupations which 'law and custom' made accessible to women were so few that, despite the fact that the number of women supporting themselves by wage-labour was far fewer than the number of men so doing, such employments remained overcrowded, the overcrowding forcing wages below those offered to men in 'male' employments.

In a section of his manuscript excluded from the final text, Mill makes a significant connection, a connection which Smith failed to make in outlining his principle that equality of net advantages of different employments could only take place where the employments were the principle employments of those occupied in them.

...the great majority of women, even of those who work for wages, have a legal claim upon a father, husband, or other male relative for subsistence. They fall therefore under the same principle which has been already illustrated in the case of domestic manufactures. Since it is not a condition of their continuing to work, that they should earn enough to

⁷⁵ibid., p.387.

⁷⁶ibid., p.395.

support them, their wages may sink to any rate, however low, for which they, or the men on whom they are dependent, may think it worth while that they work.⁷⁷

The extremely low wages offered to seamstresses, laundry-women, and the many other occupations which employed the army of female homeworkers of late nineteenth century London, can perhaps be partially explained by the overcrowding of these female occupations. Equally, however, the phenomenon no doubt owes something to those factors illuminated by Mill's other observations. For possibly the majority of the women, the activities were simply a means of supplementing a spouse's earnings, and not the sole means of supporting a family. The impact of competition from women 'subsidized' by the earnings of their husbands would be to drive wages in the trades which employed them well below a level capable of supporting a family, or even perhaps an individual, thus making the condition of those who were totally dependent on such trades desperate.

However, it is clear that Mill believed that the employment of women could have a diminishing effect upon the wages of men.⁷⁸ He believed that every class would multiply to the point at which it reached the income which 'the habits of the class' demanded, and he argued that the trades with the worst pay were generally those in which the wife of the artisan helped in his work. In these trades the income demanded to support the habits of the class was made up by the earnings of the whole family, whereas in others it had to be obtained by the labour of the man alone. Viewing the labour market at the aggregate scale, Mill argued that the effect of a labourer having a subsidiary employment was almost certainly to produce a proportional diminution of the wages of the main occupation.⁷⁹ Extending this argument to the local level, one could suggest that the impact of women taking up work might be to 'subsidize' their husbands, allowing employers to reduce the wages paid to the the male workforce.

Returning to Mill's ideas on the segmentation of the labour market, we can conclude that he went far beyond Longfield's questioning of the degree to which individuals could move across the labour market. Mill clearly viewed the operation of Smith's basic principles as being severely hampered by forces working to create rigidities in the labour market, and further believed that these

⁷⁷ibid., (MS), p.395.

⁷⁸ibid., (1848), p.396.

⁷⁹ibid., p.393.

rigidities even worked across the generations, restricting inter-generational movement. He observed that:

So complete, indeed, has hitherto been the separation, so strongly marked the line of demarcation, between different grades of labourers, as to be almost equivalent to an hereditary distinction of caste; each employment being chiefly recruited from the children of those already employed in it, or in employments of the same rank with it in social estimation, or from the children of persons who, if originally of a lower rank, have succeeded in raising themselves by their exertions.⁸⁰

In contemplating the structure of the contemporary labour market, Mill delineated four classes of labour or employments; the professions; higher skilled manual labour, a class of equal standing to the independent tradesman; lower skilled manual labour; and finally unskilled labour.⁸¹ Given the lack of movement between the classes, which he had detected, it followed, according to Mill, that the level of wages obtained by each class was determined by the population of the class.

If the wages of artizans remain so much higher than those of common labourers, it is because artizans are a more prudent class, and do not marry so early or so inconsiderately.⁸²

However, whilst believing that these deep divisions in the labour market prevented the operation of Smith's counter-balancing circumstances across the market as a whole, Mill argued that these circumstances did operate within the different grades of labour.

These inequalities of remuneration, which are supposed to compensate for the disagreeable circumstances of particular employments, would, under certain conditions, be natural consequences of perfectly free competition: and as between employments of about the same grade, and filled by nearly the same description of people, they are, no doubt, for the most part, realized in practise.⁸³

Although Mill is evidently suggesting the existence of what would now be termed a segmented labour market, he believed that this state of affairs was rapidly being changed by the relaxation of 'conventional barriers' and the increasingly widespread access to at least basic education. As he observed:

The changes, however, now so rapidly taking place in the usages and ideas, are undermining all these distinctions; the habits or disabilities

⁸⁰ibid., p.387.

⁸¹ibid., pp.387-388.

⁸²ibid., p.388.

⁸³ibid., (1852), p.383.

which chained people to their hereditary condition are fast wearing away, and every class is exposed to increased and increasing competition from at least the class immediately below it.⁸⁴

3.5 Vertical and Horizontal Divisions in the Market: Cairnes and Marshall

We are thus compelled to recognize the existence of non-competing industrial groups as a feature of our social economy.⁸⁵

That the process of change anticipated by Mill progressed at a slower pace than he had forecast is suggested by the comments of Cairnes, writing some thirty years after Mill. Cairnes is sometimes erroneously credited with having devised 'the' theory of 'non-competing' groups, a distinction which should surely fall to Mill. Nevertheless, as with Mill, Cairnes drew upon practical observation of the operation of the labour market to provide an important account of the structures within that market at the time he wrote. From such observations he concluded that it was impossible to ignore the existence of 'non-competing industrial groups' as a feature of the nation's 'social economy'.

What we find, in effect, is not a whole population competing indiscriminately for all occupations, but a series of industrial layers, superimposed on one another, within each of which the various candidates for employment possess a real and effective power of selection, while those occupying the several strata are, for all purposes of effective competition, practically isolated from each other.⁸⁶

Although following Mill in his delineation of four broad strata of occupations, Cairnes emphasized that the lines between the 'categories of persons' were not hard and fast.

I am far from contending for the existence of any hard lines of demarcation between any categories of persons in this country... the various ranks and classes fade into each other by imperceptible gradation, and individuals from all classes are constantly passing up or dropping down.⁸⁷

However, the limits to such movement were such as to make escape into higher ranks an exception, attained only through 'extraordinary energy, self-denial and enterprise.'⁸⁸ In a similar manner to Mill, Cairnes believed that

⁸⁴ibid., (1848), p.388.

⁸⁵Cairnes JE, 1874, *Some leading principles of political economy newly expounded*. Macmillan, London, p.72.

⁸⁶Idem.

⁸⁷ibid., p.73.

⁸⁸ibid., p.71.

competition was effective within the individual groups or 'competing circles(s)'. Consequently, he argued, the exchange of all commodities produced by the labour in any class was in proportion to the cost of production of their individual skills, and that in as far as it was a product of sacrifice this formed an element of that cost. As there was no competition between labour in different strata it followed, argued Cairnes, that the exchange of commodities between classes was not governed by this principle.

However, Cairnes' views were not without their critics. Alfred Marshall, writing sixteen years after Cairnes, believed that Mill's views on the breaking down of the four classes had been validated by the passage of time, and argued that by the time Cairnes adopted Mill's classification it had already lost much of its value. Marshall argued that although Mill's classification might have been valid in the past, by the 1890s these broad divisions had been almost obliterated. He suggested that the change had been brought about by the action of a number of forces which had reduced the amount of skill and ability needed in some occupations and increased it in others. He also suggested that the growth of new industry, and the decline of old, was taking place so rapidly, and the movement of adult labour from place to place and trade to trade was so large, that a premium was no longer placed on industry specific skills, but rather on 'general ability'.

That general ability which is easily transferable from one trade to another, is every year rising in importance relatively to that manual skill and technical knowledge which are specialized to one branch of industry.⁸⁹

Marshall further argued that, in the early part of the nineteenth-century, the great increase in the demand for skilled labour, at a time when the 'old exclusiveness of the artisans' was breaking down, had resulted in the absorption of the 'strongest characters' from amongst the labourers into the ranks of the artisans; the artisans became an 'aristocracy' by worth rather than by birth as before, and the rise in the quality of the class enabled it to maintain wage levels significantly higher than those offered to the unskilled.⁹⁰ However, Marshall believed that as the century progressed many of the traditionally unskilled occupations, such as those of the navy and agricultural labourer, began, largely through mechanization, to require higher degrees of ability and responsibility. At the same time as these changes were taking place, there

⁸⁹Marshall A, 1961 (1890), *Principles of economics*. Annotation by CW Guillebaud, Macmillan, London. p.573.

⁹⁰ibid., pp.683-684.

was also, Marshall argued, a growth of what he termed a 'general enlightenment' and of a 'sense of responsibility towards the young', features which manifested themselves in the devotion of a greater part of the nation's increasing wealth being invested in 'personal capital'.⁹¹ As a consequence of these changes the supply of trained ability was increased, and the scarcity value of many skilled, and more particularly marginally-skilled, occupations reduced.

Although rejecting Mill's notion of employments being distributed between four planes, Marshall nevertheless believed that there was some structure to the labour market. Reflecting the changes which he believed to have taken place in the economy, he suggested that the classification of occupations offered by Giddings (1887), with a greater emphasis upon the degree of responsibility exercised in different employments, was more suited to the existing conditions.⁹² Giddings' classification divided up occupations into four groups: 'automatic manual labour', a grade which included the lowest forms of labourer and machine tender; 'responsible manual labour', a class entrusted with greater responsibility and 'liberty of self-direction'; 'automatic brain workers', such as book keepers, the inclusion of which as a separate grade reflected the growing importance of this grade of labour since Mill's time and particularly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; and 'responsible brain workers', a class which included those who exercised authority and made decisions, such as directors and superintendents. Interestingly, Giddings noted that whilst it was impossible for those in the first class to compete for places with those in the second, those in the second might, for example in times of industrial depression, compete with those in the first. Marshall believed that Giddings' classification was open to criticism on the grounds that it drew 'broad lines of divisions where nature had made no broad lines'.⁹³ Giddings however had claimed that the significance of his groupings lay in their origins in 'natural demarcations' in the industrial structure of society.

This structure, resting on the basis of crude materials, which it transforms, adapts, and consumes, is constituted by the segregation of men into functional groups, corresponding to the sub-divisions of industrial operation and the broader differences of personal qualification.⁹⁴

⁹¹ibid., p.681.

⁹²ibid., p.218.

⁹³ibid.,

⁹⁴Giddings FH, 1887, p.69 'The persistence of competition .' *Political Science Quarterly* 2 pp.62-78.

Whilst acknowledging that Giddings' classification was as good as any in its broad division of the labour market, Marshall himself suggested that we would be better served by a finer, more complex model. He argued that occupations could usefully be compared to the steps on a long 'flight of stairs', and equally importantly, that we should in fact distinguish two flights of stairs:

... one representing the 'hard-handed industries' and the other 'the soft-handed industries'; because the vertical division between these two is in fact as broad and as clearly marked as the horizontal division between any two grades.⁹⁵

The terminology, a 'flight of stairs', is apparently so similar to the more modern 'job ladder' as to perhaps lead to a little confusion. We should acknowledge that Marshall's term is somewhat different in connotation. He appears less concerned than modern authors with the individuals' movement over their lifetime; there is no implication in the staircase metaphor that the individual will move up the staircase with age, as is implied in the modern job ladder structure. Equally, one should note that, in distinguishing between manual and non-manual flights, Marshall implies that where movement does take place, and here he is thinking of inter- rather than intra-generational mobility, it tends to be up or down one of the two flights and not between them.

Rather than suggesting that an infinite number of steps exist upon the flights of stairs, each occupation having its own step, Marshall argued that there were a large, but finite number of steps, each representing a 'grade' of labour, and each encompassing a number of occupations. He considered entry into any occupation within any grade of labour to require, from those of average ability, roughly similar amounts of expenditure in education, and entailed similar amounts of difficulty.⁹⁶ Yet, in what can be recognized as a slightly different argument, he suggested that within each grade it was the 'net advantages' of the occupations which must be roughly equal, rather than simply the costs and difficulty of entering them.

Parents generally bring up their children to occupations in their own grade, and therefore the total supply of labour in any grade in one generation is in a great measure determined by the numbers in that grade in the preceding generation, yet within the grade itself there is greater mobility. If the advantages of any one occupation in (a grade) rise

⁹⁵Marshall A, 1961 (1890), *Principles of economics*. p.218.

⁹⁶ibid., Vol.II, p.312.

above the average, there is a quick influx of youth from other occupations within the grade.⁹⁷

Importantly, in a passage deleted after the first edition of 'Principles', Marshall held that once a person had chosen his occupation he was more likely to move vertically within the same line of business than to move horizontally into another line of business within the same grade.⁹⁸ This suggestion of a further plane of segmentation, one that divided up manual workers by business or industry, brings us closer still to the modern models of career structures, where movement in the primary sector is dominated by movement within single firms. However he also noted that most people stayed in the same grade as they were placed in by their parents, and that this grade was generally the one in which the parents themselves resided.⁹⁹ Marshall is here arguing that the choice of an occupation for a newcomer to the labour market was generally made by his parents, or rather that the circumstances of the parents dictated the grade of labour which the newcomer entered. He holds that movement between grades, on either an inter- or intra-generational scale only took place in exceptional circumstances. Although he believed that the percentage of children born to the working classes who possessed natural genius was lower than for the children of the higher ranks, presumably because of some Darwinian logic, he noted that where exceptional conditions allowed men to compete on the basis of natural ability, many who would never have had the opportunity to raise themselves above their parents' lowly status, did so.

Thus, for instance, the sudden opening out of a new country, or such an event as the American war, will raise from the lower ranks of labour many men who bear themselves well in difficult and responsible posts.¹⁰⁰

As we have already noted, Marshall argued that the costs of education, and difficulties entailed in gaining entry, were similar for the different occupations in any single grade. He made a particularly useful point when he observed that labour was a 'peculiar' agent of production in that, unlike machinery and materials, it could not be bought and sold; this fact was particularly important when considering investments made in individuals.

⁹⁷ibid., Vol.I, p.217.

⁹⁸ibid., Vol.II, p.312.

⁹⁹ibid.

¹⁰⁰ibid., Vol.I, pp.572-573.

The worker sells his work, but he himself remains his own property: those who bear the expenses of rearing and educating him receive but very little of the price that is paid for his services in later years.¹⁰¹

Marshall held that the investment of capital in the rearing and training of the future generations of workers was limited both by the resources available to parents in the various grades, and by their willingness to make sacrifices for their children, the higher industrial grades being both more able and more willing to invest.

For in those grades most people distinctly realize the future, and 'discount it at a low rate of interest.' They exert themselves much to select the best careers for their sons, and the best trainings for those careers; and they are generally willing and able to incur a considerable expense for the purpose. The professional classes especially, while generally eager to save some capital for their children, are even more on the alert for opportunities of investing it in them.¹⁰²

However, besides the distinction between the grades in terms of their ability and willingness to finance the education of their offspring, Marshall also recognized that there were social factors working to the advantage of the offspring of the higher grades. Basically, parents tended to have a certain amount of influence within their own grade, usually sufficient to secure access to the grade for their offspring. Although noting the advantages of introductions from the aristocracy in gaining certain government appointments,¹⁰³ Marshall held that the benefits of a good start in life were nowhere more apparent than when the fortunes of the sons of skilled and unskilled workers were compared.

There are not many skilled trades to which the son of an unskilled labourer can get easy access; and in the large majority of cases the son follows the father's calling. The father has indeed special facilities for introducing his son. Employers and their foremen generally give to a lad whose father they already know and trust, a preference over one for whom they would have to incur the entire responsibility. And in many trades a lad, even after he has got entrance to the works, is not very likely to make good progress and obtain a secure footing, unless he is able to work by the side of his father, or some friend of his father's, who will take the trouble to teach him and let him do work that requires careful supervision, but has an educational value.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ibid., pp.560-561.

¹⁰²ibid., pp.561-562.

¹⁰³ibid., Vol.II, p.621.

¹⁰⁴ibid., Vol.I, p.563.

There are several important points highlighted in this paragraph. Most importantly, the observations on the significance of the family as a means of recruiting new workers emphasizes the importance of the unit as a field of information. Both the employers' and employees' costs of search would be minimized by the practice of recruiting the sons and relatives of existing employees. In addition, another advantage to the employer of recruiting the relatives of existing workmen was that he could use the performance and behaviour of the worker already employed as a source of information on the potential of the recruit, a source not available for workers coming from outside the existing workforce. One could even argue that by practising a policy of recruiting the relations of the existing workers, the employer gave the workforce a vested interest in the success of the business, leading perhaps to more cooperation from the workforce. Equally, to the employer the recruitment of the relatives of existing workmen carried the advantage that part of the costs of training the individual, costs which might include compensation to workmen for the time spent teaching new recruits, could be switched to the family member or friend who would take responsibility for the new recruit.

A final and simple factor which Marshall highlighted as being of great importance in determining the development of 'general ability', the skill he held to be paramount in the period, was 'the surroundings of childhood and youth', what the modern sociologist might term 'childhood environment'.¹⁰⁵ As Marshall argued that the grade to which a child's parents belonged tended to dictate the nature of its childhood environment, this factor also tended to work for inter-generational stability within the labour market. It should be noted that Marshall appears to make a distinction between the role of the material differences in the classes in shaping the environment, and those resulting from differing attitudes. He did observe that even amongst the poorest class, as far as their means and limited knowledge would allow, there was a willingness to sacrifice their own pleasure for the well-being of their children. Nevertheless, he argued that the less fully were the parents' own faculties developed, the less capable were they of realizing the importance of developing the best faculties of their children, and consequently the less would be their power of doing so.

If we now look in more detail at Marshall's account of the origins of wage differentials between grades, we find that he argued that the wage offered for any grade of labour was determined simply by the conditions of supply and demand for that particular grade of labour. The demand for each grade of

¹⁰⁵ibid., p.207.

labour was, he argued, defined by the marginal net value of product, and he recognized that the demand was far more elastic than the supply. Marshall envisaged an equilibrium position where the wages offered to every grade were great enough to support a certain level of consumption, a level which he believed 'strictly necessary' for those working in the grade to do the work efficiently. However, in addition to these necessities the wage had to cover what he termed conventional necessities and habitual comforts; necessities demanded by custom and habit.¹⁰⁶ If the real wages in a grade fell, many would prefer to give up what were strictly necessities rather than some non-essentials, behaviour which would lower the grade's efficiency.

As Marshall believed inter-generational mobility between trades in the same grade was relatively easy compared to that between different grades, it followed that the future supply of labour to any grade was heavily influenced by the number of people working in the grade in the present. A second important factor in determining the future supply of labour to a grade, in so far as the supply of labour to any grade was limited by the availability of funds sufficient to cover the costs of producing labour for the grade, was the level of earnings of those in the grade in the previous generation.¹⁰⁷ If the level of remuneration in a grade fell below that capable of supporting the worker in the condition customarily associated with the grade, a condition which allowed him to bring up his offspring to the grade, then the supply of labour to the grade would eventually fall, either because the present workers' efficiency would fall, or because in exceptional circumstances labour might migrate out of the grade, or because there would be fewer offspring entering in the next generation than were needed to replace losses. A fall in the supply of labour would result in a rise in the wages offered to the grade, a rise which would either attract more labour into the grade, increase the efficiency of those already in the grade, or enable such people to fund the bringing up of more of their offspring to the grade, all of which would increase the supply of 'labour'.

The factors that could affect the supply or demand for labour of a particular grade were myriad; subsidization of education could alter the supply of labour to the higher grades; changes in the market or technology might alter the demand. Marshall in fact gave the same example of a factor that had altered the supply of labour to the different grades as Mill; the introduction of compulsory education. The effects of this change had, in Marshall's opinion,

¹⁰⁶ibid., (1895), pp.529-530.

¹⁰⁷ibid., (1890), p.572.

been highly significant; he calculated that whereas a hundred years before more than half of the population were capable of only unskilled work, by the end of the nineteenth century only a quarter of the population fell into this category.¹⁰⁸ He further argued that this rise in the supply of 'skilled labour', skilled here meaning those in possession of a basic level of 'general ability', and consequent fall in that of unskilled, had operated through the market to raise the wages of the later group and reduce those of the former. However, although Marshall believed that something like this had indeed happened, he argued that the effect had been offset to a degree by a change in the demand for the different grades of labour; he argued that even as the supply of unskilled labour had been reduced, so also had the demand for that grade of labour relative to that for other grades. Mechanization was the force behind this change in the relative level of demand for the different grades of labour, the work of unskilled labour having been 'annexed' in Marshall's opinion at a faster rate than that of the skilled.¹⁰⁹

As we have noted, Marshall believed that where excessive inequalities had been generated between grades or trades, inequalities deriving from changes in either the supply of, or demand for, a particular grade of labour, movement would take place across the nominal boundaries between grades or trades.¹¹⁰ He in fact argued that manufacturers were constantly weighing the 'efficiency' as compared to the costs of capital and different grades of labour in the production of goods, with regard to the prospect of substituting different grades of labour for each other, or capital for labour, and here one can think of the sweated trades, labour for capital. Within the sphere of labour he suggested that the competition was primarily a 'vertical' one; a struggle between the different grades of labour employed in the same branch of production, and this despite the fact that movement was easier, at least at the inter-generational level, in a horizontal rather than vertical direction. Marshall's application of the principle of substitution to this picture of competition, lent his 'flight of stairs' metaphor a more dynamic aspect.

When two tanks containing fluid are joined by a pipe, the fluid, which is near the pipe in the tank with the higher level, will flow into the other, even though it be rather viscous; and thus the general levels of the tanks will tend to be brought together, though no fluid may flow from the further end of the one to the further end of the other; and if several tanks are connected by pipes, the fluid in all will tend to the same level, though

¹⁰⁸ibid., (1907), p.716.

¹⁰⁹ibid.

¹¹⁰ibid., (1890), p.217.

some tanks have no direct connection with others. And similarly the principle of substitution is constantly tending by indirect routes to apportion earnings to efficiency between trades, and even between grades, which are not directly in contact with one another, and which appear at first sight to have no way of competing with one another.¹¹¹

Here we have a simple yet powerful model. We can recognize Marshall's tanks as representations of different grades of labour, and the viscosity of the fluids as reflecting the 'barriers' to easy movement between the grades. We can recognize the model as one not dissimilar to the ideas of Longfield half a century earlier; however where Longfield had seen easy movement,¹¹² Marshall talked of a 'viscous flow' between contiguous ranks in the labour market.

There was one grade which Marshall regarded as particularly isolated; that grade of labour which included all the meanest, dirtiest, most dishonourable, and hardest forms of labour. As Mill had done before him, Marshall highlighted the paradox that these most unpleasant occupations were also generally the worst paid. He argued that the lowness of the wages earned by those employed in such occupations reflected the low value of their labour, their abilities being of such a low order that they were incapable of any other type of work, and, in their 'urgent need', able to consider only the wages they could earn and not the discomforts of their employments.

We have already noted Marshall's observation that labour was inalienable from the worker, a characteristic peculiar to labour as an agent of production, yet he observed several other features peculiar to labour. Importantly, he noted that labour was often sold under 'special disadvantages', disadvantages arising from two facets of the commodity; firstly its perishable nature, and secondly the fact that the majority of workers were so poor that they could not amass any 'reserve funds', and were therefore unable to withhold their labour from the market for any great length of time. The later point is to a degree a development of the former, although strictly the distinction Marshall was making when referring to perishability was that, in the sense that the worker had a finite life, every day spent idle was a day lost, whereas a machine's life might be considered as a finite number of working days, and a day spent idle entailed no loss.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, (1890), pp.662-663.

¹¹² Longfield M, 1834, *Lectures on political economy*. pp.84-85.

These disadvantages weakened labour's position in wage bargaining, but were in Marshall's opinion especially damaging to the interests of the lowest grades of labour; the grades with both the least opportunity for amassing reserve funds enabling individuals to withhold their labour from the market, and the greatest opportunity for anyone so doing to be replaced, as there were the largest number of people capable of doing the work. Marshall argued that whereas the purchaser had the advantages in bargaining for labour of a low grade, for the higher grades the advantage was often with the seller.

Many of the professional classes are richer, have larger reserve funds, more knowledge and resolution, and much greater power of concerted action with regard to the terms on which they sell their services, than the greater number of their clients and customers.¹¹³

One subject on which Marshall had relatively little to say was the level of women's wages. Interestingly the only significant observation he made on the subject in his 'Principles' was that the wages of both boys and women were rising faster than those of men, a consequence he argued principally of the breaking down of 'customary restrictions which excluded them from some trades'.¹¹⁴ Marshall failed to make any comment upon where women stood on his 'flight of stairs'.

Of far greater interest in this respect was the contribution made by William Smart in a lecture delivered in 1891. Smart found Mill's explanations for women's low wages inadequate, dismissing the idea that it reflected the fact that they were not the sole bread-winners.¹¹⁵ Although noting that women did earn as much as men in Lancashire cotton weaving, an exception caused by the exceptionally strong union in that trade, Smart believed that women generally formed a separate class of employees, excluded from the male preserves because they were women, and whose wages were determined by a different principle to that which determined men's wages.

..there is a well marked relegation of women-workers towards certain ill-paid trades; while, at the same time, there is as well a marked movement of men towards the better-paid trades...

¹¹³ibid., p.568.

¹¹⁴Marshall A, 1961 (1890), *Principles of economics*. p.685.

¹¹⁵Smart W, 1892, *Women's wages*. Paper read before the Philosophical Society of Glasgow, 9th September 1891. James MacClehose, Glasgow. p.10.

It is very much a question of difference of wages between two non-competing groups, and of groups where the levels of wages are determined by a different law.¹¹⁶

Smart argued that whereas the wages of the men were determined by the competitive forces upheld by Mill and the other classical economists as governing the labour market, the wages of women rested on 'custom'.¹¹⁷ He observed that where women came into direct competition with men the result had been the dragging down of the wage rate.

... and, as a consequence, men hive off to trades where there is more opportunity, or retain certain better-paid branches within trades, and certain trades or branches of trades are left to women.¹¹⁸

3.6 Taussig: Five Grades of Labour

We might usefully conclude this review of classical nineteenth century economists' views on wage differentials by looking at the contribution of an American economist, FW Taussig.¹¹⁹ Most of his ideas are also to be found in the writings of earlier economists, and as such his interpretation may be regarded as the culmination of earlier ideas. When reviewing the 'barriers' that prevented those coming from lowly grades entering higher grades of labour, Taussig enumerated three basic factors; firstly, the expense of education, many poor families being unable or unwilling to invest in their children; secondly, the children's background environment; and thirdly, their inborn gifts. We have already noted that Marshall felt childhood environment to be important, and indeed his arguments came close to the modern concept of inter-generational 'feedback'. In Taussig's comments on the subject, the proximity is even closer.

All the associations of nurture and family, all the force of example and imitation, keep a youth in the range of occupations to which his parents belong... The gifted and alert may feel ambition to rise, but the mass accept the conditions to which they are habituated.¹²⁰

Equally, Taussig's views upon the significance of 'inborn gifts' are similar to those which a balanced review of the modern literature on the subject might offer.

¹¹⁶ibid., p.19.

¹¹⁷ibid., p.23.

¹¹⁸ibid., p.20 .

¹¹⁹Taussig FW, 1911, *Principles of economics*. Macmillan, New York.

¹²⁰ibid., p.130.

Though the analogies from biology... strengthen the view that inheritance is all pervading, the plain facts of everyday life prove that opportunity and environment are of signal importance.¹²¹

However, besides these various comments, Taussig's chief contribution to labour economics lies in the model he advanced of the structure of the market. Although he recognized that the lines of demarcation were not sharp, he drew up a classification of labour into five non-competing groups or grades. The classification can be seen as in many ways representing a climax to much of the nineteenth century debate on structures in the labour market, being also recognizably a precursor of modern segmented labour market theory.

The lowest grade of labour in Taussig's classification were the unskilled day labourers, those who had nothing to offer but their bodily strength. Taussig also noted the apparently paradoxical low wages offered for this most unpleasant and hard class of labour, and also explained it in terms of the abundance of people capable of only this type of labour.

Their offer of abundant labor forces wages down, and they are prevented from making their way to the more favoured groups by the obstacles of environment and lack of training, or by deficiency of inborn qualities. So far as these obstacles are absent or are weakened, there will be a constant endeavour to get out of the lowest groups; hence a constant seepage into the groups above, and a tendency toward equalisation of wages.¹²²

Taussig believed that the barriers which separated the groups he outlined had been broken down in recent times, enabling movement from one to another to become easier. Specifically, he pointed to the USA where he believed the lack of a rigid class structure and the growth of the 'public schools' had done much to hasten this relaxation. He argued that it was only the continuing supply of fresh immigrants that had enabled the wages for common labour to stay as low as they had done, pointing out that the second generation of the foreign-born had invariably raised themselves into the second or third grade or rank.

The work of day labourers, and it is important to note that the class was defined as being employed by the day, required no ability other than that of bodily strength, this type of labour being available therefore to almost anyone.¹²³ Within the grade, education was only continued to the legal

¹²¹ibid., p.133-134.

¹²²ibid., p.138-139.

¹²³ibid., p.135.

minimum, after which children were set to work, achieving their maximum earnings power as soon as they reached physical maturity.¹²⁴ Indeed the prospects were that the level of earnings of those employed in the employments in the grade would actually fall as they reached middle age, and their strength began to decline.

The second class of labour in Taussig's classification was almost equally unskilled, but the work in the grade, much of it factory work, required a certain degree of responsibility and alertness; this despite its generally rather simple and tedious nature. The greater continuity of employment in this grade was reflected by wages being paid by the week and not the day.

The third category, the skilled workmen, represented the 'aristocracy of the manual labouring class.'¹²⁵ This class of labour required both a familiarity with their tools, a deft and trained hand, and a sure eye. Taussig observed that although the rewards offered for a specialized skill in a particular trade might be threatened by the competition of machines, the demand for the 'general mechanical ability' that marked out this grade was constantly growing. The grade was also marked by a 'pride in occupation' and 'spirit of independence';¹²⁶ the education of the children who grew up within the grade was generally taken beyond the legal minimum and extended by apprenticeship or preparation for entry to a particular trade.

Although making these distinctions between the employments constituting the first three of his groups of labour, Taussig argued that they should be regarded on another level as a single class: 'the manual labouring class'. Despite the three categories Taussig distinguished within the class, he argued that the gradations of wages were continuous, and the views and prejudices of those in the class similar, all anticipating living on wages alone, and not looking to either property or accumulation as a means of support. The three grades had a common sense of separation from the 'well-to-do' and possessing class. This second class was itself made up of more than one group; besides the 'leisure class' which would not properly be defined as a class of labour, the final two of Taussig's five grades of labour fell into the non-manual property owning class.

¹²⁴ibid.

¹²⁵ibid., p.135.

¹²⁶ibid., p.136.

Taussig defined the fourth of his grades by reference to the fifth, labeling it the group that 'approaches the well-to-do'¹²⁷, a term synonymous with the lower middle class. Here, the work performed was mostly semi-intellectual, the grade including teachers, clerks, small tradesmen, and book-keepers. Education was carried further than in any of the first three categories, parents being generally both more willing and more able to support their children over a long period. Some attempt was usually made at saving or accumulation, and a feeling of contempt for manual labour was nurtured, even though many in the grade might earn less than some of the more highly skilled manual workers.

The final grade, that of the 'well-to-do'¹²⁸, included the 'professions': managers of industry, salaried officials and others in positions of responsibility and power. Education was carried to the highest levels, commonly through the secondary school level, and often through university. Earning power was long delayed by the length of training and education, and tended to rise from fairly lowly beginnings. However, earnings generally rose throughout life, or at least until middle age, and the class was associated with property ownership and savings.

In concluding this review of Taussig's five classes, we might pick out a number of crucial factors running through the distinctions made between the grades: the rising amount of education as one moves up from grade to grade, a factor associated with the increasingly long delay in the period before maximum earning power was achieved; an increasing degree of continuity of employment, a change reflected in the movement from daily payment of wages, to weekly payment, to salaried employments; the change from the tedious, repetitious, and mundane tasks to those requiring responsibility and initiative; the change from the totally unskilled employments to those requiring 'general ability', to those with fairly specific skills. Further, we should take note of some of Taussig's comments upon the division between the manual and non-manual classes; he argued that the grades within each class shared common prejudices, that even the lowest form of non-manual labour held manual work in contempt, the freedom for which was expressed in their garb; 'no jumpers or overalls'.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ibid., p.136.

¹²⁸ibid., p.136-137.

¹²⁹ibid., p.137.

3.7 Conclusion

From this review of the classical and early post-classical economists' handling of the topic of wage differentials and labour market structure, several interesting points emerge. Firstly, and in relation to the earlier discussion of modern theoretical labour economics, one is struck by the degree to which the modern debate on the structure of the labour market had already taken some kind of shape in the nineteenth century literature. The idea of human capital, the most fundamental aspect of the modern neoclassical school, was already appreciated by the classical economists. Their failure to explicitly draw the connection between education and human capital should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that the concept of human capital was still in its infancy, as Blaug has argued.¹³⁰ Rather it should be recognized that the earlier accounts were written at a time when it was never envisaged that the mass of the population would be educated beyond the most basic level of reading, writing and arithmetic, or that this would be of any benefit; the skills that had advanced the country so far in so short a time were essentially manual skills taught in apprenticeship and by experience rather than in any classroom.

If 'human capital' was understood by the classical economists it would also seem apparent that within the literature reviewed many aspects of the modern segmented labour market literature can be identified, despite differences in terminology. Taking again the example of Mill, his discussion of the role of custom in both excluding women from many occupations and in restricting entry to the 'liberal professions' to those drawn from a certain rank, has obvious parallels in the modern literature on discrimination and screening. Similarly, in the work of Marshall, we find both interesting ideas on the planes of segmentation in the labour market, and a dynamic model emphasizing the viscosity of flows between different levels in the market, this emphasis on viscous flow being in many ways preferable to the somewhat less flexible models often presented in the modern SLM literature. Equally, the classical economists were acutely aware of the importance of background to a child's chances in the labour market, but through the direct importance in terms of making entry to a skilled grade easier for the sons of artisans because of their influence in the workplace,¹³¹ and indirectly via the differing attitudes and opportunities of the different classes towards the investment of funds in the education and training of their offspring.

¹³⁰Blaug M, 1986(b), 'The economics of education.'

¹³¹Marshall A, 1890, *Principles of economics*. Vol.I, p.217.

However, the apparent similarity between the classical nineteenth century economists' ideas and the modern SLM literature should not be overstated. Although Mill, Cairnes and Marshall recognized the existence of segmentation within the labour market, they also restated a belief in the basically competitive nature of that market. The chief source of the divisions which these economists observed was in their opinion not demand side discrimination or restriction of opportunities, but the consequence of rigidities in the supply side of the labour market. The lowest grades were not prevented from competing by force, but because of the very poverty of their labour. Essentially, the analysis of segmentation as advanced by Mill rested on the single observation that the poorest section of the population was unable to afford to finance the acquisition of skills by their offspring, and that as a consequence they were unable to compete for work outside the unskilled grade. As we have noted, Mill cited the case of the premium offered to those employed in occupations only requiring 'the humble education of reading and writing' before the introduction of free schooling.¹³² The classical economists after Mill viewed societies as being divided up into grades within each of which competition dictated wage differentials, but which were segregated from the grades above by the inability of the occupants of each grade to finance, except by 'extraordinary energy, self denial and enterprise',¹³³ the investment required to enter the superior grade.

In this sense the apparent similarity between the classical literature and the modern SLM literature is bogus, the connections between the classical and neo-classical being more fundamental. The link between the classical and neoclassical economists lies not only in their common heritage of Smith's principle of balancing advantages and the rewarding of investment in the acquisition of skills, but also in their recognition that basic wage differentials existed which could not be explained by these phenomena, but which had their origins in supply side decisions or preconditions and not in any form of discrimination within the market.

If the similarities between the modern segmented labour market literature and the classical economists' writings are at first striking, I believe that this must at least in part reflect a common methodology. Both groups of economists based their conceptions of the operation of the labour market on observation. The research of the SLM theorists may have been labeled 'participant

¹³²Mill JS, 1964 (1848), *Principles of political economy*. p.386.

¹³³Cairnes JE, 1874, *Some leading principles of political economy*, p.71.

observation'¹³⁴ but, nonetheless, it was the same process of contrasting theory with reality that the classical economists undertook. Just as the SLM theories were a consequence of the rediscovery of poverty in the USA in the 1960s, the classical economists' views concerning non-competing groups arose from their observing an underclass whose poverty was inexplicable through earlier theories and, indeed, whose existence contradicted those theories. Far from being exclusively theoretical, the classical economists, at least in their treatment of the labour market, shared a great interest in observation and tested their ideas against contemporary reality. Mill stated that to 'verify' any theory it was necessary to compare the results of that theory with reality, and he noted that this process had often 'drawn our attention to some important disturbing cause which we had overlooked'.¹³⁵

The value of the supposedly theoretical classical economists' direct observations as a source of information and insight concerning labour market structures and conditions has been ignored for too long. Smith's comments on the irregularity of London journeymen compared to those outside the capital, Mills' discussions of the exile of 'non-competitive groups', and Marshall's discussion of viscosity between grades and the importance of kin in gaining access to skilled occupations, all give insights into the nature of the labour markets of their own times.

A factor which emerges strongly from the review of both the modern sets of economic literature, neo-classical and SLM, is the fundamental importance of the point of entry to the labour market. The neoclassical economists argue that it is the amount invested in human capital which primarily determines wage differentials and, further, that this investment is best made prior to entry to the labour market as this yields the maximum return. The SLM economists argue that roles in the labour market are determined at the point of entry: that secondary sector workers are not naturally secondary workers, but are excluded at point of entry from the primary sector by discrimination; thereafter, they assume the characteristics of the secondary sector through feedback processes within it, so taking on those undesirable traits that they were earlier excluded from the primary sector for possessing. Further, this same emphasis on point of entry is found in the classical economists, and especially in the work of Marshall.

¹³⁴Piore M, 1983, 'Labour market segmentation: to what paradigm does it belong?' *American Economic Review*, 73, pp.249-253 (p.250).

¹³⁵Mill JS, 1948 (1844), *Essays on some unsettled questions of political economy*. London. p.154.

It is because of this emphasis in the theoretical literature on entry into the labour market that much of this thesis will consider in detail the hitherto neglected subjects of child and boy labour. However, before doing so, I will devote the next chapter to a consideration of the casual labour market in late Victorian and Edwardian London. On the basis of returns collected by Booth in 1891, it has been calculated that casual labourers and their families accounted for about 10% of the population of the capital.¹³⁶ However, in the context of this thesis, the special interest of this market lies not in its size but rather in the striking parallels to be found between the structures observed in the casual labour market and those postulated by modern segmented labour market theorists. Was the casual labour market a secondary sector in the sense employed by the modern SLM theorists, or are there classical or neoclassical explanations for the existence of such a market for labour, and class of labour? These are the questions that I will now address.

¹³⁶Stedman Jones G, 1971, *Outcast London*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.55-56.

Chapter 4

The Casual Labour Market in Late Victorian London: A Secondary Sector?

4.1 Introduction

The Charity Organization Society (COS) Special Committee on unskilled labour defined casual workers as those who were 'engaged from hour to hour or day to day, and for whom it (was) a matter of chance whether employment (would) be forthcoming on the morrow'.¹ What was peculiar to the casual workers' condition was not unemployment, but the irregularity of their employment; in some senses the time spent searching or waiting for work in the chronically casual trades actually formed part of the occupation. Clear evidence of the chronic irregularity of the casual workers' employment can be found in the wages series collected by Howarth and Wilson for 1904-1906 for a casual docker. Table 4.1 reproduces figures for the first eight months, and demonstrates that at the weekly level, the earnings of the worker varied between nothing (8 of the 47 weeks covered in 1904), and 33s. 9d. (May 14), with two relatively successful weeks in early May (May 7 - May 14), being followed immediately afterwards by two completely unsuccessful ones (May 21 - May 28).

It is important to note that if one accepts irregularity of employment as sufficient in itself to label a worker as casual, then almost all trades could be said to have had a fringe of casuals amongst the workforce. Such a fringe could even be identified in the skilled, unionized forms of labour where some names would occur regularly in the relief book claiming unemployment benefit, and others never.² This point is clearly illustrated in the figures collected by Beveridge for the London Society of Compositors covering the years 1894-1903. (Table 4.2)

Whilst only a small percentage of the membership were unemployed at any one time, somewhere between 18.0% and 26.3% of the membership experienced some unemployment during the years covered, and claimed relief for, on average, in excess of 64 days of lost work. Beveridge estimated that in

¹Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour: report and minutes of evidence, June 1908.* p.2.

²Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry.* Longmans, London. pp.71-76.

both the London Society of Compositors and Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 80% of the members were in regular employment and 20% in irregular employment.³

Table 4.1
Weekly wages series of a West Ham casual docker.⁴

Date	Amount	Date	Amount	Date	Amount	Date	Amount
Week ending	s d	Week ending	s d	Week ending	s d	Week ending	s d
		May 7	33 9	June 4	-	July 2	32 2
April 16	9 11	May 14	30 4	June 11	5 9	July 9	15 9
April 22	18 8	May 21	-	June 18	28 0	July 16	30 3
April 30	5 10	May 28	-	June 25	-	July 23	11 8
						July 30	5 3
Average	11 6	Average	16 0	Average	8 5	Average	19 0
August 6	26 3	September 3	16 4	October 1	5 10	November 5	16 11
August 13	16 11	September 10	-	October 8	21 6	November 12	-
August 20	5 3	September 17	22 0	October 15	-	November 19	22 9
August 27	5 9	September 24	9 10	October 22	30 2	November 23	11 1
				October 29	14 0		
Average	13 5	Average	12 0	Average	14 4	Average	12 8
December 3	29 7						
December 10	8 7						
December 17	25 7						
December 24	-						
December 31	31 0						
Average	18 11						

³ibid., p.76.

⁴Howarth G and Wilson M, 1907, *West Ham - a study in social and industrial problems*. Dent, London.

Table 4.2

Distribution of unemployment - London Society of Compositors

	1894	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	Mean 1894-1903
Membership	10,011	11,079	11,415	11,287	11,355	11,244	11,270	11,094
Average % unemployed at <i>some</i> time during year	5.7	3.0	4.0	4.8	4.9	5.1	4.5	4.3
Number un- employed for <i>some</i> time during year	2,636	1,991	2,166	2,546	2,552	2,511	2,294	2,281
Percentage unemployed for <i>some</i> time during year	26.3	18.0	19.0	22.6	22.5	22.3	20.4	20.6
Estimated days lost per member	17.8	9.4	12.5	15.0	15.3	15.9	14.0	14.3
Estimated days lost per member un- employed for <i>some</i> time	67.6	52.2	65.7	66.3	68.0	71.3	68.6	64.1

Source: Beveridge 1930⁵

No trade was devoid of a casual fringe in this sense, and neither was any trade completely casual. What identified the docks as the classic location of the casual labour system was not the total absence of any permanently employed men amongst the dockers, but rather the relatively low numbers of permanent men, the sheer numbers of men employed casually, the chronic openness of the occupation, and the shortness of the engagements. Thousands of men were employed each day from the crowds who jostled for selection outside the dozens of docks and wharfs that lined the banks of the Thames in the late nineteenth century. Neither references nor experience were required to gain work here; anyone could turn up on the off-chance of gaining a day, half-day or few hours' work. Here was the quintessential casual occupation:

⁵Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry*. p.74.

...one in which, whatever the number of competitors for work, each has some chance; the more casual the employment the more equal the chance. It is one in which the door is always open to fresh comers.⁶

Even on the strength of a passing acquaintance with the literature concerned with the Victorian labour market, it is clear that casual labour was not a phenomenon restricted to a handful of trades, but one widely felt throughout a great part of industrial life. Equally casualization was not an isolated condition, and in particular any treatment of casual labour must make some reference to the related phenomena of seasonal and sweated labour, phenomena inextricably entwined with that of casualness. The trades or portions of trades affected by casualness were myriad in Victorian London⁷ but here particular reference will be made to only a small number, most importantly the building industry and the docks and waterside trades. For the purposes of testing theory against reality, these trades have the advantages of being both amongst the largest employers of casual labour, and of having as a consequence been the subject of a great deal of contemporary comment and research. Obviously their size might be thought to have made them atypical and therefore an unreasonable test, but, as we shall see, in many ways the aggregate size of the trades hides the fact that they were organized on a much smaller scale, the scale of the small jobbing builder, individual wharf or ship-owner, and that because of this the conditions of employment in these trades were not dissimilar from those in the host of other trades that might be termed casual.

In studying the market for casual labour in late Victorian London and associated phenomena, regard must be paid to the outstanding study of that subject contained in the first section of Gareth Stedman Jones' 'Outcast London'.⁸ As I have argued, Jones's account of the casual trades, although seminal, served primarily as a backdrop for the two subsequent sections of his work, those dealing with working class housing and the development of class relations in London at the turn of the century. His primary concern was to

⁶ibid., p.107.

⁷Stedman Jones G, 1971, *Outcast London*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Ch.3.

⁸ibid.; for a rare example of a geographer making a valuable contribution to the study of nineteenth century labour markets, see David Green's study of the forces underlying the casualization of many trades in the capital in the first half of the nineteenth century. Green DR, 1984, *From artisans to paupers: the manufacture of poverty in mid-nineteenth century London*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge.

explore the economic and social basis for middle class fears of endemic poverty amongst the urban population, and the so-called 'residuum', a mass of supposedly semi-barbaric and potentially revolutionary poor, both unemployed and unemployable. For this reason the work makes no attempt to apply any theoretical economic framework to the casual market, or to explore any of the specific avenues of interest which might arise from such an application; broadly this will be the objective of this chapter.

In order to proceed to this goal it is obviously essential that a reasonably comprehensive outline of the casual sector should be provided, and to that extent there will inevitably be some overlap with Stedman Jones' work. However, the distinctive objectives of this study compared to Stedman Jones' call for a different emphasis in the treatment and selection of the material relating to the subject, and thus dry repetition will hopefully be avoided. Stedman Jones' work was marked by something of a narrowness in its selection of source material for discussing the casual trades, drawing almost exclusively on Charles Booth's 'Life and Labour of the People of London'. I will draw on some of the other sources of material more heavily. Although Stedman Jones's work forms essential background reading to this chapter, specific reference will be made to portions of his text where appropriate, and to some extent this facility will be used to substantiate, in absentia, a somewhat curt treatment of various subjects. For similar reasons the handling of material relating to the sweated trades will be intentionally brief. Several valuable studies have been made of this aspect of the Victorian economy and society, although, as with Stedman Jones's study of the casual trades, a wider theoretical economic background has largely been spurned in favour of a more social approach.⁹ Once again references will be made to this material where appropriate.

4.2 The Origins of the Casual Labour Problem in London

Before exploring the specific reasons for the severity of the casual labour problem in late Victorian and Edwardian London, it is worth noting that casual systems of employment were not an innovation of the nineteenth century. Indeed some comments made by Adam Smith towards the close of the eighteenth century suggest strongly that London was particularly prone to short terms of employment even before the industrial revolution.

⁹Bythell D, 1978, *The sweated trades: outwork in nineteenth century Britain*. Batsford Academic, London.; Schmiechen JA, 1984, *Sweated industries and sweated labour: the London clothing trades, 1860-1914*. Croom Helm, London.

In London almost all journeymen artificers are liable to be called upon and dismissed by their masters from day to day, and from week to week, in the same manner as day-labourers in other places¹⁰

Many of the forces that militated against regularity in employment in the capital and elsewhere had operated for centuries, and indeed continue to do so. That the casual problem should be recognized as a specific and major problem in the late nineteenth century paradoxically probably owed a great deal to the greater regularity amongst the bulk of labour. The most prominent force operating to produce this greater regularity was the growth in the quantity of capital sunk into industrial concerns, a consequence of the emergence of factory production and heavier and heavier investment in machinery, a point not lost to contemporaries.¹¹

That factory production had never developed significantly in London in the first half of the nineteenth century is but one of several important factors that can contribute to an explanation of the significance of the market for casual labour in city in the closing decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. At a broad level three central characteristics of the Victorian London economy must be mentioned in any such explanation: the city's peculiar industrial structure; the seasonality and irregularity of the demand for labour in many of her industries; and the excessive supply of unskilled labour.

The late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were marked by rapid change in the nature of industry throughout the United Kingdom, the two most fundamental features of that change being the development of factory production and the growth in the dependence of industry on coal as a fuel source. The combined effect of these two developments was to place locations which could offer both low land values and easy access to coalfields at a premium for the location of industrial facilities. In London, distant from any coalfields and with high land values, the new forms of industrial production were never likely to succeed. Indeed, their application in the provinces posed a

¹⁰Smith A, 1961 (1775), *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth and nations*. University Paperbacks, Methuen, London. p.116. This evidence of casual labouring as a tradition amongst skilled men in eighteenth century London conflicts with Green's assumption that the traditional structure for skilled trades was a non-casual one (Green DR, 1984, *From artisans to paupers*. p.5). This stands in direct contradiction to Green's suggestion that casual labour was not 'ready made' in such skilled metropolitan trades as clothing or shoemaking.

¹¹See for example the comments of Hoole, who used the argument that higher levels of capital would produce more steady employment to counter calls for factory reform. Hoole H, 1832, *A letter to the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Althorp MP, in defence of the cotton factories of Lancashire*. T Scowler, Manchester. p.6.

direct threat to the city's continued status as a major centre of manufacturing and processing industries. In his review of the state of London's engineering and metal trades in 1894, Jesse Argyle summarized the difficulties which all the Capital's industrialists faced in competing with rivals located in the north and Midlands, thus:

Circumscribed for space, with heavier rent, rates and taxes, greater costs of labour, and in most cases more to pay for carriage of raw material, the London manufacturer finds himself severely handicapped.¹²

Much of the city's manufacturing and processing industry simply failed to meet the challenge and declined, an outcome most evident in the engineering and shipbuilding industries where by the close of the century few firms were still manufacturing; those engineering companies that had neither gone out of business nor moved to the provinces chiefly handled repair work.¹³ Nevertheless, London remained the largest centre of manufacturing in the country, trades surviving against provincial competition either because they exploited some particular advantage which London offered as a location, or because they succeeded in adapting to meet that challenge.

In trades such as brewing and baking the perishability of produce and difficulty of transporting the product naturally tended to give local producers a monopoly. The perishability of news as a product was also in part the explanation for the retention of newspaper publication in central London. In fact, despite the cost disadvantages of the city as a location for printing, the most notable of which were the high London wage rates, it was only in book printing that provincial competition challenged London's dominant position in this industry which had a large casual labour section.¹⁴

For newspaper work London had the crucial advantage over provincial locations of being closer to most of the major regular sources of news: government, parliament, court, society and the high courts. It also benefited from its proximity to the largest concentration of demand in the country, the population of the metropolis itself, and the ease of communications with the rest of the country due to London's function as the central terminus for rail communications. Furthermore, in the production of both newspaper and

¹²Booth C, 1903, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Second Series, Vol.I, Augustus M Kelloy, New York. p.294.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴*ibid.*, Vol.II, pp.196-203.

parliamentary materials, rapidity of production was essential and the advantages of a location in central London in this respect overpowered any cost disadvantage. Indeed, the ability to meet demand quickly also explains much of the success of London's printers in retaining the bulk of their commercial and jobbing work, work which included the printing of both commercial and miscellaneous material such as cards, posters, hand bills and programmes. However, equally important in this respect was the small size of many of the print runs in jobbing work and the need for consultation over type faces and formatting, both considerations which militated against production for the London market being removed to provincial presses.

The ability to meet individual requirements, and to meet them quickly, was one that played a central role in many London trades, but perhaps most notably in the innumerable bespoke trades that provided the wealthy West End market with everything from clothes and jewellery to carriages. London's premier place naturally as a centre for conspicuous consumption assured a great demand for all manner of bespoke and luxury items,¹⁵ and wherever there was a demand for some product to be produced in very small quantities or as one-offs the myriad specialist workshops of the capital could secure work. Thus the minority of the workforce in London's engineering and metal working trades who were employed in manufacturing rather than repair, were largely employed in the production of some exceptional class of product such as advanced printing presses where the value to weight ratio was extremely high, or in the production of some goods to the close specifications of the customer. The surgical instrument making trade fell in some respects into both camps but perhaps relied most on its ability to cater for the request of a surgeon for 'a peculiar instrument to suit his particular fancy, or to render an operation possible in some special case'.¹⁶

Where demand was of a more universal and less specialized or personal nature, proximity to the market was not such an important advantage. Trades or the portions of trades producing for the retail or wholesale ready-made markets in products such as clothing, footwear and furniture, only survived in London by cutting costs to a minimum. The outcome of this cost cutting exercise was the spread of the so called 'sweating system' in the trades, a system which the House of Lords select committee on the subject suggested was distinguished

¹⁵For the history of the development of this feature of the London economy see George MD, 1930, *London life in the eighteenth century*. Chapter 2. London.

¹⁶Booth C, 1902, *Life and labour of the people in London*. First Series Vol.II, p.36.

by excessively long hours, low pay and insanitary working conditions.¹⁷ Another feature endemic in the sweated trades was sub-contracting, or the existence of middlemen, who Marx termed 'plundering parasites'.¹⁸

On the other hand, the tendency in London is distinctly against large factories, and in favour of home work and small workshops. The economy effected under the factory system, by a more extensive use of machinery, and by more highly organized and regular employment, seems in London to be replaced by the detailed pressure of wholesale houses, or middlemen acting for them or master tailors, who transmit this pressure to those working under them, masters and men suffering alike from the long hours, insanitary conditions, and irregular earnings characteristic of the East End workshop.¹⁹

In the pursuit of ever cheaper methods of meeting the burgeoning demand for inexpensive, poor quality clothing, once-skilled occupations were broken down into a mass of quickly learnt and separate operations and increasingly undertaken by women working at home.

The isolation of the home, if a boon to the sweated worker, has likewise been his curse. To the master it means evasion of the factory laws, a saving of rent and rates, a release from expenditure in plant, &c., but its greatest asset is that it leaves the worker unprotected and helpless. The manufacturer is immune from loss through strikes, almost from the discomfort of their threatenings.²⁰

These processes was encouraged by the introduction of a number of relatively inexpensive technical innovations such as the sewing machine, a device which made its first appearance in the 1850s. Indeed the role of the sewing machine in nurturing the sweating system in London was an important one, for sweating although extending to the manufacture of a wide variety of articles, was in London primarily associated with the stitching trades of tailoring, millinery, seamstressing, and boot and shoe making.²¹

¹⁷H.C.P. 1888 Vol.XX.

¹⁸Marx K, 1970 (1887), *Capital: a critique of political economy*. Lawrence and Wishart, London. Vol.I, p.462.

¹⁹From the evidence of Charles Booth to the House of Lords Select Committee, HCP 1888 Vol.XX, Q.307.

²⁰Wright T, 1911, 'Sweating - defined and explained.' in Wright T (ed), 1911, *Sweated labour the Trade Boards Act*. Catholic studies in social reform, Vol.II, PS King and Son, London.

²¹See the various references to London in Bythell D, 1978, *The sweated trades: outwork in nineteenth century Britain*.

The subdivision of the productive process was perhaps most advanced in the shop tailoring trade of the East End where the predominantly Jewish wholesale contractors or 'sweaters' might coordinate the efforts of individual 'cutters, basters, machinists, pressers, fellers, button-hole workers and general workers' in the production of a single coat.²² If, as the novelist and topographical writer Walter Besant suggested, the 'curse of labour... had never been fully realized until the solace of labour, the completion of good work, (has been) taken away from the craftsmen',²³ then in the sweated system that curse was realized in full. Here, as in the sweated trades as a whole, production was either undertaken in the confined atmosphere of a sweaters 'garret' or 'shop', or, and to an increasing extent before the turn of the century, as outwork in the home of the workforce. In theory, workshop workers were afforded a degree of protection under the Factory Acts. However, amongst the labyrinthine East End tenements it was difficult for factory inspectors to trace the operation of the sweaters dens, and a government labour correspondent calculated that as many as two-thirds of an estimated two-thousand sweaters operating in the district operated unbeknown to the factory inspectorate.²⁴ The workshop workers were thus effectively little better off than the domestic workers who had no legal protection. Nevertheless it was perhaps the domestic workers, the workers who lay at the very bottom of the ladder of contracts, who worked the longest hours of all.

In the 1880s the going rate in London for making men's shirts was just 10d. a dozen; for making matchboxes it was 2 1/4 d. a gross, and for finishing trousers (sewing in the linings, making button-holes, and stitching on the buttons) 2 1/2 d. a pair.²⁵ Further even these apparently minimal rates give an erroneous impression of the earning potential of the sweated worker, for many had to meet various expenses involved in their trades out of their own pockets. One London sweater, for example, paid a tailoress working from her home in 1896, 9d. for every dozen coats onto which she worked five button-holes and sewed four buttons; out of that 9d. the tailoress, who took twelve hours to complete a dozen coats, had to find not only the cost of her own sewing

²²PP. 1887, Vol.LXXXIV, Cd. 331. p.4.

²³Besant W, 1901, *East London*. Chatto and Windus, London. p.27.

²⁴ibid., p.7.

²⁵Preston W, 1969 (1883), *The bitter cry of outcast London: an inquiry into the condition of the abject poor*. Facsimile edition, Cedric Chivers, Bath.

materials, workroom and lighting, but also the 2d. fare for collecting and delivering the coats.²⁶ With such pitiful rates of payment, only by working exceedingly long hours could even a subsistence level of income be earned. Thus one old woman had to work for seventeen hours a day at making tweed trousers in order to earn just one shilling.²⁷

The wages of the sweated workers were in part driven down by the constant competition for ever cheaper production, although ultimately by the superabundance of labour willing and able to take on the work.²⁸ The breaking down of the skills once involved in the manufactures concerned meant that, increasingly, to be willing was sufficient, for what ability or skill was required was minimal and could be quickly picked up. This process left the workforce in the trades exposed to universal competition and vulnerable to influxes of labour unable to find employment elsewhere. In the tailoring trades there were two particularly important sources of growth in the supply of labour in the sector in the second half of the nineteenth century; female labour and immigrants.

Many of the women who entered this and other sweated trades were looking for an income to supplement the irregular or inadequate earnings of their husbands, something itself deriving from the general excess in the supply of unskilled labour in the labour market of late Victorian London.²⁹ The fact that many of the women were simply looking for secondary incomes weakened the position of female labour in the market and consequently lowered the levels of remuneration offered. Thus a tailor in 1875 was said to get 3s. 6d. for work that a tailoress received only 8d. or 9d. for.³⁰ Equally, entering the labour market in large numbers in the 1880s, the East End Jewish immigrants,³¹ the bulk of whom were refugees from Europe, occupied in many ways a similar position to that of the women workers, and proved similarly undiscriminating or unable to

²⁶Housden LG, 1955, *The prevention of cruelty to children*. Jonathan Cape, London. p.87.

²⁷Preston W, 1969 (1883), *The bitter cry of outcast London*.

²⁸Marx termed the domestic industries 'the last resort of the masses made 'redundant' by modern Industry and Agriculture', and recognized that it was consequently in those trades that the competition for work was at its greatest. Marx K, 1970 (1887), *Capital*. p.462.

²⁹'...homework flourishes where men's wages are low or their employment irregular, and where there are few alternative occupations open to women.' Tawney RH, 1915, *The establishment of minimum rates in the tailoring industry under the Trade Boards Act of 1909*. Bell, London.

³⁰PP. 1876, Vol.XXX, Q.15882.

³¹see Gartner LP, 1960, *The Jewish immigrant in England, 1870-1914*. Allen and Unwin, London.

discriminate in the wage levels they were willing to accept.³² It was in the tailoring and cabinet-making trades that the impact of Jewish immigration was greatest in the final quarter of the century. However, the phenomenon of labour willing to accept lower wages entering a labour market and undercutting the established labour force was not a new one in the capital. The process had taken place in one form or another in many London trades, with the offending parties being either immigrants to the city such as the Irish in the first half of the century, or youths and women. In the early 1860s the complaints of the master bakers of the city that they were being undercut, prompted a government investigation.³³ John Bennett, the then secretary of the London Operative Bakers Association, complained that the 'under-sellers' were able to sell cheaply because they employed foreigners, youths 'and others who are obliged to accept almost any wages they can obtain...'.³⁴

Unable to compete as a centre for large scale factory production, the development of London's industry and economy in the nineteenth century left her with an industrial structure dominated by the finishing trades and almost devoid of processing or heavy capital goods industries. The vast majority of production in the capital was organized around small scale enterprises, the location of production chiefly being the small workshop, or to a significant extent the home. Of all the features of its industrial structure it was the dominance of the small unit of production which was the most marked in London and distinguished it from the pattern of Victorian industrial development in the rest of the country. Even in the major metropolitan industry of printing, where the largest newspaper publishers each employed several hundred workmen, the ratio between employees and employers remained as low as 35:1.³⁵ In fact, printing was one of only a handful of trades where that ratio even rose above 20:1, the ratio in the important London trades of brewing, carriage building, tailoring and dress making, and millinery all lying below 15:1, and those in bakery and confectionery, and jewelry below 10:1.³⁶

³²PP. 1887, Vol.LXXXIX, Cd.331, p.4; Booth C, 1902, *Life and labour of the people in London*. First Series, Vol.III, p.109.; Gartner, 1960, *The Jewish immigrant in England*.

³³PP.1862, Vol.XLVII, Cd.3027.

³⁴ibid., No.27.

³⁵Booth C, 1903, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Second Series, Vol. II, p.189.

³⁶ibid., Vol.V, p.56.

The great numbers of enterprises partly reflected the low level of capital employed in many of these trades. This feature rendered the transition from 'man' into 'small master' in cabinet making for example, a relatively simple one.³⁷ Importantly these structures were not limited to trades which directly competed with provincial producers. Both the building industry and the docks were also dominated by relatively small scale concerns, and by systems of sub-contracting which tended to add to the divisions. The importance of this peculiar feature of London's industrial structure was not lost on Booth.

Irregularity of work is by far the most serious trial under which the people of London suffer, and results naturally from the industrial position of small workshops and home-work.³⁸

Faced by fluctuations in the demand for a product, producers could either maintain production at an even pace, producing for stock in periods of low demand, and using that stock to meet peaks in demand, or vary the level of production. The advantage of this last mode of behaviour was that the necessity of tying up capital in stock and of incurring the expenses of storage, were avoided. However, if a business had high fixed costs, such as the rent on a factory or the interest payments on capital invested in machinery, logic dictated that production should be maintained at as high and even a pace as possible, as only by doing this could both the fixed costs be covered and the returns on the investment maximized. The low level of capital employed in so much of London's industry made the necessity of regularizing production levels minimal, many small masters anyway having insufficient capital to support the holding of stock even if they had wished to. In the provinces, by comparison, the growth in the number of large factories and in the amount of capital invested in machinery, increased the levels of fixed capital involved in manufacture and consequently promoted greater stability in the levels of production activity, and greater equality in the use of the high levels of fixed capital.

The tendency towards irregularity of production, fostered by both the small scale of enterprises in the Capital and their low levels of capitalization, was reinforced by the prevalence of fashion and bespoke trades in the city and the relatively high proportion of the city's population employed in transport and service occupations. Whereas it was at least possible for manufacturers whose products changed little from year to year to produce for stock, for many London

³⁷ibid., p.181.

³⁸Booth C, 1902, *ibid.*, First Series, Vol. IV, p.335.

trades the product varied with the vagaries of fashion, making it necessary to defer production until the last moment. This had long been a perennial feature of the clothing trade in London, and derived from the importance of the 'season', which was itself based around the Court. These two institutions for centuries dictated the tempi of a mass of trades in the capital, the presence of the Court making the city a centre of conspicuous consumption. In 1641 a rumour that the Queen was considering moving the Court from the capital prompted a petition from 'many thousands' of courtiers, citizens, gentlemen and tradesmen's wives, pointing out that for the sale of their produce they were wholly dependent upon 'the splendour and glory of the English Court and principally upon that of the Queen's Majesty'.³⁹ By the nineteenth century the importance of the court in terms of the gross business of the capital had substantially declined from that in the seventeenth, but in terms of the marginal fluctuations the season remained highly important. Although London as a centre of manufacturing declined relative to the rest of the country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the growth of the Empire reinforced its predominant position as a centre of society, government, consumption and distribution. An increasing proportion of the city's population found employment in transport or service occupations, all sections of the economy where stock piling was impossible. No matter how desirable it might be to regularize employment, the labour of dockers, building labourers, house painters and barbers could in no way be stored during slack periods of demand.

If the low levels of capital and small size of most of the the units of production militated against employment stability in Victorian London, so did the high concentrations of unskilled occupations, and occupations where the skills required were so commonly held as to rob them of their scarcity in the market, as for example in millinery.

Where special skill or trustworthiness of character is a desideratum the employer will endeavour to keep as many as possible of the men possessing these qualities in permanent employment.⁴⁰

Such a force tended to reduce casualization in skilled labour to a small fringe. Employers could not rely upon an almost infinite and instant supply of competent men in skilled trades and therefore they offered them greater security of employment. In the highly seasonal West End bespoke tailoring trade, where

³⁹Quoted in Clark A, 1982 (1919), *Working life of women in the seventeenth century*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. p.194.

⁴⁰Poyntz JS, 1912, p.44. 'Introduction: Seasonal trades.' in Webb S and Freeman A, (eds), 1912, *Seasonal trades*. PS King and Son, London. pp.1-69.

personal fitting and the volatility of fashion mitigated against production for stock, the need to retain particularly skilled workers often produced schemes designed to regularize the numbers employed.

The aim of the employer is to secure, as a regular staff, a number of highly-skilled workmen, sufficiently large to meet the busiest season. In the slack time, the work is evenly distributed among the regular men; and an employer will advance money sooner than lose a capable workman.⁴¹

One of the chief exceptions to the marginality of casual labour in skilled occupations was provided by declining trades. In the silk weaving industry, an industry that had been a distinctive part of the East London industrial fabric in the early nineteenth century, the decline in the demand for the labour produced a relative glut in the supply of labour possessing the required skills, allowing casual employment to enter the trade, and forcing those possessing these now redundant skills onto the wider casual labour market.⁴²

The contrast in the positions of skilled and unskilled workers was neatly illustrated in the building industry. Although a casual fringe might exist in trades such as bricklaying and carpentry, casual labour was really only significant in the general labouring and painting sections of the industry's workforce.⁴³ Although a large builder might retain a core of permanently employed general labourers, the abundant supply and lack of quality of this class of labour made it unnecessary. In the case of painters it was the ease with which the trade could be learnt; one trade unionist noting that 'even the greatest rotters soon pick it up'.⁴⁴ The low value of the tools involved allowed excessive numbers to seek employment and consequently facilitated casualization.

Although the structure of so much of London's industry no doubt made irregularity worse than it might otherwise have been, it did not in itself explain that irregularity. To seek such an explanation we must look at the sources of disruption of employment in the Victorian economy. A useful starting point in this respect can be found in the identification of three basic types of unemployment

⁴¹Drake B, 1912, p.76. 'The West End tailors trade.' in Webb S and Freeman A, (eds), 1912, *ibid.*, pp.70-91.

⁴²For a discussion of the decline of the silk weaving industry in Spitalfields, see Bythell D, 1978, *The sweated trades: outwork in nineteenth century Britain.* pp.59-61.

⁴³Dearle NB, 1908, *Problems of unemployment in the London building trades.* Dent, London. p.98.

⁴⁴*ibid.*, p.101.

in that economy by a committee of the Fabian Society: cyclical, seasonal and casual.⁴⁵

Today we are familiar with the concept of the business cycle, be they 'Kuznets', 'Kondratieff' or 'Jevons', and the amplitude and periodicity of those cycles. What Beveridge called the 'pulse of the nation' has been one of the more heavily discussed aspects of that economy, at least among economic historians.⁴⁶ However the cyclical nature of the Victorian economy is of relatively little relevance in a discussion of casual labour. The irregularity which created the market for casual labour in London as elsewhere was necessarily short run in nature; it was the volatility in the levels of production and demand from week to week, day to day or even hour to hour rather than that between one year and the next, which created that market.

Although we are concerned here chiefly with the market for casual labour it is in practice difficult to separate the phenomenon of casual labour from that of seasonality of production and seasonal unemployment. Seasonality was endemic to Victorian industry, it being 'almost the exception rather than the rule for any trade to maintain fairly equitable activity throughout the year'.⁴⁷

In the building industry, one of the largest employers of labour in London throughout the Victorian era, winter was generally a slack period owing to the greater economy afforded by summer production.⁴⁸ Certain trades within the industry such as bricklaying and plastering, were particularly prone to disruption by frost and damp, and the greater prevalence of these interruptions, together with the shorter daylight hours, combined to make winter building more expensive than summer. In fact the seasonality of the various trades within the industry varied considerably, the frosts which disrupted the bricklayers employment being a boon to the plumbers and fitters.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Fabian Society, 1886, *Report by a committee on the government organization of unemployed labour*. TUC, London. pp.3-4.

⁴⁶Aldcroft DH and Richardson HW, 1969, *The British economy, 1870-1939*. Macmillan Press, London. Ch.11.

⁴⁷Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry*. p.29.

⁴⁸Webb AD, 1912, 'The stab of unemployment: with special reference to seasonal unemployment.' *Proceedings of the National Conference on the Prevention of Destitution*. PS King and Son, London. p.355.

⁴⁹Webb AD, 1912, p.340. 'The building trade.' in Webb S and Freeman A (eds), 1912, *Seasonal Trades*. pp.312-393.

Building was unusual in that the seasonality of the industry as a whole was dictated by the seasonality of disruptions to the productive process, although it was as much custom as cost that concentrated building work in the summer months. For most trades the seasonality was determined by a seasonality in the demand for the product. In the case of the gas industry that seasonality produced exactly the reverse conditions of employment to those found in the building trade, the demand for gas being boosted by the cold weather and short daylight hours of winter.⁵⁰

Neither was it only weather which dictated broad seasonal fluctuations in business. The London social season which reached a peak between May and July was always marked by intense pressure in a host of branches of industry from catering, theatre and jewellery to laundry work, but was perhaps most marked in the fashion trades such as dressmaking and tailoring. The extent to which the social season dictated fluctuations in the West End tailoring trade was highlighted by the collapse of the summer boom of 1907 on the death of Edward VII.⁵¹ Another man-made season which dictated a peak in all consumer good production was Christmas. For example, whilst depressed in August and September by the holidays, business in the printing trade picked up to peak in the two months before Christmas when the demand for cards and other seasonal merchandise was high. Similarly, the peak in demand caused by the Great Exhibition and other seasonal expansions caused restaurants to take on large numbers of extra waiters in the summer months.⁵²

In many trades affected by seasonal fluctuations in the level of business, the impact of the fluctuations on employment were partially absorbed, even if not by production for stock, then by short time working, as in building and brewing, or by the switching of workers from production to maintenance, a practice followed in the gas works. Nevertheless, some part of the fluctuation was met by the laying-off of workers regularly employed for the bulk of the year; this was the class most clearly subject to seasonal unemployment. In the case of skilled occupations, many of the union benefit schemes were designed to help their contributors to weather their largely predictable and temporary periods of

⁵⁰Popplewell F, 1912, p.162. 'The gas industry.' in Webb S and Freeman A, (eds), 1912, *ibid.*, pp.148-209.

⁵¹Drake B, 1912, p.71. 'The West End tailors trade.' in Webb S and Freeman A, (eds), 1912, *ibid.*, p.70-91.

⁵²Drake B, 1912, 'The waiter.' in Webb S and Freeman A, (eds), 1912, *ibid.*, pp.92-106.

unemployment, whilst where no such scheme existed workers might either use savings made over the period of full employment or indulge in 'retrospective saving', living on credit and paying their debts off when they regained employment.⁵³ Nevertheless in many seasonal trades the fluctuation in the demand for labour was chiefly borne as an extra burden by the casual fringe.

Even though used to meet seasonal variations in labour requirements the *raison d'être* of casual labour was to meet the variation in that demand over very much shorter periods, from week to week and day to day. Although the broad outline of demand might be seasonal, it was often at this finer time scale that demand was most volatile. Thus a day of sharp frost would call for fewer hands on the building site but more at the gas works, a situation which could well be reversed the next day if the frost was to break.

In many trades there were regular fluctuations in demand at this time scale. The weekend was a particularly important source of disruption; the vast majority of barbers only found work on Saturdays and Sundays, and as many as twice the normal number of bakers were required on Friday nights to cater for the weekend demand.⁵⁴ In other trades it was the irregular 'exceptional' conditions which promoted the greatest stress, the sensational piece of news calling for more printers and the epidemic for more undertakers. All trades associated with armaments were subject to the vicissitudes of international relations. The Boer war in 1900-1901 was met by two years of 'frantic efforts' to recruit men at the Woolwich Arsenal and Enfield Small Arms Factory, a 'reckless' haste only matched by the severity of the cut backs in the two subsequent years.⁵⁵

Seasonality and irregularity of demand were thus endemic to Victorian industry and trades. It even affected the employment of school children as well as adults. Barbers, for example, used children as a source of labour to meet peaks in casual demand. The poorest class of barbers, unable to afford to employ the services of a full-time adult assistant to help him cope with the peaks in his business at the weekend, and during the evenings, often employed a school-boy for the purpose, the boys both making up lather and sweeping the shop.⁵⁶

⁵³Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry*. p.35.

⁵⁴RC Poor Laws, 1909, Vol.XVI. p.20.

⁵⁵Jackson C, 1910, *Unemployment and trade unions*. Longman, Green and Co., London. p.6.

⁵⁶PP. 1906, Vol.XC, Cd.2809, p.11.

This chapter has therefore argued that the metropolitan casual labour market at the turn of the century, was the product of various structural features or characteristics of the London labour market, and more broadly, the Victorian economy as a whole. David Green has offered a slightly different interpretation of the development of the casual labour market in the capital in the first half of the nineteenth century, by suggesting that rather than simply reflecting 'broad economic pressures imposed on London's trades as a result of industrialization', the process of casualization was instead 'the outcome of a combination of economic change and workplace resistance.'⁵⁷ Green's concern is with the process of casualization as an 'arena of conflict' in skilled trades, subject to deskilling and the subdivision of work.⁵⁸ This approach undoubtedly offers important new insights into the process of casualization, yet fundamentally it does not challenge the importance of economic change and imperative as a source of casualization. The chief contribution of Green's study lies in its exploration of the timing of casualization in relation to particular economic crisis and the degree to which workers were successful or otherwise in controlling or resisting that change.⁵⁹

4.3 Casual Labour in the Docks

Rather than suffering from just one or two of the three basic types of irregularity in the demand for labour, cyclical, seasonal, and casual or short run, many trades suffered from all three. Although the level of activity in the port of London was affected by the sweeps of the business cycle, and in particular by those instigated by wars, of more importance in dictating the policy adopted by management for handling labour was the seasonality in much of the business. This seasonality had several sources; the seasonal arrival of products such as fruit and tobacco was determined by the harvests, whilst the grain and timber trade from the Baltic countries was greatest in the months before Christmas but thereafter curtailed by ice cutting off the supply route.⁶⁰ The demand for coal from the North was concentrated in the winter, and for ice from the Norwegian Christiana Fjord in the summer, by the seasonal nature of the demand for the

⁵⁷Green DR, 1984, *From artisans to paupers.* p.5.

⁵⁸ibid.

⁵⁹ibid., pp.44-45.

⁶⁰Poyntz JS, 1912, 'Introduction: seasonal trades.' pp.36-7.

product.⁶¹ For the lightermen working on the Thames in the winter was a time of brisk employment not only because of the coal trade, but partly because the work was harder and took longer to do when the elements were less propitious.⁶²

Custom rather than necessity could also dictate seasonal fluctuations, especially in the warehousing side of dock labour, where the practice of holding wool and tea sales at certain fixed times in the year established a 'regular up and down movement' in the numbers employed, large numbers of men being taken on at the times of the sales.⁶³ The aggregate volume of employment which emerged from the numerous individual cycles reached a peak in the months around Christmas and July, with both spring and autumn being slack.

Notwithstanding their seasonal variations, it was the variation in the demand for labour from day to day and hour to hour that dominated the labour market in the docks, the classic location of the casual system. Even Green concurs in recognising the docks as a situation where casual labour may have been 'ready made', rather than imposed.⁶⁴ Fluctuations in the demand for labour at this time scale were largely dependent on the number of ships arriving or departing. Before the introduction of the steamship the number of ships entering London in a day had been determined chiefly by the prevailing direction of the winds, and as winds were variable the numbers fluctuated significantly from day to day and week to week. Whereas in the eleventh week of 1849 only 42 vessels entered the West India Dock, in the twelfth week 131 did so, in the thirteenth 209 and in the fourteenth 85.⁶⁵ In the coal trade contrary winds could not only disrupt the supply to the capital by keeping fleets of colliers 'beating about the mouth of the Thames', sometimes for weeks, but could do so also by preventing the fleets from leaving the rivers of the North.⁶⁶ Mayhew calculated that prevailing easterly winds could throw as many as 7,000 dock

⁶¹Capper C, 1862, *The port and trade of London*. Smith, Elder and Co., London. p.220.

⁶²Booth C, 1969 (1902), *Life and labour of the people in London*. First Series Vol.IV, p.377.

⁶³Potter B, 1902 (1895), p.17, 'The docks.' reprinted in Booth C, 1902, *Life and labour of the people in London*. First Series, Vol.IV.; Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry*. p.34.

⁶⁴Green DR, 1984, *From artisans to paupers*. p.5.

⁶⁵Mayhew H, 1862, *London labour and the London poor*. Five volumes, 1861-2, London. Vol. III, p.303.

⁶⁶Capper C, 1862, *The port and trade of London*. p.475.

labourers out of employment in London, whilst he noted that a 'gentleman filling a high situation in St. Katherines Dock' was sure that if one took into consideration all the grades of labour associated with shipping, from wharf and dock labour to shipwrights, no less than 25-30,000 men might lose employment were easterly winds to persist for any length of time.⁶⁷ If the dependence on the winds promoted great irregularity in the number of ships arriving from week to week, it also encouraged a strong seasonality in the level of activity in the port, the quays being crowded in some months and empty in others.⁶⁸

Being free from the influence of wind the steamship, which replaced sail as the dominant form of carrier in the 1870s, had the benefits of reducing both the seasonality of the port's business and the fluctuations in the number of ships entering the port from week to week. Of course many of the factors producing seasonality and irregularity in the demand for labour at the docks were independent of the winds and so continued to operate. As late as 1908 it remained the custom, for example, for boats operating on the continental and short sea routes to sail on Wednesdays and Saturdays, making Tuesday and Thursday the slackest days of the week.⁶⁹ Paradoxically, even though it reduced seasonality in the level of business at the port, and reduced the irregularity in the number of ships entering the port, the introduction of the steamship did not reduce the level of casualness of the employment of dockers. In fact the steamship brought with it greater irregularity in the employment of the workforce rather than less. The chief explanation for this paradox lay in the greater capital value of the ships. Given the relatively large amounts of capital tied up in the ships, owners understandably became more insistent upon a rapid turnaround; they could not afford to allow their investment to stand idle for too long.⁷⁰ Where fifty years before a ship on berthing might have waited until it suited the dock company to attend to her, and provided regular work for a fixed number of men for weeks, the steamer entering dock in the 1870s, irrespective of what time she entered, was boarded by the ganger and his men as soon as she berthed and emptied within a fraction of that time, the men working at great pressure where before they had worked at a 'leisurely' pace.⁷¹

⁶⁷Mayhew H, 1861, *London labour and London poor*. Vol.III, p.312.

⁶⁸Potter B, 1902 (1895), 'The docks.' p.15.

⁶⁹Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. Q.1238.

⁷⁰Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour at the docks*. London. p.11.

⁷¹Potter B, 1902 (1895), 'The docks.' p.15-16.

The shipowners demanded quick despatch to ensure continual use of their capital. The implications for the employment of labour were simple:

... the shipowner wants his labour to be always at hand. But he only wants it at intervals. Short engagements suit him admirably; he has his labour when he wants it, and he is not saddled with it at other times.⁷²

Pressure for greater casualization of the workforce also came from the excessive growth in the supply of docks, wharves and warehousing in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷³ Up to 1824 the dock companies had been protected by monopolistic privileges granted to them when they were established, and the development of wharves along the Thames had been controlled and restricted by statute since the time of Charles II.⁷⁴ After the expiration without renewal in that year of the privileges granted to the West India Dock Company the limitations on competition gradually crumbled and the number of docks and wharves and the amount of warehousing quickly multiplied. The growth in these facilities far outstripped the growth in the demand for them. Although the business of the port continued to develop, that growth was checked by an increase in the competition from continental ports, the loss of much of the port's trans-shipment business in the face of European protectionism, the loss of a considerable amount of domestic business in products such as coal to the railways, and a decline in the demand for warehousing as a result of a greater ability to control the volume of stock held thanks to steamships and ocean telegraphy.⁷⁵ The excessive supply of facilities depressed the incomes of the owners of the facilities and they increasingly looked for means of reducing costs. The problem was particularly severe for the once extremely profitable older metropolitan docks who struggled to meet the competition from the newer more mechanized docks such as the Millwall Docks, and the larger and deeper docks such as the Albert and Tilbury Docks built down river after the 1850s which were capable of handling the larger steamships.

In an attempt to meet the challenge of declining profit margins the employers looked for means of cutting their wages bill. Amongst the first employers to respond were the directors of the London and St. Katherine's Docks who

⁷²Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour at the docks*. London. pp.11-12.

⁷³Gomme GL, 1898, *London, 1837-1897*. Blackie and Son, London. p.68-70.

⁷⁴Capper C, 1862, *The port and trade of London*. p.139-159.

⁷⁵Booth C, 1902, *Life and labour of the people of London*. First Series, Vol.I, p.14-15.

introduced in 1865 both piecework and a contract system in an attempt to increase productivity and reduce labour costs. The unit of hiring was no longer the day but the hour. The inclination of management towards such schemes was reinforced by the success of the casuals at these docks in gaining an extra penny an hour when they struck in 1872, a year of booming trade conditions. Unable to reduce the level of wages per hour the owners sought economy in 'more efficient management, labour saving machinery and piece work', a solution which brought greater irregularity of employment for the labourers and an increase in the pressure of work.⁷⁶

Beatrice Potter (later Webb) noticed that there were three categories of workers at the docks: the 'permanent' men who were employed all year round; the 'preference', 'royals' or 'ticket' men who were employed whenever needed; and the purely 'casual' who were only employed when the demand for labour exceeded the number of permanent and preference men available.⁷⁷ At this date the London and St. Katherine Docks employed a total of 1,070 men on a permanent or regular basis, of whom only 420 were labourers. The average requirement of men in addition to the regular men was 2,200, the maximum requirement being 3,700 and the minimum 1,100, requirements which were only partly met by the 450 'ticket' men at the docks. However, this situation was changed markedly by the dock strike of 1889 which achieved an increase in the wage rate of the dockers to 6d. an hour and a minimum length of engagement of four hours. Following the strike, and partly as a result of the pressure of opinion brought about by the work of Booth and others by highlighting the iniquities of casual labour, a major decasualization scheme was introduced by the dock company in 1891.⁷⁸ Under the scheme the number of permanent men was increased and a three tier system of preference men introduced. The dockers other than the permanent men were thus labelled either 'A', 'B', 'C' or casual, although the amount of work available to the 'C' grade quickly proved insignificant and the grade was abandoned. The purpose of the scheme was to reduce the element of chance in dock employment, by reducing the spread of the available work and offering fewer people more regular work. Men were employed according to their grade, 'A' men being employed before 'B' men and 'B' men before casuals, and according to their position in their grade, their position depending upon the standard of their work and the regularity with

⁷⁶Potter B, 1902 (1895), 'The docks.' p.14.

⁷⁷ibid., p.15.

⁷⁸Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry.* pp.88-90.

which they attended the dock.⁷⁹ Although the principle was sound the scheme almost failed because in its original form each department within each dock operated their own lists. As there was no uniformity in the level of demand for labour in different departments, it became clear that 'B' men were standing idle in one department when another was taking on casuals. As a consequence the Dock company initially reorganized the scheme so that each dock formed the unit rather than each department, and subsequently so that the entire concern formed the unit, the employment of labour being handled by a central clearing house to which the foremen at each department sent nightly estimates of their requirements for the following day.⁸⁰

The decasualization policy of the Dock Company met with success in that the amount of work handled by permanent men rose from 65.6% in 1894 to 78.4% by 1904, the amount handled by casuals falling over the same period from 5.6% to 1.9%. The result of the change had, according to the Inspector of the Company who presented the figures to the C.O.S committee on unskilled labour, been entirely beneficial.

The dock labourer who is employed by the company is as a rule, industrious, steady and honest. The system which obtains has the effect of shaking down to the tail end of the lowest list the men who cannot be so characterised, they only get work in emergencies, and the tendency is for them to drop off altogether.⁸¹

However, the impact of this system of decasualization on dock employment as a whole was reduced by the decline in the Dock Company's share of employment. The numbers employed by the dock company declined from an average of 5,076 in 1894 to 3,054 by 1904, so despite the rise in the percentage of the work undertaken by permanent men there was no increase in their numbers. By 1908 the Dock companies (excluding Tilbury) were employing only a third of the dock labourers included in the returns to the Labour Department of the Board of Trade, and even this figure must have represented a considerable overstatement of their importance as employers, as the wharves of the port were heavily under-enumerated in the returns. In part the decline in the numbers employed by the Dock companies reflected a decline in the tonnage handled by the older metropolitan docks, a decline encouraged by the continued growth in the size of steamships and

⁷⁹Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. pp.108-09.

⁸⁰ibid., Q.451.

⁸¹ibid., p.123.

consequently in the numbers which could not use the upper docks, and by the growth in the practise of unloading overboard into lighters, which gave more work to lightermen but robbed the dock workers of employment and the dock companies of income. However, the decline was also partly the result of a deliberate policy adopted by the Dock company to even out the flow or the 'course of work' which they handled, a policy which they had implemented at the expense of the volume of goods which they themselves handled but not at the expense of the volume which came through the docks.⁸²

Since the introduction of the steamship the owners had become increasingly anxious to handle the unloading of their ships themselves, arguing that it was only 'human nature' that the dock officers should not take as much interest in the unloading of their ships as they themselves would.⁸³ The strike in 1889 convinced the dock authorities that they would be saved a great deal of trouble by conceding the point to the shipowners and concentrating their labour on their warehousing business.⁸⁴ Thus as a result of the decline in the tonnage handled by the docks and the transfer of a certain portion of the tonnage handled in the docks to the shipowners and their subcontractors, the dock decasualization scheme was robbed of much of its impact. Mr. Orbell of the Dockers Union estimated in 1913 that of the 16,000 members of his Union in the London area, less than 7,000 averaged three days or more work per week.⁸⁵

The nature of the alterations the dock company made to their decasualization scheme highlighted one of the chief obstacles to the regularization of labour in the dock system as a whole and one of the central factors underlying the casual labour system as it existed in London docks, the division of the market for dock labour into myriad smaller and to some degree geographically distinct markets with largely unconnected patterns of demand for labour. As we have noted, the Dock companies attempted to overcome the problems caused by the unilateral nature of the demands for labour in the different divisions and the friction in the movement of men between the divisions by introducing a central clearing house system. However, any efforts to

⁸²ibid., p.117.

⁸³ibid., Q.1436.

⁸⁴Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour and the docks.* p.99.

⁸⁵Cited in Lascelles ECP and Bullock SS, 1924, *Dock labour and decasualization.* PS King and Son, London. pp.48-49. Orbell's full figures were as follows: 5,000 averaged six days a week; 2,000 averaged three or four days per week; 3,000 averaged two to three days per week; 2,000 averaged two days per week; 4,000 averaged one to two days per week. ibid., p.49.

overcome the fragmented nature of the market for riparian labour were hampered by the huge number of separate employers. The concentration of the ownership of the docks as the nineteenth century progressed was matched by the simultaneous proliferation of other types of employer.⁸⁶

By the close of the century, in excess of one hundred wharfingers were sending employment returns to the Board of Trade from the London docks.⁸⁷ Wharfingers were of course just one class of independent employer amongst many, including master stevedores, lightermen, shippers and ship owners, all of whom would have had their own arrangements for calling men, and all of whom engaged men independently of each other, as and when they had need of them.

Booth demonstrated to the 1891 Labour Commission something of the likely scale of the excess in the numbers of men employed along the Thames as a whole, by contrasting the number of men who would have been required on the busiest day of the year if the port had operated as a single labour market, 17,994, with the number who would have been required if the port had in fact been divided into ten separate markets, 21,353. The ten sub-divisions which Booth used in his calculations covered such broad fields as 'shipowners in the Victoria and Albert Docks', a category within which there were certainly several separate focii of employment, and 'north side wharves' where there were dozens of separate focii between which some considerable friction in the movement of labour existed.⁸⁸ Even when the points of employment were within the same dock it was often the case that whilst all the men who waited at one point were employed and more would have been taken on if they had been available, at another men waited in vain for work.⁸⁹

Given the geographical friction in the movement of labour it was natural that employers should wish to maintain around them a 'pool' of labour sufficient to meet even their greatest demand. The employers, or their foreman who generally took charge of the hiring of labour, usually achieved this end by rewarding those men who regularly attended their particular 'stand', the point where men were taken on, with more regular employment, and punishing those

⁸⁶See Gomme GL, 1898, *London, 1837-1897*. pp.68-70.

⁸⁷Phillips G and Whiteside N, 1985, *Casual labour: the unemployment question in the port transport industry, 1880-1970*. Clarendon, Oxford. pp.18-19.

⁸⁸Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour at the docks*. p.19.

⁸⁹*ibid.*, p.34.

who missed 'calls', of which there could be several a day, by 'drilling' them, that is, by passing them over when work was available or 'standing them upon the stones'.⁹⁰ 'Drilling' could be a subtle form of discipline and was widely used in the docks and riverside employments, and indeed in one form or other throughout the casual trades. One man who suffered more than most from the system was Dan Cullen, a docker who had played an active part in the 'Great Dock Strike' of 1889.⁹¹ The author Jack London, who met Cullen towards the end of his life after ten years in which the docker had been 'paid off' for what he had done, suggested that being 'drilled' was merely a polite term for being 'starved'. It was not in the interests of the foreman to give as many men as possible regular work as that would have reduced the amount of work which he could divide amongst the more casual workers in order to ensure their continued presence. As a result most waterside employers employed fewer men on a permanent basis than were needed even in their slackest week or day. Besides the core of permanent men attached to each employer or foreman, there was thus a mass of workers who, according to how well regarded and regular they were, would be subject to a greater or lesser degree of irregularity.⁹² Each worker knew that to fail to make themselves available was to risk losing their ranking in the foreman's list, a list which often existed only in the head of the foreman.

Commonly the foreman would arrive at the stand for the first call at seven or eight o'clock and take on as many of the regular men as he required for the first shift. If he had more work than could be performed by the men familiar to him he would select men from the crowds of purely casual men, often indicating his choices by handing out tickets or passes. Unsurprisingly it was not unknown for foremen to expect favours in return for his patronage; for many labourers the best chance of getting regular work lay in lounging 'about the pubs, where the foremen go and treat(ing) them'.⁹³ Even where not directly bribed, foremen

⁹⁰ibid., p.35.

⁹¹London J, 1903, *The people of the abyss*. London. pp.68-69.

⁹²Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour at the docks*. pp.40-42.

⁹³Booth W, 1890, *In darkest England and the way out*. William Burgess, London. p.37. One docker giving evidence to a committee investigating unemployment in Liverpool was adamant about the detrimental effects of bribery on the chances of the honest man: 'the system of bribery, which is carried on, is most detrimental to the honest, straightforward men, who will not stoop to such trickery as tipping and paying for drinks, and these are the men who are generally told to stand out, and this very often the men who are most deserving have to suffer most.' Full report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Subject of the Unemployed in the City of Liverpool, 1894, p.87.

favoured their 'pals', a standing generally established in the ubiquitous beer houses close by the docks.

Each foreman takes on his own. If that foreman is very fond of beer, you may rest assured that all he takes on must be fond of beer too.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, competition at the dock gate during 'calling on' was often severe. In his survey of London life in the 1860s, Mayhew advised those in search of the 'extraordinary' to visit the dock gates at 7.30 a.m.

There he will see congregated within the principal entrance masses of men of all grades, looks and kinds. ... Presently you know by the stream pouring through the gates and the rush towards particular spots, that the 'calling foreman' has made his appearance. Then begins the scuffling and scrambling forth of countless hands high in the air, to catch the eye of him whose voice may give them work. As the foreman calls from a book the names, some of the men jump upon the backs of others, so as to lift themselves high above the rest and attract the notice of him who hires them. All are shouting. Some cry aloud his surname. Some his Christian name, others call out their own names to remind him they are there. Now the appeal is made in Irish blarney - now in broken English. Indeed it is a sight to sadden the most callous, the scuffle being made the fiercer by the knowledge that hundreds out of the number there assembled must be left to idle the day and in want.⁹⁵

Although the 'big whiskered Pole' spotted amongst the throng by Mayhew may have disappeared from the scene towards the close of the century, other than that little changed; especially at the wharfs, the scene described by Mayhew was to continue to be re-enacted daily up to the time of the First World War.⁹⁶ At the more important stands hundreds of men might compete for only a handful, literally, of free 'tickets' or 'passes'; selection from the throng was often a matter of pure chance, a fact evident in the experience of a taking-on foreman employed by one of the dock companies before the introduction of the decasualization scheme.

...a great roar went up from hundreds of throats calling my name.... A great mass of faces and hands... appeared before me, fighting and struggling, so much so, that it was difficult to detect which face the hand belonged to.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. Q774.

⁹⁵Mayhew H, 1861, *London labour and the London poor*. p.313.

⁹⁶For contemporary accounts of similar scenes in London in the late 1880s and early 1900s, see Booth W, 1890, *In darkest England*. p.37.; Howarth G and Wilson M, 1907, *West Ham - a study in social and industrial problems*. pp.200-201.

⁹⁷Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. Q.697.

Under these circumstances the success or failure of a man in gaining employment was a matter of luck, a matter of whether his was one of the hands into which a ticket was thrust, even if the foreman had not set eyes on his face.⁹⁸

In the ranks of men gaining employment from the docks in Victorian and Edwardian London one can identify four divisions: the men needed to meet the constant business of the port as a whole, the number who would have been employed on the slackest day of the year; the men required to meet the difference between the slackest day and the busiest; the men needed because of the friction in the movement of labour between employers and points of employment; and finally those who even given the degree of friction were absolutely surplus to requirements but who gained employment because of the element of chance involved in the distribution of work.

The dock unions did make some attempts to grapple with the problem of casual labour, and, for example, were successful in getting the number of stands in the Victoria and Albert Docks reduced nominally to just two, the Custom House and Connaught Road.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the position of the waterside unions was not a strong one and even the skilled stevedores faced problems from non-union competition which undermined their efforts to reduce the number of stands, especially after the 1912 strike.¹⁰⁰

In fact if the pools of labour from which the different employers of dock labour drew their supply were far from being entirely united, they were also not completely distinct. A flow of labour did exist from one employer to another but the flow was viscous partly because of the lack of information on the availability of work around the port, and partly because of the men's unwillingness to move around the port for fear of losing any advantage they might have had in their normal place of employment.¹⁰¹

In the building industry many of these problems were exacerbated by the lack of fixed centres of production and employment. The foreman as in the docks generally had a nucleus of permanent men who would follow him from job to job, but would rely on the spread of information about the job to attract

⁹⁸ibid., Q.702.

⁹⁹Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour at the docks*. p.31.

¹⁰⁰ibid., p.32.

¹⁰¹ibid., p.95-6.

sufficient new men to a new site to meet his extra requirements. Men commonly followed laden builders' carts as a means of finding the location of fresh work, and it was not uncommon for a foreman to find a vacant site surrounded by men of all trades when he arrived.¹⁰² The reliance of the foremen on word of mouth and chance could not have worked without the existence of a mass of men constantly searching for work, 'a reserve of labour drifting perpetually about the streets'.¹⁰³ At each new site extra men would be taken on largely in the order in which they presented themselves for employment, and thus employment would be spread over an unnecessarily large body of men. One survey of master builders found the proportion of general labourers who were unknown by the foreman when taken on varied between 10 and 80%.¹⁰⁴ However, the building operatives had at least one great advantage over dock labour in that, although subject to only an hour's notice on either side, they were usually taken on for the duration of the 'job'; whereas a ship could be unloaded in a matter of hours, the average 'job' of the building operative might last weeks or even months. In this way the docks were, as in so many other ways, ideally suited to casualization.

4.4 Casual Labourers for Casual Labour

It was above all else the ease with which people could enter the trades and the over-supply of labour to the trades which made the casual trades casual. What all the employers of casual labour relied upon was the ready supply of the labour they required. Without the assurance that there would always be those willing to accept the conditions of employment which he offered the shipowner, wharfinger, builder or whoever employed casual labour, would not have been able to adopt such a lavishly wasteful means of securing a ready supply of labour. Mr. Schwartz, a wharfinger who employed only 25% of his labour on a permanent basis and a similar proportion on a purely casual basis, confirmed that there was a 'superabundance' of the type of labour he required and that only during the hopping season and immediately after public holidays did he ever experience difficulty in securing as much labour as he required.¹⁰⁵ If a trade was purely unskilled, or the skill involved was easily acquired and any

¹⁰²Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. Q.134.

¹⁰³Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry*. p.97.

¹⁰⁴Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. p.47.

¹⁰⁵*ibid.*, Q.1256.

tools required inexpensive, then the trade was open to invasion by the glut of unskilled labour which underpinned the casual system.

Where did this supply come from? Why did it exist? One source of supply on which contemporaries placed a great deal of emphasis was that deriving from graduates of juvenile 'dead-end' or 'blind-alley' jobs.¹⁰⁶ Much concern was generated over the large numbers of boys who on leaving school entered jobs which offered neither training nor the prospect of progress into an adult position. The attraction of such jobs to the boys were the high immediate earnings they offered and the ease with which they could be secured. On reaching their late teens thousands of boys were thus left with no training, no skills and not even the prospect of a secure if unskilled position. To these boys, brought up on a diet of relatively highly paid work with easy access, the docks and other casual occupations could be the best or perhaps only avenue open to them. The docks were open to all and to the young unmarried man they could offer a reasonable living, his freshness and strength being at a premium. Neither was the 'casual' nature of the employment totally unwelcome to many workers, for it freed them from the necessity of working a standard, continuous six-day week, offering them relatively high earnings for irregular, short periods of work.¹⁰⁷ In the context of the building industry, Dearle noted the habit of 'coming to earn a drink' and the existence of men who would not do a full week, preferring to 'enjoy the proceeds' of their earlier efforts,¹⁰⁸ whilst in the docks it had long been observed that when wages were high the men drank more and worked shorter hours.¹⁰⁹

So strong was the desire to maximize earnings amongst the majority of juveniles, that many London employers found it difficult to fill posts leading to skilled trades.¹¹⁰ Whilst the problem existed nationally it was perhaps

¹⁰⁶Cloete JG, 1904, 'The boy and his work.' in Urwick EJ (ed), 1904, *Studies of boy life in our cities*. Dent, London. pp.102-138.; London County Council, 1906, *Home circumstances of necessitous children in twelve selected schools*. LCC, London. Tawney RH, 1909, 'The economics of boy labour.' *Economic Journal* 19 pp.517-537.; Keeling F, 1910, *The labour exchange in relation to boy and girl labour*. PS King and Son, London.

¹⁰⁷For a discussion of this aspect of dock life, see Phillips G and Whiteside N, 1985, *Casual labour: the unemployment question in the port transport industry, 1880-1970*. pp.33-37.

¹⁰⁸Dearle NB, 1908, *Problems of unemployment*. pp.100-110.

¹⁰⁹Trevelyan C, 1870, *Seven articles on London: pauperism and its relations to the labour market*. Published in *The Parochial Critic and Weekly Record of Metropolitan Organizations* in July and August 1870, London.

¹¹⁰R.C. 1909, Vol.XVI., p.148.

particularly severe in London. The results of a survey carried out for the Board of Trade by school managers revealed that 39.9% of boys leaving school in London in 1894 entered work as errand-boys and cart-boys, two of the worst examples of 'boy labour', compared to only 21.8% in the other large urban and manufacturing districts of the country.¹¹¹ Even where the jobs entered were not evidently limited to the juvenile years, as were the employments of errand-boy and bell-boy, many of the posts filled by boys proved to be 'dead-end' because of the excessive number of boys employed in the industry as a whole. Thus there were far too many boys employed in the printing, office work, baking and many other trades, their numbers dictating that only a fraction of them could go on to secure adult work in the trades; many of the boys were in effect simply performing work of a character suited to the inexperienced, rather than learning a trade.¹¹²

However, at the docks at least there was a marked dearth of young men, the majority of dockers entering the occupation when aged over twenty-five.¹¹³ This suggests that although the absence of training for a trade may have had an impact on the glutting of the unskilled labour market it was not directly connected to the excessive supply of labour to the docks. Many youths graduating from dead-end jobs and unable to find secure employment entered the Army, a fact reflected in the career histories of London recruits, more than half of whom began life as either errand-boys or van-boys.¹¹⁴

The explanation for the dearth of young men in the docks lies in the low standing of that employment. Llewellyn Smith termed the docks the 'residual' employment of the East End, the employment to which people resorted only after all else had failed.¹¹⁵ The failure could be a personal one, due to ill health, incompetence, drink or misfortune. Such a man once on the slippery slope of decline often found it difficult to avoid quickly filtering through all the grades of labour, till he arrived at the bottom of all as a dock casual. It was this process that accounted for the presence of sons of a solicitor, a general and a

¹¹¹PP. 1899 Vol.LXXV(ii), Table 1. p.vii.

¹¹²Tawney RH, 1909, 'The economics of boy labour.' pp.526-28.

¹¹³Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry.* pp.128-9. Lascelles ECP and Bullock SS, 1924, *Dock labour and decasualization.*

¹¹⁴R.C. 1909, Vol.XVI., p.168.

¹¹⁵Booth C, 1902, *Life and labour of the people in London.* First Series, Vol.III, pp.88-9.

baronet in the crowds at the dock gates in the 1880s¹¹⁶ and the 'velvet collars ...worn through to the canvas', 'the rags of ...showy gentility', spotted amongst the greasy sporting jackets and half-fashioned surtouts.¹¹⁷

However, many more fell to these depths because of situations over which they themselves had no control.¹¹⁸ The bankruptcy of an employer, the introduction of some new machine or process or the structural decline of an industry in a particular location, all could rob men of good character of what had been permanent posts. The man most vulnerable to such a reverse in fortunes was the one who had worked for years for an employer and whose skills were specific to that employer. Unable to prove his worth to other employers, and with little experience of searching for work, this type of man often went down 'completely and rapidly'.¹¹⁹ In the case of Frank Cavilla, a house decorator and a respectable and steady workman, calamity took the form of the death of his employer in an accident.¹²⁰ The death of a long time employer was particularly unfortunate as the employee then had no reference with which to seek other work. Cavilla, as with so many in similar circumstances, found it impossible to regain steady work and was forced through necessity into casual employments instead. Unable to earn enough to adequately support himself and his family, his health failed and he fell ill. Cavilla's case was only unusual in that he was finally driven to killing his wife and four children and then committing suicide. Countless others merely struggled on, robbed of their character and strength by their poverty, unable to escape the casual labour market. Unable to secure work, a once well turned out and respectable man would soon decline into 'shabby gentility', his 'faultless' linen would become 'unkept and unclean', his hours of tramping the streets in search of work render him literally down at heel.

If the odds were against (him) before, how much more so now seeing that (he) was too shabby even to command attention, much less a reply to (his) enquiry for work.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ibid.

¹¹⁷Mayhew H, 1862, *London labour and the London poor*. p.313.

¹¹⁸Webb S and Webb B, 1909, *The labour market*. London. pp.165-70.

¹¹⁹Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry*. pp.111-17.

¹²⁰London J, 1903, *The people of the abyss*. pp.109-10. London.

¹²¹Booth W, 1890, *In darkest England*. p.33.

Even the skilled could be forced to look for work in a lower grade of labour, especially when their skills had been devalued by technical or structural change; these were the men, in the words of Mill, 'sacrificed to the gains of posterity'. In the East End of London structural decline was centred on two industries in particular, silk weaving and shipbuilding.¹²² In both trades men either continued to compete for the reduced amount of work available, becoming casual within their own trade, or were forced to move out of the trade to look for work elsewhere. That movement was invariably downwards.

Men can pass downwards from a skilled trade to compete for unskilled work at times of depression or industrial reconstruction: there is no possibility of an opposite movement.¹²³

When structural change was rapid, as throughout the nineteenth century in London, there was almost inevitably an excessive accumulation of men in the unskilled market, an excess which employers worsened by adopting casual labour systems which enhanced the problem by fostering that excess. In London this problem was added to by the role of the city as a centre for the collection of all grades of displaced persons, for whatever reason they had been displaced. From within the capital, supply came from the silk workers and shipbuilders and associated crafts, whilst as the capital was a centre of high wages it attracted from outside its boundaries large numbers of Irish emigrants in the wake of the famine, thousands of Jews fleeing persecution in Europe, and thousands of agricultural workers displaced by the structural change in that industry. Not all the immigrants went into casual, sweated or unskilled occupations, though many undercut the London-born labourers and forced them into that market. Nevertheless the easily identified Irish and Jews were concentrated in certain branches of industry, the Jews dominating the sweated tailoring trades and a disproportionately large number of the Irish working as general labourers.

Paddy enjoys more than his proportional share of dock work with its privileges and its miseries. He is to be found especially among the irregular hands, disliking as a rule the 'six to six business' for six days of the week.¹²⁴

¹²²Stedman-Jones, 1971, *Outcast London*. pp.100-105.

¹²³Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry*. p.127.

¹²⁴Potter B, 1902 (1895), 'The docks.' p.22.

If men displaced permanently from trades often entered the casual labour market permanently, men displaced temporarily by seasonal or cyclical fluctuations often entered it for short periods. In effect there were two types of men who entered specific casual trades for only a portion of the year, those 'dovetailing' down from seasonally depressed non-casual employments and those dovetailing between casual employments.

The 'casualness' of the employment of the Casual labourer is aggravated by the competition for jobs by men belonging to other trades, who happen to be unemployed and in distress.¹²⁵

A trade depression was a double blow to the professional, full-time casual attending the docks or the builders site, for not only would the amount of work available decline, the number of men who competed for it would rise as men from other industries invaded his market. The docks in particular were 'the stand-by' of all the unfortunates of industry', a stand-by which almost all labourers would take advantage of at some time in their careers.¹²⁶

A factor which militated against any sharp seasonality in the general level of employment in London's economy, despite the marked seasonality in many industries, was the lack of uniformity in the seasons; what was a busy season in one trade was the slack season in another. Throughout the year some trades were at their peak and conversely some at their slackest.¹²⁷ In the gas industry, even by 1910 when the growth in the use of gas by industry and for cooking had flattened out the seasonality of demand for the product, there was still a 18.7% rise in the number of men employed between summer and winter.¹²⁸ Given the variation in the seasonality of trades there were obviously opportunities for the 'dovetailing' of employments. Many of the men who worked as retort house men and stokers in the gas works for the majority of the year, spent some time in the summer either working in the brickfields or the docks, whilst some bricklayers likewise looked for employment in the gas works during periods of winter slackness in their own trade.¹²⁹ This dovetailing of occupations had long been practised in the capital and elsewhere. In the eighteenth century, chairmen, for

¹²⁵Webb S and Webb B, *The labour market*. p.187.

¹²⁶Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour and the docks*. p.77.

¹²⁷Booth C, 1903, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Second Series, Vol. V, p.256.

¹²⁸Popplewell F, 1912, 'The gas industry.' p.198.

¹²⁹ibid., pp.168-70.

whom the seasonal demand reached a peak in the winter months, were said to sometimes seek work as bricklayers.¹³⁰

However, although dovetailing existed throughout the labour market it was generally rare for skilled workmen to dovetail out of their own trade; the vast majority of men dovetailing out of the building industry in the winter were simple labourers, who, among other things, worked 'on the ice', at the railways and hawked goods.¹³¹ A peculiar source of seasonal employment which attracted all manner of unskilled labourers even when their own trades were not particularly slack were the Kent hop and fruit harvests in August and September.

At a seasonal level many skilled trades paid well enough to support the workforce through the slack period, as Smith's third principle had suggested they should, whereas for the labourer the summer earnings were insufficient for this purpose.¹³² Most dovetailing by skilled operatives tended to use the skills of the operatives, the builders' joiner turning to cabinet making, the bricklayer or carpenter to undertaking odd jobs for neighbours. However there was some considerable opposition to skilled operatives dovetailing, generated not least by self respect and snobbishness within the trades.

...if he was a mechanic and went to work in the gasworks in the winter, that would be against him on the next job. They would say: 'He is only a gas stoker. He is no mechanic.'¹³³

Nevertheless, long periods of unemployment could force even the skilled worker through 'sheer necessity' to 'turn their hand' to other trades, and they too would have to enter unskilled trades where entrance was not blocked either by the requirement of some skill or the need for experience.

¹³⁰Smith A, 1961 (1776), *The wealth of nations*. p.116.

¹³¹Booth C, 1903, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Second Series, Vol.I, p.130-1.

¹³²Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. Q134.

¹³³ibid., Q.409.

4.5 A Secondary Sector?

Ringed in my ears now is the hoarse whisper of a prisoner in the exercise yard of Pentonville - stick to the unemployed, John; work is our only hope'. From the depths of the criminal habit into which poverty and want of work had plunged him, he saw instinctively the remedy for his failing...¹³⁴

Having reviewed the leading paradigms of modern labour market economics, and briefly explored the nature of the casual/unskilled labour market in Victorian and Edwardian London, it is evident that striking parallels exist between that market and the secondary sector of SLM theory. The openness of access of the sector, the lack of barriers to the circulation of labour within the sector, the lack of access of the sectors' workforce to the higher grades of labour, the lack of security of the jobs, the arbitrary means of selection, low pay and lack of prospects and training offered to the workforce in the sector, and the absence or weakness of the unions, all these features endured by the casual labourer, can be identified in both the casual labour market and the SLM secondary sector. Equally the high proportion of Irishmen working as general labourers might be evidence of their being excluded or segregated by discrimination, another process identified by SLM economists in the exclusion of secondary sector workers from the primary sector.

However, even more suggestive are observations of the Victorian social scientists, social commentators, and witnesses to committees of investigation which touched upon the subject of casual labour, on the effect the casual system of employment had upon the character and condition of men employed in casual trades. It was almost universally observed that such employment had a seriously detrimental effect, ruining good men and turning the unemployed into the unemployable.

The improvidence of the casual dock-labourer is due, therefore, not to any particular malformation of his moral constitution, but to the precarious character of his calling. His vices are the vices of ordinary human nature. Ninety-nine in every hundred men similarly circumstanced would commit similar enormities.¹³⁵

¹³⁴Burns J, (1893) 1902, *The unemployed*. Fabian Tract No.47., Fabian Society, London.

¹³⁵Mayhew H, 1862, *London labour and the London poor*. Vol.III, p.310.

The irregularity of waterside work reacts on the character and habits of the men who do it...¹³⁶

... a large wage one week and none the next, ... are not favourable conditions to thrift, temperance, and good management. Payment by the hour, with the uncertainty as to whether a job will last two or twenty-four hours, and the consequently incalculable nature of even daily income, encourages the wasteful habits of expenditure which are characteristic of this class. ...The widely known fact that a man without character can live by dock labour becomes the turning point in many lives: it decides the man trembling in the balance to choose the evil course - to throw to one side the irksome shackles of honesty and regularity. ...To have worked at the docks is sufficient to damn a man for other work.¹³⁷

The intermittent stream of jobs, on which livelihood depends, comes along, plentifully or scantily as the case may be, without any regard to individual merit; success in catching the foreman's eye, and getting picked out of the struggling crowd, may come, indeed, more frequently to the physically strong man of dissolute habits and brutal instincts than to the more refined nature. Amid the evil influences of such a life no personal character is likely to be able to maintain itself against temptation.¹³⁸

Casual work in almost every case seems to involve some deterioration in character,... They think not unnaturally, that zeal, fidelity, and honest effort are matters of little account when the work is done for a shifting succession of employers.¹³⁹

These comments all suggest the existence in the casual labour market of the process which the modern SLM economists have described as 'feedback'. Workers were often consigned to the casual labour market and employed casually because they were thought to be irregular in their habits, untrustworthy or physically inadequate, yet these were the characteristics which the system bred in its workforce; the casual docker was thought to be the 'scum of the earth' but the life of the casual docker would have broken down even the most responsible of men. It might be argued then, that the casual trades in effect manufactured the degraded labour which was all they required to function, in a similar fashion to that in which secondary sector workers are held to assume via 'feedback' the negative work characteristics associated with the workforce, rather than possessing them on entering that sector.

¹³⁶Booth C, 1892, *Inaugural address of Charles Booth Esq., President of the Royal Statistical Society*. Delivered 15th November 1892, Session 1892-3. p.141.

¹³⁷Potter B, 1902 (1895), 'The docks.' pp.27-29.

¹³⁸Webb S and Webb B, 1909, *The labour market*. London. p.192.

¹³⁹Lascales ECP and Bullock SS, 1924, *Dock labour and decasualization*. p.62.

Apart from the restrictions to movement out of the casual trades, posed by this positive process of feedback, there was also a secondary factor which tended to trap the workforce, a factor which might be termed 'geographical feedback'. The opportunities for the casual worker to gain work outside the sector were in effect limited by the geographical limitations which his calling placed upon him. The nature of the market dictated that he had to be constantly available in order to be able to meet a demand for his labour whenever it arose, and that necessity made living close to the source of employment imperative. The casuals at the docks had to arrive for the first call at seven or eight o'clock and, should they fail to gain a place from that call, they would then have a couple of hours to kill before the next. Obviously the early start and the intermittent calls throughout the day made it advantageous to live locally.

In fact the geographical immobility of the casual worker was added to by the importance of supplementary incomes earned by wives. The irregular and limited incomes of the casual worker meant that wives were often called upon to supplement their spouses' earnings. Entering the market without option, and willing to accept almost any wage, these women formed a vulnerable and poorly organized workforce, one ideally suited to the requirements of the sweated trades and various light and unskilled forms of manufacturing such as jam and sweet making.¹⁴⁰ Talking principally of the docks in London, Tawney noted that the 'special character' of such industries:

...creates a supply of women's labour which has been artificially cheapened by the necessities of their families, and of which some though not all, firms take advantage... such that women are obliged to work on any terms that they can get.¹⁴¹

The connection between the sweated trades and the casual trades was thus a close one even where the two were not one-and-the-same, the sweated trades congregating in the locations of casual labour in order to take advantage of the supply of cheap female labour in these locations. This concentration reinforced the immobility of the male casual as to move was to risk the loss of the vital secondary income provided by his spouse. Thus once caught in the

¹⁴⁰Howarth G and Wilson M, 1907, *West Ham - a study in social and industrial problems*. p.40.

¹⁴¹Tawney RH, 1915, *The establishment of minimum rates in the tailoring industry*. pp.115-116.

casual sector the casual and his family became so dependent upon their location they faced great difficulties in escaping it.

However, although the comparison between the casual labour market and the SLM secondary sector is an attractive one, I believe there are many elements of the market which do not fit neatly into a SLM model, and which suggest a traditional, neo-classical approach as more appropriate as an explanation of the nature of the casual labour market. Perhaps the most important elements of the market in this respect are the existence of skilled casual occupations which offered reasonable rewards, and the existence of wage differentials within the casual trades which appear to reflect ability, productivity and experience.

Within the docks there were several more-or-less skilled but casually employed groups of workers, all of whom received some benefit from their skills. Whilst often more casual than the preference men of the dock companies, the stevedores, the men who loaded cargoes, and the lightermen, the men who navigated the river craft, were both unionized and received wages sufficiently above the level of the common dockers to enable them generally to tide themselves over periods without work. The skill of the stevedores lay in packing the holds of ships so as to ensure the ship lay on an even keel, and that the cargoes would not move. Even within the labour handling the unloading of cargoes there were specialized skilled and semi-skilled branches; coal, grain and timber porters were all accorded a standing 'above the ordinary docker'.¹⁴² The inability of men to perform the work in these sections, unless familiar with it, was recognized by its superior wages rate.¹⁴³

How can we explain the existence of casual skilled occupations or large casual sections in skilled trades? In part the explanation lies in terms of the volatility of demand that explains so much of wider process of casualization, but we might also usefully employ some of the ideas found in Gary Becker's 'Human Capital'.¹⁴⁴

That casual employment could exist in skilled trades such as stevedoring, or coal portering, can be regarded as reflecting the lack of any 'firm-specific'

¹⁴²Potter B, 1902 (1895), 'The docks.' p.19.; Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour at the docks.* p.13.

¹⁴³Beveridge WH, 1909, *Unemployment - a problem of industry.* p.83.

¹⁴⁴Becker GS, 1964, *Human capital.* National Bureau of Economic Research, New York.

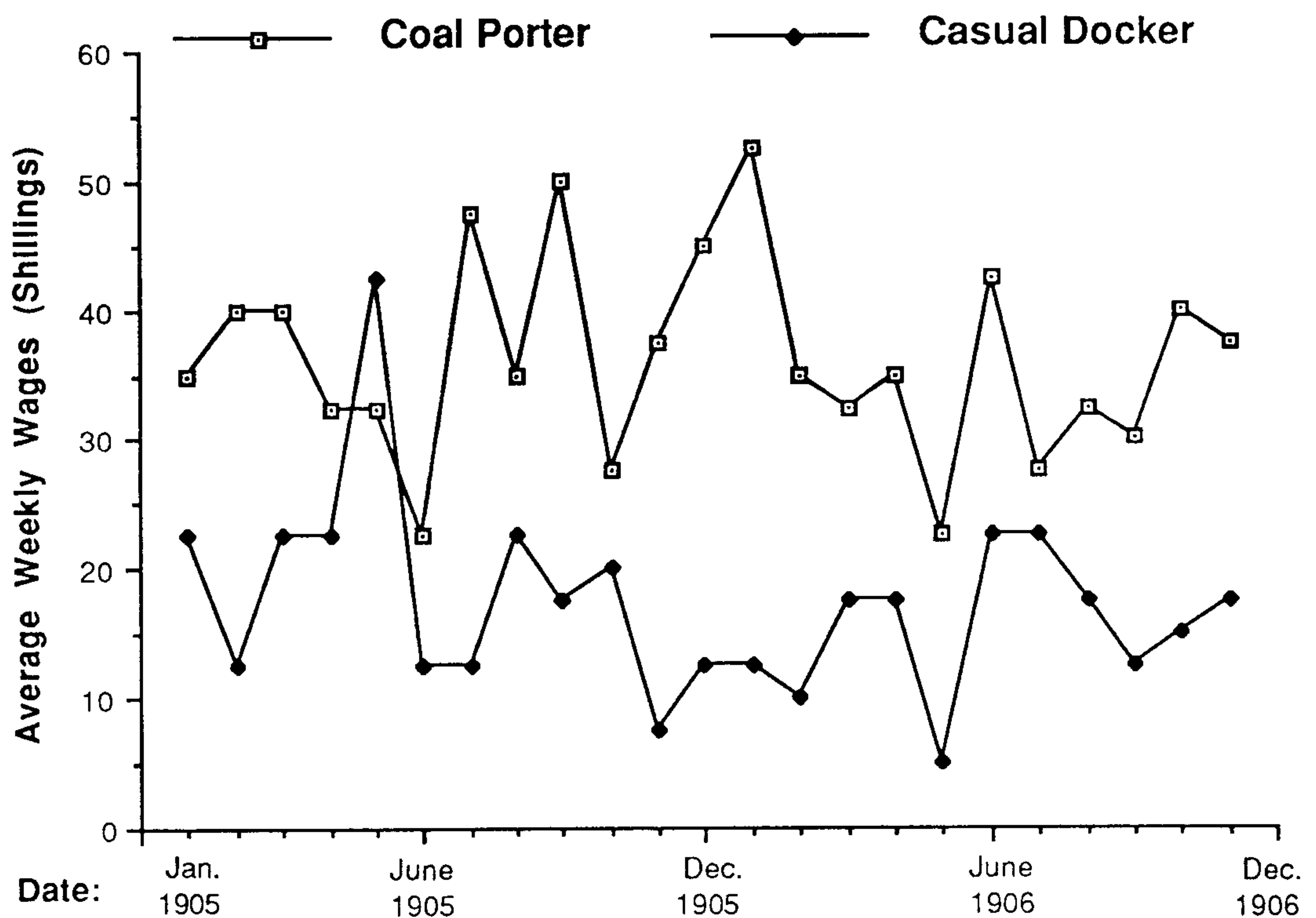
element in the skills of the workers. The investment in the acquisition of what Becker has termed 'general skills'¹⁴⁵, was as Becker predicts for modern 'general' skilled labour, primarily funded by the workers themselves, via accepting low levels of remuneration whilst under apprenticeship, or more likely, during a process of 'learning the ropes'. As the employers had made no investment in the acquisition of the skills, and the skills required were general rather than 'firm-specific', the employers had no incentive to retain workers when demand declined, or to attempt to regularize demand. Consequently in those trades such as stevedoring and other forms of cargo handling, where there was no firm-specific element to the skills or investment skill by employers, skilled trades could be casualized. That a skilled trade should be casualized did not relegate its operatives to the levels of poverty found amongst the unskilled casual workforce. The wage series of a West Ham coal porter, collected by Howarth and Wilson¹⁴⁶, shows a significantly higher general level of income than a similar series collected for a casual docker. In Figure 4.1 the average weekly income for the two workers in the years 1905 and 1906 are contrasted showing clearly the superiority of the coal porter's income, whilst also highlighting the correspondence in the general pattern of movement, both men's earnings rising and falling in parallel reflecting their shared source of employment.

Nevertheless, the income of the coal porter was highly variable, and in 1906 ranged from nothing (week ending 29th September) to 106s. 9d. (week ending 27th January). At a weekly level, in 1905 the casual docker actually earned more than the coal porter in nine weeks in the year.

¹⁴⁵ibid., pp.11-29.

¹⁴⁶Howarth G and Wilson M, 1907, *West Ham - a study in social and industrial problems*. pp.250-251.

Figure 4.1
Monthly Average Weekly Earnings of Coal Porter
& Casual Docker, 1905-1906



Source: Howarth & Wilson (1907), pp.248-251

Within the casual and sweated trades the widespread practice of payment by the piece tied earnings closely to productivity, as neo-classical theory suggested they should be, and it was also not unknown for men to be paid different wages according to their worth even where no such formal scheme existed.¹⁴⁷ However, the connection between reward and productivity existed at a far finer scale within the casual trades in the form of the distribution of work. Although there may have been a certain amount of bribery involved, employers generally gave preference to the more able and regular. Thus the 'preference' men at the dock were..

....for the most part an honest, hard working sect, who have established themselves by their regular attendance and honesty in the confidence of their employers.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. Q.1153.

¹⁴⁸Potter B, 1902 (1895), 'The docks.' p.26.

I would argue that this system may be regarded as a primitive form of job ladder, the more competent casuals working their way according to ability to positions of greater security. A similar system to that at the docks could be observed in operation in the employment of building labourers, as the comments of one builder illustrate.

If you have competent men you retain them to the last, so that the most skilled man really gets the preference. He earns, on average, more, because he is the last to be sacked and the first to be taken on.¹⁴⁹

The shortness of the terms of employment, commonly an hour's notice either side in the building trades, meant that those who were incompetent, men who often were not specialists in the type of work but merely trying their luck, were quickly out of work again after being taken on, whilst the more able, often those who had specialized in the work, were retained longer, reaping a more secure and steady income.

Further support for a human capital interpretation can be found in the large numbers of casuals who either entered casual trades directly after employment in 'dead-end' jobs, or entered later as a consequence of following such occupations and then being limited to unskilled labour where the chances of becoming casualized were greatest. The attraction of the 'dead-end' employments was the high wages they offered relative to juvenile employments which gave the boys some training or prospect of security; the boys in effect sacrificed their future prospects for more immediate rewards.¹⁵⁰ The margin of just a shilling or two a week could be enough in many families to rob a child of the opportunity to follow a skilled career.

A head teacher told me of one boy whose skill in modelling rose to something approaching genius. Two managers of a prominent jewellery firm came down to the school, saw his work, and offered him the prospect of apprenticeship and certain advancement. His parents sent him off as an errand boy for an extra shilling a week.¹⁵¹

How far then can one justify looking upon the segregation of the casual worker in Victorian London as a consequence of the lack of personal quality and investment in training for skills? How far were these workers segregated

¹⁴⁹Charity Organization Society, 1908, *Special committee on unskilled labour*. Q.268.

¹⁵⁰This subject will be covered in depth in Chapter 7.

¹⁵¹Freeman A, 1914, *Boy life and labour - the manufacture of inefficiency*. PS King and Son, London. p.173.

before they entered the adult labour market? One evident feature is the stress laid upon the point of entry into the labour market by SLM and neoclassical economists, and by contemporary observers of the Victorian and Edwardian metropolitan labour market. Yet as we have seen almost all the work concerned with the labour market at this time has shown little or no interest in this aspect of the market, most having emanated from social historians, being concerned chiefly with the ramifications of the 'labour aristocracy' in the adult sphere, and the process of 'class formation'.¹⁵² How far would the analysis of this disputed phenomenon benefit from more study of the crucial process of entry to the market? If we look again at the comments of the classical economists and their immediate successors, as reviewed in the last chapter, we must conclude that the benefits might be considerable. Marshall's contemporary comments highlight this point.

There are not many skilled trades to which the son of an unskilled labourer can get easy access; and in the large majority of cases the son follows the father's calling. The father has indeed special facilities for introducing his son. Employers and their foremen generally give to a lad whose father they already know and trust, a preference over one for whom they have to incur the entire responsibility.¹⁵³

That Marshall should write thus should encourage us to look harder at the writings of contemporary economists, a source of insight into the operation of the labour market almost totally neglected. In particular we should study closely the work of J.S. Mill, for there we can find perhaps the most concise and vital interpretation of the operation of that market, and one that demonstrates convincingly the sources of divisions or segmentation. As we noted, up to the time of Mill it had been accepted almost without question that Smith's five principles governed the differentials in the wages between jobs across the labour market as a whole. Mill simply pointed out that the inequalities in wages were generally exactly the reverse of those which the operation of Smith's principles would suggest they should be, the explanation for which Mill suggested lay in the existence of 'non-competing groups' within the market.

¹⁵²Stedman Jones G, 1971, *Outcast London*.; Foster J, 1974, *Class struggle and the industrial revolution: early industrial capitalism in three English towns*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.; Gray RQ, 1976, *The labour aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh*. Clarendon, Oxford.; Crossick G, 1978, 'The labour aristocracy and its values: a study of mid-Victorian Kentish London.' *Victorian Studies* 19 pp.301-28.

¹⁵³Marshall A, 1961 (1890), *Principles of economics*. Macmillan and Co, London. p.563.

The really exhausting and the really repulsive labours, instead of being better paid than others, are almost invariably paid the worst of all, because performed by those who have no choice.¹⁵⁴

To Mill the basis of the differentials between the wages of skilled and unskilled labour lay in the lack of access of the bulk of the population to capital sufficient to fund even the most simple training. It is worth quoting again Fawcett's development of Mill's ideas.

The difference in the wages of skilled and unskilled labour represents a large return to the capital which has been spent in the skilled workman's education. This must be so whilst so few of our workmen have either the foresight or the means to bring their children up to some skilled employment. Skilled workmen therefore possess, as it were, the advantages of monopoly.¹⁵⁵

Here then was the point where a simple human capital model failed in the Victorian economy; it failed because it made the assumption that all individuals entering the labour market were free to invest in themselves. As the degree to which an individual was able to invest seems to have been strongly tied to the circumstances of his family, there is likely to have been a considerable element of inter-generational feedback operating in the labour market; the children from poorer families were obliged to find as high a wage as possible on leaving school, with dire consequences for their future careers.

In poorer families the money which the husband brings home is largely supplemented from other sources. The day on which the children will be able to leave school is eagerly looked forward to, and they are hurried into work which will bring in as much as possible at once, without much regard to future prospects. And in this way hundreds of boys are started on inauspicious careers which will bring them by and by to the same plight as their fathers are in.¹⁵⁶

Mill argued that the operation of Smith's five principles across the labour market as a whole was blocked by the divisions in the labour market which made each grade or caste independent of the conditions in the others. However, he argued that the principles did operate within the different grades of labour.¹⁵⁷ This idea tallies with our observations on the existence of wage

¹⁵⁴Mill JS, 1965 (1852), *Principles of political economy: with some of their application to social philosophy*. University of Toronto Press, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Canada. p.383.

¹⁵⁵ibid., (1863) p.163.

¹⁵⁶Mess HA, 1916, *Casual labour at the docks*. pp. 48-49.

¹⁵⁷Mill JS, 1965 (1852), *Principles of political economy*. p.383.

differentials within the casual trades. Mill thus supported neo-classical concepts of how the labour market operated, but demonstrated how in practice the operation of these processes produced segmentation; segmentation in the labour market was to Mill fundamentally based not upon prejudice and discrimination, but upon the operation of the concept of human capital.

It is also worth quoting again Smith's comments on the likely consequences of the permanent decline in the prospects of a trade.

In a decaying manufacture..., many workmen, rather than quit their old trade, are contented with smaller wages than would otherwise be suitable to the nature of their employment.¹⁵⁸

The casual nature of many of London's older trades, such as silk-weaving, ship-building, and to a certain extent workshop carpentry and tobacco processing, owed much to just this process, the decline in wages being a consequence in no small part of the division of less and less work between a workforce reluctant to leave the trades that had once provided them with an adequate livelihood.

In conclusion, it can convincingly be argued that the casual labour market in late Victorian and Edwardian London is fundamentally one that can be accommodated within a classical/neoclassical framework of explanation, and that segmentation resulted primarily from supply side decisions of labour market participants. It is undoubtedly true that these decisions were in fact generally taken with little actual choice, the decision being fixed by circumstances. In reaching such an understanding of the casual labour market, the ideas of Mill and Marshall are perhaps more valuable than those of either SLM or neoclassical modern labour market theorists. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the casual labour sector such as the operation of 'feedback' are redolent of the processes and structures highlighted as operating in the secondary sectors of modern labour markets by SLM economists. In the case of the docks, the identification of basic systems of job ladders operating amongst the more regular attenders illustrates that in this sector of the casual labour market at least, that market was not totally without structure. Further, the discussion of the existence of relatively well remunerated casual skilled employments such as stevedoring, emphasizes the importance of the lack of firm specific skills in the Victorian labour force as an explanation for the lack of incentive for employers to regularize employment.

¹⁵⁸Smith A, 1961 (1776), *The wealth of nations*. pp.129.

Although it has not been a primary consideration here, it is evident that the market for female labour could perhaps be more fairly regarded as a segregated market in the sense employed by the SLM economists. At least at first glance, it would appear that female labour was a class of labour clearly segregated from the main labour market. However, here again the modern ideas of families deciding on investment in human capital at a family level may be relevant, and the observations of contemporary economists provide another useful source of insight. As one contemporary observed, there may well have been a high level of self-stereotyping by the girls entering the labour market:

The girl is glad to enter those trades in which she can pick up a few shillings quickly, for her wage-earning faculties improve her position in the matrimonial market. Indeed, her industrial life is only of temporary interest to the working girl, who regards it merely as a preliminary to marriage. Therefore she is disinclined to spend much time in training, and prefers unskilled work in which wage-earning begins immediately.¹⁵⁹

There is in such observations the outline of a 'human capital' explanation for much of the wage differentials between female and male employments. This topic certainly deserves a fuller and more considered treatment than I have had time to give it here.

Returning to the consideration of the main casual labour market, as with the theoretical labour market literature, both modern and contemporary, the point of entry to the labour market has emerged from this discussion of the casual trades as a factor believed by contemporaries to be of primary importance. It is to this subject that the rest of this thesis will be directed.

To understand the nature of entry to the labour market in late Victorian and Edwardian London, it is important to gain a perspective of the legislative controls operating upon point of entry at that date. As with many aspects of the late Victorian urban economy, this was an area where considerable legislative interference was gradually shaping an economic structure. An understanding of the problems of child and boy labour, as perceived by contemporaries in late Victorian London can only be achieved by recognising the forces that underlay legislative control of these aspects of the labour market. Essentially, I will argue that the problems themselves existed in the forms that they did because of the nature of legislative interference, and that the failure of legislation to extinguish

¹⁵⁹Montagu LH, 1904, p.237-238. 'The girl in the background.' in Urwick EJ, (ed), 1904, *Studies of boy life in our cities.* pp.233-254.

the problem of child labour was not primarily the consequence of any lack of effort or commitment on the part of the legislators, but due to the dynamic nature of the responses of those subject to the legislation. I shall argue strongly that the problem of casual labour in late Victorian and Edwardian London can only be understood through an appreciation of the peculiar circumstances that had evolved to manufacture large volumes of unskilled workers, for whom casual labour offered the only opportunity of employment.

Chapter 5

Child and Juvenile Labour: The Origins of Intervention

5.1 Introduction

As a prerequisite to any understanding of the nature and extent of child and juvenile employments at the end of the nineteenth century, I believe that it is necessary to appreciate the severe constraints placed upon it by legislation which emerged over the preceding hundred years. The bulk of this legislation can be conveniently divided into two classes: the factory or industrial legislation which was designed to control either specific types of child labour, such as 'climbing-boys', or industrial employments in general; and the chronologically later educational legislation, which, although not directly addressed to the conditions of child labour, by its very nature constrained it. Besides the purely technical development of legislation which I will present in the next chapter, a study of attitudes towards child labour and of the problems of enforcing that legislation is valuable in that it establishes a background against which we can see the problems faced at the close of the century. It is only by placing the nature of child labour at the close of the nineteenth century in its historical context, as a position reached after centuries of child labour and a century of reform, that it can be understood.

5.2 Child Labour: An Invention of the Industrial Revolution?

...Arkwright's machine resulted in two other developments that were landmarks in the textile industry. It marked the beginning of the Factory System, for the machine was unsuitable for use in the worker's home. Then, even more important in those days of cheap labour, the Water Frame could be operated by children, so the sorry story of child slavery commenced.¹

The quote above is taken from an 'O' level text book and illustrates succinctly the commonly accepted perception of the relationship between child labour and the 'Industrial Revolution'. Unfortunately, I believe that the idea that child labour was neatly confined to the period 1780-1870 is doubly inaccurate: Arkwright may have invented the Water-Frame, but he by no means invented child labour, and Shaftesbury's great Education Act of 1870 did not mark the end of the phenomenon, but merely a further stage in the long process of state

¹Stamp AH, 1979, *A social and economic history of England from 1700 to 1979*. Research Publishing Co., London. p.52.

manipulation, conscious or otherwise, of the form of child participation in the labour market. Child labour as a social and economic phenomenon has existed throughout history, and to associate it so exclusively with the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries is to perpetuate a serious misrepresentation. Why then is that impression so strong?

At least one factor contributing to the myth that the industrial revolution 'invented' child labour, is that it was only with the arrival of the factory and steam-power that comprehensive legislation to protect children from the worst excesses of labour began to emerge. Prior to the factory legislation of the early nineteenth century the chief concern of the limited amount of national legislation to touch upon child labour had been to encourage rather than to hinder it.²

Although there is little hard statistical evidence on the extent to which children were employed in pre-industrial England, there is a considerable volume of circumstantial evidence, especially in the large number of social commentaries that survive from the period. Such commentaries confirm that, far from being unheard of or insignificant during this period, child labour was not only commonplace and socially accepted³, but both economically and socially important to many families and the economy as a whole.

To understand child labour it is important to understand the attitude of society towards children and the idea of childhood. As Aries explained in his seminal work on the history of childhood,⁴ during the middle ages no clear distinction had been drawn in Western European culture between childhood and adulthood, a fact reflected in the attitudes expressed in contemporary literature and in the absence of any unique forms of dress and literature for children; children were treated simply as diminutive adults. As late as the

²Under the Act of 1536 those aged between twelve and sixteen who refused to enter service and persisted in idleness, could be whipped. Beier AL, 1974, p.9., 'Vagrants and the social order in Elizabethan England.' *Past and Present* 64 pp.3-9.

³In 1697, the philosopher John Locke suggested the age of three as a suitable one at which to expect the poor's children to begin working for at least part of the day. Paper to the Lord Justices for the Board of Trade (1697), reproduced in Bourne HRF, 1876, *The life of John Locke*. Henry S King and Co., London. p.377-91, p.383.

⁴Aries P, (1960) 1979, *Centuries of childhood*. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth. Especially Ch.2.

eighteenth century children aged only seven were still treated as adults under English law and subjected to the full force of the punitive legal code.⁵

In a less sophisticated age, when the margin between what a man could produce and what he needed to survive was smaller, it was impossible to support a large population of dependents. When the average age of the population was below twenty-seven, and perhaps 45% of the population were children,⁶ it would evidently be a matter of necessity rather than choice that children should make some contribution towards their own upkeep at even the most tender of ages, and work to their full capacity as soon as possible. In blunt terms, childhood was a luxury few parents could afford to offer their offspring, and one which nature anyway often cut short by the simple means of orphanage. It is not insignificant that when Aries first identifies the emergence of a distinct culture of childhood, it is with reference only to the wealthiest portion of the population.⁷

Although collected between 1788 and 1794, after the arrival of the earliest factories, the information compiled by the Reverend David Davies on the state of the rural labouring class offers us a unique insight into both the lives of that population as a whole, and specifically, the prevalence of child labour within that class in pre-industrial Britain. Spurred by the favourable response to his own investigation of the income and expenditure of rural labouring families in a single rural parish, Davies encouraged others to follow his example. In all he received returns from about thirty parishes, from as far-afield as St. Austell in Cornwall, Marsham in Norfolk, Llangeil and Sutherland. These returns, most of them compiled by fellow clergymen, Davies published as an Appendix to his book 'The Case of Labourers in Husbandry Stated and Considered' (1795).

When interpreting the returns we should remember the objectives of those who collected them. The returns were specifically limited to poor labouring rural families, and should be interpreted in that light. Nevertheless, and despite the very limited number of families included in most of the returns, the detailed information provided makes them a particularly valuable source. Typically the returns give details for each household of the family's weekly income, broken down into three separate contributions, those of the husband, wife and

⁵Pinchbeck I and Hewitt M, 1973, *Children in English society: from the eighteenth century to the Children Act 1948*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. pp.351-2.

⁶Laslett P, 1965, *The world we have lost*. Methuen, London. p.103.

⁷Aries P, (1960) 1979, *Centuries of Childhood*, p.48.

'children'. Importantly for our purposes they also generally provide information on the number of children in the household and the age of at least the eldest child. Unfortunately, where children did contribute to the family income, none of the returns give any indication of how they earned that money. Neither do they specify whether the total given for the earnings of the children was earned only by the eldest child or by two or more of the children in the family. Nevertheless, given the information which we are provided with it is possible to look at the relationship between the age of the eldest child and the earnings of children.

Table 5.1

Wage-Earning Children in Rural Britain c.1790

Age of Eldest Child	Number of Families	Number in Which Children Earning		Total Earnings Per Week		Average Earnings of those working	
		No	%	s.	d.	s.	d.
< 6	21	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
6-7	21	2	9.5	1	0	0	6
8-9	19	12	63.2	8	7	0	9
10-11	14	9	64.3	12	11	1	5
12-13	14	12	85.7	14	11	1	3
14-15	13	12	92.3	26	9	2	3
>15	10	10	100.0	45	9	4	7

Source: Based upon information contained in the Appendix to Davies (1795)⁸

Of course, the increase in the average earnings of the children in the families as the age of the eldest child increases will reflect, in part, the fact that more than one child was earning, something more likely when the eldest was fifteen than when he was ten. However, even allowing for the fact that this growth in the average earnings of the 'children' of families with the age of the eldest child is not directly equivalent to a growth in the earnings of the individual children, the actual monetary value gives us at least some idea of the value of

⁸In the case of one family from the parish of Keddlestone, the two eldest children were both unable to work due to illness in the case of the eldest, a girl, and a broken arm in the case of her nearest sibling, a boy. For the purposes of this table the third eldest child in the family has been treated as the eldest. It may well be that similar explanations lie behind the absence of any children's earnings in some of the other families, but no other direct reference was made to them. In the case of the one family where the eldest child was aged fourteen but earned nothing, the child was still at school. A few parishes' returns have been excluded from the table (Table 5.1) because the earnings of the children were not given as a separate category, either being combined with those of the wife or in a total for the entire family. Where the term 'infant' was used the child was assumed to be aged less than six.

child labour within households. The chief value of the table lies in the information it provides us on how widespread waged labour was amongst even very young children. Although no assessment can be made of how representative the rather limited selection of families included in the returns were of the agricultural labouring population as a whole, the returns certainly strongly support the conclusion that a majority of the children of agricultural labourers were involved in waged labour from as early as eight or nine years of age.

Although we should recognize that the age at which children would start to earn was probably lower in the poorest class in agricultural society than in any other, we should also remember that the population of that class by the close of the eighteenth century was probably greater than any other. Neither should we forget when interpreting the figures that the returns were only concerned with the 'earnings' of the children, rather than their work. Thus no account is given to the un-paid labour of the children within the household. One return actually records that the eldest child, a girl aged twelve 'earns nothing abroad' but 'assists her mother at home' (Keddlestone, Derbyshire). This observation not only highlights the importance of unrecorded domestic labour, but also raises the issue of gender.

In most returns no distinction was made as to the sex of the eldest child; such a distinction might well have shown that boys had higher activity rates than girls at all ages. Importantly we should recognize that, irrespective of sex, the large families of this period put a great deal of pressure on the time of the eldest child. The entry of many of the eldest children, especially where that child was a girl, would have been delayed by their taking over from their mother the raising of their younger brothers and sisters, thus enabling the mother to devote herself to wage earning. A significant proportion of the eldest children would have been unable to begin earning money themselves, and thus appearing as working in the table above, until their nearest sibling was able to take over the task of looking after the younger children. Bearing these points in mind it might be wise to conclude that although the table above may give a reasonably accurate impression of the ages at which children began to earn a wage it undoubtedly understates the useful labour of the children. Household chores would have been a universal imposition upon the time of young children, and that a considerable amount of hard work was involved can not be doubted. In the days before electricity and mains water supply, the collection of both fuel and water alone would have taken up considerable time and effort.

Although agricultural and domestic tasks accounted for vast majority of labour performed by children prior to the industrial revolution, the body of working children most often discussed by contemporaries were those engaged in cloth making, the most important craft in England. Children were used for many of the simpler tasks involved in the process of manufacturing cloth, such as the cleaning of the wool and winding, or 'quiling', of the spun yarn onto the bobbins. The ability of small children to earn their keep through diligent application in such employments was something which seems to have excited admiration in all who saw it. Touring the country in the 1720's Daniel Defoe proudly recorded instances of districts where children commonly worked from the age of four. Defoe was told that there was not a hand in all the eastern and middle part of the county of Norfolk unemployed if they would work, and that 'the very children after four or five years of age, could every one earn their own bread.'⁹ Similarly, Richard Braithwaite, writing in 1615 noted that 'young brats:

"Who hardly have the wit to don their clothes.

Are set to worke.....

Winding of spooles, or such like easie paine....."¹⁰

An important function of children in pre-industrial England was to act as a reserve supply of labour. Whilst the very young might not be required to work for all of the year, at times of great strain such as harvest time, every hand would be called upon.

In considering the impact of the factory, it is worth remembering that for many children the working day under the domestic system of manufacturing may have been little less arduous than that endured by the early factory workers. In the framework knitting trade, a trade that employed large numbers of children, the working day in the eighteenth century was said to be of the order of sixteen or seventeen hours.¹¹ In considering the impact of the factory on child labour, I would argue that it is particularly important that it is noted that in the early days of the reform movement there were few who questioned that working class children should work. If one reads the recorded minutes of evidence one notes

⁹Defoe D. 1724-27, A tour thro' the wole island of Great Britain; divided into circuits or journeys. G Strahan, London.

¹⁰Wadsworth AP and De Lacy Mann J. 1931, The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire, 1600-1870. Manchester University Press, Manchester.p.9.

¹¹Hutchins BL and Harrison A, 1911, A history of factory legislation. PS King and Son, London. p.5.

that vast majority of witnesses to early parliamentary committees suggested ages of less than ten as reasonable ones at which to expect children to start working as long as working-hours were reduced, and ten as a reasonable age at which to expect children to work full-time. Thus whilst quoted out of context and in isolation many witnesses appear to challenge the entire idea of children working, in reality most sought only to control gross excesses. For example, whilst Doctor Baillie, a witness to the 1816 Committee of Inquiry, was strongly of the opinion that children were being injured by over-work in the factories and mills, stating that no-one could work for thirteen hours a day without damaging their health, he nevertheless thought it reasonable that children should work for four or five hours a day when seven years old, rising to a maximum of ten hours at ten.¹² Even Robert Owen the philanthropic mill owner, made the children employed in his New Lanark Mill work a twelve hour day from the age of ten.¹³

I believe that, at least in part, the enthusiasm shown for child labour by the pre-industrial commentators may have owed something to a fear of idleness amongst the poor, and possibly even the memory of the 'valiant beggars' and idle paupers that had seemed to many to pose a threat to the stability of Elizabethan England.¹⁴ The puritan distrust of idleness amongst the young died hard; Sir Robert Peel, the man responsible for the earliest factory legislation, nevertheless affirmed that the employment of young children was to the advantage of societies:

I conceive... it is much better to have poor people's children employed... and being made useful members of society, at an early period, rather than seeing them of no use, nuisances in the street, naked, and in the habits of pilfering and beggary¹⁵

Similarly, Robert Owen, argued that it was better that children aged less than ten should be 'employed in any occupation' rather than left unoccupied to make 'mischief'.¹⁶

To avoid the prospect of such 'mischief' and to hold down the cost of poor relief many Poor Law authorities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

¹²PP.1816, Vol.III, p.29.

¹³ibid., p.167.

¹⁴Beier AL, 1974, *Vagrants and the social order.*; Slack PA, 1974, 'Vagrants and vagrancy in England, 1598-1664.' *Economic History Review* Second Series 27 pp.360-379.

¹⁵Report of the Commission on the Woollen Manufacturers of England, PP.1806, p.441.

¹⁶PP. 1816, Vol.III, p.23.

went to great lengths to either off-load the parish foundlings and orphans as indentured or non-indentured 'apprentices', or wrest some income directly from them by putting them to work themselves.¹⁷ Before the introduction of the workhouses, parishes had put children too young to apprentice out to nurse, a practice that was almost universally unpleasant, and occasionally fatal as the nurses were renowned for their barbarity.¹⁸ The levels of mortality amongst the parish infants put out to nurse were in fact so appalling, an Act was passed in 1767 requiring that 2s.6d. be paid per week for the care of each child, with a bonus of 10s. to any nurse who was so 'public spirited' as to keep a parish baby alive for a whole year.¹⁹ Regrettably, in their desire to save money, the parish authorities were also often less than discriminating in their choice of masters for their wards, and the small fees offered to prospective masters attracted many less than praiseworthy volunteers. Cases of children being beaten, starved and even murdered by their masters or mistresses were not unknown, their existence being recorded in court records either as criminal prosecutions, or as parts of pleas on behalf of apprentices for the termination of their bonds.²⁰ Many parish apprentices were used simply as drudges for the period of years for which they were bound, the employer offering little or no pretence that any industrial training was being given, or any future livelihood secured.²¹

If the fate of the parish apprentices was generally a poor one, that of those put to work inside the workhouses was generally little better.²² Child and adult workhouses were largely an innovation of the second half of the seventeenth century and reflected both a toughening of official attitudes towards the poor in the period, and the decline in the importance of charitable trusts as a consequence of the civil war.²³ Increasingly the poor of all ages were expected

¹⁷For a discussion of various forms of non-indentured labour see Hampson EM, 1934, *The treatment of poverty in Cambridgeshire, 1597-1834*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Ch.XII. For a valuable collection of evidence of the use of parish children in the sixteenth century East Anglian wool cloth industry, see, Unwin G, 1927, *Stories in economic history: the collected papers of G Unwin*. Edited by RH Tawney, Macmillan, London.

¹⁸George MD, 1930, *London life in the eighteenth century*. London. p.217.

¹⁹Hutchins BL and Harrison A, 1911, *A history of factory legislation*. p.7.

²⁰For a detailed account of apprenticeship as it existed in eighteenth century London, see George MD, 1930, *London life in the eighteenth century*. Ch.5.

²¹ibid., p.225. It was not unknown for unscrupulous masters to pocket the fee and then either abscond or try to have the boys press-ganged. ibid., p.230.

²²Pinchbeck I and Hewitt M, 1969, *Children in English Society*. pp.126-75.

²³ibid., p.146.

to make a contribution to their own upkeep by working at various menial tasks such as oakum picking and stone breaking. Workhouses did at least offer the pauper children the advantage of taking them out of the hands of the parish nurses. In the words of one of the enthusiastic mid-eighteenth century pamphlets supporting the construction of more of the new workhouses, it was confidently predicted that the workhouse would render the children who passed through them 'useful to the country' by instilling in them 'habits of virtue' and, importantly, by ensuring that they were 'inured to labour'.²⁴ For many children life inside the workhouses took on an aspect not dissimilar to that experienced later by the children working in the early factories. Excluding the time allowed for meals, the young inmates of the institution in the London parish of Bishopsgate in 1708 worked a ten hour day, their tasks to 'spin wool and flax, knit stockings, to make new their linen, clothes, shoes, mark, etc'.²⁵

On reviewing the evidence, it must be conceded that neither child labour nor its abuse was an innovation of the industrial revolution. It should in particular be remembered that the lot of parish apprentices had for a long time been particularly bad, and it was this group who provided most of the workforce of the early mills and factories. It can even be suggested that the introduction of factory production actually had a beneficial effect on child labour, as it probably led to a decline in the quantity of labour performed by the very young; whereas under the domestic system every child might have expected from a very early age to take some part in the manufacturing process, the cost of supervision would often have made the labour of the very young uneconomic to the factory owners. Nevertheless we should be very wary of underestimating the adverse effects that factory production was to bring. It remains likely that the industrial revolution, especially in its earliest manifestations, did bring both a growth in the quantity of child labour, and, at least in aggregate terms, a worsening in the conditions endured by the children. Although not creating a new phenomenon, but simply developing one that had existed for as long as there had been mouths to fill, the new factories and machinery towards the close of the eighteenth century were to combine to produce an environment where 'easie paine' was rarely enjoyed.²⁶

²⁴George MD, 1930, *London life in the eighteenth century*. p.218.

²⁵ibid., p.219.

²⁶For a useful collection of evidence on this question, see Pike ER, 1966, *Human documents of the industrial revolution in Britain*. Allen and Unwin, London. pp.75-230.; Fielden J, 1936, *The curse of the factory system*. A Cobbett, London,; Ure A, 1835, *The philosophy of*

5.3 The Arrival of the Factories

Petty rogues submit to fate, That great ones may enjoy their state²⁷

For children as a whole there were particular drawbacks to the industrial system created by the factory and mechanized production. The necessity of keeping up with the pace set by machinery put greater strain upon adult labour, and still more upon children; when this was combined with long hours, fatigue was inevitable. Excessive fatigue seems to have been practically universal amongst the early child factory hands, and particularly severe in Scotland where factory hours were typically an hour longer than in England.²⁸ Hours were at their longest in the early isolated mills. In the Backbarrow mill in Lancashire in 1814, the young apprentices, some of whom were brought to the mill when aged only seven, worked a fifteen hour day with only an hour off for meals.²⁹ Some children were so exhausted by this regime that they occasionally fell asleep at their posts.³⁰ What made the lot of the early mill children even worse was the level of brutality amongst the overlookers or overseers who supervised them in their labour.³¹ It is impossible not to be moved by Robert Blincoe's detailed recollections of his life as a young bound apprentice in two mills in the Midlands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³² There can be very few more sinister characters, even in fiction, than the sadistic Robert Woodward, an overseer in the Lowdham mill in Derbyshire, the second mill in which Blincoe served. Woodward found nothing more 'delightful' than the sight of blood gushing from a wound inflicted by a roller thrown at the head of an apprentice, and for 'amusement' would sharpen the teeth of the apprentices with a file, advising them that he did it so that they

manufactures or an exposition of the scientific, moral and commercial economy of the factory system of Great Britain. Charles Knight, London.

²⁷Ashley, 1841, *On making a humble address to Her Majesty, to appoint a commission of inquiry into the employment of children in mines, collieries, and other occupations not regulated by the Factory Acts.* Speech of Lord Ashley in the House of Commons, 24th August 1840. L and G Seeley, London. p.4.

²⁸PP.1833, Vol.XX, pp.25-27.

²⁹PP.1816, Vol.III, p.178.

³⁰ibid., p.180.

³¹In addition to the overseers, fellow apprentices also abused the younger apprentices in the early mills, PP. 1876, Vol.III, p.181.

³²Brown J, 1977 (1832), *A memoir of Robert Blincoe.* Caliban Books, Sussex.

might eat their 'Sunday dinner the better'.³³ At a less severe level, the beating of children seems to have been routine, accepted as such by overseers, spinners and children alike.³⁴ However, it should be recalled that such apparent indifference towards brutality was not confined to the denizens of the mills but was endemic to the times. The regimes in the Victorian public schools to which the elite chose to send their children, generation after generation, were little less brutal than those in the factories. ³⁵

Nevertheless, human brutality was not the only danger faced by the young mill hands. The combination of steam and water power, often inadequately fenced machinery, and the low roofs of the early mills which had made use of buildings not specifically designed as mills, made any lack of concentration dangerous and potentially fatal. Fatigue and chance inevitably produced accidents.³⁶ Further, even when no accident was encountered, the long hours of monotonous activity, often spent standing minding machinery, bending to mend broken threads, or crawling beneath the machinery to collect cotton waste, unsurprisingly encouraged a number of orthopaedic conditions and even permanent deformities. Dr. Robert Baker, one of the earliest factory inspectors, left a vivid description of his experience as a young medical practitioner in a thriving industrial town in 1830.

I was in practice at Leeds and was in the habit of seeing then, as everybody did, that the factory cripples were to be seen in almost every street in the Yorkshire and Lancashire districts. Their legs were bowed, where their legs were affected, and where the foot was affected, it was as flat, comparatively, as a piece of paper. Where the spine was affected, it was curved either in or out, according to the machinery between which the people had worked.³⁷

In addition to these direct physical dangers there were a host of respiratory ones. Although associated with a number of industries, workers employed in

³³ibid, pp.54-56 et seq.

³⁴PP.1831-32, Vol.XV, p.168.; PP.1833, Vol.XX, pp.18-20.

³⁵Dr. George Moberley testified to the clarendon Committee on Education that commonly 20 boys a day had been beaten in the school of 150 boys which he had attended, and that 'nobody cared about it'. Clarendon Committee on Education Report, Vol.20, p.153. See Chandos J, 1984, *Boys together: English public schools, 1800-1864*. Hutchinson, London. Ch.11.; for a useful study of the severity and frequency of physical chastisement in public school in the first half of the nineteenth century.

³⁶Robert Blincoe gives a chilling eye witness account of the accident that befell Mary Richards, one of his contemporaries in the Lowdham mill, after her apron became caught on the shaft of a machine. Brown J, 1977 (1832), *A memoir of Robert Blincoe*. p.36.

³⁷PP. 1876, Vol.XXX, Q.566.

the cotton industry were particularly badly affected by respiratory disorders as the high humidity required for the cotton thread to remain at its most workable when combined with the dust and fluff, or 'flue' as it was called in the cotton mills, produced a distinctly unhealthy atmosphere, a situation only made worse in the early mills by the cramped conditions of both the mills themselves and the apprentice houses. In fact it was an outbreak of typhus in the cotton mills around Radcliffe near Bury in 1784 which first drew the public's attention to the poor conditions prevailing in the mills. After several years of investigation Thomas Percival, the head of a committee of doctors set up to investigate the outbreak, set out his conclusions in a memorandum to the Manchester Board of Health:

The large factories are generally injurious to the constitution of those employed in them, even where no particular diseases prevail, from the close confinement which is enjoined, from the debilitating effects of hot or impure air, and from the want of the active exercises which nature points out as essential in childhood and youth.³⁸

As Charles Thackrah, a general practitioner and surgeon from Leeds, emphasized in his evidence to the Sadler Committee, the chief danger posed by the mills was not one of immediate or direct mortality; most diseases encouraged by the working environment in the mills were chronic rather than acute.³⁹ The dangers were long term ones and often indirect, the cumulatively debilitating effects of long term exposure to the poor environment in the mills rendering the workforce vulnerable to diseases not directly associated with the conditions themselves.

However, the picture of fatigue cruelty and ill-health presented by many, and especially by the witnesses called by the Sadler committee, did not go unchallenged.⁴⁰ Many medical men were equally willing to assert that factory children were well cared for and in good health, indeed one described them as:

.....well fed and clothed, clean and healthy, more so than the generality of the poor of any other description, or in any other

³⁸(1796), reproduced in PP.1816, Vol.III, p.377.

³⁹PP. 1831-32, Vol.XV, Q.10485.

⁴⁰For collections of such evidence and opinions, see Royle V, 1833, 'The factory system defended.' in Scowler T *Reply to some parts of the speech of G Lundy ESqu, Barrister-at-law, at a public meeting held in Manchester on 14th February 1833*. T Scowler, Manchester.; Baines E, 1835, *History of the cotton manufacture in Great Britain*. H Fisher, R Fisher and P Jackson, London.; and Ure A, 1835, *The philosophy of manufactures*. All three can to some extent be seen as responses to the Sadler Committee.

employment in the neighbourhood thereof, and appear cheerful and happy⁴¹

Perhaps most damaging to the claims of the factory reformers was the evidence collected by William Tufnell, a factory commissioner who reported on Manchester and the North West. Tufnell noted that of the 89 witnesses to the Sadler committee only three had come from Manchester, the most important centre of the cotton industry in the country, and that of those three none was a manufacturer, clergyman or doctor, and only one was willing to be interviewed by Tufnell. Further, on investigation Tufnell found that much of that man's evidence, evidence which filled nine folio pages in the original report, referred to charges thirty or forty years old, and that all the specific allegations were in fact 'absolutely false'.⁴² Tufnell was equally sceptical of claims that factory labour was particularly tiring because of its incessant nature:

...far from being true that the work in a factory is incessant, because the motion of the steam engine is incessant, ...the fact is, that the labour is not incessant on that very account, because it is performed in conjunction with the steam engine.⁴³

This point particularly applied to children's employments in the mills, which on the whole involved a minimal amount of hard manual toil. Tufnell found no evidence to support the claims that the scavengers, the children who collected loose threads and cotton, were 'constantly in a state of grief, always in terror, and every moment they had to spare stretched all their length upon the floor in a state of perspiration',⁴⁴

Neither did everyone agree that excessive overcrowding was a major problem in the mills and factories. The leading economist Nassau Senior was particularly disparaging of such claims:

Nothing can exceed the absurdity of the lamentation over the children as 'crowded in factories.' Crowding in a factory is physically impossible. The machinery occupies the bulk of the space; the persons who have to attend to it are almost too distant to converse.⁴⁵

⁴¹PP.1816, Vol.III, p.222, see also Royle V, 1833, *ibid.*, Baines E, 1835, *ibid.*, and Ure A, 1835, *ibid.*, for collections of similar evidence and arguments.

⁴²PP. 1834, Vol.XIX, D2, p.210.

⁴³PP.1834, Vol.XIX, D2, p.205.

⁴⁴The quote came from the Report of the factory commission, p.375.

⁴⁵Senior NW, *Letters on the Factory Act, as it affects the cotton manufacture, addressed to the Right Honourable, the President of the Board of Trade.* Fellowes, London. 1837, p.24.

Much of the diversity in the opinions expressed about the conditions in the mills and factories no doubt originated in the self interest of those giving them. Manufacturers and their employees and toadies no doubt played a significant part in presenting positive impressions of the conditions, whilst equally, those wishing to reduce the hours of labour for adults via the indirect means of lowering those for children played an important role in engendering the opposite impression. Even Engels thought Sadler had been 'betrayed by his noble enthusiasm' into producing 'distorted and erroneous statements' and leading his witnesses.⁴⁶ No doubt both sides of the factory debate contained their propagandists open to charges of 'bedaub(ing) themselves desperately with the mud and slime of field preaching'.⁴⁷ However, we should recognise that in part the diversity in opinions reflected a diversity in the conditions found in the mills and factories; not every factory owner was a Joseph Gradgrind, nor every one a Robert Owen. This factor no doubt went far to explain what one M.P. felt was the inexplicable, the signing of certificates to the effect that factories were adequately ventilated, and their workforce enjoying good health, by two Manchester doctors who had previously signed petitions for legislative interference.⁴⁸

I believe that it is reasonable to conclude that much of the evidence of poor conditions was somewhat dated by the time it was presented, the conditions referred to being either those that had prevailed in the not too distant past, or those that generally only survived in the older, smaller and more isolated mills.⁴⁹ Thus, for example, whilst acknowledging the 'injurious' nature of the atmosphere in mills and the associated fevers, Aitken, writing in 1795, could also note that the remedies to the grievances had already been widely adopted with 'true benevolence and much success'.⁵⁰

One may conclude therefore, that even if one accepts that many children endured appalling conditions when working in the early factories and mills, and certainly that basic fact cannot be questioned, that does not in itself explain why

⁴⁶Quoted in Thomas MW, 1948, *The early factory legislation*. Thomas Bank Publishing Co. Leigh-on-Sea. p.41. For a useful account of the Ten Hour Agitation, see Ch. 3.

⁴⁷Royle V, *The factory system defended*. p.7.

⁴⁸Hansard 1818, Vol.XXXVIII, p.361.

⁴⁹Royle V, 1833, *The factory system defended*. p.9.z

⁵⁰Aitken J, 1795, *A description of the country from thirty to forty miles round Manchester*. Manchester. p.221

the cotton industry was selected as the object of innovative protective legislation.

5.4 Child Labour Outside the Factories

I need not remind your Lordship that the question of health and morals is one of comparison only.⁵¹

If the existence of employments in which young children were forced to work excessive hours in poor conditions had been sufficient to spur reform, reform would surely not only have come much earlier, but when it did come would have come to a far wider range of employments than those covered by the early Factory Acts. The earliest piece of legislation to touch upon conditions in the factories was Peel's Health and Morals of Apprentices Act of 1802. This Act, which was strictly speaking a Poor Law Act rather than a Factory Act, was, as its name implied fundamentally concerned with the welfare of parish apprentices. The clauses of the Act dealing with certain minimal regulations regarding hygiene and ventilation applied not only to all factories employing three or more apprentices, but also to to any cotton or wool mills or factories employing more than twenty persons. However, only the apprentices were covered by the clauses which restricted the working day to twelve hours, instituted a gradual removal of night work, and insisted upon some, albeit negligible , instruction for the factory children in reading, writing and arithmetic. Although the first Factory Act, passed in 1819, was applicable to 'free labour', meaning those not bound under terms of apprenticeship, it was in one sense even more restricted than the 1802 Act, for it only applied to cotton mills and factories. This restriction was shared by all the subsequent Factory Acts up to 1833, when limited protection was extended to a number of other textile trades.⁵² The first non-textile industries to be subject to similar interference were mining in 1842, and printing in 1845; the bulk of the thousands of children employed outside the textile trades, or in workshops employing less than fifty persons, had to wait until the 1860s to receive comparable treatment.

For evidence that the children employed in the factories and mills were not necessarily the worst treated we need look no further than the conclusions of the 1833 Factory Commission, which stated that far from entailing the worst

⁵¹Hoole H, 1832, *A letter to the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Althrup, in defence of the cotton factories of Lancashire*. T Scowler, Manchester. p.9.

⁵²The 1833 factory Act actually applied to all cotton, woollen, worsted, hemp, flax, tow, linen and silk mills or factories where steam, water, or any other mechanical source of power was utilized.

conditions, the employments in the factories were in fact amongst the least 'unwholesome' to which children were subjected.

Hand-loom weavers, frame-work knitters, lace-runners, and workpeople engaged in other lines of domestic manufacture, are in most cases worked at earlier ages, for longer hours and for less wages, than the body of children employed in factories.⁵³

It was certainly true that children continued to labour at far earlier ages in trades, such as calico printing, which lay outside the remit of the factory legislation.⁵⁴ Interestingly, most calico printers employed their own children as their tear-boys.⁵⁵

I think it important to recognise that much of the ill health observed by commentators amongst the young cotton operatives and other working children probably owed more to the generally appalling standards of housing and sanitation in the rapidly expanding early nineteenth century industrial towns and cities than to their occupations.⁵⁶ A comparison made in the 1842 Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, revealed just how significant the urban element of poor health could be.

⁵³PP. 1833, Vol.XX, p.52.

⁵⁴For a wide collection of such evidence see the various reports of the Children's Employment Commission of 1842.

⁵⁵PP.1833, XX, D2, p.63.

⁵⁶For early comments to this effect see: Baines E, 1835, *History of cotton manufacture*. p.501.; Senior NW, 1938 (1837), *Letters on the Factory Act*. pp.24-25.

Table 5.2

**Profession and residence: comparison of average death rates
1842**

Classification:	Average age of death (years)	
	Manchester	Rutlandshire
Professional persons and Gentry, and their families.	38	52
Tradesmen, and their families (In Rutlandshire, Farmers and Graziers are included with Shopkeepers)	20	41
Mechanics, labourers, and their families.	17	38

That the contrast in the average ages of death in urban Manchester and rural Rutlandshire should be so different even amongst the professional classes, highlights the importance of the general 'urban' element in the ill health of the cotton workers and their contemporaries.

If legislation had been purely a function of the severity of the conditions endured by working children, then it would surely have come far earlier than it did to a host of handicrafts and workshop industries; no condition, or combination of conditions, endured by factory hands was unique to them. Samuel Stocks, giving evidence to the 1816 committee, stated, for example, that he could not recall hearing of any factory as damp or ill-ventilated as the hand-loom weavers' cellars.⁵⁷

If the severity of conditions had been the key to reform, legislation would surely have been applied to the mines far earlier than it was. The 1842 Mining Commission Report included innumerable reports of children working in the most horrific of conditions from ages as low as five.⁵⁸ Conditions appear to have been particularly bad in the East of Scotland mining district, and it was here that the greatest use was made of child and female labour underground. R.H. Franks, the sub-commissioner for the region, concluded on the evidence he collected that:

⁵⁷PP.1816, Vol.III, p.493.

⁵⁸PP.1842, Vol.XVI.

"...a picture is presented of deadly physical oppression and systematic slavery, of which I conscientiously believe no one acquainted with such facts would credit the existence in the British dominions".⁵⁹

Although the evidence of the degree of hardship endured by children down the mines may have come as a surprise to society as a whole, to those familiar with the industry it was far from being a revelation. William Tufnell had interviewed coal workers and even visited a pit eight years earlier and had specifically pointed out the hardships of colliery and other non-factory employments in his return to the Home Office. Whilst not denying that instances of ill-usage did occur in the textile factories, Tufnell insisted that they were 'exceedingly rare, and concluded:

It would be the grossest injustice to assert that they equal one quarter of the cruelties which children endure in the glass-house, pin-heading, and colliery trades.⁶⁰

In considering the limitation of the early protective legislation to the cotton industry it is worth remembering that the industry never employed more than a fraction of all working children.⁶¹ In fact it was not until 1871 that agriculture was overtaken by textiles as the largest single employer of children aged under fifteen. In our own urban age it is sometimes difficult to remember that the lives of the plough-boy, shepherd or crow-scarer were rarely the rural bliss that our inherited memory, tinted by the poetry of the likes of Wordsworth and Clare, might suggest they were. Their lives could be just as monotonous and hard as those of the youthful factory hands.⁶²

For many young farm hands outdoors all year round for more than half the day, 'life was not worth the living'.⁶³ Life in a factory 'felt like heaven'⁶⁴ to Mrs.

⁵⁹PP. 1842, Vol.XVI, p.387, (26).

⁶⁰PP.1834, Vol.XIX, D2, p.194.

⁶¹The 1836 returns show less than 30,000 children aged less than 14 working in all textile factories in Lancashire and West Yorkshire.

⁶²See for example the evidence of Mary Puddicombe who was thus apprenticed when aged only nine (in all there were three other girl and four boy apprentices working on the farm); she was employed in a wide variety of agricultural work, including the back-breaking tasks of digging and pulling turnips.

⁶³So commented Roger Langdon on his four years as a farm boy 1833-37; Burnett J, 1982, *Destiny obscure: autobiographies of childhood, education and family from the 1820s to the 1920s*. Allen Lane, London. p.61.

⁶⁴ibid. p.62

Burrows, who had spent four years walking fourteen hours a day in an agricultural gang in the 1850's. Mrs Burrows had, in fact, been the eldest of fifty-five children in the gang when she joined it aged just eight. Agricultural gangs had first appeared during the Napoleonic wars, yet it was only after the 1865 Children's Employment Commission had concluded that the gangs posed a danger to the welfare and morals of the children that parliament set up a licensing scheme for the gangs and set a minimum age of eight for employment in a gang. Thus, more than sixty years passed between the first legislation to protect the children in cotton factories and the first to protect even a fraction of those working in agriculture.

5.5 Why Did They Legislate?

I think that the preceding account raises several important questions. Most fundamentally I think we should ask ourselves why, if the cotton mills and factories of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were not unique in terms of either their employment of children or the poor conditions in which the labour was performed, why was it then that legislation was passed with respect to that industry, and at that date, where none had been passed before? In part, an explanation for the arrival of interventionist legislation is to be found in broad socio-political trends: 'the widespread and ever-growing influence of humanitarian sentiment... the increasing sensitivity of politics to public pressures'.⁶⁵ However, such ideas only offer at best a partial answer, and one that should be hedged by the observation that the legislation itself did much to establish what was considered in-humane or unacceptable. Beyond that answer lies the second question of why it was that the new legislation, when it came, was restricted to just one section of the textile industry, and then subsequently to just the textile trades for such a long period?

To that question I believe the answer may in part be provided by the somewhat glib observation that something had to come first, 'Everything could not be done at once'.⁶⁶ However, that observation hardly accounts for the decades of delay before any other trades or industries were subject to legislation. I will argue that two specific features of the cotton industry potentially offer significant insights into both the timing of the early cotton legislation, and the delay in its application elsewhere: firstly, the familiar argument involving the

⁶⁵MacDonagh O, 1958, pp.57-8. 'The nineteenth century revolution in government; a reappraisal.' *The Historical Journal* 1 pp.52-67.

⁶⁶Shaftesbury, 1863, *Speeches of the Earl of Shaftesbury upon subjects having relation chiefly to the claims of the labouring class*. Chapman and Hall, London. p.v.

role of visibility, and the related factor of the enforceability of the legislation, and secondly what I think one might term 'surrogate paternalism'.

With regard to legislation on child employment, the most important change which the industrial revolution brought was the concentration of large numbers of children at work in single locations. That overwork and poor conditions had been endured by a minority of children for centuries must be accepted. However, that cruelty became more visible, and consequently appeared less acceptable when, instead of being widely distributed in households, workshops and farms, it was concentrated in one or two compact sites.⁶⁷ Although the abuse of child labour in the older handicrafts may have been no less serious than that in the early cotton factories, it existed in a more elusive form and avoided the 'light of day' that inevitably fell upon the large new factories.⁶⁸ The concentration of numbers not only encouraged legislation by making excesses more obvious, it also did so by rendering the problem to a significant degree easier at least in theory to legislate against. The relative ease with which factories could be regulated derived from two characteristics, their size and organization. The naturally disciplined nature of life in the factories, with their rule-books and set hours, a discipline derived from their dependence on machinery, made the imposition of regulations more feasible than in the chaotic workshop and domestic trades. As one prominent factory owner noted, any advocate of legislation:

...fixes his attention solely upon the labour connected with MACHINERY moved by Steam or Water power, because there his task is easy; for such machinery being itself clockwork, is capable of being regulated with the utmost exactness of the clock.⁶⁹

Although the author of that piece was an opponent of factory legislation, one of its major champions, Shaftesbury, later explicitly acknowledged that it had indeed been these aspects of the industry that had suggested textile factories as the first industry to which legislation ought to be applied.

...the multitudes gathered under a single roof, whose toil was governed by the precision and publicity of steam-power, offered, for the

⁶⁷That the large numbers employed in the cotton factories played an important part in spurring Peel to introduce legislation can be seen from his use of the large numbers employed in Manchester alone as a defence for his 1818 Bill. See Hansard, Vol. XXXVIII, 1818, pp.353-4.

⁶⁸Hutchins BL and Harrison A, 1911, *A history of factory legislation*. pp.21-22.

⁶⁹Hoole H, *Letter to Lord Viscount Althrup*. p.4.

enactment of legal restrictions, facilities which could not be found in employments of a less symmetrical and more widely spread character.⁷⁰

The importance of visibility and the greater ease with which law could be applied to larger and more regulated units, can be seen not only in the fact that legislation applied to the cotton factories before any others, but also in the entire chronology of factory and industrial legislation; the earliest factory legislation applied only to the cotton mills and factories, subsequently it was extended to other textile factories, then to the mines, other factories, to agricultural gangs, workshops, and finally to home-work and domestic production. With respect to the early legislation, it is interesting to note that although conditions for children in the cotton industry had almost certainly been at their worst in the early small mills which had been located in isolated river valleys to take advantage of fast flowing water to drive the machinery, effective legislation and widespread public concern was not forthcoming until steam power had brought both larger mills, and in this context perhaps most importantly, a relocation of the industry to large towns and cities.

The second feature of the early cotton mills and factories which I would suggest offers a partial explanation for their having produced legislation where before there was none, lies in the fact that they brought not only a change in the location of child labour but a similar transformation in the relation between children and their employers.

Before the arrival of the mills and factories, the majority of children had been employed and supervised in their labours by the at least theoretically benevolent parents and guardians. In the cotton mills and factories for the first time large numbers of children were to be found employed and supervised by total strangers. Indeed orphans and foundlings in the form of parish apprentices formed a substantial source of labour to the early isolated mills, a consequence both of the demand for child labour and the difficulty that owners had found in recruiting 'free labour' for the mills.⁷¹

Even where the parish apprentices had parents or other kin alive or interested in their welfare, the great distances over which many of them had been transported made visiting impracticable. The early cotton mills in and around Manchester, for example, took considerable numbers of apprentices

⁷⁰Shaftesbury, 1863. *Speeches of the Earl of Shaftesbury*. p.v.

⁷¹Brown J. *A memoir of Robert Blincoe*. p.22.

from London and Westminster.⁷² The apprentices, many of them as young as seven or eight, were thus left at the mercy of the millowners and their overseers 'unknown, unprotected, and forgotten by those to whose care nature or the laws had consigned them'.⁷³ As the campaigner Fielden observed, the 'beautiful and romantic valleys of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Lancashire, secluded from the public eye, became the dismal solitudes of torture'.⁷⁴

Fundamentally society has always been loath to intervene between the parent and the child, but thankfully less so in relations between children and unrelated adults. That large numbers of children were being supervised and employed by persons other than parents or close relations seemed to call for greater concern on the part of society. The fact that Peel's 1802 Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, the first Act to protect children in factory employment, should be addressed almost solely to the welfare of the parish apprentices, reflected, at least in part, this strand of concern. Whereas later acts met with considerable opposition, Peel's Act passed without difficulty.⁷⁵ Even Lord Stanley, who strongly opposed the extension of similar provisions to cover so-called 'free children', was willing to sanction the protection of parish apprentices.⁷⁶ I would extend this argument and suggest that the delay in the application of legislation to 'free' child labour, and the limited nature of all that legislation up to the 1830s, may in part be explained by developing some idea of surrogate paternalism as a motive for legislation, or perhaps more accurately by emphasizing parliament's unwillingness to intervene when children were employed or controlled by parents.⁷⁷

⁷²Aitken, 1795, *A description of the country from thirty to forty miles round Manchester*. pp.219-20.

⁷³ibid.

⁷⁴Fielden J, 1836, *The curse of the factory system, or a short account of the origin of factory cruelties*. Halifax. p.6.

⁷⁵Hutchins BL and Harrison A, 1911, *A history of factory legislation*. p.16.

⁷⁶Hansard, 1818, Vol.XXXVIII, p.345.

⁷⁷"The view that children were the property of the state or community, which had therefore not only a duty to protect parent-less children, but also a right to intervene in the parent-child relationship, can be traced back to Plato's 'The Republic' if not earlier. Nevertheless this viewpoint remained a minority one, most European legal codes up to and beyond the second half of the nineteenth century, followed the line established in Roman Law, which treated children as the chattels of parents, and as such gave the parents complete freedom in their treatment, use and abuse of them.

After the initial rapid expansion the mill owners quickly exhausted the available supply of pauper children and began to employ 'free' labour. In recruiting and hiring labour, mill and mine-owners and their managers found it convenient to adopt systems of sub-contracting. The family or kin-group was a simple unit for this purpose and was widely adopted. After the initial dominance of parish apprentices, many of the mill children were thus employed as part of a family unit and found themselves supervised not by strangers but by kin.⁷⁸ One of the arguments advanced by Lord Stanley in opposing Peel's 1818 Bill was that any interference with the labour of the 'free' factory children implied that 'parliament would no longer trust parents with the care of their own children'.⁷⁹ In fact the kin-group system of employment, which had never been universal, broke down in the mills in the 1820s and 1830s when new technology, such as the automatic mule, reduced the number of adults which the mill owners wished to employ. Indeed, automation not only reduced the demand for adult workers, but in addition correspondingly increased that for child labour as more machine minders were required.⁸⁰

The inevitable consequence of the reduction in the ratio of adults to children in the mills was a similar reduction in the proportion of children employed or supervised by kin.⁸¹ It is debatable whether the conditions of child labour in the textile mills and factories actually grew worse as the proportion of children employed/supervised by parents or kin fell.⁸² What I believe is certain is that

⁷⁸Smelser NJ, 1959, *Social change in the industrial revolution: an application of theory to the Lancashire cotton industry, 1770-1840*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

⁷⁹Hansard, 1818, Vol.XXXVIII, p.346.

⁸⁰Henriques URQ, 1971, *The early Factory Acts and their enforcement*. Historical Association, London. p.2.

⁸¹Edwards MM and Lloyd-Jones R, 1973, 'NJ Smelser and the cotton factory family: a reassessment.' in Harte NB and Ponting KG, (eds), 1973, *Textile history and economic history*. Manchester University Press, Manchester. pp.300-350.

Child employment in the textile industry in Preston and District.

Area	% of children employed by master	% of children employed by spinners (excl. parents)	% of children employed by parents and siblings
Preston Town	42.4	47.0	11.6
Preston District	38.0	37.5	24.5

(Source: Edwards MM and Lloyd-Jones R, 1974, *ibid.*, p.314)

⁸²For evidence of parental abuse in mills. pp. 1833, vol XX, D2, p.2.,5.,21. See Pike ER, 1966, *Human documents of the industrial revolution in Britain*. Allen and Unwin, London. The Lords Committee of 1819 refused to speak further to one cotton spinner who admitted that his daughter's broken arm was a result of his having pushed her over "for not just doing what I told her". (H.L. 1819, XVI, p.448.)

calls for reform, perhaps previously tempered by self interest on the part of large numbers of adult workers and the high proportion of children employed by kin, certainly increased in the 1830s. I think that it is not without significance that, whereas previously pressure for legislation had come from small numbers of philanthropists, doctors and sympathetic millowners, in the 1830s a considerable and influential popular movement began to take shape.

The importance of 'surrogate paternalism' as a motive for legislation is I would argue reflected not only in the application of the earliest legislation solely to parish apprentices, but also in that the one notable exception to the lack of practical concern from parliament for the protection of working children before the legislation of the early nineteenth century concerned a group invariably employed by other than kin; the chimney sweep. It was commonly the orphan or foundling pauper released by the churchwarden or overseers, or the child of poor parents, that was sold or given to the master sweep, often at a pitifully tender age when the child was small enough to scale even the narrowest of flues.

I believe that it is worthwhile briefly diverting from the consideration of factory legislation to explore briefly the history of the sweeps' apprentices or climbing-boys, and the development of legislation controlling and governing their employment in the field; not only was it the earliest legislation designed to protect any body of working children, but also because it illustrates what was to be a long term problem with all such legislation, the failure to make adequate provision for enforcement.

The rise of the climbing-boy as a significant social phenomenon in London and much of the rest of the country only really came about in the eighteenth century when, amongst other things, the increasing cost of wood forced more and more households to switch to using coal as a fuel.⁸³ Coal fires required narrower flues to be efficient, and chimneys were consequently built with flues little more than twelve inches wide, which required sweeping. Despite the appalling conditions endured by the boys, master sweeps rarely encountered any problem in finding apprentices; young orphans were willingly given over to the master's care by the Poor Law authorities or bought direct into apprenticeship from poor parents. Many remained blind to the cruelty of the trade, only being roused from their indifference by the inevitable occasional

⁸³Strange KH, 1982, *The climbing boys: a study of sweeps apprentices*. Allison and Busby Ltd., London. Ch.1.

fatality. Dicken's Mr. Gamfield, in making an application to take the orphan Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish as an apprentice-sweep, was far from convincing in his reassurances on the humane conditions of sweeping and the unlikelihood of the boy being 'smothered' (sic) in a chimney.

Boys is wery obstinit, and wery lazy, gen'lmen, and there's nothink like a good hot blaze to make 'em come down with a run. It's humane too, gen'lmen, acause, even if they're stuck in the chimbley, roasting their feet makes 'em struggle to hextricate theirselves.⁸⁴

Of course Mr Gamfield was the sweep in caricature, but Dickens's sweep was uncomfortably close to reality. There are, for example, striking parallels between the fiction of Dickens and the factual account of of the 1817 House of Commons committee of enquiry into the work of the chimney-sweeps. In many respects the less emotive language of the committee makes the more fantastic and horrific reading.

It is evident that children are stolen from their parents and inveigled out of workhouses; that in order to conquer the natural repugnance of the infants to ascend the narrow and dangerous chimneys, to clean which their labours are required, blows are often used, that pins are forced into their feet by the boy that follows them up the chimney, in order to compel them to ascend it, and that lighted straw has been employed for that purpose.⁸⁵

The shocking conditions recorded by the 1817 committee are all the more horrifying when one remembers that this was the reality of the sweeps' apprentices' lives nearly thirty years after the passing of the first piece of legislation designed to protect and control them, and after more than fifty years of campaigning and lobbying by concerned individuals. The earliest champion of the climbing-boys cause was Jonas Hanway, the author of 'The State of Chimney Sweepers' Young Apprentices'⁸⁶ and, most famously, of the 'Sentimental History of Chimney Sweeps in London and Westminster'.⁸⁷ That Hanway should estimate that there were as few as 400 climbing-boys in the Metropolis is in no way surprising, as even nationally the numbers of children involved in the operation can never have risen much above a few thousand. Nevertheless, the severity of the conditions endured by the boys, the mass of

⁸⁴Dickens C , 1838, *Oliver Twist*. Ch.3.

⁸⁵PP.1817, Vol.VI, p.173.

⁸⁶Hanway J, 1773, *The state of chimney sweepers' young apprentices*. London.

⁸⁷Hanway J, 1785, *A sentimental history of chimney sweepers in London and Westminster, showing the necessity of putting them under regulations to prevent the grossest inhumanity to the climbing boys*. London.

both fictional and non-fictional literature highlighting their misery, and the regular fatalities, ensured that the boys came to occupy a unique place in the public's imagination.

However, despite widespread public support, successful reform proved illusory. The campaign spawned by Hanway's books achieved its earliest legislative success in 1788 when the Chimney Sweepers Act established eight as the minimum age at which a boy might be employed in the trade. Nevertheless, and despite three parliamentary committees of enquiry, further Acts in 1834 and 1840 which raised the minimum age of apprenticeship to ten and sixteen respectively, and the tireless efforts of Shaftesbury and other campaigners, little effective progress had been achieved by 1875. The underlying problem with the legislation was the ineffectiveness with which it was administered and the lack of a satisfactory means of enforcement. In 1875 Shaftesbury succeeded in getting a comprehensive and effective piece of legislation onto the statute book, an achievement to which he had been inspired by the suffocation in 1873 of a boy aged less than eight while working in a chimney. That a child of eight should die thus, almost forty years after the setting of a minimum age of ten for climbing-boys, indicates just how ineffective the earlier legislation had been.

5.6 The Nineteenth Century Government Revolution: Child Labour a Model Case?

As I highlighted in the brief review of the development of legislation designed to control climbing-boys, the passage of legislation did not in itself ensure success in controlling a problem. Fortunately, although far from immediate, the achievement of significant results by the factory and industrial legislation of the first half of the nineteenth century was somewhat less protracted.

It is important that this particular body of legislation should be placed within the context of the wider growth in government intervention in the nineteenth century. The literature debating the so-called revolution in state intervention or government in Britain in the nineteenth century is both considerable and diverse, much of it revolving around attempts to reconcile the great expansion in government intervention at a period when principles of laissez faire were gospel.⁸⁸ Perhaps the most widely cited interpretation of the 'revolution' in

⁸⁸For a useful review of this debate see Fraser D, 1973, *Evolution of the British welfare state*. Macmillan, London. pp.101-114.

government's function in the nineteenth century is that offered by MacDonagh,⁸⁹ who, largely on the basis of a study of the development of the Passenger Acts, suggested that whilst the growth of government intervention had its roots in exogenous, extra-governmental forces, because of an inherent 'administrative momentum' its production and extension quickly became endogenous. A brief exploration of the model MacDonagh constructed of the process of interventionism will not only illustrate the grounds for this conclusion, but also provides us with a useful framework against which to view the limited review of the development of the early factory and industrial legislation which follows.

MacDonagh argued that the first stage in the development of interventionist legislation applying to any field was the exposure of some evil, an exposure usually exogenous to government, and typically the work of concerned individual or body of individuals, what we might term today a pressure group. Once revealed this 'evil' became recognized as 'intolerable' and legislation became inevitable.

Throughout and even before the Victorian years 'intolerability' was the master card. No wall of either doctrine or interest could permanently withstand that single trumpet cry, all the more so as governments grew ever more responsive to public sentiment, and public sentiment ever more humane.⁹⁰

The resulting seminal piece of legislation was invariably a compromise between the ambitions of the activists and the counter arguments of vested interests threatened by any change in the status quo. The legislation was, MacDonagh argues, for that reason generally rather amateurish in nature, being often more of a statement of attitude and intent than an effective measure.⁹¹ Writing some fifty years before MacDonagh, Bray took a slightly different line in seeking an explanation for the ineffectiveness of the early legislation; rather than stressing the importance of 'compromise' Bray suggests that the weakness derived from the significance of 'sentiment' in shaping the legislation:

(Sentiment) was a source of weakness because sentiment is essentially local in its sphere of influence.... It lacks the breadth, the insight and the calm of that imaginative reason which is now slowly taking its place. In the course of suffering, for example, it troubles itself not at all about the remote causes of suffering or the more remote

⁸⁹MacDonagh O, 1958, 'Nineteenth century revolution in government.'

⁹⁰ibid., p.58.

⁹¹ibid., pp.58-59.

sufferer, but surges round some particular sufferer or some particular grievance, existing here and now.⁹²

Whether its origins were in compromise or unbalanced sentiment, the consequence of the weakness in the early legislation was, that at some point, either gradually or catastrophically it proved inadequate. This failure set in train what MacDonagh envisaged as an almost irresistible momentum of changes. The immediate response to this failure was generally the appointment of 'executive officers' with the duty of ensuring that the law was enacted. In the course of fulfilling that objective this group of 'professional' men provided a 'more concrete revelation of conditions' and consequently more legislation. These changes in turn tended to produce a need for some intermediary link between parliament and the executive in the field. For this reason, and in order to aid in the definition of the law, to systematically collect information, and to act as an 'authoritative superior' for officers in their contacts with the 'anarchic' public, superintending central bodies emerged.⁹³ The enforcing body, by its very nature, tended to highlight inefficiencies and failings in the legislation and thus generated a further requirement for additional legislation.

The fourth stage in MacDonagh's model saw a change in the attitude of the administrators. They began to see the process of administration less as a 'dynamic' one, and more as a 'static' one, a matter of building up experience in the field and dealing with broad issues rather than specific problems.

...they ceased to regard their problems as resolvable once for all by some grand piece of legislation or by the multiplication of their own number. Instead, they began to see improvement as a slow, uncertain process of closing loopholes and tightening the screw ring by ring, in the light of continuous experience and experiment.⁹⁴

In the fifth and final stage of MacDonagh's model, government executive officers and their superiors began to demand, and to some extent secure, legislation which granted them significant discretionary powers, with regard to both the application of the existing legislation and the development of new measures. Research became more systematic and rigorous, and government more active in seeking solutions for problems and improvements in standards; government no longer simply observed 'evils' and devised means of remedying them, they now encouraged research into new safety facilities and technology

⁹²Bray RA, 1911, *Boy labour and apprenticeship*. Constable and Co. Ltd., London. p.31.

⁹³MacDonagh O, 1958, 'Nineteenth century revolution in government.' p.60.

⁹⁴ibid.

and, where that research bore fruit as in the mines and railways, passed appropriate legislation to ensure its use.⁹⁵

Although MacDonagh's model has been extensively criticized by those preferring to see some clear role for the philosophy of Benthamism, not least in spurring reform,⁹⁶ I believe it nonetheless has several valuable qualities. The emphasis given to the exposure of 'evils' in generating reform is perhaps the first and by no means the last of these. The lack of any place for Benthamism as a source of greater government intervention in MacDonagh's model leaves the stress instead on a 'pragmatic', almost accidental response to major problems as the driving force behind the extension of government into ever wider spheres of the nation's life. Anyone taking the time to read the minutes of parliamentary debates; Factory Inspectors reports, and various Commissions of Enquiry, will quickly appreciate how little abstract theories entered into considerations of the need for reform, and just how far practicality governed that process.

How then does MacDonagh's model of the development of government intervention in the nineteenth century match up with the specific case study here, child employment legislation? I believe that a review of the progress of that legislation throws up several failings in the model. In part the failings, such as a lack of regard for the continued importance of exogenous agencies in generating new legislation, are failings excusable in a model. Indeed, MacDonagh was aware of the fallibility of his model and emphasized that its intention was only to pick out 'a very powerful impulse or tendency'.⁹⁷ However, although many minor quibbles can indeed be disregarded in order to preserve the lucidity of the model, with regard at least to the development of legislation controlling the participation of children in the labour market, I will advance three closely connected criticisms which are sufficiently important to deserve comment.

I would firstly criticize the model for its failure to encompass any specific notion of the relationship between the passing of legislation in one sphere and the perceived need for reform outside that sphere. I would argue that as legislation intervened in one sphere, the perceived need for legislation in another, even if conditions didn't alter in it, at least in terms of the perceptions of

⁹⁵ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁹⁶See for example, Parris H, 1960, 'The nineteenth century revolution in government: a reappraisal reappraised.' *Historical Journal* 3 pp.17-37.

⁹⁷ibid., p.61.

the individuals observing it, became the greater. In effect MacDonagh's analysis lacks a suitable emphasis on the importance of past legislation in establishing what could be regarded as intolerable outside the specific field the legislation covered. Thus, to give one example, the employment of extremely young children in agriculture appeared unacceptable in mid-nineteenth century England at least in part because they had been banned from working in mills.

A more minor criticism is that the model makes no allowance for the element of inexperience in accounting for the failure of the early legislation. A major obstacle to the effectiveness of the earliest legislation lay in its use of the local judiciary for its implementation, yet as the judiciary had been almost the sole representatives of government in the community for hundreds of years it was hardly a source of surprise that they should be entrusted with the responsibility of enforcing this new legislation; only the evidence gained from the operation of this system proved that judiciary was an ineffective means of implementation.

My third and most important criticism of the MacDonagh model, and one particularly important with regard to child labour, is that the model contains no clear suggestion as to the importance of responses to new legislation in creating a requirement for further legislation. In the case of legislation concerned with child labour, I would argue that as legislation closed one avenue for child labour the problem adapted to the constraints imposed and created a new 'intolerable' situation, and consequently a need for further legislation. Thus whereas the problem in the early part of the nineteenth century had been factory labour, by the close of the century it was labour out of school, and dead-end juvenile jobs, and in both cases, particularly street trading. As I shall show, the very shape of these problems had to no insignificant degree been dictated by legislation. In effect the most important criticism which I make of MacDonagh's model is that it lacks any stress on the consequences of the responses to legislation, an almost implicit assumption built into the model being that legislation was passed against a fixed background of evils, each 'loophole' in the previous legislation being closed, one by one by a new piece or series of pieces of legislation. No emphasis is given to the role of legislation in creating new 'evils', or transforming previously unimportant problems into major fields for concern.

Chapter 6

The Evolution of Legal Controls on Early Entry to the Labour Market.

6.1 Introduction

As was noted in the introduction to Chapter 5, two distinct bodies of legislation can be identified in the development of legal controls on children's participation in the labour market : the factory and industrial legislation, and the chronologically later educational legislation. The context of the former was discussed at some length in the previous chapter, hence this chapter begins with a short account of the factory legislation; this history is primarily one of incremental changes in permissible hours of work and ages, and therefore this chapter will discuss the later educational legislation at greater length.

6.2 Factory and Industrial Legislation 1802-1914

The immediate genesis of Robert Peel's Health and Morals of Apprentices Act probably lay in the outbreaks of fever in a number of Lancashire mills in the late 1790s, including Peel's mill at Ratcliff Bridge near Manchester. A report issued by the Manchester Board of Health in 1796 called for legislation to control the hours and conditions of work in the factories, the majority of the labour force still at that time being parish apprentices. Section Two of the 1802 Act required all mill and factory owners to ensure that the walls were whitewashed at least twice a year and that there was adequate ventilation. This section of the Act applied to all mills and factories where more than twenty persons were employed, or three or more apprentices. However, the sections of the Act dealing with restrictions on the length of the working day applied solely to apprentices. For them, the working day was restricted to twelve hours, night work was prohibited, and the owners were ordered to ensure that their apprentices received some limited instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, and religious knowledge.

To ensure compliance with the Act, the local magistrates were instructed to appoint one of their own number and a local clergyman of the established church to act as visitors. Where the regulations were broken the justices could impose fines of between £2 and £5. It was in this system of enforcement that the great weakness of the Act lay. It could not be said, as MacDonagh's model suggests, that the weakness was one brought about by opposition to the

legislation, for Peel's Act had in fact met with little or no opposition in its passage through parliament.¹ In fact I think the weakness of the measure, as with that of many similar succeeding measures, derived chiefly from inexperience. It was almost inevitable that the implementation of the act should be entrusted to the magistracy, who had always had principal responsibility for the enforcement of law in their districts. However, the employment of unpaid amateurs to administer the Act's provisions proved disastrous, and with only minor exceptions the Act was rarely enforced.² Giving evidence to the 1816 Factory Commission, David Evans, a Manchester magistrate admitted that, although aware of the passage of the Act, he had not had the 'curiosity' to read it.³

Even so, the minority of magistrates who did take their task seriously proved significant in that they highlighted the trend towards the greater employment of 'free' children, children who returned to their parents' homes after each day in the mill, and to whom the existing legislation offered no protection.⁴ It was not in fact the ineffectiveness of the original legislation that provoked further legislation, but rather this change in the nature of the problem from one concerned with parish children to one concerned with free children, which in turn reflected the increasing use being made of steam power in the mills, and the movement of the centre of production into the towns.

We can perhaps date the genesis of the factory reform movement to Oastler's impassioned letter on 'Yorkshire Slavery' in the Leeds Mercury of the 16th of October 1830. Oastler argued that the children working in the worsted mills of Bradford were worse than slaves, for whereas the slave owner had an interest in preserving his 'capital', by ensuring that his slaves remained 'strong and healthy', not owning the children the mill owner had no such vested interest in his workforce's health and welfare.⁵ Addressing the children directly in his letter, Oastler advised them that they were 'doomed to labour from morning to

¹Hutchins BL and Harrison A, 1911, *A history of factory legislation*. PS King and Son, London. p.16.

²Thomas MW, 1948, *The early factory legislation*. Thomas Bank Publishing Co., Leigh-on-Sea. pp.12-13.; Henriques URQ, 1971, *The early Factory Acts and their enforcement*. Historical Association, London. p.1.

³PP. 1816, Vol.III, p.319. Similarly, James Moss, the apprentice-house keeper at the Blackbarrow mill in Lancashire stated that he had never heard of the Act let alone seen copies of it posted around the mill, PP. 1816, Vol. III, p.163.

⁴Hutchins BL and Harrison A, 1911, *A history of factory legislation*. p.17-18.

⁵Peel had in fact made a similar point when proposing his 1818 Bill, noting that masters had an interest in protecting their apprentices, but no such interest in the 'free' children they employed (Hansard, 1818, Vol.XXXVIII, pp.354-5.).

night for one who cares not how soon your weak and tender frames are stretched to breaking.'

The arguments of those who opposed the early factory legislation derived either from a general feeling that it was unnecessary and would hinder competitiveness, or from laissez faire economics. The arguments of Lord Stanley who opposed Peel's 1818 Bill fell into the second category: the Bill was in his opinion an unprecedented attempt to interfere with 'free labour'.⁶

Although the act has been seen as a turning point in the development of social policy for its acknowledgement that the community at large had the ultimate responsibility for the welfare of children at work, it was in fact in the report of the factory commission which preceded the Act that the really crucial distinction between the position of a child and an adult in the labour market was clearly established.⁷ The commission not only noted the damaging effects of excessive labour at an early age, it also concluded that, at the ages at which these injuries were being suffered, children were not in fact the 'free agents' of laissez-faire economics. Adults were able to decide for themselves whether or not to work for a given wage, or where to work; children lacked such freedoms. It was the children's parents or guardians who made these decisions. The Commission concluded that on these grounds a case existed for the interference of the legislature on behalf of children employed in factories.⁸ This conclusion provided the basis for the protective legislation which appeared piecemeal from 1833 onwards.

By 1851, the census recorded only 28% of children aged ten to fifteen with occupations other than that of scholar, suggesting that the legislation was having some effect. However, the legislation designed to protect working children remained crucially weak in one respect. Only children working in the textile factories, the mines, and one or two other special forms of labour were offered even modest protection. If we ignore the Mines Acts and the 1845 Printmakers Act, the 1860 Factory Act, which applied to bleach and dye works, may be seen as a symbolic bridge between the earlier textile legislation and the later wider reforms. Having gone some way towards legislating for the

⁶...his great objection to the measure, ...was on the principle that it went to interfere with free labour. Had it been confined merely to apprentices, he should not oppose it, but in the law of the country there was no precedent for such an interference.' Hansard, Vol.XXXVIII, 1818, p.345. In fact as Peel pointed out in his reply, such a precedent had been set by the Chimney Sweeps Act which had not simply regulated the labour but banned it for children below a certain age.

⁷PP.1833, Vol.XX, Cd.450.

⁸ibid., p.32.

improvement of the worst conditions found in the textile factories it was inevitable that conditions found in associated finishing trades should appear particularly in need of similar treatment, irrespective of whether they were the worst to be found. The seven reports of the 1862 Child Employment Commission highlighted the excessive hours and poor working conditions of children outside the protected industries.⁹

Parliament responded with two key pieces of legislation, the first passed even before the Commission had published its final report. The Factory Act of 1864 extended the provisions of the previous factory acts to a number of new industries such as printing¹⁰, whilst the later Workshops Regulation Act (1867) extended those provisions to premises where fewer than fifty persons were employed. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, industrial legislation was to advance to cover an ever wider range of trades and industries, and to increasingly limit the overwork and exploitation of young workers.¹¹ However, it was not this industrial legislation which was to have the greatest impact on entry into the labour market.

6.3 The Advent of Compulsory Education¹²

'O for the coming of that glorious time
When, prizing knowledge as her noblest wealth
And best protection, this imperial Realm,
While she exacts allegiance, shall admit
An obligation, on her part, to teach'

William Wordsworth.¹³

Although the factory legislation undoubtedly played a part in reducing child employment, its impact was to be dwarfed in the last thirty years of the

⁹For a useful collection of evidence from the commission's reports, see Pike ER, 1967, *Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age 1850-1875*. Allen & Unwin, London, ch.3.

¹⁰Earthenware (except bricks), matches, percussion caps and cartridges, paper staining, fustian cutting.

¹¹Narrative accounts of this legislation are provided by Hutchins BL and Harrison A, 1911, *A history of factory legislation*. PS King and Son, London.; and by Keeling J, 1914, *Child labour in the United Kingdom*. PS King and Son, London.

¹²For the background to the development of elementary education in England, see Birchenough C, 1938, *History of elementary education*. University Tutorial Press, London. Third edition.; and Smith F, 1931, *A history of English elementary education, 1760-1902*. University of London Press, London.

¹³Wordsworth W, 'The Excursion' (1814) in De Salincourt E and Darbyshire H, (eds) 1949, *The poetical works of William Wordsworth*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

nineteenth century by that of the major educational legislation, the history of whose implementation is much less well known. Up to 1870, there had been no state system of schooling in the country; schooling for the working-classes, or indeed any class, was neither compulsory nor, on the whole, free. Before this date the vast majority of the school places available for the working-classes had been provided in schools established by various church societies. By far the most important of these societies were the Nonconformists' 'British and Foreign School Society', established in 1808 by Joseph Lancaster, and the Anglicans' 'National Society for Providing The Education of the Poor in The Principles of the Established Church', established three years later by Andrew Bell. It was in fact Bell's tract outlining a system of teaching large numbers of children by employing the so-called 'pupil-teacher' system, that provided the foundation for the rapid expansion of the voluntary school movement.¹⁴ The value and quantity of this privately provided schooling should not be lightly dismissed,¹⁵ and neither should the importance of various kinds of informal schooling;¹⁶ even as early as 1840 the bulk of the adult male labour force appears to have been literate.¹⁷ Government had been reluctant to become involved in the provision of schooling, but in 1833 made some recognition of a duty to assist in such work by providing a £20,000 annual grant to the societies. This initially modest level of central government expenditure proved difficult to contain, and without any specific policy decision being taken, spiralled upwards; by 1857 the annual grant had reached £500,000. Faced by this inflation in the level of support for schooling, it was understandable that the government should seek to establish the efficiency with which its funds were being used.

Appointed in 1858, the Newcastle Committee surveyed the state of elementary education and noted that, whilst they had failed to come across a single child who had never attended a school, slightly less than one in eight of the population was actually attending school at the time of their enquiry. They

¹⁴Bell, 'An Experiment in Education made at the asylum of Madras.' This book also inspired William Wordsworth both to take up teaching in his local school, and to devote the ninth section of his lengthy poem "The Excursion", part of which is quoted above, to a long monologue calling for the State to educate the poor on moral grounds. Moorman M, 1965, *William Wordsworth: the later years, 1803-1850*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. p.141.

¹⁵West EG, 1965, *Education and the state*. London. ; West EG, 1970, 'Resource allocation and growth in early nineteenth century British education. *Economic History Review* Second Series 23 pp.68-95.

¹⁶Blaug M, 1986(b), 'The economics of education in English classical political economy: a re-examination.' in Blaug M, 1986(c), *Economic history of the history of economics*. Wheatsheaf Books, Brighton. pp.173-4.

¹⁷Hartwell RM (ed), 1970, *The industrial revolution*. Nuffield College Studies in Economic History, No.1. Oxford. pp.236-8.

criticized both the standards and methods of teaching, and called for a greater emphasis on the rudiments of a basic education, and on ensuring higher levels of attendance. The response of the government was to reorganize its system of grants, changing to a system based on payment by results, in part in terms of levels of attendance, but also based on a new scheme of streaming children according to their academic achievements into six standards. Although the pressure for higher levels of attendance may have been a healthy change, the system of standards and payments by results encouraged unenlightened teaching techniques of dubious benefit.

The 1870 Elementary Education Act proved a far more radical and positive change, for it provided the foundation of a national system of schools by requiring the establishment of locally elected School Boards to found and run schools in areas unserved, or under-served, by the church schools. These School Board schools were to be supported partly by annual grants from central government, but also by a local education rate. Even in crude terms of numbers of places and average attendance at schools, the achievements made under this Act were impressive; within six years of the Act's passage Board schools capable of housing in excess of half a million pupils had been completed.¹⁸ However, the Act did not introduce any element of compulsion with regard to attendance. Although the idea of compulsory attendance had been mooted, the opposition to the idea remained fierce. Once more this opposition centred around laissez-faire ideas about the rights of the individual to freedom of choice. With regard to the question of compulsory schooling, it was the rights of the parents rather than the child which were regarded as being under threat; many parents relied heavily on the earnings of their children and opposed any change that might restrict this income. That the majority of schools still charged fees, no matter how small, further fuelled opposition.

Nevertheless, although it had not made such provisions obligatory, the 1870 Education Act did give every local School Board the power to introduce compulsory schooling should they wish to, advising that compulsion, if introduced, should cover those aged between five and thirteen, and allow for exemptions above the age of ten. This power to implement compulsory schooling was further extended when Lord Sandon's 1876 Education Act set up School Attendance Committees, with exactly the same powers as the School Boards, in all areas where no Board existed. Further, the 1876 Act advised all parents that, whilst not compulsory, it was their 'duty' to send their children to

¹⁸Report of the Committee Of Education, 1876-77.

school at least between the ages of five and ten. Many of the Committees and School Boards, especially in the rural areas, remained opposed to compulsion, and it was only with the passing of Mundella's 1880 Education Act, during Gladstone's second term as Premier, that a national system of compulsory elementary education was secured. The 1880 Act established that all children aged between five and ten had by law to attend school full-time; those children aged between ten and thirteen could gain exemption by reaching a standard of proficiency fixed by by-laws, whilst those aged thirteen could do so purely on the basis of the number of attendances made. The 1880 Act thus followed the 1876 Act in accepting the principle that the individual local authority or school board should be allowed to decide upon the exact nature of the exemptions that should be allowed. Although this principle long remained intact, the minimum age at which exemption could be sought was gradually pushed up by parliament, rising from ten to eleven in 1893, and with minor exceptions in rural areas to twelve in 1899.

There were three further important reforms in the educational system before the close of the nineteenth century, the first of which was the removal of the system of payment by results which had been heavily criticized from many sides, but perhaps most strongly by the teaching profession itself. The second significant reform was the introduction of free education by Lord Salisbury in his Education Act of 1891. Salisbury's Act gave every parent the right to demand a free education for their children, and made it compulsory for the authorities to supply one. As Preston observed in his survey of the condition of the poorest classes in East London, however beneficent the purpose of the 1880 Act had been in introducing compulsory education, it bore with 'cruel weight' upon the poorest families, 'to whom twopence or a penny a week for the school fees of each of three or four children, mean(t) so much lack of bread'¹⁹ Preston arguably exaggerated the importance of the fees, and certainly the reduction in fees seems to have played only a marginal role in explaining increased enrolment.²⁰

The third significant change came in 1899 when the Technical Instruction Act gave the newly established County Councils authority to levy a penny rate to support programmes of technical education; this reform represented a nationalistic response to the growing evidence that Britain's industrial

¹⁹Preston WC, 1883, *The bitter cry of outcast London*. James Clarke and Co., London. p.11.

²⁰Mitch DF, 1986, 'The impact of subsidies to elementary schooling on enrolment rates in nineteenth century England.' *Economic History Review* Second Series 39 pp.371-391.

competitiveness was being eroded, and that it was the increasingly well developed technical programmes being operated on the continent that lay at the root of this trend.²¹

The 1890s were a decade of expansion in the provision of all forms of secondary education, the local school boards being particularly active in supplying higher grade schools and evening schools; the London School Board alone was running seventy higher grade schools by 1900. However, after a test case in the courts, the so-called Cockerton judgement established that the provision of secondary education on the rates was not covered by the existing legislation, making it technically illegal for councils to allocate funds for this purpose. The Government responded with a new Education Act in 1902 which disbanded the school boards, their functions being handed over to the county and county borough councils, who, with only minor exceptions, were made responsible for providing both elementary and secondary (county) schools. Further, the act finally placed the church schools on the rates.

As we have noted, the 1880 Education Act and subsequent reforms introduced a national system of compulsory education up to the age of twelve, and, given the powers conferred upon the school boards, potentially up to the age of fourteen. This did not mean that full-time schooling to the age of fourteen became universal. Many school boards and later local authorities chose to set relatively low standards for part-time and full-time exemption. In England and Wales in 1912 there were still as many as 55,000 children aged under fourteen working full-time under the Factory Act, and a further 140,000 working full-time outside those Acts.²² Prior to the Education Act of 1918 roughly half those aged between twelve and fourteen were still able to leave school for full-time employment.

6.4 The Half-Time System

It was the 1918 Education Act which finally closed all avenues for partial or total exemption, and established a national minimum leaving age of fourteen. The oldest and most important of several concessions which had survived through to 1918 was the half-time system, a system allowing partial exemption

²¹For a wider ranging discussion of the attitudes of the Victorians and Edwardians to education and technical training as forms of national investment, see Evans EW and Wiseman NC, 1984, 'Education, training and economic performance: British economists' views, 1868 - 1939.' *Journal of Economic History* 40.

²²Keeling F, 1914, *Child labour in the United Kingdom*. pp. xxvii-ix. PS King and Son, London.

on condition that the child attended school on alternate days or in the morning or afternoon of each working day. The origins of this system can perhaps be found in the charity schools of the seventeenth century, and in particular in the school established in Little Britain by Thomas Firkin, the author of the influential tract entitled 'Proposals for the Employment of the Poor' (1681). Firkin's ideas and examples were taken up and copied in many of the early children's workhouses set up in the early eighteenth century. In the case of the workhouse in the London parish of St. Giles, children were kept in a special 'school' up to the age of five, but thereafter combined learning to read and write, and later costing accounts, with spinning and knitting.²³ We should not forget that much of the debate around the treatment of children in factories in the early nineteenth century concerned the detrimental effects it had on their morals and education. Almost all the Acts and Bills concerned with factory children made some specific provision for the educative needs of the children, even if, as with the 1802 Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, the provisions were only fairly vague references to a need for some instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic. As we have already noted, an interesting and notable exception to this rule was Sadler's Ten Hour Bill. However, it was only with the passage of the 1845 Factory Act that the as yet embryonic half-time system really began to take shape. The half-time system as adopted in this legislation was in fact said to have arisen by default rather than by design:

Some means being sought whereby evidence should be available that a child was not working at a certain hour, it was suggested by Mr. Edwin Chadwick that presence in school would afford the best possible evidence.²⁴

At its inception the half-time system was welcomed as an innovative and valuable reform, and indeed it deserves some credit as the first example of legislation providing for compulsory education. Many commentators argued that the sum benefit of education combined with labour was greater than the sum of the individual parts, a view which is perhaps echoed in some recent thinking on government education and training policy. One notable advocate of such policies was Robert Owen, who suggested in 1816 that children should not work but be instructed up to the age of ten, when, for two years they might be 'advantageously occupying one half the day in making further progress in their instruction, and the other half in acquiring the habits of a manufacturing life'.²⁵

²³Pinchbeck I and Hewitt M, 1969, *Children in English society: from Tudor times to the eighteenth century*. (Vol.I.) Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. p.168.

²⁴Jevons S, 1871, *The theory of political economics*. Macmillan, London. p.58.

²⁵PP.1816, Vol.III, p.24.

This view was strongly recommended by Marx who believed that education in the future would combine productive labour with instruction and gymnastics, to produce not only a more efficient workforce but 'fully developed human beings'.²⁶ Indeed Marx argued that, given suitable measures to protect young children from excessive labour, the early combination of productive labour with education was 'one of the most powerful means for the transformation of present society'.²⁷

The diversity of provisions in the local by-laws made for a certain amount of regional contrast in the prevalence of half-time labour. However, more important in this respect was an underlying regional concentration in the demand for child labour of the kind available under the system. The origins of the system were closely tied to the development of the cotton industry, and it was in the regional economies dominated by the textile industries that the greatest use was made of the half-time system. Thus, at a regional scale, it was in Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire that the majority of the half-timers were employed.²⁸ The cotton mills of the former and the worsted mills of the latter provided a ready and relatively remunerative employment for young school children, over two thirds of the total number of half-timers registered in England and Wales coming from these two counties (Table 6.1).

²⁶Marx K, 1970 (1887), *Capital: a critique of political economy*. Vol.I., Lawrence and Wishart, London. Part IV, Ch XV, Section 9, p.483-4. A similar view was expressed by Senior NW, 1938 (1836), *An outline of the science of political economy*. Library of Economics Reprint, London. pp.63-64.

²⁷Marx K, 1974, 'Critique of the Gotha Programme.' in Fernbach D (ed), 1974 *The First International and after*. Penguin, Harmondsworth. p.356.

²⁸So great was the demand for the labour of half-timers, fathers with several children would be given a job in preference to other applicants. Cruikshank M, 1981, *Children and industry*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Table 6.1
Distribution Of Half-Time Employment 1897-98

	Number of Half-Timers Throughout the Year	Number of Scholars on the Registers on the last day of the school year	Number of Half- Timers per 100 Registered Scholars
Counties			
Lancashire	57,064	748,290	7.6
London	994	747,315	0.1
West Yorkshire	28,204	478,059	5.9
County Boroughs			
Halifax	3,507	14,759	23.8
Burnley	3,695	17,295	21.4
Blackburn	4,926	24,346	20.2
Rochdale	2,472	12,278	20.1
Bury	1,752	10,480	16.7
Bradford	4,886	39,258	12.4
Stockport	1,615	13,600	11.9
Bolton	3,098	27,345	11.3
Preston	2,390	21,508	11.1
Oldham	2,423	24,295	10.0
Leicester	1,140	35,884	3.2
Wigan	332	11,799	2.8
Huddersfield	362	14,844	2.4
Saint Helens	381	16,624	2.3
Nottingham	862	43,464	2.0
Salford	332	38,248	0.9
Manchester	257	96,729	0.3
Liverpool	257	115,147	0.2

Source: The report of the Committee of the Council of Education (England and Wales) 1898-99 (C.9401, PP.1899, XX, table 9).

Note: County totals include the county boroughs within their boundaries.

If we look at individual towns the extent of the concentration of the system becomes even more apparent. Predictably, the large mill-towns emerge as being the major centres for the system. In Halifax, Burnley, Blackburn, and Rochdale the total number of half-timers registered throughout 1897-8 was over one fifth of the total number of scholars on the towns' school rolls at the end of the year. This connection with mill towns was not however a universal one, as is demonstrated by the low number of half-timers in Huddersfield. Here the School Board pursued a positive line of opposition to the system, reducing the number

of registered half-timers in the town from 1,762 in 1879 to only 94 in 1901.²⁹ Although the textile trade of Huddersfield was distinct from that of either Bradford or Halifax, the ability of a progressive School Board in a textile town to restrict the system by opposing applications illustrates that it was custom rather than necessity which maintained it.

Employers were in fact divided in their attitudes towards half-timers, and towards the end of the nineteenth century the newer mills either abandoned the system or never employed it. Further, many of those employers whose mills continued to operate the system would have liked to abandon it, but 'did not care to run counter to the district, and incur unpopularity with some of the parents and operatives'.³⁰ It was from the parents and the operatives that the greatest opposition to the abolition of the system came. Many parents were loath to sacrifice the wages of their children, especially as the damage done to their children's education was camouflaged by the partial attendance requirement. Opposition amongst parents to compulsory education, and to restrictions on the age at which their children might start work, had a long history. One example concerns the 1874 Factory Act, which had laid down fourteen as the minimum age for full-time employment but allowed children aged thirteen to work if they could produce a surgeon's certificate to verify their age. One employer, on asking a very young-looking boy how old he was, was told 'thirteen'; on asking how the boy knew his age, the boy replied that his mother had told him. 'How old were you before your mother told you that you were thirteen?' asked the employer. 'Nine' replied the boy.³¹

However, there were other important motives for the opposition of the adult mill workers to the abolition of the scheme. Many adult workers in fact employed the children in the mills on a sub-contracting basis, and there was a fear amongst these workers that they would have had to bear the extra cost of replacing the children with adults should half-time labour be withdrawn.³² The strength of the opposition to abolition amongst the cotton operatives was reflected in the overturning of a pro-abolition motion, put before them by their union leaders in February 1909, by a majority of 151,032 votes to 34,120.³³ In part the half-time system, once established, created an internal momentum that

²⁹PP. 1909, Vol.XVII, Cd.4791, Q.1926.

³⁰ibid., p.10.

³¹PP. 1876, Vol. XXX, Q.4334.

³²ibid., Q.3807, 3812, 5324.

³³ibid., Q.3807.

generated a constant supply of fresh recruits parents taking it as natural that as they had worked in the mill for their parents from such an early age, so should their children for them. Even parents who would have liked their children to have continued schooling felt that they had to send them into half-time labour in order not to damage their chances of promotion.

The notion is - 'so long as other peoples' children go half-time, I must send mine.' Because if they are in the Mill, they are under the notice of the tackler or weaver, and when the time comes to go to regular tenting there they are.³⁴

A final important, if ironically peripheral pressure against the abolition of the system came from the children themselves. Only 7 of 300 half-timers questioned in one survey preferred full-time to half-time education, most enjoying the degree of independence which the position brought, and not least the opportunity to earn 'sel'-brass'.³⁵

In interpreting the Council of Education figures on which Table 6.1 is based, it is important to realize that the figure for half-timers was the sum total number of children who had at some time during the year claimed part-time exemption rather than the average number claiming at any one time throughout the year, or at the year end. Thus the figure for half-timers would include children who had only claimed exemption for a short period during the year, those who had claimed exemption and subsequently left school, and those who had only claimed exemption on the very last day of the recorded year. In order to gain a clearer impression of the extent and relative importance of half-time labour we must make some correction to the Council of Education figures. Fortunately there are two useful sources to help us with this task. In 1892 a detailed survey made of the extent of part-time exemptions in the towns of Oldham, Bradford, Bolton, Blackburn and Leicester found that the figure for average number of part-time scholars attending throughout the year represented only 57% of the total returned to the Council of Education. Similarly it was found in 1906-7 that for Britain as a whole the average number of half-timers attending school at any time during the year was only 47,360, or 57% of the 82,970 total of the Council of Education. The exact similarity in the findings of these two reports is probably coincidental, but we can at least conclude that the Council of Education figure for half-timers should be deflated by perhaps 40-50% to reach a figure for the average number at any one time.

³⁴ibid., Q.444.

³⁵ibid., Q.4121.

The level of exaggeration identified in the Council of Education figures should not deter us from making use of them as a guide to the likely underlying spatial and temporal patterns in the data. One fact which supports such a conclusion is the similarity in the level of exaggeration found by the two studies reviewed above; if the level of exaggeration remained roughly constant over time, then the patterns found in the data are a reliable guide to what was really happening. Having looked already at the spatial spread of half-timers we might now consider the temporal aspect.

Table 6.2

Total number of Half-Timers Scholars registered, by year.

1889-1890	175,437	1900-1901	74,468
1890-1891	173,040	1901-1902	77,426
1891-1892	172,363	1902-1903	80,681
1892-1893	164,018	1903-1904	78,876
1893-1894	140,831	1904-1905	80,368
1894-1895	126,896	1905-1906	82,328
1895-1896	119,747	1906-1907	82,970
1896-1897	110,654	1907-1908	84,298
1897-1898	103,678		
1898-1899	95,621	1909-1910	75,610
1899-1900	89,036		

Sources: PP. 1909 XVII Cd.4887 Appendix 2, PP. 1911 LXIV (3)

One of the most immediately notable features of the figures listed in Table 6.2 is the rapid decline in the number of half-timers during the final decade of the nineteenth century. A particularly rapid fall in the numbers thus employed can be observed in the years 1892-95, reflecting the raising of the minimum age of partial exemption from ten to eleven, and again in 1899-1901 when the age was raised to twelve. Underlying these sharp declines, due to legislation which took children out of the market, was a slower more prolonged reduction deriving from the long-term decline of the British textile industry. In the first decade of the twentieth century the decline in the numbers of half-timers was halted, and

even, on a modest scale, reversed. During these years the textile industry enjoyed an 'indian summer', the consumption of raw cotton in the U.K. reaching an all-time high between 1906 and 1908.³⁶ I would suggest that the recovery in the fortunes of the industry was fundamental to the recovery in the numbers of registered half-timers, but an additional factor may well have been the increasingly rigorous enforcement of higher criteria for full-time exemption. The greater difficulty encountered in gaining full-time exemption could well have pushed many children into half-time employment who would previously have gained full-time exemption. Nevertheless, the recovery was short lived and by 1910 the total number of half-timers registered over the year had fallen to a low of 75,610, or perhaps, after allowing for the exaggeration built into the Council of Education figures, as few as 42,000.

That after 1870 educational legislation played the primary role in the limitation of labour amongst the young did not mean that non-educational legislation regarding the group failed to progress, but it did marginalize it. A succession of factory, mines and miscellaneous employment acts introduced greater restrictions upon the labour of young persons, in part via general regulations applying to all age groups, but chiefly via measures specific to the young.

The minimum age at which boys might be employed underground rose from eleven to twelve in 1872, to thirteen in 1900, and to fourteen in 1911. The minimum age at which a child could enter a textile factory was set at ten in 1874, a minimum extended to all factories and workshops in 1878, and one increased to eleven in 1891 and twelve in 1901. Further in a large number of dangerous and unhealthy trades the employment of boys and girls aged under eighteen was prohibited, and the 1903 Employment of Children Act prohibited the employment of all children aged under fourteen (whether attending school or not) between the hours of 9 pm and 6 am. On the whole young persons working outside the trades covered by the Mines and Factory acts tended to be less well protected. Perhaps the most unregulated and exposed of all were those employed in industries, or sections of industry, dominated by the 'sweating system'.

Even where legislation existed covering small workshops and the home, the chief locations of sweated labour, regulation proved virtually impossible. This section of the economy remained the scene of the worst abuses of child and

³⁶Mitchell BR and Deane P, 1962, *Abstract of British historical statistics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Table 2., p.179.

adult labour well into the twentieth-century. Only with the passing of the 1909 Trades Board Act, which attempted, with considerable success, to strengthen the weak bargaining position of the sweated worker, was any degree of improvement in the lot of this, the most pitiful section of the labour force achieved.

A further body of child and juvenile labour which government had great difficulty in regulating were the errand-boys, shop-boys and shop-assistants theoretically protected by the Shop Acts. Although the 1892 Act had prohibited the employment of persons aged under eighteen for more than 74 hours a week, the provision both failed to cover those children employed in 'family shops', perhaps the largest class of employer in the retail sector, and proved difficult to use even where applicable. This last failing was one common to all legislation which limited the number of hours worked rather than the hours of work.

6.5 Avoidance of Compulsory Education: Adaptations in Child Labour Patterns

Do the people in the church see the child in the street?
Have they looked down the pathway before his young feet,
How it leads due away from skilled labour and trade
To where the Reform School looms darkly ahead?
When the list of lost children at length is complete,
Will the people at last take the child from the street?

Sarah Cleghorn, 'The child in the street'³⁷

Despite the continued importance of non-educational legislation, it was of course the educational legislation which played the dominant part in establishing the framework within which children could participate in the labour market. That the law existed was of course no guarantee that it would be complied with. Opposition to the idea of compulsory education was succeeded by opposition to its implementation; some indication of the scale of this problem is provided by the statistics relating to the annual number of offences against the Elementary Education Acts, shown in Table 6.3.

³⁷Cleghorn SN, 1898, 'Stories about the other child', *Child Labour Bulletin, Supplement*, Vol.II, No.5, p.43.

Table 6.3:
**Number of Offences Against the Elementary Education Acts,
England and Wales 1875-1910**

1875	21,386	1895	59,737
1880	55,696	1900	89,657
1885	76,173	1905	56,023
1890	87,439	1910	36,823

Source: Judicial Statistics (England and Wales) PP. 1895, CVIII, C.7725, Table B. PP. 1912-13, CX, Cd.6071, table C.

As we can see in the table above, the numbers of such offences were extremely large. Only offences under the intoxicating liquor laws exceeded them in number throughout the period up to the First World War. Opposition to the imposition of compulsory attendance came chiefly from the working classes, or more specifically from the lowest classes amongst the working classes, for the skilled artisan class were not only generally supportive of the idea of compulsory education but had actively agitated for it.³⁸ A motion passed unanimously at the second congress of the T.U.C. in 1889, held that the Congress believed that 'nothing short of a system of national, unsectarian, and compulsory education (would) satisfy the requirements of the people of the United Kingdom'.³⁹ Children out of school during school hours were relatively easily identified by the policemen or school attendance officers, and, although avoidance remained a significant problem, parents increasingly faced up to the reality of only being able to find employment for their children in hours outside those of school.

That children were now either excluded from full-time employment or protected from the worst conditions and excesses of employments in factories, workshops, and mines did not thus signify an end to the problem of child labour.

³⁸Lacqueur T, 1976, 'Working class demand and the growth of English elementary education.' in Stone L, (ed), 1976, *Schooling in society*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.pp.192-205.

³⁹Quoted in Simon B, 1960, *Studies in the history of education, 1780-1870*. Lawrence and Wishart, London. p.362.

Rather, the problem once again adapted to the new conditions and changed its shape or form. The great need for legislation was not now for that covering the normal working day, the time which had been usurped for schooling, but rather to control work undertaken outside these hours, i.e. in the hours before and after school, and at the weekends. In 1880, the date at which compulsory full-time education was finally achieved, there remained a lack of legislative controls, and it was to remain limited and only marginally effective for the next forty years or more.

The 1876 Education Act had made it illegal for anyone to employ a child in such a manner as to interfere with its education. Although *de jure* a catch-all phrase capable of covering all employment that so exhausted or weakened a child, whether through excessive hours or effort, to the point where its education suffered, the phrase was *de facto* interpreted as only applying to those who employed children during school hours. The weakness in this legislation was typical of the mass of acts and clauses which were drafted with the object of controlling the problem.

Amongst the most commented upon and visible forms of child employment was street-trading, a category that covered the selling of a vast miscellany of goods from matches and newspapers to button-holes. No Victorian street was complete without its complement of children pestering passers-by with their wares, a picture still familiar in the Third World. The first significant attempt to control the problem in England and Wales came in the form of the 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to, and Better Protection of, Children Act. This Act represented the first achievement of the recently established Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, whose founder and first Director, Benjamin Waugh, was widely credited with having been the chief force behind the promotion of the Bill. Under section 3(c) of the Act anyone who either caused or procured a child aged less than ten to work for profit was liable to prosecution, an exception being the limited number of children licensed to perform in public entertainments. Further, the specific regulations dealing with street trading prohibited the employment of boys aged under eleven and girls aged under sixteen, between the hours of 10 pm and 5 am, hours which local authorities were empowered to 'extend or restrict' if they so wished.

An amending Act in 1894 strengthened all the original Act's provisions, raising the minimum age to eleven and extending the prohibited hours to between 9 pm and 6 am. One weakness of the 1889 Act had been that it contained no direct penalty for any minor breaking of the standards it laid down, but only penalties for any adult who caused or procured a child to do so. The

1894 Act made some attempt to remedy this failing by making parents and guardians who simply 'allowed' children to transgress the standards liable. Nevertheless, due to the difficulty of determining the exact age of many children when suspected of trading illegally, and the inability to prosecute parents or guardians if they claimed the child had been trading without their knowledge or consent, even the 1894 Act quickly proved ineffectual.⁴⁰ A further, and particularly unfortunate weakness of the act was its failure to cover children employed in delivering goods rather than selling them, or for that matter the substantial army of children who found employment in 'knocking-up' workmen for their early shifts.

If the early legislation was ineffectual in controlling street trading and other similar forms of employment for children, little more success met the legislation designed to control the employment of children in public entertainments. The bulk of the children employed in this field worked in variety and other forms of shows such as circuses that moved from town to town, whilst a further significant portion were taken on for the annual pantomime season. Although the numbers involved were never particularly large, one estimate putting the number of theatre children in London in 1887 at 1,000, the amount of work for those employed could be considerable, especially as the hours were often late and the seasons long.⁴¹ In addition, the pantomime seasons could be extremely long; the production at Drury Lane in the winter of 1886-7 which employed a hundred children lasted for four months, excluding the six weeks rehearsals.⁴²

The earliest legislation addressed to children's employment in the theatre was concerned only with the minority of the children employed in the so-called 'dangerous performances' such as acrobatics and contortionism. The Children's Dangerous Performance Act (1879) prohibited the employment of children aged under fourteen in performances considered dangerous by the courts, but this proved ineffectual.⁴³ Of more value was the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act of 1889, which prohibited the employment of children aged less than seven in all public entertainments, and required those employing any child aged less than ten to apply for a licence for that employment from the local Petty Sessional Court. In considering such applications the courts were instructed to

⁴⁰London County Council, 1900, *Report of the Chief Officer of the Public Court Department as to the limitation and regulations of the employment of school children out of school hours*. LCC No.468. London. p.6.

⁴¹PP.1887, Vol.XXX, Q.50442-4.

⁴²ibid.

⁴³Keeling J, 1914, *Child labour in the United Kingdom*. p.71.

ensure that due provision had been made for the kind treatment of the children, and empowered to place conditions on the licence regarding aspects of the employment such as working hours; the local factory inspectorate was responsible for enforcing such conditions.

Under the amending Act of 1894 the upper age limit for the requirement of a licence was raised to eleven and a number of extra conditions introduced to improve the efficiency of the system. Most importantly, under section 6(5) the employer granted the licence was henceforth required under penalty of a fine of up to £5 to forward a copy of the licence within ten days to the local factory inspector. The Act also extended the system of licensing to all children aged under sixteen training in dangerous performances, unless the child was being trained by its parent or guardian. The effectiveness of these regulations was limited by the continued laxity of employers in applying for licences and forwarding copies. Further, the ability of the inspectors to regulate and enforce the conditions of the licences was hampered by their lack of legal powers of entry to theatres, and their inability to prosecute. In cases where they felt it necessary to prosecute the inspectors had to enlist the help of the police.⁴⁴

The slow emergence of national legislation covering extra-curricular employment, and the ineffectiveness of that which did emerge, only heightened the pressure for greater controls, particularly on young street traders. Several provincial cities used corporation bills to secure statutory powers to make by-laws restricting the activities of this particular body of child and juvenile labour. Birmingham Corporation, for example, passed a by-law in 1883 prohibiting the employment of children aged under twelve on the city's streets after 9 pm. In 1898 Liverpool introduced the most extensive set of controls enacted by any local authority, not only placing age restrictions on the activity, and banning children from trading in public houses and music-halls, but attempting to restrict the number of hours they could work. Yet this local legislation often failed crucially in the same respect as so much of the central legislation, that is, in the lack of provision made for enforcement.

In August 1897 Mrs. E.F.Hogg published an article on the subject of child wage earners in the magazine 'Nineteenth Century', based on evidence collected by a sub-committee of the Education Council of the Women's Industrial Council set up to investigate the problem.⁴⁵ The study centred on 54 London schools held to be 'representative' of the conditions in the capital as a

⁴⁴ibid., p.15.

⁴⁵Hogg EF, 1897, 'School children as wage earners', *Nineteenth Century*, XLII, pp.235-44.

whole. Only children who received monetary reward for their labour were considered employed by the study, although Mrs. Hogg did make some comments upon the lot of those who received no wage. In total, 16,000 boys were investigated and 10,000 girls. Of the 26,000 school-children investigated 1252 workers were identified, 729 boys and 523 girls, giving activity rates for the two sexes of 4.6% and 5.2% respectively. Thus of the 26,000 London school children investigated, 4.8% were found to have some paid extra-curricular employment, a figure which rises to 4.9% when the responses are weighted to allow for the imbalance in the sexual division of the sample.

However, it was not the level of activity that spurred concern, but rather the conditions under which the children worked, in particular the long hours which many endured, and the adverse consequences of the labour on the education of the children. Of the 150 boys aged under eleven who had some form of employment, 75 worked for 12 hours or more a week. Mrs. Hogg concluded that there was widespread over-work of children and that this over-work made it impossible for the children to draw the maximum benefit from their education. She considered that among the most worrying problems highlighted by the investigation was the complete lack of relevance of the jobs undertaken. Of the 729 boys employed, only a dozen could be said to have been employed in occupations that could in any way further their prospects of a career in a skilled occupation.

One of the most immediate responses to Mrs. Hogg's article was an attempt by the government to obtain a clearer, more comprehensive picture of the extent and nature of school child employment throughout the country. In June 1898 the Board of Education sent out a circular to all 20,022 public elementary schools in England and Wales asking teachers to fill in schedules with details of the occupations of their students. The returns published in 1899, although far from comprehensive, fuelled concern over the subject and led to the appointment in 1901 of an inter-departmental committee to carry out more detailed investigations and suggest remedial legislation.

The recommendations of the Child Employment Committee were closely followed in the Employment of Children Act of 1903. Most importantly, under section (2) of the Act, all local authorities were given the power to enact by-laws restricting the employment of children aged under sixteen in street trading, and those under fourteen in employments in general, all by-laws drafted under these powers being subject to ratification by the Home Secretary. Soon after the passage of the Act the Home Office circulated a specimen set of by-laws. Most local authorities followed the basic structure of this specimen when drafting their

own provisions. Generally all girls under the age of sixteen were prohibited from trading on the streets unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. In addition some kind of licensing system was often introduced in order to allow greater control of street trading amongst the young. London uniquely opted for a system of control which relied on the issuing of badges rather than licences.

With the exceptions of Leeds, Oldham, Salford and Sunderland, by 1910 all populous cities had made some by-laws restricting street trading.⁴⁶ However, whereas 50 out of the 74 county boroughs had made such provisions, only a handful of the smaller urban districts had followed suit.⁴⁷ Further, even where new laws had been framed, only exceptionally were determined efforts made to enforce them. The minority report of the parliamentary committee appointed in 1910 to review the operation of the 1903 Act noted that, of the eight cities from which detailed evidence on the operation of by-laws restricting street employment had been gathered, only three, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool, had fully utilized the powers available to them under the Act.⁴⁸ It was not, primarily, a lack of legislation which hampered the effective treatment of the problem, but a lack of will at a local level to use the powers available. Where determined efforts had been made to enforce control of street trading, as for example in Manchester, a degree of success had been achieved.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, such examples remained scarce, and even when the representatives of the L.C.C., an authority which had introduced a scheme to ensure that the local by-laws were abided by, claimed that their officers had the problem under control, the committee remained sceptical.⁵⁰ The mass of evidence of children operating illegally uncovered by the committee and various other bodies and individuals, demonstrates just how limited the success of the by-laws had been. Even in Liverpool, where the by-laws were enforced more conscientiously than in most places, 9.4% (408) of boys due to leave school in 1910 admitted to working during prohibited hours.⁵¹

If the effectiveness of the legislation covering street trading varied widely across the country, so did the effectiveness of the legislation designed to regulate children's participation in public entertainments. The 1903

⁴⁶PP 1910 Vol.XXVII Cd.5230 p.6.

⁴⁷ibid.

⁴⁸ibid., p.19.

⁴⁹ibid.

⁵⁰ibid., p.9.

⁵¹Keeling F, 1914, *Child labour in the United Kingdom.* p.262.

Employment of Children Act and 1904 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act had between them increased the minimum age of employment of children in such activities to ten and passed from the Factory Inspectors to the officers of the local authorities the duty of enforcing the conditions of the licences. Where no special by-laws were passed altering the conditions, the latest time to which children could work was that set in 1903 for employments in general, 9 pm. In Manchester, before granting a licence the Local Authority asked for a birth certificate to be produced and made enquiries into both the previous licences granted with respect to the child, and the nature of the performance in which the child was to be employed.⁵² Manchester Council also delegated the duty of visiting theatres to police officers who specialized in the enforcement of the Employment of Children Act and kindred legislation, a procedure calculated to improve the efficiency with which the regulations were enforced.⁵³ However, just as in its treatment of street trading by children, Manchester's effective use and application of the available legislation regulating child employment in public entertainments was exceptional.⁵⁴

Even if the legislation which resulted from the extensive investigations of the problem of young street traders, and of school-age labour in general, was only marginally effective, the investigations at least supply us with a mass of evidence about the operation of the market for child labour around the turn of the century. As an obviously a-political and non-unionized element of the labour market, and one apparently marginal to the mainstream of the economy, the group has been little studied, and this mass of material barely disturbed. Yet the evidence can be extremely powerful, not only affording accounts of the many different forms of employment pursued, of the wages, perks, times, conditions and hours of the employments, but also of the backgrounds of the children who sought employment, sometimes of their motives for doing so, and even of the consequences for the children.

The 1898 returns were potentially an outstandingly useful source of information about childhood labour. Certainly the sheer size of the undertaking demands respect; the 1898 survey was undoubtedly the most extensive and systematic attempt ever made to determine the quantitative outlines of school-child labour in Victorian or Edwardian England and Wales. However, on the most basic of all questions one might ask of the returns, that of the numbers and

⁵²ibid., p.38.

⁵³ibid.

⁵⁴ibid., p.39.

percentages of children involved in extra-curricula employment, the returns are an unreliable guide. As the persons responsible for drafting the summary to the returns were at pains to point out, they suffered from a range of problems and were consequently far from comprehensive.

The instructions accompanying the schedules had unfortunately been vague enough to allow managers or teachers to place a wide variety of interpretations on the objectives of the enquiry, and consequently upon the nature of the returns required. A common practice was to enter on the schedules only those whom the teacher believed had fairly regular employment. In several schedules it was recorded that there were no working school children attending the school in question, whilst, in a general paragraph, some mention was made of children who only worked at particular times of the year, or only irregularly throughout the year. One respondent commented:

Besides those cases who are in regular employment, a great many boys earn money in the evening by selling papers, matches, carrying parcels, &c.⁵⁵

A second source of error in the 1898 returns was the frequent omission of children who received no wage for the work which they did, or whose wages were paid to the parent, both common practices where the child worked for under, or with a parent. One of the most universal, even if generally one of the least arduous, forms of such employments was the taking of meals to relatives at work. (See Illustration 6.1) Such relatively light forms of employments as 'dinner-taking' were also sometimes excluded from returns by respondents who believed that the enquiry was only interested in cases of working school children where the children were harmed by their employments, one respondent commenting that the questions couldn't 'surely allude to boys selling the Echo after school hours on their own account'.⁵⁶ Many managers or teachers simply took no interest in the enquiry, 231 schools failing to make any return, or refused to pry into matters held to be 'too private to allow enquiries.'⁵⁷ A final failing was that the schedules were often interpreted as only making enquiry about employment outside school hours; such an approach left no record when boys took whole days or weeks off school during certain seasons, for example to help with the harvest, earn a few shilling as golf caddies, help

⁵⁵PP 1899, Vol.LXXV, Cd.205, p.7.

⁵⁶ibid., p.8.

⁵⁷ibid., pp.11-12.

with the unloading of the annual mackerel catch, or to act as beaters during the shooting season.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ibid., p.5.

Illustration 6.1



THE "EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN" QUESTION.

District Visitor. "JUST THINK OF THE LANGUAGE CHILDREN HEAR IN PUBLIC-HOUSES!"

Natty. "JUST THINK OF THE LANGUAGE THEY'LL 'EAR AT 'OME WHEN I 'AVE TO TURN OUT AND FETCH IT!"

In part we can see that much of the confusion in the returns derives from the basic difficulty of finding a definition for child labour. Different respondents came up with different definitions and consequently collected different information. So what should we regard as child labour? What distinguishes it from other activities of the young? The difficulty faced in finding a satisfactory definition is most evident with regard to domestic activities, to activities undertaken in the home for parents, activities which generally were not rewarded by a wage as such, and which were often of an irregular nature. Should any task undertaken in the house be regarded as labour, or should a distinction be drawn between those tasks undertaken directly for the benefit of the child's family, and those undertaken to provide a service for others in order to benefit the child itself or its family indirectly? Such a distinction, although perhaps at first sight attractive, is in many respects unsatisfactory, for no matter who the task was performed for it involved the child in the same amount of effort. A child washing the floor of her mother's front room cannot be said to have been working any harder if that room happened to be used as a tap-room or shop. Further, to claim that a girl was any less employed if she minded her younger siblings in order to allow her mother to work than if she minded the baby of a neighbour for a similar purpose and received a penny or two a week for her trouble is surely pedantic.

Even if no satisfactory definition of what constituted child labour can be found, it is worth noting that as a class domestic employments are more likely to have escaped inclusion than any other, and, as these employments were dominated by girls, that it is therefore probable that the employment of girls was particularly under-enumerated in the 1898 returns. Similarly, it seems probable that working school children in rural, agricultural areas were under-enumerated far more than those in urban ones. In rural areas there existed much greater opportunity for children to find employment in types of work which so many managers and teachers, for the reasons outlined above, failed to report. Indirect evidence of this is provided by the high proportion of the respondents quoted in the introductory memorandum to the 1898 report to illustrate various reasons for blank or incomplete returns, who refer to rural forms of employment. A particularly important reason for incomplete returns from rural areas was the exclusion by some respondents of children only employed irregularly. Given the seasonal nature of innumerable agricultural tasks which children could assist with, particularly those associated with the harvest, such a policy must have excluded many children from the returns. Some of the comments accompanying incomplete returns to the 1898 enquiry illustrate this point:

During the strawberry and pea season, about one-fifth of the elder children are employed both before and after school hours.⁵⁹

Children are sometimes tempted away from school at busy seasons such as haytime, harvest, turnip-pulling, and potato-picking.⁶⁰

A large percentage of the children have to help their parents or neighbours out of school hours, and many are kept from school for days (sometimes weeks) together for such work as picking stones in the fields, weeding, sheep-shearing, harvest, and potato-picking.⁶¹

No particular definite cases. From time to time some few children are away for a few days (a) potato-picking, (b) fishing, (c) crow-scaring, (d) osier-peeling, (e) hawking cockles;⁶²

Besides such comments some indication of the widespread under-enumeration of rural workers can be gleaned from the very low numbers of schools in rural counties which returned even as much as one working child; In London 85.9% of all elementary schools made such returns, whereas in Cornwall only 31.7%, and in Lincolnshire only 33.6% did so. In part the higher figure for London no doubt reflected the larger size of the London schools, but nevertheless, that over two-thirds of any country's schools should contain not a single pupil who was working for a 'wage' or 'employed for profit', as the circular enquired, seems highly unlikely.

Despite the failings of the 1898 returns they nevertheless represent a useful starting point from which to explore the extent and variety of child employment in late Victorian England and Wales, and more specifically London. A total of 144,026 children were enumerated as having some form of employment, 110,161 boys and 33,865 girls.⁶³ To this initial total must be added a further 3,323 children from 409 schools whose returns arrived too late for inclusion in the full returns, raising the total number of working school-children identified by the returns to 147,349. Even taking this final total, the returns only yield an overall activity rate of 2.6%,⁶⁴ a figure well below that reported in Hogg's article.

In considering the extent of the shortfall of the 1898 returns it is worth noting that 9,949 of the 19,382 schools who submitted their returns in time to be

⁵⁹PP. 1899, Vol.LXXV, Cd.205, p.5.

⁶⁰ibid., p.6.

⁶¹ibid., p.5.

⁶²ibid., p.5.

⁶³PP 1899 LXXV Cd.205.Table I, pp.32-33.

⁶⁴Both here and elsewhere, when calculating national activity rates, the population of school children at this date is taken as 5,601,249, that being the total number of scholars on the registers of Day schools on the 31st August 1898. PP.1899, Vol.LXXV, C.9210, table 6.

included in the full report either submitted them blank or simply reported that there were no working children at the school concerned. Given the extent of the concern over the problem, it is difficult to believe that many schools should have not a single child working, let alone that nearly half of the total number of elementary schools in the country should be able to claim such. Further we should remember that the 1898 enquiry was chiefly concerned with children earning wages and that the tendency not to include children working without wages or for parents was a particularly strong one. Mrs Hogg described the case of one school where her enquiry had only recorded twelve regular wage earners, but where 'nearly all' of the children were said to have been employed in the house, or by neighbours or relations for 'food, stray articles of clothing and casual coppers'.⁶⁵

The 1901 Inter-Departmental Committee on the Employment of Children⁶⁶ suggested that the number of full-time school children who had some employment outside school hours probably exceeded the 1898 returns total by at least 50,000.⁶⁷ It also noted that the 1898 figures excluded half timers, a group which it numbered at around 100,000.⁶⁸ In fact this figure represents a mis-reading of the Home Office returns on the numbers of scholars having partial exemption from schooling. The figure represented the total number of scholars claiming such an exemption throughout the year, including those who subsequently left school during the year, and not the average number at any one time. The average number of half-timers in attendance might be nearer to 60,000 than 100,000.⁶⁹ If we correct the 1901 estimate we get a total of around 260,000 elementary school children working for wages, 4.6% of the total number registered in 1898.

Of the 138,195 working elementary school children whose rate of pay was recorded in the 1898 returns, only 5,719 (4.1%) either worked for their parents or received no monetary wage.⁷⁰ Even if we suppose that the bulk of the 5,831 children⁷¹ whose rate of pay was not stated also received no monetary wage, the 1898 returns still only give us a final national total of around 11,000. Given

⁶⁵Hogg EF, 1897, 'School children as wage earners', *Nineteenth Century*, XLII, p.238.

⁶⁶PP 1902 Vol.XXV, Cd.849.

⁶⁷ibid., p.8.

⁶⁸ibid., p.8.

⁶⁹See earlier discussion of the half-time returns for details to support this contention.

⁷⁰PP.1899 Vol.LXXV, Cd.205, Table VI, pp.48-51.

⁷¹ibid.

this minuscule figure and the report's own remarks about the large number of respondents who only made returns where children were receiving monetary wages, it seems safe to conclude that the more personal, irregular and informal types of employments were particularly prone to escaping inclusion.

We have already noted that the survey reported by Mrs Hogg had found a far higher rate of participation in the labour market than the 1898 returns' national figure of 2.6%. Given the total exclusion of unpaid labour on the part of Hogg's report, and the near total exclusion of that class of labour from the 1898 returns, comparing the National and Hogg figures would seem a fair comparison. However we are not really comparing like with like, as the Hogg returns are specifically metropolitan. If the 1898 returns are broken down by county we can draw a more valid comparison by calculating the activity rate for the metropolis alone. The 1898 London returns found a total of 30,807 working school children, 1,988 of whom received either no monetary wage or worked for their parents. As the total number of elementary school children registered in London schools on the 31st August 1898 was 752,259,⁷² the proportion of school children working for wages enumerated by the 1898 returns can be calculated as 3.8%, a figure significantly lower than the weighted final figure found by Hogg. Given that over 85% of the London schools reported having at least one working child registered with them, the smallness of the estimate cannot be explained by a low rate of response to the initial inquiry. Even the small figure of 3.8% may be a slight over-estimation of the level of activity found by the 1898 returns, for it assumes that all of the 980 cases where no rate of pay was recorded did earn a wage, whereas intuition would suggest that a large number actually did not, which would further lower the activity rate.

Two further fairly large scale studies, the results of which were submitted to the 1901 Inter-departmental Committee, highlight once again the likely scale of the under-estimation by the 1898 returns, whilst in no way being able to claim comprehensiveness themselves.

E.W.Hance, the clerk of Liverpool's School Board, submitted to the 1901 Committee of Enquiry a report based on a thorough investigation he had undertaken of the extent of child employment in the Board Schools of Liverpool in 1901.⁷³ He found that of the 32,762 children registered with the schools 2,312 or 7.1% worked outside school hours. Further this figure excluded those school children licensed as street traders, a group who numbered 327 at the

⁷²PP.1899, Vol.LXXV, C.9210, Table 6.

⁷³PP. 1902, Vol.XXV, Cd.849., App.40.

time of Hance's investigation and which, assuming that street traders had no other occupation and had therefore not already made an appearance in Hance's figures, would have raised the proportion of school children with some form of employment to 8.1% if included. Interestingly Hance found in Liverpool more than five times the level of parental employment that the 1898 returns had identified in London, and in excess of seven times that which the 1898 returns had shown in England and Wales as a whole.

The second major study to report to the 1901 Committee was an investigation undertaken by the Committee on Wage-Earning Children.⁷⁴ Their report grew directly out of the concern generated by Mrs. Hogg's article, and consisted of two sections, the first dealing with an investigation undertaken in London, the second with one in the provinces. In London the managers of schools, charity workers and others who had direct contact with schools and their pupils were asked to prepare returns on the numbers of children working, the nature of that work and the nature of the children's family circumstances. In all returns were received from 107 schools, although only 43 gave all the information requested and some returns had to be rejected due to their poor quality. Nevertheless, on the most basic question, that on the level of activity amongst the population, a clear figure was produced. Of the 42,097 children on average attending the schools investigated, 3,897 or 9.3% were working for wages before or after school hours.⁷⁵ No estimate was made of the number of children who worked but received no monetary wage. If we are to compare this return to those calculated above from Hogg, Hance and the 1898 returns we must make an adjustment to compensate for the fact that the figure has been expressed as a proportion of the average attendance and not the total number of children registered. The average level of attendance as a percentage of the total register in London in 1898 was only 81%. Taking this figure into account we can calculate that the registers of the 107 investigated had approximately 52,000 names on them, representing around 7% of the total number of students on the capital's register in 1898. The 3,897 working children can now be calculated as representing an activity rate of 7.5 rather than 9.3%.

In the provinces the scale of the investigation was far more limited, taking in only 142 schools, schools with an average attendance of only 67,865, only slightly more than 2.5% of the national total excluding London.⁷⁶ A total of 3,122

⁷⁴ibid., App.27.

⁷⁵ibid., p.374.

⁷⁶ibid., p.375.

or 4.6% of these children were believed to be working for wages outside school hours.⁷⁷ If we correct this figure so as to gain the level of activity as a percentage of the total number registered with the schools, we obtain a figure of around 3.7%, still substantially above the 2.6% found by the 1898 survey in the provinces. However we should note that all bar a handful of the 142 schools were from large urban centres. The 48 Leeds schools alone accounted for more than a third of the average attendance of all the schools. We might expect that this over-concentration on large urban areas would produce an exaggerated impression of the levels of activity in the provinces as a whole, and certainly the size of the returns makes them an unreliable source. However we should remember that Yorkshire and Lancashire between them had the great bulk of the country's half-timers and that many of the children who might have stayed at school and taken up extra-curricula employment had the opportunity to work more lucratively as part-timers, and as a consequence to avoid inclusion on the working school child returns. Both Bradford, which contributed 32 schools to the returns, and Bolton, which contributed 8, had amongst the highest concentrations of half-time labour in the country.⁷⁸

Let us conclude then on the initial and basic question about the numbers of children working outside school hours at the turn of the century. From the available evidence it would appear reasonable to suggest that, excluding the 1% or so employed as half-timers, in England and Wales somewhere between 4 and 5% of full-time school children were working outside school hours, the majority of them for money. This represents a total of between 250,000 and 300,000 children.

At a metropolitan level the proportion of school children working at the turn of the century would seem more likely to have rather higher than 4 or 5% running at somewhere between 8 and 10%.⁷⁹ Something of the scale of underestimation in the 1898 returns for London is indicated by the fact that the returns for London only included 3,000 children categorised as engaged in street trading, when in excess of 10,000 schoolboys were licensed as street

⁷⁷ibid.

⁷⁸see Table 6.1.

⁷⁹Evidence that the level of child labour in the capital remained roughly constant during the 1900s may be found in Carter JMA, 1909, *Infant Life and Child Labour*. Report presented by the Honorary Secretary of the Christian Social Union, Oxford. p.11.

traders during each of the years in the period July 1908 to March 1911.⁸⁰

6.6 The London School Board and Compulsory Attendance

'Look at those big, isolated clumps of building rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead covered sea.'

'The Board schools.'

'Lighthouses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future.'⁸¹

On its election in 1870, the new London School Board (LSB) faced a vast challenge; there was a chronic under-supply of schooling in the capital and a strong and thriving tradition of child labour, the cause of the latter lying in both poverty and opportunity. As Horace Mann wrote in the Census Report of 1851, even the lowest wages which the child of a labouring man might receive were 'so great a relief to the parents' that it was hopeless to expect them to withstand the temptation.⁸² It was amongst the poorest families that child labour was most common. Many of the domestic or sweated industries placed a premium on nimble fingers and London was a major centre for such industries. This form of industrial organization contributed numerous opportunities for child employment, and indeed some industries depended on a supply of such labour, a fact highlighted in the reports of the Children's Employment Commission in the 1860s. A notable example described in some detail by JE White in the first report of the Commission was the matchbox and matchmaking industry of the East End.⁸³ To many who had worked at an early age themselves, and who

⁸⁰Number of boys to whom street trading badges were issued in London:

Year	Under 14	Aged 14-15 inclusive	Total	Estimated Number of girls engaged in street trading
1908-9	10,479	3,394	13,873	922
1909-10	9,832	3,351	13,183	927
1910-11	11,647	3,794	15,441	1,049
1911-12	10,046 *	4,529	14,575	-

*Before August 1911, when the new bye-law prohibiting the employment of children in street trading came into force. Source Keeling F, 1914, *Child labour in the United Kingdom*. p.230.

⁸¹Doyle AC, 1893, 'The adventure of the naval treaty.' *The adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. *Strand Magazine* 6 p.401.

⁸²PP.1852 13 Vol.90, p.xxiii

⁸³This material is reproduced in Pike ER, 1967, *Human documents of the Victorian Golden Age, 1850 - 1875*. pp.115-119.

could use their children to good effect in their own work, the attraction of compulsory education must have seemed illusory. Far more pressing than the need to spell was the 'dark struggle for bread',⁸⁴ and for many parents the 'opportunity cost' of compulsory education for their offspring was high. What relevance could education of the kind offered by the LSB have to the sweated workers of the East End?

Mrs Jennings, a maker of waistcoats, instructed at the turn of the century by an inspector to send her children to school instead of using them to sew on buttons, was far from convinced of the benefits of such an education:

'What good' said she to me bitterly, 'does this schooling do the kids? I 'ad precious little, and they ain't likely to be any better off nor me! Is it better to be 'ungry or to be ignorant?'⁸⁵

Even if not opposed to sending their children to school, parents often failed to realize the importance of regularity.⁸⁶ Neither were the children themselves averse to taking time off school with or without the guidance of their parents. Thomas Morgan showed considerable ingenuity in 'hopping the wag' from his school in turn of the century Blackfriars.

What I used to do to get away from school, I used to get a button, you know, a bone button, and I used to press it in me throat just before I went into class, see. And I used to go up to the headmistress and say, 'Mother said, could you tell me what this was?' 'Oh ringworms - oh!' I was away from school three or four months at a time.⁸⁷

The LSB recognized that ensuring attendance was going to be a major problem, and within a few weeks of its election it set up a special committee to draft by-laws. The committee emphasized the need for caution and tact in establishing a system of compulsory attendance.⁸⁸ To put the by-laws into effect, the LSB set up a divisional committee in each of the ten divisions into which the 1870 Act had divided London. These committees appointed school attendance officers or 'visitors', a title chosen in preference to the more descriptive 'child's Beadle',⁸⁹ whose responsibility it was to construct schedules

⁸⁴Booth C, 1902, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Augustus M Kelloy, New York. First Series, Vol.3, p.219.

⁸⁵Quoted in Malvery OC, 1907, *Baby toilers*. Hutchinson and Co., London. p.48.

⁸⁶Birchenough C, 1938, *History of elementary education*. p.120.

⁸⁷From the oral reminiscences collected in Thompson T, 1981, *Edwardian childhood*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. p.26.

⁸⁸LSB, 1904, *Final report of the London School Board, 1870-1904*. Second Edition, King, London. p.193-194.

⁸⁹Reeves J, 1913, *Recollections of a School Attendance Officer*. AH Stockwell, London. p.12.

of all the children eligible for schooling in their district, and to ensure that they attended. The LSB drafted two 'notices' for this purpose, an 'A' notice which was served to parents as a warning, and a 'B' notice which was sent if there was no subsequent improvement. The 'B' notice requested parents to attend before a committee to explain their infringement of the by-laws. As a final resort, the Board could apply to the police courts for a summons, and prosecute the parent.

The visitors bore the brunt of opposition to the compulsory attendance by-laws. One of the longest serving visitors, writing of these early days, noted the strength of opposition to the enforcement of attendance.

It must be remembered that in the beginning the work was entirely new, and in the popular mind considered 'un-English', and was met with the greatest opposition which often resolved itself into antagonism and abuse of the officer.⁹⁰

In fact, opposition to the idea of compulsory education was not universal amongst the working classes. Robert Applegarth, the leader of the skilled carpenters union was openly critical of the attitudes of 'the other class' of working man.

No one knows better than the men themselves that there are amongst the working people two classes. There is the careless and indifferent man, who has been so long neglected and degraded that he does not understand the value of education; and him the other class, the better class of working men, have to carry on their backs.⁹¹

Nevertheless, support for opposition amongst the poorer parents to the 'un-English' interference between parent and child came from sources outside the working class. The Countess of Warwick, campaigning for an increase in the school leaving age, complained that 'so many of the suggestions for improvement are met by the old cry of "interference with family life", although in the factory districts family life has been pretty well destroyed',⁹² and this cry was undoubtedly the most popular rallying-point for opposition to all kinds of restrictive legislation, and one popular amongst all classes of opposition. Whilst espousing the advantages of education, for example, many newspapers continued to write one-sided reports on the School Board cases, making the

⁹⁰ibid., p.11.

⁹¹Quoted in Rubenstein D, 1911, p.234. 'Socialization and the London School Board, 1870-1904: aims, methods and public opinion.' in McCann P (ed), 1977, *Popular education and socialization in the nineteenth century*. Methuen, London. pp.231-264.

⁹²Countess of Warwick, 1906, *A Nation's Youth*. Cassell & Company, London, p.29.

working of the by-laws 'an absolute impossibility.'⁹³ However, the greatest obstacle to the enforcement of the new by-laws effectively came from the magistrates.

The experience of a Divisional Superintendent was not untypical. In 1873 he reported 'securing only one conviction out of thirty-three cases, despite the fact that several of the parents had been summoned on two or three previous occasions.'⁹⁴ Furthermore, even if the magistrates convicted parents, they often levied only derisory fines, often a great deal less than the sums earned by the children. The magistrates, the majority of whom were drawn from the upper-middle class, obstructed the School Board for a number of reasons, including no doubt a feeling of paternalism towards the very poor. Of one magistrate, Mr Montague Williams, a school attendance officer noted that:

He showed great kindness to the poor, and organized blanket funds etc. ...but often failed as far as our work was concerned and made it difficult to enforce the by-laws to the LSB.⁹⁵

However, perhaps more important than paternalism in explaining the magistrates' actions was a sheer lack of sympathy for the idea of compulsory education. Partly as a consequence of repeated appeals to the Home Office about the difficulties which the Board was experiencing in obtaining adequate facilities at the Police Courts, but more importantly through a gradual change in the attitudes of the magistrates, the situation with regard to summonses and convictions improved; in 1900, as many as 90% of the 28,836 summonses issued resulted in convictions.⁹⁶ At the same time as this improvement in enforcement, the accommodation shortage inherited by the LSB, which had hampered attempts to ensure universal attendance, was reduced by a major building programme. The number of visitors was increased, and the numbers of children each visitor had to cover reduced, making them correspondingly more effective.⁹⁷

In 1872, the Board Schools had achieved an estimated attendance rate of 66%. By 1904, the date of the LSB's disappearance, that figure had risen to

⁹³*The Board Teacher*. Vol. IX, 1st November 1892, p.232.

⁹⁴London School Board, 1904, *Final report of the London School Board, 1870-1904*. Second Revised Edition, King, London. p.199.

⁹⁵Reeves J, 1913, *Recollections of a school attendance officer*. p.15-16.

⁹⁶London School Board, 1904, *Final report of the London School Board, 1870-1904*. p.203.

⁹⁷*ibid.*, pp.166-201

88%.⁹⁸ Bearing in mind the considerable improvement likely in the comprehensiveness of the scheduling of children, this change was a remarkable achievement, especially as even post Second World War rates have failed to make any marked improvement on the 1904 figure. In fact, this overall attendance figure hides as much as it reveals, for attendance rates in the poorest quarters of the city often remained depressingly low. This was the result of a number of factors: the relatively poor health of such children, their high levels of absenteeism for no purpose, and the still significant numbers of children working during school hours in such areas. Although the attendance rates reached almost 90% it is likely that up to a quarter of children were occasionally absent in order to work during school hours. Girls in particular had a lower attendance record, being absent largely as a consequence of the intermittent demands placed upon them by their families to perform various domestic duties. It was, for example, common for many girls to be absent on washing days, and they were also the first to be called upon to look after sick relatives or to 'mind babies'.⁹⁹ Where the father's income was insufficient to support the family, the mother worked, and consequently the daughter did the mother's housework.¹⁰⁰ Other irregular demands on children's time in London included the annual hop and fruit picking seasons. To many thousands of school children in the south of London, these seasons represented an unofficial holiday, and on average involved an absence from school of about a month.¹⁰¹

Although in decline, a considerable number of children still avoided school permanently, by avoiding scheduling. When called upon by the school visitor, parents often denied a child's existence or even claimed they had died. Without the cooperation of the population, tracing children working in the sweated dens of the East End was extremely difficult, and even more so when families changed residence so regularly. Other children were more visible. Although never tremendously large in number, the so-called street arabs, the homeless boys who spent their lives on the streets in semi-criminal pursuits, were a common sight in Victorian and Edwardian London.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ibid., pp.199-201.

⁹⁹Hogg EF, 1897, p.239. 'School children as wage earners. *Nineteenth Century* XLII pp.235-244.

¹⁰⁰PP 1902 Vol.XXV, Cd.849, Q.208.

¹⁰¹LSB, 1901, *Reports of the School Board for London, Report No.15.* p.16.

¹⁰²Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes employed a gang of 'ragged little street arabs' to scour the banks of the Thames for the steam launch *Aurora* in *The sign of four*. Doyle AC, 1890, *Baker Street Irregulars*. Blackett, London. Ch.8.

Nevertheless, despite the existence of the vestiges of unskilled labour, the problem of working school children can be seen to have gradually changed over the period in which the School Board operated. By the turn of the century, concern was focussed on the problem of such children working outside school hours rather than those children working inside them, the consequence both of the increasingly strict legislation, and the determined and dogged efforts of the LSB. In 1904, Bray observed the success of the School Boards and the reluctant submission of the parents:

Active opposition has almost entirely disappeared. Attendance at school, like the payment of house-rent or the Sunday closing of public houses, has at length come to be considered one of those unpleasant ordinances of Nature which may be evaded if possible, but not openly withstood.¹⁰³

6.7 Out-of-School Labour in London

If we accept the conclusion in Section 6.6 that 8-10% of London school children worked outside school hours, it would imply that only some 40,000 to 50,000 children were thus employed. This might seem to indicate that such employment was a fairly marginal economic or social phenomenon, even in London. However, such an impression would be misleading. If we look at the breakdown of the 1898 returns by age, using the LSB age tables to calculate the age specific rates of employment we get a different impression (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4
Age specific activity rates for London school children, 1898

Age	% working		
	Boys	Girls	Total
<7	0.0	0.0	0.0
7-8	0.3	0.1	0.2
8-9	1.6	0.7	1.1
9-10	3.6	1.5	2.5
10-11	6.8	2.9	4.8
11-12	12.7	5.3	9.0
12-13	18.8	7.8	13.3
13-14	18.7	7.8	13.2
14+	7.5	3.1	5.3
Total	5.8	2.4	4.1

Figures calculated from 1898 returns and London School Board age tables.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³Bray RA, 1904, 'The boy and the family' in Urwick EJ, (ed), 1904, *Studies of boy life in our cities*. Dent, London pp.1-101.

¹⁰⁴Table II pp.34-37. PP 1899 Vol.LXXV, Cd.205,; London School Board, 1904, *Final Report of the London School Board*. p.157.

In interpreting the figures in this table we should remember that they probably underestimated the true rates of activity by some 15-25% for the reasons discussed earlier. Allowing for this factor we might suggest that something like 22-25% of London school boys aged between 11 and 14 worked regularly, and that possibly up to 50% might have worked occasionally. Similarly for schoolgirls, we could suggest that 10-12% of 11 to 14 year olds might have worked regularly for wages of one sort or another, and at least 25% at least occasionally. The bulk of girls and indeed boys would have, in addition, carried out unpaid domestic work in their own homes, girls especially occasionally missing school in order to do so.

Table 6.5 demonstrates that the hours worked by those employed often amounted to over three hours a day, 37.3% of the London children supplying information working 21 hours or more per week. In terms of wages, the bulk of London school children received less than 2s. for their weekly work, although 7.3% received in excess of 3s. (Table 6.6). It is interesting to note that London children both worked longer hours than the children in the rest of the country and received higher wages (Tables 6.5 and 6.6). Considering the marginal nature of so many household budgets, the addition of even a shilling or two would be highly welcome. Further, these wages actually understate the value of the work to the children and their families as they omit the often significant non-monetary rewards. Shopboys and errand boys at greengrocers, for example, often benefited from free meals.¹⁰⁵

Table 6.5

Working school children

Hours per week	<10	10-20	21-30	31-40	41+	NS	NS
London	6,914	11,856	6,900	3,322	1,273	542	30,807
(%)	22.4	38.5	22.4	10.8	4.1	1.8	100
Rest England and Wales	32,441	48,412	20,108	6,456	1,910	4,434	113,219
(%)	28.7	42.8	17.8	5.7	1.7	3.9	100

Source: PP1899 LXXV CD 205 Table V

¹⁰⁵PP 1902 Vol.XXV, Cd.849 Q4953.

Table 6.6

Wages of working school children

Wages	<6d	6d-1s	1s 1d to 2s 0d	2s 1d to 3s 0d	3s+	No work ing wage	W for Parents	Pay not stated	Total
London	2,899	8,858	8,646	6,061	2,251	105	1,008	980	30,80
(%)	9.4	28.8	28.1	19.7	7.3	0.3	3.3	3.2	100
Rest of England and Wales	14,185	38,415	31,594	13,696	5,871	753	3,853	4,851	113,2
(%)	12.5	33.9	27.9	12.1	5.2	0.7	3.4	4.3	100

Source: 1899 LXXV Cd 205 Table VI

Table 6.7

Occupations of working school children

Occupations	Children paid by piece work, all children employed on own account, chiefly boys.			Paid by time gen. superintended chiefly girls.		Domestic employments.			
	Selling n'papers	hawk- ing	other occs.	Farm shops	On farms.	Odd jobs	Minding babies	Homewk laundry	Other occs.
London	2,167	578	1,466	15,132	7	3,205	3,475	2,110	2,667
(%)	7.0	1.9	4.6	49.1	0.0	10.4	11.3	6.8	8.7
Rest England and Wales.	13,015	1,857	7,161	61,041	6,108	7,431	8,110	7,144	1,352
(%)	11.5	1.6	6.3	53.9	5.4	6.6	7.2	6.3	1.2
Total	15,182	2,435	8,627	76,173	6,115	10,636	11,585	9,254	4,019
(%)	10.5	1.7	6.0	52.9	4.2	7.4	8.0	6.4	2.8

Source: 1899 LXXV Cd 205 Table IV. Total for London - 30,807, rest of England and Wales - 113,219

NB: Hance's study found in London a population of 30,807, made up of 21,755 boys (70.6%), and 9,052 girls (29.4%). Net total: London 113,291, made up of 88,406 boys (78.1%), and 24,813 girls (21.9%).

Table 6.7 illustrates the predominance of shopboys amongst both the children employed in London and those employed in the rest of the country.

This category covered a variety of actual functions including watching stock and delivering orders. The London figures are marked by a clear distinction between the sexes, and further by a high level of out of school labour devoted to domestic activities. As the returns state, such domestic employments were generally the preserve of girls. In London in particular, large numbers of children were employed in looking after babies. If we assume that the bulk of this class were girls, this class of employment can be estimated to have occupied up to 40% of all the girls employed out of school. The majority of the remaining girls would have found employment in the 'Other, needlework and such employment' category, a category far larger in London than elsewhere, probably reflecting the importance of the city as a centre for the sweated tailoring trades.

In all large manufacturing districts, but more especially in certain parts of the East End of London, the children are regarded as wage-earners almost as soon as they are able to walk. There are whole districts in the neighbourhood of Poplar and Bow whose inhabitants work in their own homes for the great factories and warehouses round about, and in every house the children are forced to work in order to add a pitiful amount to an already pitiful wage.¹⁰⁶

Hogg produced a more detailed breakdown of school children's out-of-school occupations based on her study of fifty-four London schools (Table 6.8). Here again we can notice, more explicitly, the contrast between girls' and boys' jobs, few categories of employment being shared by the two sexes. Girls were already following the occupations which they entered full-time after leaving school; domestic work, small goods manufacture, hosiery, nursing. They were even as children acquiring and practising jobs with the low levels of skill required by some of these occupations, often inheriting the trades from their mothers.

¹⁰⁶Hird R, 1898, *The cry of the children: an exposure of certain British industries in which children were iniquitously employed*. James Bowden, London. p.10

Table 6.8

Nature of employment of boys and girls

Boys	No.	%	Girls	No.	%
Shops	313	42.9	Errands	140	26.8
Errands	134	18.4	Baby-minding	135	25.8
Newspaper delivery	102	14.0	House cleaning	115	22.0
Street sellers	56	7.7	Quill winders, paper bag making, steel coverers, brush makers book folders and artificial flower makers	35	6.7
Domestic work	22	3.0	Sewers and machinists	18	3.4
Fur work, flower, stay box, mat and wire work	17	2.3	Matchbox makers	17	3.3
Minding carts, van, barges	16	2.2	Fancy box makers	16	3.1
Carrying and loading coal	15	2.1	Jet workers, fur makers and polishers	13	2.5
Sweeping schools	13	1.8	Street sellers	9	1.7
Mangling, rag sorting and pressing	9	1.2	Boot sellers	9	1.7
Others	32	4.4	Others	16	3.1
Total	729	100.0	Total	523	100.0

Source: Hogg EF, 1897, Table D, p.244¹⁰⁷

Hogg noticed that in addition to the difference in the employments of the two sexes, girls' employments offered lower pay, as confirmed in Table 6.9, below. On the basis of the information collected in a major study of child employment in Liverpool, girls received an average of 0.6d. per hour worked, and boys 0.94d. Hogg offered an interesting explanation for this fact.

The difference between the wages of the boys and girls was not merely the beginning of that difference which was so strongly marked between the wages of men and women, but was a consequence of the fact that, while boys accepted employment largely in order to earn a little money, the wages were a subordinate consideration in the case of the girls. It seemed to the mothers natural that a girl should help to clean or baby-mind, and if there was no need of her services at home, then she could 'oblige' a neighbour.¹⁰⁸

Confirmation of the importance of 'domestic' tasks in the life of girls can be found in almost every account of childhood at this time. Doris Francis, born in Putney in 1908, had a brother who sometimes helped, but on the whole left such tasks to her sister.

¹⁰⁷Hogg EF, 1897, 'School children as wage earners.' *Nineteenth Century* XLII pp.235-244.

¹⁰⁸ibid., p.239.

From the moment I was capable of wielding a duster I was given regular weekly jobs to do, such as polishing all the brass door-handles throughout the flat with Bluebell Metal Polish, cleaning all the family's boots and shoes, and removing stains from the table-knives by rubbing them briskly on a wooden knife-board sprinkled with Bath Brick. I also had to shop for the groceries, do the washing-up, and peel all the vegetables (and for a family of five that was quite a lot of spud-bashing for one small girl). Worst of all, I was given all the family's mending to do - a most tedious and boring job which took up a whole evening of every week, and included the darning of everybody's socks and stockings.¹⁰⁹

It is interesting to observe the devaluation of female labour and the segregation of the sexes emerging even at the level of school child labour. In many ways this foreshadowed the 'secondary' nature of women's work in the main labour market.

If the market for girl labour was evidently a non-competitive market, the market for boy labour seems far more competitive. Boys were freer to find their own positions and tended to move from job to job in search of higher income or better conditions. Further the distribution of incomes would seem to indicate the operation of Smith's five principles or balancing advantages, for it was the most unpleasant, hardest and least respectable occupations that offered the higher rewards. The clearest evidence of this may be found in the data collected by the clerk to the Liverpool School Board for the 1902 Inter-Departmental Committee on Employment of School Children.¹¹⁰

Table 6.9

Schoolboy employment in Liverpool Board School, 1901

Occupation	No.	%	Average hours	Average pay s d	Average pay per hr d	% employed by parents	% free meal *
Hairdresser	101	5.1	31.9	2 0	0.75	11.9	29.2
Milk dealer	199	10.0	17.9	1 3	0.86	12.1	36.6
Grocer	248	12.5	23.4	1 11	0.98	2.8	22.8
Butcher	225	11.4	17.8	1 5	0.98	6.7	41.4
Newsagent	135	6.8	16.0	2 4	1.72	13.3	10.3
All Boys	1,982	-	20.5	1 7	0.94	7.8	25.2
All Girls	329	-	11.6	0 7	0.60	17.3	54.8

* excluding those employed by parents
Source: PP 1902 Cd 849 Appendix No.40

¹⁰⁹Recounted in Burnett, J, 1982, *Destiny obscure: autobiography of childhood, education and family from the 1820s to the 1920s*. Allen Lane, London. p.221.

¹¹⁰PP 1901 Vol XXVa, Cd 849, pp.40.

Each trade has its balance of advantages, although the variations in the rate of average pay received by those employed in the different classes of employments is considerable, the employment selected in the table offering between 2s. 4d. and 1s. 3d. 'Hairdressing' refers to the occupation of the 'lather boys' whose chief functions were to prepare lather for the barber and to sweep up the hair from the shop floor. This occupation was one that carried an above-average wage and also more than the usual chance of a free meal, and this is despite a high proportion of the boys (11.9%) being employed by their parents, a factor which would have tended to depress both wages and the number recording free meals as a benefit. However, the occupation was universally held to be amongst the worst and most damaging a school boy could accept. One commentator noted that the unusual care that London Jews took of the health of their children meant that although there were a considerable number of Jewish barbers in London, there was 'not a single Jewish lather boy to be found'.¹¹¹

However, it was not principally the long hours that the occupation usually entailed that worried those concerned with child employment, for the work was generally light. It was rather the 'vile', poor, unhealthy atmosphere created by ventilation of the shops, the necessity for the boys to spend most of those long hours on their feet, and the reputation of the shops as centres for gambling and 'gambling talk'.¹¹² Evidence of the damage done to the health of the boys was provided to a committee reviewing the effectiveness of some LCC by-laws by Dr. Argles, an Assistant Medical Officer. He confirmed that hairdressers suffered from higher levels of mortality than the population as a whole, and that they were peculiarly liable to TB and other infections of the lungs and throat. In an examination of 150 working school boys, he had found only 31 or 20.07% unfit. Of the 17 lather-boys included in the examination, 10 or 58.8% were designated unfit.¹¹³ Although Dr. Argles had never come across it, many of the barbers were rumoured to act as bookmakers or bookmakers' touts¹¹⁴ and Thomas Morgan in his recollection of his Edwardian childhood in Blackfriars

¹¹¹Gorst JE, 1907, *The children of the nation*. Second Edition, Methuen and Co., London. p.105.

¹¹²PP. 1902 Vol.XXV, Cd 849, Q 4107, Q2181, Q2011.

¹¹³PP. 1911 Vol.LXIV, Cd 5497, pp.5-6.

¹¹⁴PP. 1906 Vol.XC, Cd.2809, p.11.

remembered that one of the biggest bookmakers in the district was one Davey Cope, 'who kept the barbers shop.'¹¹⁵

This combination of characteristics lent the occupation of lather-boy the reputation of being damaging to both the health and the morals of the thousands of lads thus employed, and it was exclusively from the ranks of the poorest families that the boys were recruited. Although starting work earlier in the morning, boys employed as milk dealers worked far shorter hours than the hairdressers, working only 17.8 hours on average by Hance's figures compared to an average for all boys employed of 20.5. The tasks of the milk-boy were fairly simple:

I helped to push that heavily laden barrow, I carried cans of milk to the various doorsteps as directed, hanging the cans by their handles on nails and hooks away from the attention of stray cats and dogs.¹¹⁶

Commentators, although critical of the long hours involved, generally acknowledged that the employment was a healthy one:

As a whole that is good - it is done in the early morning, and the children come out of unhealthy rooms... in one or two cases with consumptive tendencies there has been a marked improvement in their health since taking up this early morning work.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, the occupation had the advantages of a good chance of receiving either free meals, or failing that 'a considerable amount of milk'.¹¹⁸

In the case of the milk boys it was not the very poorest parent's children who dominated, but the children of those in no great need.

...the boys in the milk trade are a far better stamp of traders than in the paper trade... [the newspaper street traders] generally come from the poorest class of homes. ... There is not the slightest doubt that the boys

¹¹⁵Thompson T, 1981, *Edwardian childhoods*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. p.22.

¹¹⁶Southgate W, 1982, *That's the way it was: a working class autobiography, 1890-1950*. New Clarendon Press, London.

¹¹⁷PP. 1902 Vol.XXV, Cd. 849, Q2570-73.

¹¹⁸PP. 1910 Vol.XXVIII, Cd 5230, Q9128. Another 'unintentional' form of perk was provided by the opportunity the boys had on Sunday mornings to pick up 'an article of interest' left by the 'odd drunk' from the previous evening:

Oddments were many and varied. One drunk had turned out his pockets of silver coins and had taken the trouble of laying them out in a row along the kerb edge. They ranged from a five shilling piece to a threepenny bit, which was very generous of him. (Southgate W, 1982, *That's the way it was*. p.52.)

On another occasion Southgate found a gold ring which his mother pawned for £3 and 'set straight family affairs for more than a week' (*ibid*).

who are engaged in selling newspapers are of a distinctly inferior type.¹¹⁹

Indeed it was commonly noted that waged out-of-school labour was as common amongst the children of 'artisans' as amongst the children of the poorest sections of the population.¹²⁰ In part this reflected the fact that these children tended to stay on at school beyond the point whereby they were legally required to, whilst the poorer children left earlier.¹²¹ As the usefulness of the boys and their activity rates increased with their age, it follows that this tendency must have produced an excess in the number of boys from artisan households working whilst at school compared to the number of poorer children; when the artisans' sons were still at school and working part-time in the evenings or at weekends, the poorer child was already working full-time. However, the large number of artisan children, or children from the 'better class' of working class households working out-of-school also reflected both the greater demand for these neater, more respectable children, and the encouragement given by many parents from this class to the practice. These parents approved of such employments for a number of reasons. Part-time jobs were, for example, thought to keep the boys 'off the streets' and teach them the 'value of work'. In addition, many parents approved of the practice because the boys, who in this class generally retained all their earnings, saved their earnings up for special purchases such as holidays, many joining savings clubs.¹²²

However, as already noted, there was a significant diversity in the occupations pursued by school-boys and it was the children of the poorest families, those where money was actually short, who worked the longest hours and accepted the worst and most damaging employments. Street-hawking for example, the subject of more concern than any other type of child labour, was in London as elsewhere almost the sole reserve of children from the poorest homes.¹²³

The contrast in the behaviour of poor and artisan children in the labour market is especially clear within the newsagent class of occupations. The category can in fact be divided into two broad groupings; the group of boys who

¹¹⁹PP. 1910 Vol.XXVIII, Cd 5230, Q9074; Q9126.

¹²⁰Carter JMA, 1909, *Infant life and child labour*. p.11.

¹²¹Booth C, 1902, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Augustus M Kelly, New York. First Series, Vol.III, pp.216-217.

¹²²ibid., pp.224-225.

¹²³Adler N, 1902, *Wage-earning children in England*., Church of West End Charity, London, p.3.

delivered papers, a category chiefly restricted to the artisan and middle class districts and suburbs, and performed chiefly by the sons of artisans; and secondly, the class of newsboys who sold papers on the streets, a class of employment almost exclusively performed by children drawn from the poorest section of the social spectrum.¹²⁴ The two employments both shared the advantages of plenty of fresh air and exercise, and indeed this class of street sellers shared with all other forms of street selling a reputation for being beneficial rather than harmful to the health of those boys who pursued it.¹²⁵ However the boys who sold newspapers on the streets had perhaps the worst reputation of all the branches of street selling for the corruption of their characters by exposure to the 'excitement' of street life. It should be mentioned that school-boys who sold papers on the streets of the major cities such as London and Manchester on the whole worked on the main thoroughfares out of the centre of the cities and not in the city centres themselves; juveniles dominated that market. Nevertheless, many of the poorest children were tempted to work in the centre to sell papers or other articles.¹²⁶

If he is trading in the centre of the city he will meet any number of youths of an older age, and large numbers of them have been in prison... there is a risk of being damaged by association with them.¹²⁷

Generally the young boys who sold as opposed to delivered papers purchased their papers from middle-men, who picked up batches of papers from the offices of the newspapers and delivered them to the established points for collection, the boys making a profit both from the commission the middle-man allowed them in the price he charged them for the armful of papers they took of him, and in the rare piece of change which the purchaser allowed them to keep.¹²⁸ An impression of this routine, and something of the energy which the boys devoted to this quick and easy means of acquiring small sums of money can be gleaned from the recollections of Thomas Morgan, of Edwardian London.

I used to run papers. I used to buy three copies for a penny and of course the paper used to come out with a horse and van then - a two wheeled cart like. And of course, they were very quick horses or ponies, very fast. And we used to wait at this spot where they used to pull up - three copies - penny. Well you used to clash round. Sell the three - you

¹²⁴PP. 1902 Vol.XXV, Cd. 849, Q3858-9. Adler N, 1902, *Wage-earning children in England*. p.3; PP.1910 Vol XXVIII, Cd.5230, Q9126; *ibid.* Q.1292-93.

¹²⁵PP. 1910 Vol.XXVIII, Cd.5230, Q9528.

¹²⁶PP. 1910 Vol XXVIII, Cd 5230, Q6839.

¹²⁷PP. 1910 Vol. XXVIII, Cd 5230, Q3084-3085.

¹²⁸PP. 1902 Vol.XXV, Cd.849, Q3717-8; PP 1910 Cd 5230 Vol.XXXVIII Q1865-1867.

earned a penny. Well you'd dash back again when he came up again. You might be able to have six copies, see. Well that six copies earned you another penny.¹²⁹

A piece of choice news would produce a scramble for custom from the boys, and a similar scramble among their clients.

'Sensational murder! Read all about it!' would be the favourite call of some newsboys late at night, passing through the streets disturbing everybody. The street then became alive, doors opened and a brisk trade was done selling a piece of sensational news compressed into a few lines.¹³⁰

School-boys were particularly important as a means of selling the afternoon and evening papers which carried the latest racing results, and would race away as soon as they had collected their pile of papers calling out the times of the races for which they had the results. In the poorer districts of the city, such as Whitechapel, virtually the whole business of selling newspapers was confined to the selling of the half-penny sporting papers.¹³¹ Indeed the association between the boys and gambling went beyond the distribution of sporting news; the boys had a great reputation as gamblers, a point noted by many witnesses to the various committees that discussed the group. This habit was endemic to the group and no doubt derived in part from both the boys' preoccupation with the distribution of racing news, and their continual handling of small change, an aspect of their work which set them aside from the artisan's sons delivering papers.

One sees the little newspaper boys sitting down together, five or six of them on any convenient doorstep with their heads together over the betting news. I have taken special note of it in the last few months, and it is the only part of the paper the boys ever seem to look at.¹³²

In addition the more experienced boys could earn not inconsiderable amounts at the occupation, giving them a greater ability to dispose of money in a less than frugal fashion. Their preoccupation with gambling and their exposure to the hustle and bustle of the busy streets lent the boys a sharpness of wits. (See illustration 6.2)

Neither is it surprising that the excitement of life on the streets should have distracted boys from their education. Similarly, many of the working children from the poorest families would have worked in various forms of domestic

¹²⁹Part of oral autobiography: Thompson T, 1981, *Edwardian childhoods*. p.21.

¹³⁰Southgate W, 1982, *That's the way it was*. p.81.

¹³¹PP 1910 Vol.XXVIII, Cd.5230, Q.1383.

¹³²PP 1910 Vol.XXVIII, Cd.5230, Q558.

industries associated strongly with the wives of the casual and unskilled class of labourers. Even where not directly involved in the manufacture of boxes, artificial flowers and the hundred and one other items produced by this class, elder children were often kept out of school to look after younger siblings in order to allow their mother to work. Involvement in such a fashion, or directly in the manufacture itself, both encouraged absenteeism and, through the long hours of labour and the cramped ill-ventilated conditions in which it was performed, damaged the health of the children, reducing their attendance still further, and rendering them so exhausted on arrival at school as to rob them of much of the value of their education. One of the most significant examples of an interruption to the education of the poorest class of children, at least in the south of London, was provided by the annual unofficial hop picking holiday in Kent. In 75 South London schools making returns to a special committee of the London School Board in 1900, more than 4,000 children were absent for an average of four weeks each because of fruit and hop picking.¹³³

¹³³London School Board, 1901, *Report of the School Board*. Report No.15. p.16.

Illustration 6.2



First Newsboy. "I'LL BET YOU TUPPENCE TO A PENN'ORTH O' NUTS ;
THAT 'SKAFFER' WINS THE DURBY."
Second Newsboy. "DONE!"
Third Newsboy. "I'LL 'OLD THE STAKES."
First Newsboy. "YES, BUT WHO'S A-GOIN' TO 'OLD YOU?"

6.8 Conclusion

We can thus see a distinction within the market for child labour. The children drawn from the poorest backgrounds, from the homes of unskilled or casual labourers, or those where the father was either dead or unable to work through ill-health, performed the hardest, most unpleasant and disrespected employments, but received the highest wages.¹³⁴ These boys worked permanently, every penny that they could earn being valued by the family, or by themselves, as much of their income failed to return to the family but was spent instead on food and gambling by the boys themselves. By contrast, the boys from the artisan households rarely engaged in the less wholesome employments and consequently tended to receive rather less reward. An interesting illustration of the force of circumstances in dictating the behaviour of boys in the labour market for school-boy labour can be found in the observation made by the inspector responsible for issuing street-trading badges in London. He noted that few artisans' sons took out badges for what was, as we have noted, an occupation with a very poor reputation, but that where they did they were often returned with the comment that the father had regained employment so the badge would no longer be needed. For the children of the casual labourer, street trading and the other highly paid but disreputable employments were not employments that they resorted to when the family was faced by some particular crisis, but a permanent feature of their lives.

In effect, if we were to adopt a neoclassical perspective on the market for school-boy labour, we could conclude that through a high concern for short term income the children of the poorest section of the population were driven into those occupations which offered the highest immediate reward, often to the detriment of their investment in their own human capital, that is, their education. The consequences of this early devotion to maximizing returns from their labour were twofold, and came at the point at which the pupils left school. Firstly, their poorer performance in academic terms directly restricted their ability to enter many occupations even within the unskilled sector; a good example of this is provided by the railway goods yards. Although only unskilled work and paid at a relatively low rate, the jobs in the railways goods yards were particularly valued because of their stability, but only those who had passed the sixth standard could apply.

¹³⁴PP 1902 Vol.XXV, Cd.849, Q3674, Q3596.

However, perhaps even more important than this factor was the 'sociological' impact of their labour on the aspirations of the boys performing the labour. Boys pursuing careers in street-trading whilst still at school acquired a taste both for the high rewards that such occupations offered them and the freedom of their lifestyle. In addition they came into contact with boys who had graduated out of school-boy street-trading into doing the work full-time when they had left school, and were thus made aware of the even higher income available to them should they choose to follow that example; the 'frequenters of the kerbstone and the gutter' were well aware that on leaving school they could make more money in one successful night than an office-boy could make in a week.¹³⁵ Boys from artisan families, who had either not worked or had received lower wages, were likely to have placed a far lower emphasis on maximizing their incomes when they left school, and indeed been less aware of the relatively high incomes available.

The long term importance of child labour to the individual came in the damage it did to their accumulation of human capital both via the permanent damage it did in a minority of cases to the health of the children and, more importantly, via the damage it did to the education of large numbers of children.¹³⁶ However, probably the most damaging effect of child labour was through creating, amongst those who pursued the most lucrative employments, an expectation of high rewards immediately on leaving school. We have already observed a marked difference in behaviour between the sons of artisans and those of unskilled or casual labourers in the market for school-boy labour. This difference became still more marked in the market for juvenile labour, partly as a result of their earlier behaviour, and this divide lay at the heart of the so-called 'boy labour problem', the subject of the next chapter.

¹³⁵PP 1910, Vol.XXVIII, Q.4587, Q.6847.

¹³⁶Hogg EF, 1897, 'School children as wage earners.' p.244.; Gibb SJ, 1912, 'Boy labour: some studies in detail.' p.57. in Whitehouse MP (ed), 1912, *Problems of boy life*. PS King, London. pp.52-78.

Chapter 7

The Late Victorian and Edwardian Boy Labour Problem

7.1 Introduction

There is no subject as to which we have received so much and such conclusive evidence as upon the extent to which thousands of boys, from lack of any sort of training for industrial occupations, grow up, almost inevitably, so as to become chronically Unemployed, or Under-employed, and presently to recruit the ranks of the Unemployable.¹

...at the present time the boy as a worker is in great demand, and the question of boy labour has become one of the important social problems of the day.²

Although the problem of boy-labour had existed in a number of trades before the 1890s,³ the phenomenon only really surfaced as a major source of concern at the close of the nineteenth century. That concern reached its zenith in the Edwardian period,⁴ and in 1909 was the topic of a major study undertaken as part of the Poor Law Commission of that year. It was no accident that it was a Poor Law Commission that dedicated such attention to the subject, for it was the connection between boy-labour and the phenomena of unemployment, under-employment and the existence of a class of unemployable labour in the adult labour market that lay at the heart of much of the concern given to the problem. The conclusion that boy-labour was playing a significant part in creating these problems was one common throughout most of the literature discussing the problem itself as well as in the findings of the Poor Law commissioners.

¹Minority report of the 1909 Poor Law commission:as published by the Webbs as *The Labour Market*. p.220.

² Cloete JG, 1904, p.103. 'Boy life in our cities.' in Urwick EJ, 1904, *Studies in boy life in our cities*. Dent, London. pp.102-138

³For a discussion of the origins of the problem see Bray RA,1911, *Boy Labour and apprenticeship*. Constable and Co. Ltd., London. pp.15-25

⁴Writing in 1910, Frederic Keeling commented that the 'public sense of the evil is deeper than ever'. Keeling F, 1910, *The Labour exchange in relation to boy and girl labour*. PS King and Son, London. p.2

Large numbers of boys, leaving school, embark upon forms of employment which, involving no skill, and imparting none, are without definite promise of future settlement; and, liable to end absolutely with boyhood, leave a youth resourceless at an age when he is too old to embark upon a trained career, and thus tend to convert him into a chronic economic cripple.⁵

...there is a very large employment of boy labour now, boys employed as messengers and errand boys, which teaches them nothing useful for their future life; and when they have outgrown the age at when they can be employed in this way the risk of drifting into the ranks of the unskilled labourer is a very large one.⁶

There has been in the last few years a remarkable concentration of attention upon the circumstances surrounding the entry of youths into industrial life, and a disposition to see in them one of the causes of the prevalence of adult unemployment.⁷

Throughout industry the supply of unskilled labour exceeds the demand, because the occupations of boys and girls are such as to produce neither the skill nor the character necessary for the higher grades.⁸

However, Stedman Jones, the only recent author to comment in any detail on the problem of boy labour, has cast doubt on its significance as a source of labour to the casual sector of the London labour market as it existed towards the close of the nineteenth century.⁹ To Jones the real problem lay elsewhere, and boy labour was merely a 'symptom' rather than a major problem in itself.

The real problem was the relative over-supply of adult unskilled labour Throughout the period there was a relatively greater opportunity for teenage labour than for those in their twenties..... The real cause of this difference was the concentration of provincial immigration in the age group 15 to 30. This greatly intensified the supply of unskilled labour between the ages of 20 and 30, and thus pushed many down into the ranks of casual labour.¹⁰

⁵Gibb SJ, 1903, Irregular employment of boys. Christian Social Union, London. p.11.

⁶pp 1904, XXXII, Cd.2175, Q10440 Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration.

⁷Tawney RH, 1909, p.517. 'The economics of boy labour.' *Economic journal* 19 pp.517-537.

⁸Jackson C, 1910, *Unemployment and trade unions*. Longman, Green and Co., London. p.6.

⁹Stedman Jones G. 1971, *Outcast London*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. pp.69-73.

¹⁰ibid., pp.72-3

Although Stedman Jones's brief analysis and assessment of the significance of the boy-labour problem is illuminating, for a number of reasons it can be regarded as inadequate. If the problem was one caused by provincial immigration why was the problem of boy labour recognized as a problem nationally? Surely if Jones' arguments are correct the provinces should have escaped the problem. In the following sections some attempt will be made to explore the subject of boy labour in some greater detail. On the basis of this analysis it will be suggested that boy labour was in fact a highly important phenomenon within society and the labour market, and not least at the level of the individual. Further, although the growth in interest in the subject in the Edwardian period was in part stimulated by a number of other unrelated factors, it may to an important degree, at least in the case of London, have reflected an actual worsening of the problem.

7.2 The Boy Labour Problem Defined

Fundamentally, the boy labour problem derived from the existence of a market for juvenile labour, distinct from that for adult labour. The existence of such a market is easily illustrated by reference to a tabulation of the returns collected in the academic year 1906-7 by the London School Board on the occupations of boys leaving school compared to those of their fathers. From this (Table 7.1) one can immediately observe the disproportionate number of boys entering the Transport category (38%), over three times the proportion of parents finding employment in the same category (10.55%).

Table 7.1**Classes of Occupation for Parents and Boys 1906-7**

Class of occupation	Parents	Boys
Trades and industries	41.46	22.31
Domestic offices or services	1.97	2.53
Transport (including messengers, errand boys, van boys etc.)	10.55	38.00
Shopkeepers, shop assistants, and dealers	10.39	8.52
Commercial occupations	7.98	9.36
General labour	22.06	9.22
Professional occupations and their subordinate services	2.16	0.28
General or local government	3.17	0.41
Defence	0.26	0.16
Higher education	-	3.05
Unemployed	-	6.16

Source: Bray 1909

Defined simply, the problem which many commentators identified was the production of a casual unskilled labour force by the entry of so large a proportion of juveniles into 'blind-alley' or 'dead-end' employments, employments where the boys were employed solely for their immediate 'commercial utility'¹¹ in occupations where the number of boys employed bore no relation to the demand for adult workers in the trade or industry, and where there was consequently little possibility of the vast majority of them remaining beyond their late teens or early twenties. The graduates of such employments, it was argued, were thrown back onto the labour market,

...generally without the requisite knowledge, skill and industrial intelligence necessary to obtain a permanent situation.¹²

Gibb (1919) distinguished two classes of boy employment; the 'probationary' and the 'blind-alley'. In the probationary employment the boy was engaged upon the 'elementary processes' of the work he would be doing completely at

¹¹Tawney RH, 1909, 'The economics of boy labour.' p.529.

¹²Greenwood A, 1911, p.4. *Juvenile labour exchanges : and after-care*. PS King and Son, London

manhood; the work was progressive in that the boy moved to an end foreseen from the start.¹³

In 'blind-alley' occupations, on the other hand, there is no such organic and continuous connection between the earlier and later work.¹⁴

Not only were the prospects for the boy employed in 'blind-alley' occupations precarious, but unlike in probationary employment, his work did not prepare him for any adult employment.

The type of employments that fitted this description varied according to the industrial structure of the area being studied, and indeed the prevalence of the class of occupation was similarly believed to vary geographically¹⁵, although no hard and fast statement could be made about such subjects as the phenomenon was difficult if not impossible to measure. In London the most important classes of employments to fall into the category were those associated with the distributive trades and London's role as a centre of government and communications.

¹³Gibb SJ, 1919, *Boy Work: exploitation or training?* T Fisher Unwin Ltd., London. p.45

¹⁴ibid

¹⁵Tawney RH, 1909, 'The economics of boy labour.' *passim*.

Table 7.2
Employments of Children on Leaving School (Upper Standards)
in the late 1890s

	Large urban manufacturing districts of England and Wales		London	
	No.	%	No.	%
Building trades	1,973	4.10	787	3.05
Woodworking	591	1.23	905	3.51
Metal, engineering and ship	4,090	8.50	949	3.68
Mining and quarrying	1,584	3.29	-	-
Textiles	6,046	12.57	49	0.19
Clothing	1,634	3.40	665	2.58
Printing and allied trades	868	1.80	1,121	4.35
Clerical	5,666	11.78	2,060	7.99
In shops	6,084	12.65	3,584	13.91
Transport	10,496	21.82	10,283	39.91
Newsboys and street vendors	1,472	3.06	964	3.74
Domestic service	173	0.36	301	1.17
Miscellaneous	5,319	11.06	2,376	9.22
No reported occupation	2,097	4.36	1,623	6.30
Total return	48,093	-	25,768	-

Source: PP 1899 LXXV Part 2.

Errand-boys, van-boys and messengers, many of whom were employed by special messenger companies, absorbed about 40% of the boys graduating from London's schools. One characteristic of the 'dead-end' employments was the high turnover of the incumbents, a consequence of the rapid movement of boys from job to job in search of higher wages.

They know that if they leave one situation they can find another one as soon as they wish, and the knowledge causes them recklessly to throw up good work on some slight pretext, or for some fancied injury to their pride. What is easily gained is seldom valued, and it is hardly surprising that the average lad of thirteen to fifteen fails to look ahead for himself when parents, teachers and employers are careless of his future, and the present earning of money is the only thing suggested as important in connection with his work.¹⁶

¹⁶R.C., 1909, p.157

Most youths had had numerous jobs by the time they began to look for an adult wage. Vivid evidence of this juvenile wanderlust was provided by the accounts of applicants to a Liverpool Distress Committee. One twenty year old had 'contrived' to work under twenty-two different employers within the space of six and a half years, another managing to pack thirty-eight different jobs into the three years after leaving school.¹⁷ The exceptions to the foot-looseness amongst juveniles were those youths training for some skilled occupation who tended only to become mobile after completing their training, and then only within their own trade rather than between different occupations.

The dead-end jobs left the boys unsatisfied with the wages they received by the time they reached the age of eighteen or twenty, and having squandered the period over which it was normal to acquire skills they were left with little alternative but to seek work in the casual unskilled sector, a sector in which they still possessed the advantage of their youth and strength:

Too often one can trace the evolution of the 'builder's labourer', working as a newsboy or an errand boy, then as messenger boy or in ropeworks, then taking other jobs as he gets too old for these, till finally, usually between the ages of 20 and 25, he becomes a casual labourer in the building trade.¹⁸

However, it should be noted that many juveniles did manage by one means or another to switch out of boy-employments and into semi-skilled and skilled trades, and that the movement was especially strong in the first year or two after leaving school. Many skilled men's sons spent a short time working as errand boys before being able to find a place as an apprentice or learner in a workshop.¹⁹ The problem was not with this body of boy labourers, but with the large numbers who continued to pursue the boy employments into their late teens and beyond. Apart from unskilled labour the only other option available to the graduate from boy labour was the Army which, as Table 7.3 illustrates, recruited heavily from amongst these graduates.

¹⁷Jackson C, 1910, *Unemployment and trade unions* . pp.60-61

¹⁸Dearle NB, 1908, *Problems of unemployment in the London building trades*, JM Dent and Co., London. p.100.

¹⁹Tawney RH, 1909, 'The economics of boy labour.' p.525.

Table 7.3
Occupations of 519 boys entering the army at various ages

Ages:	14		15		16		17		18		19		20	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Skilled	18	4	23	5	30	6	30	6	23	4	15	3	15	3
Clerks	28	6	26	5	26	5	27	5	15	3	11	2	4	1
Low skilled	169	35	200	40	231	46	240	48	105	20	64	12	33	6
Carmen	1	-	7	1	20	4	43	8	28	5	18	3	9	2
Van boys	53	11	59	12	45	9	25	5	8	1	3	1	2	-
General, casual	20	4	28	6	42	8	62	12	34	6	21	4	10	2
Shop boys	69	14	70	14	63	13	50	10	20	4	6	1	5	1
Errand boys	116	24	74	15	35	7	14	3	2	-	-	-	-	-
At sea	4	1	4	1	3	1	6	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Post office	4	1	6	1	5	1	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Army	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	1	282	54	381	73	441	85
Totals	482		497		500		504		519		519		519	

Source: PP. 1909, Vol.XVII, Cd.4791, Table 25.²⁰

Had the life of a boy labourer not been a preparation for the army, we would expect to find a similar distribution of the recruits in the occupational categories as that found for the wider population. However, as we can see, those categories associated with the label of boy labour are heavily over-represented in the returns from the army. Although in the short term the army provided a solution to the lack of opportunities available to the boy graduating out of boy labour, it effectively only delayed the inevitable, as it offered them no training in anything other than how to be a labourer.

7.3 The Boy Labour Problem in London

One need have no fear of being accused of exaggeration in describing the boy worker in London as ubiquitous. As page-boy in the house of the rich, or as errand-boy for the humblest East End shopkeeper, he is equally indispensable.²¹

²⁰Stedman Jones G, 1971, *Outcast London*. p.77. after R.C. Poor Laws, 1909, (Jackson), Vol.XVII., p.54.

²¹Cloete JG, 1904, p.102. 'The boy and his work.' in Urwick EJ (ed), 1904, *Studies of boy life in our cities*. Dent, London. pp.102-138.

The case of the London boy is a particularly difficult one. It is so fatally easy for him to drift into some employment, which, while the initial wages are high, offers no prospects in the future, and leads him inevitably, when a man, into the ranks of the unskilled labourer, the casual worker, and the unemployed.²²

In a great city - and in London pre-eminently - the demand for boy labour is virtually unlimited.²³

For a number of reasons the problem of boy-labour would appear to have been particularly severe in the capital in the last decade of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth century. Booth, one of the shrewdest commentators, noted 'the immense London demand for boy labour, at high rates of wages, but for employments which have no future'.²⁴ The first factor encouraging a worsening in the problem was the impact of educational legislation. This factor was of course not confined to the local context of London. The history of the Elementary Education Acts was one of steadily increasing standards for partial and total exemption, as shown in Table 7.4.

²²London County Council, 1906, *The apprenticeship question*.LCC Publication No.925. PS King and Son, London.

²³Gibb SJ, 1919, *Boy Work: exploitation or training?* p.100.

²⁴Booth C, 1903, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Augustus M Kelly, New York. Second Series, vol.5, p.297.

Table 7.4
Conditions for Exemption from Schooling under National Legislation

Date	Part-time exemption	Full-time exemption																		
1870	Bye-laws to provide for partial or total exemption of a child between 10 and 13 years if child has reached a standard of education specified in bye-laws.																			
1877		A child could be employed full-time in 1877 if aged over nine and subsequently if aged over ten under the following conditions:																		
		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">Year</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Standard passed</th> <th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1877</td> <td>I</td> <td>Or made 250 attendances in not more than 2 schools for two years.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1878</td> <td>I</td> <td>"</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1879</td> <td>III</td> <td>for three years</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1880</td> <td>III</td> <td>for four years</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1881</td> <td>IV</td> <td>for five years</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Standard passed		1877	I	Or made 250 attendances in not more than 2 schools for two years.	1878	I	"	1879	III	for three years	1880	III	for four years	1881	IV	for five years
Year	Standard passed																			
1877	I	Or made 250 attendances in not more than 2 schools for two years.																		
1878	I	"																		
1879	III	for three years																		
1880	III	for four years																		
1881	IV	for five years																		
1893	Minimum age raised to eleven years	Minimum age raised to eleven years																		
1899	Between twelve and thirteen if reached standard V, or made 300 attendances in not more than two schools for 5 years.	Minimum age raised to twelve years																		
1900	Maximum age raised to fourteen.	Maximum age raised to fourteen years, and 350 attendances substituted for the 250 attendances mentioned in the 1876 Act.																		

Source: London School Board 1904.²⁵

The impact of each successive increase in the standards was, of course, to reduce the number of children and juveniles in the labour market and by doing so to give a greater market advantage to those who remained. If it had been the only consideration, the increase in the minimum age at which exemption was granted from eleven to twelve in 1899, for example, would have withdrawn about 80,000 juveniles from the London labour market. Of course, the situation was in fact more complicated than this as the ability to gain full-time exemption also rested on meeting various other requirements, and not all those entitled to claim full-time exemption took it. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of the

²⁵London School Board, 1904, *Final Report of the London School Board, 1870-1904*. Second Edition revised. PS King, London. p.208.

progressive improvements in the standards required between 1870 and 1900, as laid out in Table 7.4, made significant inroads into the number of children and juveniles in the labour market. At the local level the impact of this legislation in London was even greater than the national provisions might suggest, for the London School Board placed both a great deal of emphasis on the enforcement of the rules regarding exemptions, and, under the discretionary powers granted by the Elementary Education Acts, set standards for exemption well above the minimum required by that national legislation, as shown in Table 7.5.

Table 7.5
Attendance at school: Conditions set by London School Board
Bye-Laws

Bye Laws	Partial Exemption	Total Exemption
Nov 1871- May 1879	Child had to be aged over ten and engaged in beneficial and necessary employment and had to attend for ten hours a week.	Over ten and reached Standard V.
May 1879 - July 1891	Ten to thirteen and reached Standard III. Child must make five attendances a week and be beneficially and necessarily at work.	Ten to thirteen and reached Standard VI.
July 1891 - Feb 1894	Standard IV and beneficially and necessarily at work.	" " " " " " " " "
Feb 1894 - July 1898	Eleven to thirteen and Standard IV and beneficially and necessarily at work.	Eleven to thirteen and Standard VI
July 1898 - Feb 1900	Eleven to thirteen and Standard V.	Eleven to thirteen and Standard VII
Feb 1900 - Dec 1900	Twelve to thirteen and Standard V <i>or</i> having made 300 attendances in not more than two schools during each year for five preceding years after five years of age, whether consecutive or not.	Twelve to thirteen, and Standard VII
Dec 1900 - Dec 1904	No partial exemption.	Twelve to fourteen and Standard VII.

Source: London School Board, 1904²⁶

Whereas national legislation in 1900 allowed for total exemption for pupils aged twelve or over who had reached the fourth standard, the London bye laws required the pupil to have reached the seventh standard. Likewise, under the national legislation it was still possible for partial exemption to be granted between the ages of twelve and fourteen if the child concerned met certain conditions, and indeed nationally there were in excess of 75,000 half-timers in

²⁶ibid.

1900 and 85,000 in 1908 (see Table 6.2). In London however, the LSB did everything it could to discourage partial exemption, and from 1900 onwards their policy was to grant no partial exemptions whatsoever. Effectively from 1900 onwards the age of entry of London school-boys onto the labour market was set at fourteen. The logic of the market dictates that the impact of this policy by restricting the supply of child and juvenile labour was to improve the market position of the age group immediately above school leaving age still further than the national legislation would have done, and thereby accentuate still further the returns available to boys willing to pursue specialist boy-labour employments. It follows that the effect of the Board's policy was, paradoxically, to make the relative 'opportunity' costs of undergoing a training higher in the capital.

An illustration of this process in operation was given by an official of the LCC giving evidence to the 1903 Departmental Committee on the Employment of Children Act 1903. Asked whether the prohibition of small school children from street trading in certain areas of the city had created any hardship, he answered that:

We have had some evidence the other way, because, of course, the matter does cut both ways. When the younger children have not been allowed to go out to work by the action of the bye-laws, there has often been better employment for the older children of the family, and things have righted themselves in that way. In London it has had a very marked effect.²⁷

In London as elsewhere it was a common observation of those concerned with boy labour that the improvements in the provision of elementary education had played a part in encouraging the market for specifically boy labour. Writing in 1904, Cloete observed that:

The London boy of fifty years ago was by no means qualified to fill the many different places that he occupies to-day.²⁸

It was argued that schooling's most impressive triumph had been in instilling habits of regularity, obedience and intelligence.

Now, these qualities are essential to success in all walks of life; but for one form of employment alone are they all that is required. This form of employment includes those occupations in which boys and boys only are engaged, and where the boys are discharged as soon as they become

²⁷PP 1910 Cd 5230 Vo..XXVIII Q581.

²⁸Cloete JG, 1904, 'The boy and his work.' p.102.

men. ... It is not without significance that the rapid increase in the number of boys so engaged has synchronized with the rapid improvement in the system of elementary education.²⁹

The pressures building up for higher wages for juveniles would have forced employers seeking juveniles to enter training for skilled and semi-skilled occupations to pay more for that labour, just as it was noted that employers of unskilled boy labour such as messengers were having to increase the wages they offered due to the increased demand.³⁰ This increase in wages for boys would in turn have encouraged those employers either to extract more value from the labour of the boys via reducing the element of training in their employment, a force leading towards de-skilling, or to seek to recruit their skilled workforce by some other means, most importantly by recruiting it from outside the capital.

A second important factor in explaining the generation of a particularly severe boy labour problem in London was the concentration in the city of a number of industries particularly prone to the problem. London was not unique in having such a concentration, but because of its industrial structure the concentration was particularly strong.³¹ It was a centre of distribution, conspicuous consumption, society, service industries, government and information, and consequently newspapers and printing,³² and many of these functions proved particularly heavy users of boy labour. We have already mentioned the example of printing, as an industry concentrated in London, and it was one particularly subject to the problem of boy labour.³³ However, of far greater importance in purely numerical terms were the transport, distribution, and service industries. In the transport and distribution categories we might include the van-boys and various classes of messengers, ranging from errand-boys to telegraph-boys.

'Van boys' or 'nippers' accompanied drivers of horse-drawn vans and carts, and increasingly in the years upto the First World War, those of motor-vans.

²⁹Bray R, 1911, *Boy labour and apprenticeship*. p.87.

³⁰Cloete JG, 1904, 'The boy and his work.' p.113.

³¹Gibb SJ, 1919, *Boy work: exploitation or training?* p.100.

³²This is discussed in Chapter 4. See also Hall PG, 1962, *The industries of London since 1861*. London. Chs. 1 and 2.

³³See age graph of printers in Booth C, 1902, *Life and labour of the people in London*. Second series, Vol.II, p.189.

There were many openings for van drivers in the expanding London distribution sector, but it was physically impossible for all the young boys to be 'absorbed',³⁴ as adults after graduating from the position of 'nippers', and large numbers were forced to leave the occupation in their late teens, or more commonly 'drifted' out as they became frustrated with their lack of advancement and appreciated the dead-end they faced.³⁵ Having a boy as an assistant was ideal for a carman or van driver in that the boy was capable of helping with the delivery of heavier loads, and more importantly, could guard the vehicle against theft in the drivers' absence. In London and other large cities there was both a greater danger of theft and stricter enforcement of bye-laws prohibiting the leaving of vehicles unattended, both factors which encouraged the use of greater numbers of van boys.³⁶

The road haulage business in the capital had a considerable casual fringe amongst the adult carmen,³⁷ and so even amongst those van-boys who did secure work as adults there was likely to be a considerable number who did so only on a casual basis. Further, casual work was not limited to adults for in one district of London at least, large firms of carmen contractors supplemented a small staff of regular van boys, paid by the week, with a system of casual boys taken on by the day.³⁸ Amongst the most visible and numerous class of boy labour were the messengers, a form of employment that took the boys frequently onto the streets.

Messenger work absorbs thousands of boys engaged by private employers. The streets of London especially are alive with boy-messengers employed by cable companies, by press agencies, and by the District Messenger Company.³⁹

The District Messenger Company alone employed between 700 and 900 'general utility' boys in London, who performed a wide variety of services from

³⁴PP.1913,XXXIII, Cd6886, p.8. Report of the Departmental Committee on the Hours and Conditions of Employment of Van Boys and Warehouse Boys.

³⁵ibid.

³⁶ibid., pp.4-5.

³⁷See Stedman Jones, G, 1971, *Outcast London*. p.58, for a discussion.

³⁸PP. 1913, Vol.XXXIII, Cd.6887. Evidence taken before the Departmental Committee on the Hours and conditions of employment of Van Boys and Warehouse Boys. p.22.

³⁹Gibb SJ, 1919, *Boy work: exploitation or training?* pp.78-79.

taking messages to keeping positions in theatre queues.⁴⁰ Cyril Jackson concluded from his investigations that the prospects of the boys employed by the Private Telegraph and Messenger Companies being retained through to adulthood were slim. For the Private Telegraph Companies he observed that 'these boys have practically no prospects with the companies. In one case it appeared that about one in 200 of the messengers remained in their employ.'⁴¹ However, by far the largest single employer of messenger boys at the turn of the century was the Post Office Telegraph service which offered boys in London a relatively high minimum starting salary of 7s. or 8s. in the inner ring.⁴² The Post Office was recognized as a major employer of boy labour and widely criticized for the large numbers of telegraph boys it failed to retain beyond the age of sixteen. The Post Master General stated that:

Service as a telegraph messenger beyond the age of sixteen is only allowed if there is thought to be a prospect of succeeding to an appointment as postman. The number of probable vacancies for postmen is calculated very carefully; and the number of boys retained is limited to that number, with a certain addition for wastage from various causes... The age at which this 'weeding out' takes place has been fixed at sixteen, as that appears to be the latest age at which the boys have a reasonable chance of fitting themselves for other employment.⁴³

However, vague hopes of retention were held out to the boys whilst in service, and the majority seemed to assume that the care shown in their selection indicated that the opportunities to continue in the service were good.⁴⁴ The care shown in selecting boys, and indeed the use made of boys by the Post Office, whilst popular with the public, was less welcome amongst adult postmen. (see Illustration 7.1) How far the hundreds of boys dismissed at sixteen did succeed in 'fitting themselves for other employments' was a matter of hot debate, and many parents complained of the effects the time their sons had spent in the Post Office had had on their childrens' prospects in life.⁴⁵ One former Post Office messenger giving evidence to the 1909 Poor Law

⁴⁰Gibb SJ, 1912, p.64. 'Recent parliamentary and other inquiries concerned with problems of boy life.' in Whitehouse JH, (ed) 1912, *Problems of boy life*. PS King and Son, London. pp.307-331.

⁴¹PP. 1909, Vol.XLIV, Cd.4632, p.17.

⁴²Cloete JG, 1904, 'The boy and his work.' p.122.

⁴³pp. 1909, Vol.XLIV, Cd.4632, p.70.

⁴⁴ibid., p.75.

⁴⁵ibid., p.64.

Commission emphasized that even if leaving at sixteen was better than at eighteen, it still left the boys 'two years behind in wages and experience'.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ibid., p.71.

Illustration 7.1



THE DOG IN THE MANGER.

Postman. "HERE, I SAY, WHAT HAVE YOU GOT THERE! A LETTER! HAND IT OVER TO ME. YOU'RE MUCH TOO SMART, YOU ARE."
Mr. Punch. "WHAT A SHAME! WHY CAN'T YOU LET THE BOY ALONE, AND DELIVER YOUR OWN LETTERS PUNCTUALLY!"

Even more visible than messengers were the street traders, newspaper sellers and errand boys that crowded the London streets and found a regular place as incidental comical figures in contemporary cartoons. (see Illustrations 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4.) The street traders and newsboys who sold papers on the streets had often performed the same jobs on a part-time basis whilst still at school.⁴⁷ The attractions of the life were both the high levels of earnings and its casual nature, allowing the boys greater liberty than their more regularly employed counterparts.⁴⁸ A boy employed in the occupation at school had plenty of opportunity to appreciate the advantages of his older counterparts' employment.

If a boy goes on street trading after leaving school he immediately finds he can quite easily earn 9s. or 10s. a week, and he also knows he cannot start work in a factory at more than 5s. a week. Therefore unless there is somebody behind him to point out the evils of street trading he will not go into a factory until it is too late.⁴⁹

The boys were actually often at a distinct advantage over adult men in attracting custom, their advantage lying in their 'picturesque' quality.

The dangers of the newsboys' life are really serious. The excitement of their career tends to make them more and more reluctant to work steadily, even during the few hours when they are plying their trade, and more and more prevents them to enter upon more regular, but more monotonous work. They quickly become careless of their appearance, except when they are studiously untidy, for a picturesque ruggedness is sometimes of service to them. The great majority are unwilling to forego their calling until they become men (a man earns less in news-selling than a boy), by which time they are ready to fall into a lower rank of society.⁵⁰

The life of the newspaper sellers was one of intermittent bursts of activity followed by periods of idleness. Superintendent John Mulvany of the Metropolitan Police, discussing the street trade in his districts of Whitechapel and Spitalfields, noted the source of much of this uneven activity:

⁴⁷See section 6.7.

⁴⁸Newspaper boys in the centre of Manchester were said to earn 'easily' 10s. - 14s. per week for only a few hours work. PP.1910, Vol.XXVII, Cd.5230, Q3087-3088.

⁴⁹ibid., Q6974.

⁵⁰Gibb SJ, 1912, p.70. 'Boy labour: some studies in detail.' in Whitehouse MP (ed), 1912, *Problems of boy life*. PS King and Son, London. pp.52-58. See also pp 1910, Vol.XXVII, Cd.5230, Q4587.

...the 'Star' that is published at 11 o'clock in the morning is bought particularly for the sporting news which it contains, weights, runners, etc... Then another issue comes out directly after the first race is run, we will say at 1 o'clock and the lads will go on cycles from the City with heaps of papers on their backs and directly they get into Aldgate you will see a score of boys come for those papers and then rush away down the street calling 'the first winner'.⁵¹

Another important source of employment for London boys in the service sector were the hundreds of hotels and clubs in the city. Bell-boys and pages were thick on the ground in London's club land. Their school training had given them all that was required, essentially a smart appearance, and the work involved only menial functions, such as opening doors, calling cabs, collecting theatre tickets and carrying luggage, with little opportunity for progress into secure posts. This was especially true in the clubs which reached their zenith in the Edwardian era. Some might progress to being waiters, but this was a very seasonal and often casual employment, and anyway the numbers of boys was too great to allow for advancement for any but a few. The attractions of the West End hotels, clubs and restaurants lay not so much in the promise of high earnings, as the employees tended to be relatively poorly paid, but in the opportunities to pick up good tips which could raise the boy's income to over a pound a week.⁵²

It is worth recording that the service sector was the last to be covered by restrictive legislation. By the turn of the century, regulations regarding maximum hours and conditions of employment for young workers in factories and workshops were fairly well developed and implemented. In service and clerical employments the only limit was one of seventy-four hours a week, and even this legal maximum was impossible to police. In some sense one could argue that the relative lack of such legislation controlling these employments was a source of encouragement to the employment of youth in them, and that their freedom from regulation effectively gave the young workers a relative advantage in them. The growth in importance of such employments was not one restricted to London but part of a trend within the national economy as a whole. The service and distribution sectors were expanding nationally, reflecting not least the growing affluence of the population.

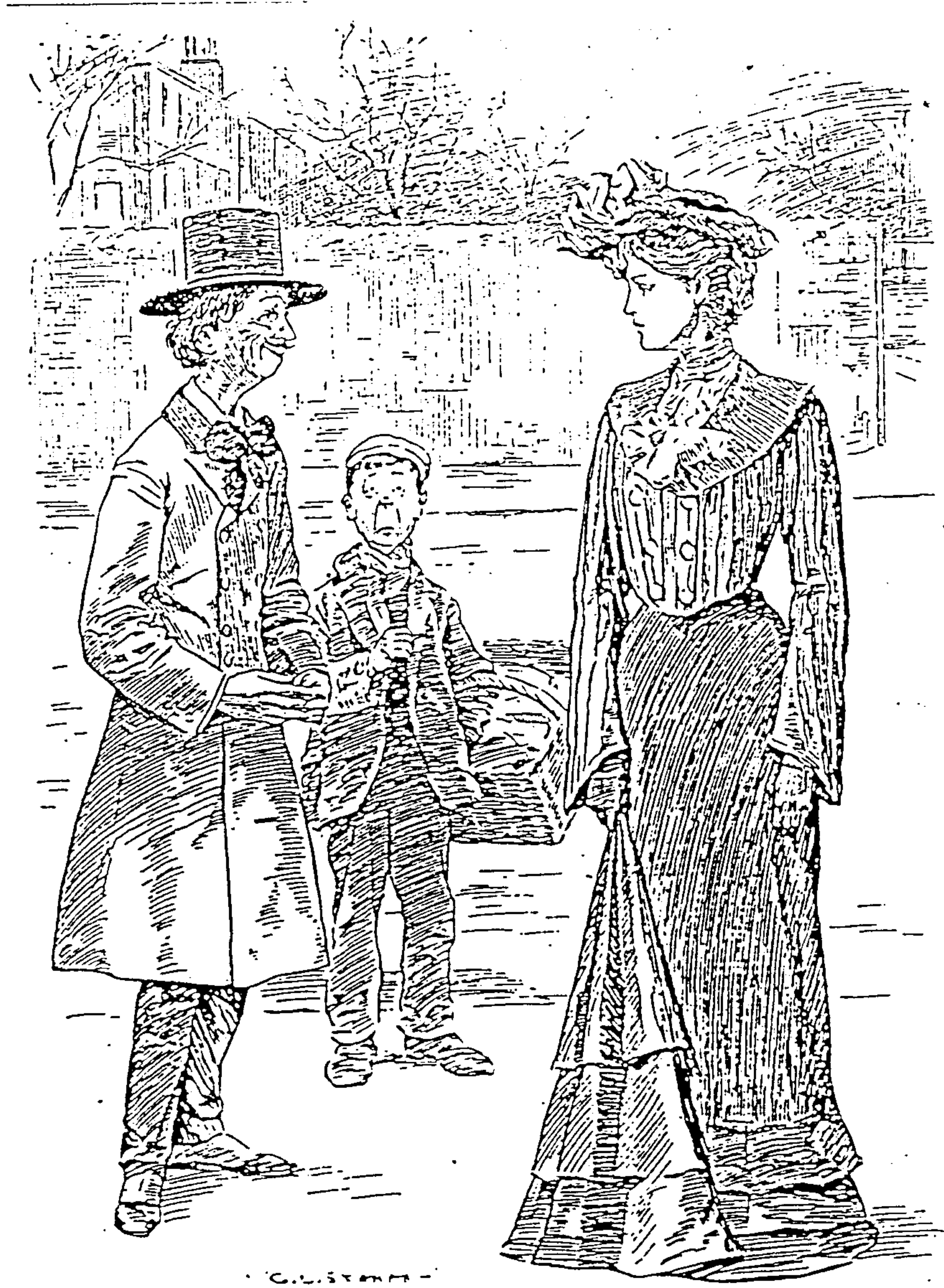
⁵¹PP.1910, Vol.XXVII, Cd.5230, Q1385.

⁵²Gibb SJ, 1919, *Boy work: exploitation or training?* p.84, p.90.

This tendency to demand the services of boys has spread through all classes of society. To take a single example of quite recent growth: it is becoming less and less common for the housewife to bring the results of her marketing home herself; a boy delivers the goods instead.⁵³

⁵³Bray RA, 1911, *Boy labour and apprenticeship*. p.14.

Illustration 7.2



She (to Raphael Greene, who paints gains for the R.A. that are never accepted). "I DO HOPE YOU'LL BE HUNG THIS YEAR. I'M SURE YOU DESERVE TO BE!"

Illustration 7.3



ERRAND BOYS.

First Boy. "WHERE ARE YER GOIN' TO, BILL!"
Second Boy. "I 'VE GOT TO GO RIGHT OVER 'AMMERSMITH BRIDGE TO BARNES, THEN I 'SE GOT TO GO TO PUTNEY AND BACK BY FULHAM ROAD, THEN TO 'IGH STREET, KENSINGTON."
First Boy. "WHY, I 'VE GOT TO GO TO 'IGH STREET. YOU GO ON. I 'M IN A BIT OF A HURRY, BUT I 'LL WAIT FOR YER!"

Illustration 7.4



C. U. STAMP

*Policeman (examining broken window). "BEGORRA, BUT IT'S MORE SERIOUS THAN I
THOUGHT IT WAS. IT'S BROKE ON BOTH SIDES!"*

Likewise the readership of newspapers spread giving further employment to youths in their production, distribution and sale. Growth in the readership of the evening papers⁵⁴ was particularly significant, and the competition for readership between the different evening papers in the capital was fierce. The short life of the Daily News in 1887 as a second evening paper for London re-introduced a flavour of that competition. However, such competition could not compare with the mass of evening papers available to the reader at the turn of the century.⁵⁵ All these publications competed vigorously for the business of the capital's swelling population, and provided employment for hundreds of vociferous juveniles in the crowded streets.

In addition to this growth in the service sector, another industrial factor contributing to the growth in the demand for boy labour in London was the continuing trend in many of the capital's industries towards the de-skilling of certain trades, and the sub-division of tasks, leading to the employment of unskilled youths each performing one in a series of simple tasks and so replacing skilled men.

In London the systems of indentured apprenticeship had been in decline for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. The Education Committee of the London County Council considering the question of apprenticeship in the capital concluded that many factors had contributed to this result:

The subdivision of labour, the introduction of machinery, the development of mammoth factories, and the high rents and consequent limited workshop space in London have all tended to render the old practise either undesirable or impracticable. The large employer does not care to be troubled with boys if he is compelled to teach them the whole trade. He prefers to divide his processes into men's work and boy's work, and to keep each grade to its allotted routine.⁵⁶

The third major strand in any explanation of the problem of boy labour, and its importance in understanding the supply of unskilled adult labour in Victorian

⁵⁴These were on the whole sold more often than the morning papers, a higher proportion of which were delivered.

⁵⁵In offering instructions for the placing of an advertisement in the London evening papers, Sherlock Holmes could suggest to his commissionaire, 'the Globe, Star, Pall Mall, St. James's Gazette, Evening News, Standard, Echo and any others that occur to you.' Doyle AC, 1916 (1892) *The adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. p.153.

⁵⁶London County Council Publication, 1906, *The apprenticeship question*.

and Edwardian London, is a demographic one. We have already noted Stedman Jones' suggestion that the problem of boy labour was in fact not a problem in itself but a consequence of the peak in immigration to the capital in the age group 20-30. However, when Stedman Jones talks of an excessive supply of unskilled young men aged between twenty and thirty entering the market, what does the term 'excessive' signify? In the rapidly changing Victorian economy, or indeed in any other, there is no natural stability in the profile of demand for labour, nor necessarily any reason why that demand should discriminate in terms of age. Surely the term excessive in this context must be held to denote that there was a peculiarly large number of men of this age competing for a smaller number of vacancies, a number in line with the rest of the age structure. If this was the case we would expect to find a much higher proportion of the male population of London falling into this 'glutted' age range than in the nation as a whole.

If we now look at the following tables in which the age structure of the capital is broken down into various cohorts, and the distribution of the population amongst the different cohorts is compared to that found in the population of the nation as a whole, some interesting and useful conclusions emerge:

Table 7.6
London Population: % of male population in each cohort.

Age	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
< 5	13.8	13.9	13.8	12.5	11.6	11.0
5. - 9	11.4	11.4	11.6	11.3	10.3	10.2
10. - 14	10.0	10.1	10.0	10.4	9.7	9.4
15. - 19	9.2	9.4	9.5	9.9	9.8	9.1
20. - 24	9.4	9.4	9.5	9.8	10.1	9.0
25. - 29	8.5	8.9	8.9	9.0	9.3	8.9
30. - 34	7.9	7.7	7.6	7.8	8.0	8.2
35. - 39	6.8	6.4	6.6	6.7	7.0	7.4
40. - 44	6.3	5.9	5.8	5.7	6.1	6.4
45. - 49	4.8	4.7	4.4	4.8	5.0	5.5
50. - 54	3.9	4.1	3.8	3.9	4.1	4.6
55. - 59	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.7	3.1	3.5
60. - 64	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.7
65. +	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.4	4.2

Source: Census

Table 7.7
Relative proportions of male population in each cohort, relative to national totals: 100 = parity

Age	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
< 5	100	100	99	99	98	99
5. - 9	95	93	93	94	93	96
10. - 14	92	91	90	90	91	96
15. - 19	94	96	95	95	95	96
20. - 24	106	110	111	110	108	104
25. - 29	114	116	115	113	110	107
30. - 34	116	115	114	112	109	104
35. - 39	112	111	112	109	107	103
40. - 44	111	110	109	107	106	104
45. - 49	104	103	103	105	104	104
50. - 54	98	100	98	100	101	104
55. - 59	87	88	89	92	97	100
60. - 64	86	86	89	89	95	99
65. +	70	70	73	77	82	91

Source: Census returns

Certainly the tables confirm the impact of immigration in producing a bulge in the metropolitan supply of labour above the age of twenty compared to the nation as a whole. However the excess exists beyond the early twenties and extends even as far as the mid-fifties by 1911, and at just as great a magnitude as that in the low twenties, putting into question the idea of a 'glut' in the younger age group. In fact, rather than emphasizing the excessive numbers of young adults we might be better served in emphasizing the relative scarcity or shortage of juveniles and children in the population. In terms of the magnitude of the excess we may note that the impact of immigration of those aged in excess of twenty on the structure of the population seems to have declined from a peak in the 1860s and 1870s. In 1871 for example, 9% fewer people were aged between 10-15 in London than in the nation's population as a whole, whilst the number in the age group 25-30 was in excess by some 16%; for 1911, two years after Cyril Jackson's detailed study of the problem of boy labour for the Poor Law Commission, the comparative figures were 4% for 10 - 15 year olds, and 7% of the 25 - 30 age group. In effect the 'excess' of those aged above twenty had been sharply reduced between 1871-1911, whilst the relative scarcity of those aged below twenty, the age group for boy labour, had remained just as distinct. The observation must of course throw into serious doubt any suggestion that the boy labour problem's emergence as a major topic of concern amongst social and economic commentators towards the end of the

century was caused by a growth in the relative over-supply of unskilled men entering the labour market in their twenties in the period.

These observations do not mean, of course, that the concentration of immigration in the age group 20 - 30 was not a contributory factor in the great discontinuity between juvenile and adult labour in the capital, but should cause us to question how far the boy labour problem could really be regarded as a consequence of it; if it had been merely 'a symptom'⁵⁷ the problem would have emerged twenty or thirty years before it did. Besides the contribution made to the problem by the relative scarcity of juveniles in the population, a scarcity which, assuming a constant pattern of demand for labour by age, would have placed juvenile employments at a higher premium, the other demographic factor tending to place a premium on the employment of boys was the absolute decline in the proportion of juveniles in the population, a consequence of the increasing decline in both death rates and birth rates towards the end of the century. As Table 7.6 shows, the percentage of the population of London aged between 15 and 20 fell from 9.9% in 1891 to 9.1% in 1911.

All these factors then tended to promote the development of a peculiarly severe boy labour problem in Edwardian London; demand was growing for purely juvenile labour whilst the supply was contracting. These conditions provided a buoyant market for boy labour, so that boys were able to move from job to job with little fear that they would not find a new place quickly. The biographies of juveniles entering the labour market at this time emphasize their lack of stability, their concern with maximizing their income, and their willingness to shift rapidly from job to job in search of the best returns, no commitment being shown to any particular line of work, and the vast majority of the work being unskilled. If we look at a rare piece of evidence collected on wage rates, we find that the best wages came in specifically dead-end employments.

⁵⁷Stedman Jones G, 1971, *Outcast London*. p.71.

Table 7.8

Average Wages of Different Occupations at ages 14 - 21

Age	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Skilled trades (excl. apprentices)	6/8.5	8/0	10/5	13/9	16/11	23/5	28/8	32/6
Apprentices	5/8	6/5.5	8/0	10/5	12/4.5	15/0.5	-	-
Clerks and office boys	7/5.5	9/2.5	13/0	14/7	17/10	18/7.5	21/5.5	25/5.5
Low skilled and unskilled trades	7/0.5	8/10	12/3	13/7.5	15/10.5	18/5.5	18/11	20/11.5
Car men with horses	9/0	11/10.5	15/1	17/0.5	18/2.5	19/0.5	21/7	23/4.5
Labourers and casuals	8/0.5	10/1.5	13/2.5	14/8	17/7	19/8	23/0	22/0
Post office	6/11.5	8/2.5	11/0.5	-	-	-	-	-
Errand and shop boys	6/11	8/5	10/0	11/7	13/8.5	15/0	17/3	17/5
Van boys	7/8	8/1.5	9/10	10/1.5	11/10.5	11/6	-	-

Where fewer than ten cases are available, they are not included.

Source: PP 1909 XLIV Cd.4632 Appendix XX Table 24.

We may contrast the average wages received by apprentices with those received by van-boys or errand-boys. In fact, as we have noted, apprenticeship was in decline in London throughout much of the second half of the nineteenth century and generally survived through to the early twentieth century only in a minority of specialized trades. Nevertheless, if we compare the dead-end employments to the skilled trades, we find the same contrast, the dead-end employments offering higher wages in the first few years but then quickly falling behind.

Further figures in Table 7.8 understate the gap in earnings between the skilled and semi-skilled, and unskilled occupations for, as we have noted earlier, many of the latter forms of employment carried richer opportunities to supplement the basic wage with 'tips'. Many of the boys employed as 'pages' and 'door-boys' in the hotels, shops and restaurants stuck to these jobs 'for the sake of the tips which fall to their lot' and which often formed the bulk of their

earnings.⁵⁸ The primary reason for so many London boys being attracted to follow boy labour occupations is then fairly clear:

The high wages a lad can earn as an errand boy, or district messenger, or van boy, or in other occupations confined to youths, are more attractive than the low wages associated with an industrial training. Earning looms larger in his imagination than the laborious and less remunerative learning.⁵⁹

Mr. HB Lethbridge, the governor of Wormwood Scrubs prison, found little success in his attempts to reform the boys committed to his care, despite the attempts to teach the boys a trade during their time in prison.

I see a boy a month before he goes out, and I make every effort to induce him to follow the trade that he has learnt, or at any rate that he has got some insight into while he has been in prison. He will probably be told that his wages will start at something very small, and he will reply, 'no, I can make more than that on a potato round', or, 'I can make more than that by selling newspapers'.⁶⁰

So many boys were attracted by the higher initial wages of the poorer jobs that some London employers complained of being unable to fill vacancies in skilled occupations.⁶¹

Viewing the market as a whole, the pattern of earnings over time would seem to fit extremely well into the human capital model; Figure 7.1, which plots the earnings tracks of the skilled, and labourer/casual categories of employments, categories which respectively tended to absorb boys graduating from the apprentice and dead-end employments, bears a striking resemblance to Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2, which illustrates the operation of the theory of human capital. It is only between the ages of eighteen and nineteen that those boys employed in skilled employments, reflecting their growing productivity as workers, began to obtain a higher average wage than their counterparts employed in labouring. Even if an individual should have wished to move into a skilled trade at around this age, many employers only took on much younger boys as learners. One London employer in the

⁵⁸Gibb SJ, 1912, 'Boy labour: Some studies in detail.' in Whitehouse MP (ed), 1912, *Problems of boy life*. pp.52-78.

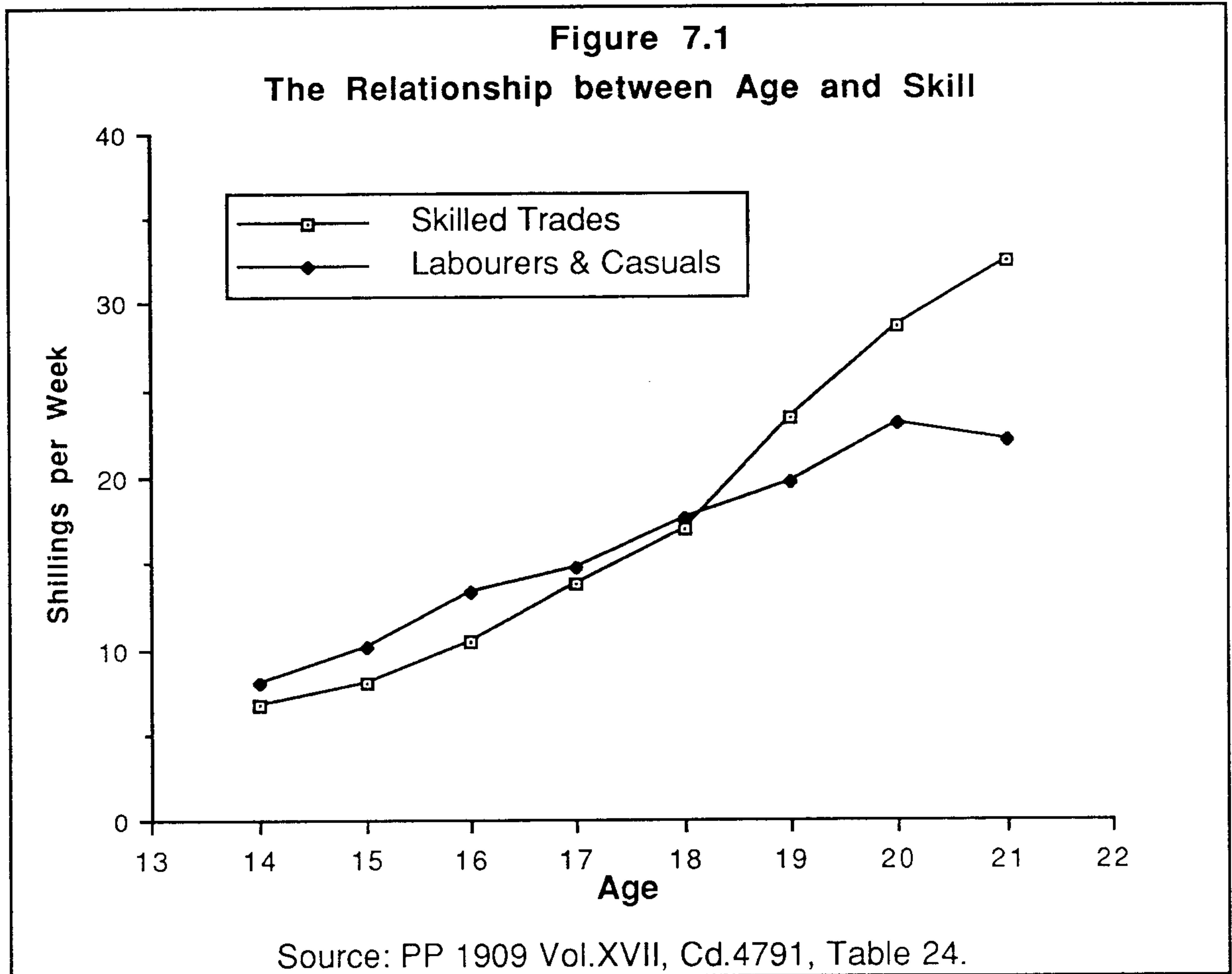
⁵⁹London County Council, 1906, *The apprenticeship question*. p.4.

⁶⁰PP. 1910, Vol.XXVIII, Cd.5230, p.11.

⁶¹RC 1909, p.133, p.148.

metal trades submitting evidence to the Royal Commission on Poor Laws observed:

...the higher wages to be earned by errand-boys in retail shops makes it difficult to obtain boys direct from school to learn the trade, ...it is too late to learn at eighteen when the boys apply.⁶²



⁶²R.C. 1090, p.133.

Even if employers had been willing to take older boys, a boy entering a skilled or semi-skilled trade at seventeen or eighteen would have had to accept a large reduction in his wage as he would have started from the point reached by his counterparts three or four years earlier.

The wages of the unpromising employment, higher than those of the probationary work, which ought to be sought, have begun to be reckoned on in the weekly budget.⁶³

As the average wage of the labourer continued to rise, even if at a slower pace than that of the skilled worker, so the costs of moving into a skilled trade grew progressively greater with age, and the ability of the worker to move thus became progressively lower. In their report on 'The Apprenticeship Question'⁶⁴ the London County Council commented on the difficulty facing any boy graduating from boy labour jobs in London:

He has grown accustomed to comparatively high wages, and will rarely reconcile himself to the considerable reduction which any sort of industrial training necessarily involves. The boy must be caught in the net of some skilled trade as he leaves school or he will never be caught at all.⁶⁵

In reading Table 7.8 it should be recognized that the categories themselves encompass a wide range of circumstances, and that within the categories the pattern produced in the wider market was reproduced at a finer scale. Just as the employments that offered the greatest future tended to receive lower immediate returns at the level of the category, within categories the best immediate earnings tended to be associated with the poorest prospects. A category such as that of Clerks and Office-boys covered a wide range of circumstances. Many office-boys were responsible for carrying out a host of fairly menial tasks and had no prospects of securing a place after their juvenile years, this being especially true where the boy was employed in a very small concern.

In every considerable commercial centre are small businesses - agencies and the like - in which all the effective work is done by the master himself. He keeps an office-boy, however, to address envelopes, write up a postage book, answer telephone calls, mind the office in his own frequent absences, and perhaps justify the addition of the legend '&

⁶³Gibb SJ, 1919, *Boy work: exploitation or training?* p.100.

⁶⁴LCC, *The apprenticeship Question*.

⁶⁵ibid. , p.9.

Co.' after his name... It is seldom that such a boy is offered a tangible prospect or learns anything which will be of future service. His wages are sometimes good out of all proportion to his services, and he is tempted to remain in his leisurely position until an age at which it is impossible for him to embark upon trained work, either clerical or manual.⁶⁶

7.4 Conclusion

It is reasonable to conclude that the boy labour problem played a major part in generating the excessive supply of unskilled and casual labour in the adult labour market in London at the close of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, there is a mass of evidence to support the conclusion that people found their way into that market to a significant degree because they had chosen to maximize their incomes at the time of their original entry to the market; at a fundamental level therefore, the divisions in the adult labour market may be seen as fitting broadly into a human capital model of explanation. However, even if one were to accept Stedman Jones' argument that boy labour was not the chief cause of the glut in unskilled labour that was at the heart of the severity of the casual labour problem, this would not invalidate the observation that, in a free market, some individuals chose to enter dead-end employments whilst others chose to enter lower paid jobs that offered security against entry into that overcrowded market. Of course, although in an absolute sense the choice was free, for a large proportion of boys this was far from being the case. It would be a mistake to exaggerate the voluntaristic nature of the decisions made by boys. Boys were often subject to severe economic constraints, much of the pressure for the boys to maximize their earnings coming from the pressure of economic circumstances at home. Parental pressure to maximize earnings was greatest upon the eldest children.

It is the exception rather than the rule to meet with parents who are willing to put their sons to a good trade and accept the lower wages that anything in the nature of an apprenticeship would involve. It is the elder children who suffer from this, for the struggle for existence is always keenest whilst all the children are still at school.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Gibb JS, 1912, p.72. 'Boy labour: some studies in detail,' in Whitehouse MP, (ed), 1912 *Problems of boy life*.

⁶⁷Cloete JG, 1904, 'The boys and his work.' p.105. An exception to the rule of the elder children standing least chance of gaining an apprenticeship or training is shown in the case of Verow Garratt, who left school in Birmingham in 1906, set 'to get the best wages (he) could, without reference to premiums and apprenticeship', as a consequence of his elder brother having been 'bound to a job under the terms of which he was to work for only a few shillings a week until he was twenty-one'. Garratt VW, 1939. *A man in the street*. Dent, London. pp.75-

Walter Southgate entered the 'vortex' of the London labour market with an excellent character note from his headmaster, an LCC Merit Certificate, a gold medal for attendance and 'great hopes' of getting a job involving his chief interest, art and drawing. Offered a seven year apprenticeship with a firm engaged in church furnishing and mosaic work, at a few shillings a week, or another for five years with similarly low income, both had to be rejected because of his father's unwillingness to 'keep' him for so long.

There was now nothing for it but to take the first situation, pot luck, that offered itself. It might be as a messenger boy, a van boy, a shop boy or any other dead-end job. The main consideration was that I had to bring a little cash into the home each week to feed myself.⁶⁸

Much of the selection of careers for boys was left to chance, but parents were a significant determinant either through their influence in being able to secure places for their offspring or through their pressure for them to earn as much money as quickly as possible. In securing a position it was often the sons of casual or irregular men who were at the greatest disadvantage in being able to call upon any paternal influence:

...a favourable social relationship existing between certain members of the unskilled and those in active control of industry played a very important and decisive part. Generally, the benefits occurring through such relationships would depend upon the relative importance of the husband in industry as determined by the time he has spent there, his steadiness and application, whereby he has been able to place himself in a more favourable position than others to obtain any favour he requires for his son or daughter at the works where he is employed.⁶⁹

Where a man was himself casually employed there was little chance of him being able to secure a place for his boy, and the boy would graduate towards the less improving types of labour. In the skilled trades, even within the docks, although often casual, there was greater opportunity for boys to follow their fathers.⁷⁰

76. However, this appears to have owed more the 'rebellious reactions' of his brother to the confinements of his situation than to any great hardship caused by the earlier commitment.

⁶⁸Southgate W, 1982, *That's the way it was: a working class autobiography, 1890-1950*. New Clarion Press, London.

⁶⁹Lewis LE, 1924, *The children of the unskilled: an economic and social study*. PS King and Son, London.p.70.

⁷⁰See Gosling H, 1927, *Up and down stream*. Methuen, London. p.6. In this autobiography of a lighterman, Gosling states: 'I worked in my grandfather's boat just as he

As I discussed in Chapter 3, many of the classical economists had strong views on the importance of families in determining a boy's chances on entering the labour market. Marshall in particular, writing in the 1890s, discussed both the greater willingness and ability of different grades of society to invest the education and training of their children,⁷¹ and more broadly, the importance of family in determining the opportunities and chances of boys entering the labour market. It is perhaps worth quoting again his comments on the advantages the sons of skilled workmen possessed above those of the unskilled:

There are not many skilled trades to which the son of an unskilled labourer can get easy access; and in the large majority of cases the son follows the father's calling. The father has indeed special facilities for introducing his son. Employers and their foremen generally give to a lad whose father they already know and trust, a preference over one for whom they would have to incur the entire responsibility. And in many trades a lad, even after he had got entrance to the works, is not very likely to make good progress and obtain a secure footing, unless he is able to work by the side of his father, or some friend of his father's, who will take the trouble to teach him and let him do work that requires careful supervision, but has an educational value.⁷²

Another element of what amounts to inter-generational feedback, was the geographical limitations placed on the sons of the casual or unskilled labourers. We have already discussed in Chapter 4 the need on the part of casual labourers to live close to the sources of their employment. The son of a casual docker, unable to afford to live outside his family home, was severely limited in the area over which he could hunt for a position on leaving school, and living in an area of unskilled and casual employment would have had both less chance of finding a place as an apprentice or learner, and have needed on average to travel further from the family home. If the wages offered with a post as apprentice or learner were already below those of the readily and locally available boy labour employment, then any cost of travelling broadened that gap still further. Gibb observed that in London the tendency was for skilled industries to concentrate in certain localities, and further that:

had worked in his grandfather's, and for the same reason: it was a matter of family routine.' p.6.

⁷¹Marshall A, 1961 (1890), Principles of economics Macmillan, London. pp.561-562.

⁷²ibid., p.563.

The distances which separated district from district, and the expense of transit, tend to isolate these localities - to make of a large city, in fact, a congregation of industrial communities - and to limit the supply of boys to those living in or near these centres. Skilled employment may be actually unattainable, or at any rate the cost of travelling to the place of work may make so great an inroad into the small wages of apprenticeship as to reduce them to almost nothing.⁷³

The importance of access to information on the availability of different jobs, and on the prospects of various occupations was emphasized by many commentators. The 1909 Consultative Committee on Attendance at Continuation Schools, urged the need to give greater information and guidance to juveniles if the country was to avoid the 'great waste of early promise' and 'lessening of industrial efficiency' that the boy labour problem entailed. The Committee believed that there were cases where it was need that led to the acceptance of poor openings with higher pay for offspring, but that this was only true of a minority of cases.

There are of course parents whose genuine poverty compels them to accept the first offer of work for their children without regard to the future. There are others who, though under no compulsion, put their children into unskilled employment from purely selfish reasons. But there are others, and the Committee believe them to be the large majority, who would be both able and willing to accept rather lower wages at first for their children for the sake of bettering their subsequent position, but who are not sufficiently acquainted with the prospects of the various trades and occupations to be able to make a wise selection for them.⁷⁴

In the early part of the twentieth century, amongst commentators and concerned individuals of all kinds, it was widely believed that the boy labour problem could be largely eradicated if the labour market, and the participants in that market, were better organized.⁷⁵ Attempts to improve the flow of

⁷³Gibb SJ, 1919, *Boy work: exploitation or training?* p.101. See also comments pp.206-209. Here Gibb contrasts the situation in the early twentieth century with that which existed when apprenticeship was at its strongest, and boys learning a craft or skill lived 'under their master's roof'. p.207.

⁷⁴PP. 1909 Vol.XVII, Cd.4757, p.62.

⁷⁵See Bray RA, 1911, *Boy labour and apprenticeship*. Constable and Co., London. Ch.3.; Keeling F, 1910, *The labour exchange in relation to boy and girl labour*. PS King and Son, London. *passim*.

information and advice to school children entering the labour market, the parents of those children, and juveniles already in the market were contemporaneous to similar steps emerging to counter adult employment and casual labour problems in the docks and elsewhere. In the case of school leavers and juveniles, concern produced a large number of structures of help and advice including care committees, apprenticeship committees, boys brigades, and more broadly, increasing numbers of technical and evening class schools. The LCC adopted school leaving forms that were filled in by the head master of a school some time before a child left, giving details of the child's abilities, health, conduct and any recommended job. These forms were used, as sources of information by the school or children's Care Committees which amongst other duties, were supposed to concern themselves with helping and advising parents on securing employment for their children leaving school.⁷⁶ Where suitable the cases were referred to local apprenticeship Committees. Local Apprenticeship Committees endeavoured to collect information on openings and where possible helped boys to find suitable places. This was also the realm of a large number of similarly titled unofficial benevolent or religious committees and boards. The LCC Education Committee in 1906 listed amongst other London bodies concerned with the care for and placing of school children and juveniles in the labour market, the Skilled Employment Sub-Committee of the Charity Organization Society, the Central Apprenticeship Committee of the Invalid Children's Aid Association, the Trades' Registry and Apprenticeship Committee, and various Apprenticeship and Skilled Employment Committees.⁷⁷

A weakness of many of these organizations was that they concentrated almost exclusively on encouraging boys to enter apprenticeship even to the point of making something of a 'fetish of indentures'.⁷⁸ Nevertheless they did much useful work, a good example of which is provided by the handbook published by the Apprenticeship and Skilled Employment Association in 1908, which set out particulars of opportunities for learners as well as apprentices in a

⁷⁶Elliot WHH, 1912, p.231-232. 'Children's care committees.' in Whitehouse JH (ed), 1912, Problems of boy labour. PS King and Son, London. pp.228-239.

⁷⁷London County Council, 1906, The apprenticeship question.

⁷⁸Gibb JS, 1919, Boy work: exploitation or training? p.103.

large number of trades in the capital, together with details of wage rates, evening classes, and the proportions of boys to men in the trades.

However, potentially far more important in organizing the market for juvenile labour than these various local and benevolent institutions, was the national system of labour exchanges set up in February 1910. In their first twenty-three months of operation the London exchanges were notified of 50,794 vacancies for boys aged less than seventeen, and filled 37,746 such places.⁷⁹ The relative initial success of the scheme in London compared to elsewhere is indicated by the fact that these figures represented 32.4% and 32.5% of the national totals respectively. However, with regard to the boy labour problem, a major weakness of the labour exchanges was that they tended to be solely concerned with unemployment, consequently they simply operated as a means of filling vacancies and placing unemployed juveniles rather than as a means of countering the boy labour problem. This is clearly indicated by the occupational analysis of national placings of boys (those aged under seventeen) by the exchanges in their first twenty-three months. (See Table 7.9)

That 40.94% of vacancies notified for boys, and 40.60% of those filled, should be in the category 'Conveyance of men, goods, and messages', a category which would include messenger boys, errand boys and numerous other classes of 'boy labour', reflects the lack of discrimination in the operation of the labour exchanges. In London and elsewhere the criticism of the exchanges as 'engines(s) for the exploitation of boy labour'⁸⁰ prompted the Board of Trade in 1910 to appoint Advisory Committees to deal with juveniles. In London the Central Juvenile Advisory Committee constituted in August 1910, had eighteen members, six nominated by the Board of Trade, six by the LCC and six from employers and trade unionists. The committee's primary duty was to oversee the appointment of Local Advisory Committees who worked in conjunction with the newly established juvenile departments of the labour exchanges, and aimed to give general advice on juvenile employment and the

⁷⁹Greenwood A and Kettlewell JE, 1912, 'Some statistics of juvenile employment and unemployment.' *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 75 pp.744-753. Table 5.

⁸⁰Bray RA, 1911, *Boy labour and apprenticeship*. p.71.

finding of suitable occupations for the juvenile population of the city.⁸¹ In London then, in the years up to the First World War, there was a growing bureaucracy centred on the juvenile labour market and school leavers, a bureaucracy which aimed to organize a disorganized market and counter the perceived dangers for individuals and society of boy labour.

Table 7.9
Juvenile vacancies notified to and filled by Board of Trade
labour exchanges between 1st February 1910 and 31st December
1911

Trade	% total vacancies for boys	% total placings of boys	% of placings to vacancies
Buildings and works of construction	2.85	2.60	67.69
Mining and quarrying	0.89	0.99	83.06
Metals, machines, implements and conveyances	10.73	11.33	78.48
Textiles	3.73	3.55	70.70
Dress	4.11	3.32	60.70
Conveyance of men, goods and messages	40.94	40.60	73.64
Agriculture	1.52	1.60	78.11
Paper, prints, books and stationary	2.91	2.83	72.24
Wood, furniture, fittings and decorations	2.89	2.82	72.16
Chemicals, oils, grease, soap, resin etc	0.65	0.65	74.80
Bricks, cement, pottery and glass	0.81	0.79	72.86
Food tobacco, drink and lodging	6.00	5.59	69.13
Skins, leather, hair and feathers	0.64	0.60	69.38
Precious metals, jewels, watches, instruments and games	1.03	1.03	74.74
Running water, electricity supply and sanitary service	0.32	0.36	82.97
Commercial	7.25	7.46	76.33
Domestic (outdoor)	1.41	1.27	66.79
Others, general and undefined: (a) general labourers	1.50	1.79	88.12
41. others	9.73	10.84	82.70
Totals	-	-	74.26

(Source: Greenwood A and Kettlewell JE, p.747⁸²)

⁸¹Baron B, 1912, *The growing generation: a study of working boys and girls in our cities*. Student Christian Movement, London. p.69.

⁸²ibid., p.747.

Boy labour was undoubtedly a major feature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century labour market throughout England and Wales, but particularly in London. It both ensured an excessive supply of unskilled labour and determined, via the path taken through this difficult age, the prospects of each individual boy. Those from the poorest homes, who had often learnt the benefits of relatively high earnings as school-boy traders, newsboys or errand-boys, could find themselves comparatively well paid employment with no great difficulty, and drift from one such employment to another until they reached adulthood, where the only prospects open to them were general labouring, the docks or some casual fringe of a semi-skilled occupation such as the painters in the building trade. Furthermore, many of the boys graduating from boy labour had lost the habits of regularity, neatness and efficiency drilled into them at the Board Schools, a consequence of the nature of their boy labour employments.

The uneducated character of blind alley jobs, the fatal ease with which young workers can move from job to job, and the comparatively high wages obtained lead to decivilization and the formation of 'casual' habits for life.⁸³

Boys entering the labour market had squandered the 'human capital' invested in them in their years at school and simply existed on the benefits of that capital, investing nothing. The more careful parent, or the one who through his own more secure post had some influence, was able to get for his son a more useful post, one that offered some prospect of improvement even if at the immediate cost of a few shillings per week of income foregone. The son of such a parent was able to add to the 'human capital' acquired at school and look forward with greater certainty to a higher level of income and security than his counterpart.

To a significant degree the strong demand for boy labour in London at the turn of the century generated a market structure which ensured a continuing supply of debased male labour to the casual and unskilled trades, which in turn

⁸³Greenwood A, 1911, Juvenile labour exchange and after-care. PS King and Son, London. p.4.

ensured a similar supply of female labour to the sweated trades, forced into the market to supplement the irregular or inadequate earnings of their spouses. The evident significance of boy labour as a social and economic phenomenon in London at this time rested not only on broad trends within the economy as a whole, but also on particular institutional, industrial and demographic factors peculiar to the capital.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

A primary objective of this thesis as set out in chapter 1 was to explore the value of using the theoretical explanations for wage differentials and labour market structures found in modern labour economics, to the casual sector of the labour market in late Victorian and Edwardian London. In this concluding chapter I will summarise the applicability or validity of these theories in this context. In addition I will re-emphasize the social centrality of the labour market, point to a number of questions arising out of the research undertaken and raise the question of whether or not the structures of Victorian and Edwardian labour markets may be rediscovered in contemporary Britain.

8.1 The Theories Compared

In Chapter 2, the work of labour economists was reviewed and a distinction drawn between two fundamental schools of thought; both the neoclassical and the SLM approaches provide clear insights into the operation of labour markets, and the nature of the structures to be found within them. The neoclassical economists emphasize the competitive nature of the labour market and suggest that differences in the level of investment in training are the key to understanding wage differentials. It is further argued that the key decisions on the level of investment in education and skills are taken by individuals at the point of entry to the labour market, in the context of the family unit and the individual's perceived role in that unit. SLM economists disagree fundamentally with this approach. They argue that the labour market is divided into non-competing segments, entry to which is determined on the basis of class, sex, or race. To them, the central role of education is not an investment in skill but merely a means of legitimizing the segregation of certain workers into secondary markets.

According to SLM economists, the poor work characteristics associated with workers in the secondary sector are the result of a process of 'feedback' operating in this sector: the nature of the work produces these undesirable characteristics in the workforce; they are not the inevitable consequences of the workers' class, sex, or race. Although in many ways they are fundamentally opposed then, both modern schools of labour economists attach special importance to the point of entry to the labour market.

However, before examining how appropriate these ideas are to the study of the casual labour markets of London, a review (Chapter 3) was presented of the

ideas of the classical economists of the period. This review was instructive in various ways. Firstly, I demonstrated the extent to which the current debate within labour economics is simply a reworking of ideas found in the earlier literature. The central 'modern' concepts of human capital and segmented markets can both be clearly identified in the classical literature. I further argued that, in their treatment of wage differentials and market structures, far from being purely theoretical, as is the accepted interpretation, the classical economists showed a willingness to draw on their observations of the society in which they lived as a means of testing and improving their theoretical models.

In completing this review I highlighted the potential value of the classical economists as a source of explanations of stratification within the social economy, as well as of accounts of the operation of the Victorian and Edwardian labour markets. Marshall's remarks on the vertical and horizontal divisions in the labour market, and on the viscosity in movement between different grades of labour offer us considerable insights into the nature of the social economy at the end of the nineteenth century, just as the interpretations of Mill, Taussig, Giddings, and Cairnes do for the Victorian and Edwardian periods as a whole. The dynamic and subtle divisions drawn within the labour force by these economists contrast strongly with both the rather crude system of divisions hypothesized by modern SLM theorists and the simplistic marxist dichotomy of rich and poor, bourgeois and proletariat.

In reviewing the work of the classical economists it was noted that despite recognizing and analysing divisions or segmentation in the labour market, they retained a belief in the fundamentally competitive nature of the market. As with both modern schools, the classical economists stressed the importance of the point at which individuals entered the labour market. The paradox of the most unwholesome and unpopular employments being the worst paid was generally explained through supply side factors: the lack of foresight shown by so many parents in choosing their childrens' occupation and, more importantly, the inability of so much of the population to finance their children during a period of training for skilled employment. This lack of 'foresight' could be recognized by modern neoclassical economists as simply a heavy discounting of future earnings. The poverty of so much of the population made immediate income an overriding concern. These factors meant that the supply of labour capable of only the lowest forms of work was always excessive and tended to drive down the wages of this category of work, distorting the 'balance of advantages'.

In Chapter 4, I attempted to assess the relevance of the ideas which emerged from the theoretical reviews to an understanding of the casual labour

market of late Victorian and Edwardian London. Initially, this market would seem to fit well into an SLM model, having many of the characteristics of a secondary sector. In the case of dock and waterside labour, to which I gave particular attention, I found no obvious barriers to entry. A man could simply present himself at the dock gates and hope that his face fitted, or that his hand would be the one into which a ticket was pressed at random; unionization remained weak despite the great docks strike of 1889. Perhaps the most striking parallel between the secondary sector of the SLM models and the casual labour sector in London was the clear operation of what modern writers term 'feedback'. As I illustrated, it was commonly observed that the casual nature of employment in the docks and other casual trades reacted on the character of the men and produced in them many of the vices and character defects which excluded them from more regular employment.

However, beyond the effects of employment on the character of the casually employed, I would argue that a geographical feedback process also operated. Because access to sources of information on the availability and location of work was crucial, and because those seeking work had to attend hiring points throughout the day, workers in the casual sector, especially in the docks, were forced to live very close to their work, and were therefore unable to participate in wider urban markets. I further argue that this process of geographical confinement was reinforced by the concentration of sweated labour for women in the same areas. The demand for female labour was attracted by the supply of female workers forced onto the market to supplement the inadequate or irregular earnings of husbands and fathers.

However, on closer examination, I believe that the casual labour market can not be said to represent a truly segmented market in the sense adopted by the SLM theorists and that it is in fact instead better interpreted within a human capital framework. It is a mistake to see the docks as a truly open market, lacking any differentiation between job applicants. As I have illustrated, there were in fact primitive forms of job-ladders operating there, a feature associated with the primary sector by SLM theorists. Those who possessed some level of skill at the work, or who attended more regularly, became known to the foremen and secured more regular employment and, consequently, a higher income. Furthermore, every casual employer had a core of permanent men and those who showed special aptitude could work their way up via the innumerable levels of ill-defined preference towards the most secure posts.

I would further argue that the existence of many skilled, relatively well-paid and often unionized casual workers, such as stevedores and lightermen, cannot

be easily reconciled with the modern SLM theories and the characteristics of a secondary sector. Borrowing from the modern neo-classical economists, I would argue that the casual nature of these skilled employments was due to the non firm-specific nature of the skills employed; employers had no incentive to regularize the employment of the holders of these skills. Further, as the dock and waterside trades were predominantly service industries, the employers could not use any capital employed to 'produce for stock' when there was no demand, so reinforcing the incentive to meet declines in demand by reducing the workforce.

The casual labour sector was able to operate in this way because of the over-supply of unskilled labour in London at the end of the nineteenth century. This over-supply can be traced to a number of sources, not least the regular influx of largely unskilled immigrants from the provinces and Europe. However, structural change in industry was another important factor and many of the men who came to the dock gates did so because the investment they had made in their human capital had been devalued by industrial changes. London had more than its share of industries experiencing structural decline, such as shipbuilding, engineering and silk weaving. Such industries had all but disappeared from the capital but they left large numbers of men underemployed or redundant with few prospects other than joining the ranks of the unskilled seeking work in the casual trades.

However, I have strongly advanced the hypothesis that another crucially important source of unskilled labour was boy labour, a social and economic phenomenon which was examined in depth in chapter 7. Even if one argues that the majority of openings available to boys entering the labour market at the turn of the century were unskilled, it was the progress of individuals through their juvenile years which determined their status in later life. Those who entered the low-paid probationary employments for skilled and semi-skilled work, most obviously apprenticeships, or those who entered such employments shortly after leaving school stood the best chance of avoiding unskilled work and the casual sector. Those who took advantage of the high wages available to boy labour in London and remained in such work until their late 'teens failed to invest in their human capital, exploiting instead the limited amount they had accumulated in the board schools. I think that we have here a clear case of the basic dynamic of the neo-classical human capital model, those forgoing earnings in the early part of their careers reaping the rewards in later life through higher pay relative to those who maximized initial earnings.

I have demonstrated that the boy labour issue was particularly important in London during the period as a result of the industrial structure of the city, certain demographic factors and the nature of legal controls on entry to the labour market at this time. The importance given to the point of entry to the labour market by both modern and nineteenth century economists suggests that an understanding of the casual labour market, and indeed of the labour market as a whole, requires an understanding of the boy labour problem. To comprehend the nature of that problem, I believe that we must relate it, in turn, to the question of child labour and the effects of the legislative reforms which had acted on the labour market by controlling the ages of entry of individuals to the market.

Consequently, Chapters 5 and 6 chronicle the legislative intervention, its motivation and its effects. In tracing the development of such legislation I demonstrated that child labour was not a creation of the industrial revolution as is often implied by the more naive discussion of factory legislation but rather that intervention owed its origins to the specific features which child labour took on as a result of that revolution; in particular, the concentration of many individuals at a single location, and the isolation of child workers from the perhaps doubtful benefits of parental or family guidance. Society adopted a surrogate paternalism towards the very young, seeking to restrict their labour because they were thought too young to be 'free' to choose and to protect them both from unscrupulous mill and factory owners and from uncaring parents.

The part played by parents in encouraging and maintaining child labour has, in my opinion tended to be overlooked. In my review of the development of factory and later educational legislation curbing children's access to the labour market, the key role of parents in attempts to evade each successive set of restrictions and so find new employments for their offspring, became apparent. Restrictions on factory work clearly encouraged parents to find new jobs outside the factory; the introduction of compulsory education was similarly hampered by absenteeism and out-of-school labour. I have argued that the failure of successive legislation to limit the child labour problem reflected not incompetence or an absence of serious intent by the legislators but rather the dynamic nature of the problem. As one area for child labour was closed off, so parents reacted by exploring other avenues for employment which made new legislation necessary.

In interpreting the opposition of parents to reform, I would suggest must recognize the importance of the child worker to the family budget. Although the earnings of a child might be thought to be meagre, poverty or near-poverty meant that any earnings, however small, were to be prized. Even a shilling or

two a week was significant. I found direct evidence of this in the innumerable working class biographies of those who grew up in this period:

I cannot remember a time in my life when work did not figure largely in it. ... by the time I was about nine years of age I worked before going to school, and every summer holiday I got a job of some kind or other, to supplement the narrow income of the family.¹

Further, amongst those raised within this tradition of child labour, there remained a belief in the value of work, and a parallel suspicion and disbelief in the value of 'education' of the formal kind offered by the schools. The opportunity costs of compulsory education for their children remained high for many working class parents and it was amongst their children that most of the worst excesses of out-of-school working were to be found.

I believe that the significance of out of school labour in London lay not just in the number of children involved and the often long hours worked, but in the degree to which many of the occupations formed an apprenticeship for boy-labour jobs taken up when the children left school full-time. Even at this level, the children of the poorest section of the capital's population were maximizing their incomes at the expense of their investment in education and gaining an impression of the ease with which they could earn significantly more in boy-labour than a concerned school master might secure for them as a 'learner' or apprentice. I have further illustrated that another way in which the child labour problem fed directly into that of boy-labour was through the restrictions placed on the ability of school-age children to work, as this had the effect of increasing the demand (and hence the wage-rates offered) for boy-labour to do the same work.

Further questions arising from the review of the development of restrictions on entry to the labour market relate to the purpose that education was serving. I would argue that fundamentally, the reluctance of many modern economists to recognize the idea of human capital in writings of the classical economists, rests on the failure of the nineteenth century writers to make a connection between compulsory education and economic investment. However, if one looks at the goals of the suggested education, it is evident that little of it was intended directly as training. It was, rather, a socializing force designed to create ideal citizens rather than ideal workers. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth

¹Brown WJ, 1943, *So Far ...* Allen & Unwin, London, p.20.

century that the education of the labouring masses came to be seen as something which might contribute directly to the economic well-being of the country. At this time, there were increasing calls for more direct, practical instruction to be introduced:

Our schools hampered by the old system of payment by results, have tended to become too unpractical. Teachers have aimed at making the children memorize certain facts of arithmetic, spelling or geography, and generally the facts memorized are comparatively unimportant and of no use in after-life. Children have not been taught in school to apply their knowledge to the practical problems of life before them.²

We are slowly coming to realize that a system of education which does not consciously strive to fit each youthful citizen, physically, mentally, and morally, to play a useful part in the work of the community must stand self-condemned. The old superstition, that an education good in the abstract and regarded as an end in itself would prove serviceable in the rough and tumble of life, is passing away; and we are demanding from our Education Committees more clear thought and less amiable sentiment, more definitely conceived plans and a closer adaptation of curricula to the concrete needs of the industrial world than were to be found in the charming, though vague, dreams of the earlier managers of our schools.³

Even so, many of the critics of boy-labour did not speak of the waste of the human capital or potential of the boys so employed:

What we need to consider is not the sacrifice of a certain number of youths through faulty industrial arrangements, but the lack of training and the manufacture of inefficiency in the majority of boys between school and manhood.⁴

The loss in 'efficiency' was not a loss of basic industrial skills or usefulness, but rather the breaking down of the habits of regularity, neatness, and civility that board schools were supposed to have instilled. The real waste was held to occur in the juvenile years, when the nation allowed its young workers to go untrained. Those concerned with the problem were arguing, in today's terms, that the opportunity cost of allowing boys to pursue these occupations was too high for society to bear.

²Jackson C, 1910, *Unemployment and trade unions*. Longmans, Green and Co., London. p.71.

³Bray RA, 1909, p.404. 'The apprenticeship question.' *Economic Journal* 19 pp.404-415.

⁴Freeman A, 1914, p.3. *Boy life and labour - the manufacture of inefficiency*. PS King and Son, London.

8.2 The Social Centrality of the Labour Market

In exploring the nature of the casual labour market and the related question of boy and child labour, I have drawn attention both to the merits of using economic theory as a means of gaining insight into such questions and to the value of non-quantitative contemporary accounts such as the reports and evidence prepared for and collected by parliamentary, local government, and charitable committees. The first-hand evidence on the workings of the labour market that have been retrieved from these sources and from the autobiographies of the period, go some way towards putting people back into the formerly 'curiously anonymous ... crowded streets'⁵ of Victorian and Edwardian London. I have viewed the operation of the labour market at the level of the individual, in terms of the choices faced by individuals and the pressures that bore down on them in making those choices.

One finding that has emerged strongly, especially from reading contemporary biographies was the fundamental importance of the labour market in people's lives. If we are to understand Victorians and Edwardians, we must understand this central aspect of their lives. Within the limited scope of this thesis, I have demonstrated how the workings of the casual labour market confined populations to the locality in which they found such work, creating secondary concentrations of sweated domestic industries and so reinforcing the immobility of the household. I have also discussed evidence of the likely importance of such concentrations in restricting the horizons of the children of casual labourers in their choice of employment. I have suggested that these constraints operated both through the physical limits on the circuits of information to which children could gain access and (unlike the children of artisans) through the inability of those childrens' fathers to secure work for them with their own employer. The consequence of these factors was I believe to generate the further supplies of unskilled labour on which the casual labour system relied. Further, the labour market may have been important not only in imposing such patterns of spatial segregation but also in encouraging other dimensions of segregation once modern transport systems allowed greater spatial differentiation. It would be interesting to see how appropriate the models of divisions in the labour market constructed by the classical economists are in understanding the planes along which such segregation operated.

⁵Lawton R, 1987, p.269. 'Peopling the past', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 12, pp.259-283.

8.3 Matters Arising

I have been concerned in this thesis with a period which has received relatively little attention to date from historical geographers. Despite the ready availability of relevant source material. I would argue that a major redirection of historico-geographic research towards the close of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth is justified. In many ways, the period saw far more significant changes in the city (see chapter 1) than did earlier years. Within my particular field of interest, the labour market, the significance of this period lies as I have illustrated not only in the increasing legal restrictions on entry into the market, but also in the significant attempts that began to be made at this time to organize the market.

As has been shown, both the casual and the boy-labour problems were seen by contemporaries as problems of disorganization in the labour market, and both provoked the introduction of new structures or institutions to organize the market, most importantly through Labour Exchanges. It would be interesting to study the relative success of these institutions in managing their particular segments of the economy of the early twentieth century city. Certainly, there is a need for further research on the significance of their attempts to organize the disorganized labour market, a field which has received little attention. Having highlighted the importance of circuits of information to the casual worker a number of further questions suggest themselves: most importantly we could speculate as to how quickly the labour exchanges established themselves as sources of information, and how far they simply operated as local clearing houses, locking in opportunities within their local area and reinforcing the localization of job opportunities in large cities such as London.

In relation to entry into the labour market, and casual labour, this study has tended to concentrate solely on the employment of men and boys. If theoretical ideas, both contemporary and modern, have helped us towards a better understanding of some of the processes involved, then so may the application of these ideas to questions concerning female employment in our period. In the conclusion to chapter 3, I discussed Smart's comments on the 'well-marked relegation of women workers towards certain ill-paid trades'.⁶ From the description of women as a 'non-competing' group whose wages were

⁶Smart W, 1892, *Women's wages*. Paper read before the Philosophical Society of Glasgow, 9th September 1891, James MacClehose, Glasgow. p.19.

determined by 'a different law' or 'custom',⁷ it would appear that female labour might fit well into an SLM model as an obvious secondary sector. However, before accepting such a view, I believe we need consider how far the segregation of women could be accommodated within a classical or neo-classical perspective; how far, for example, were the low relative earnings of women a consequence of decisions taken by them in the context of their expectations of the role they expected to play within the family?⁸ Consideration of such issues would be likely to have a significant spatial variation, the role of women in the labour force in London being quite distinct from that of women in the textile areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire, for example. In pursuing such questions, the value of Mill's comments on the low value attributed to female labour resulting from its being a secondary supply may be of particular relevance in the specific context of London.⁹

If I have identified primitive forms of 'job-ladders' in the operation of the docks, there may well have been more explicit and well defined structures developing in other industries, just as the influence of parents in securing posts for their children may have been giving way to more credentialist structures of recruitment. In areas such as this and the study of the significance of the rapidly expanding white collar workers, much work has yet to be done. For geographers, even at the most simplistic level, a host of questions emerge from the constitution of the labour market, and the recognition of the importance of that structure to the urban economy and the lives of the people.¹⁰ To take the example of the classic geographical process of residential mobility, the importance of the labour market in people's lives would suggest that great value should be attached to attempts to link individual residential moves to their employment histories or, more broadly, to link levels of mobility to the trade cycle.

⁷ibid., p.23.

⁸See the comments of Miss Lily H Montagu, who suggested that girls avoided investing in skills because they anticipated marriage disrupting their participation in the labour market. Montagu LH, 1904, 'The girl in the background.' in Urwick EJ, (ed), 1904, *Studies in boy life in our cities*. Dent, London. pp.233-254.

⁹For an interesting Marxist interpretation of the role of female labour in early nineteenth century London, see Alexander S, 1976, 'Women's work in nineteenth century London: a study of the years 1820-50.' in Oakley A and Mitchell J, (eds), 1976, *The rights and wrongs of women*, Penguin, Harmondsworth. pp.59-111.

¹⁰I have discussed some examples more fully in Chapter 1.

8.4 Victorian and Edwardian Structures in Contemporary Labour Markets?

In the popularity of turn of the century calls for raising the school leaving age and expanding the role of national and local government in providing training, we can see direct parallels with much of the current debate on entry to the labour market. As in the early years of the twentieth century our performance in training is contrasted to that of Germany, and the relatively poor economic performance of Britain seen as directly tied to the poor level and quality of training offered to the British workforce and especially school leavers. Once again, there are calls to raise the effective age of entry into the labour market, by introducing universal systems of training for all those aged under eighteen. Such policies rest on a belief that, left to its own devices, the labour market is incapable of finding sufficient educative places for those entering it and that consequently skills shortages are likely to become an increasing problem for the economy.

We might then suggest that the late Victorian and Edwardian debates over 'dead-end' jobs and 'boy-labour' remain relevant to us today. As I have illustrated, the existence of a boy-labour problem in late 19th century and Edwardian London was dependent on the existence of both a supply and demand for that labour. The demand for that Labour in London was, as discussed, led by a number of distinct industries including hotels, newspapers and service industries in general.

In considering whether the problem exists, or is likely to re-emerge in the 1990's we need to consider whether or not there is a significant level of demand for largely unskilled juvenile labour. In looking at the juvenile labour market and recruitment in Britain in the late 1980's and early 1990's, one is struck by the major areas of growth being once again in service industries; leisure, tourism and financial and business services.¹¹ One of Britain's fastest growing industries, in the 1980's, has been and continues to be the fast food industry. In fact, the fast food industry of hamburger and pizza restaurants is currently the largest single employer of first-time school-leavers. Here is an industry with many of the classical features of boy-labour; the bulk of the workforce is aged under twenty-two; the employers commonly experience a 300% annual turnover in staff; the work is almost totally unskilled and the trade is highly seasonal. All these characteristics are strongly reminiscent of the casual and

¹¹ "New entrants to the labour market in the 1990's" Employment Gazette, May 1988, p.270.

boy-labour markets of Edwardian London. Further, the large numbers of school-leavers who choose to work in this industry is explained both by the relative ease of entry to the jobs and by the high wages they offer compared to government-sponsored training schemes, schemes which have often proved difficult to fill despite the constant complaints from industry of shortages of skilled workers. In 1986, the average fast food restaurant offered no training but a minimum weekly wage of between £40 and £49 as compared to the £27 per week on offer to school leavers entering government training schemes.¹² There have been repeated suggestions that the Government should abolish the minimum wage rates for juveniles, a suggestion which has been welcomed by Trust House Forte - one of the country's leading hotel groups - who have mooted the idea of re-introducing bell-boys.

This description of such a major employer of juvenile labour in modern Britain, bears a striking and unhealthy resemblance to much that was discussed in the Victorian literature on juvenile employment. It would be interesting to see whether there is a very close connection between the selection of such jobs and the economic circumstances of school-leaver's families; there is already clear evidence that the incidence of child labour out of school hours is growing and that avoidance of the laws restricting such labour has been increasing as adult unemployment has risen.¹³

One of the most visible examples of child labour remains the newspaper boy or girl. Just as in the Victorian period, selling papers on the street remains amongst the most well remunerated of all child employments, with boys aged from 12 upwards earning as much as £20 a week for two hours work on each weekday evening.¹⁴ In the increasingly credentialist labour market, the damage that such labour may do to the children of the unemployed, where the child may be the only breadwinner in the family, is an obvious example of inter-generational feedback. The Victorian reports of children falling asleep in class due to the hours spent working outside the classroom find parallels in reports from current day teachers. One Bristol teacher, for example, discovered that the

¹²'In Business', B.B.C. Radio 4; broadcast 29th May 1986.

¹³'... in some families children are the only bread-winners'; see the comments of Dave Beer, the General Secretary of the National Association of Social Workers in Education, in 'Illegal little earners', *The Times*, August 30th 1986, p.26.

¹⁴Head J, 1908, 'Childrens hours.' *New Society*, 26 February 1988, p.20.

reason why several of the girls in her class were falling asleep was the hours they were all working in a night shift in a local factory.¹⁵

A further question that emerges from the consideration of the structure of the Victorian Labour Market and the current market, is whether or not the existing unemployment levels of in excess of three million pose a danger of the production of an 'under-class' in the sense in which the workers in the casual and sweated trades represented such a class in Victorian London. Certainly the size of the pool of unemployed workers makes it possible for manufacturers and other employers to return to a process of tailoring their employment of unskilled labour more closely to the demand for their product. This possibility is reinforced by the growth in both absolute and relative terms of the service sector and, in particular, by the growth in the leisure and tourist industries, with their highly seasonal levels of business and many part-time and casual jobs and low levels of skills, firm-specific or otherwise.¹⁶ The number of temporary or casual workers has in fact climbed throughout the 1980's in parallel with the expansion of these service industries.¹⁷ The possibility of the re-emergence of an underclass within British society might be associated with events such as the Poll Tax riot in Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly in 1990. This riot with the associated looting and arson, has been interpreted by many as indicating the existence of a class of people who feel they have no vested interest in society or in its continued stability. It is perhaps not insignificant that the last great riot in London, took place in this same area after a meeting of the unemployed was called by the Fair Trade League in Trafalgar Square on 8 February 1886. In 1886 the London Times commented that "the West End was for a couple of hours in the hands of the mob"¹⁸, a sentiment echoed throughout much of the press coverage of the 1990 riot.

The immediate trigger for the 1886 riot lay in a severe economic depression and a period of exceptionally cold weather which brought the docks and building industry to a stand-still. Such a coincidence of conditions finds a clear echo in the present day; we enter 1991 with a recession just beginning to start to bite and the construction industry in its deepest recession for many years. If

¹⁵ibid. p.21.

¹⁶Green AE, 1986, 'The likelihood of becoming and remaining unemployed in Great Britain, 1984.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers New Series* 11 pp.37-56.

¹⁷King S, 1988, 'Temporary workers in Britain: Findings from the 1986 Labour Force Survey.' *Employment Gazette*, April 1988. p.239.

¹⁸The Times, 9 Feb 1886, Leading article. p.9.

the economic climate is similar to that which helped to generate casual labour in the nineteenth century, current demographic trends would seem to be conducive to the re-emergence of a boy-labour problem. I have argued that one facet of the London labour market towards the close of the nineteenth century which encouraged or aggravated the boy-labour problem was the relative decline in the supply of juvenile labour; my argument has been that the restricted supply encouraged higher levels of pay for participants, thereby further aggravating the gap between the remuneration for dead end jobs and that for skilled apprenticeship. Current demographic trends indicate that once again the supply of juvenile labour to the labour market is falling in absolute and relative terms. In a slightly expanding total population, the number of 16 to 19 year olds is projected to fall from the 3.4 million in 1986 to less than 2.6 million in the mid 1990's¹⁹, and the number of school leavers available for work in Great Britain is expected to fall by over a fifth from 580,000 in 1987 to 460,000 in 1991²⁰. Overall the youth labour market is thought to be heading away from a period of surplus to one of potential shortfall. The 'most obvious adjustment mechanism to meet this shortfall, is a change in relative pay'.²¹ Such pressures can only further enhance the attractiveness of those employments offering the least training, making the recurrence of boy-labour and the production of unskilled adult labour the raw material of the casual labour market, more likely.

A further suggestive parallel between the 19th century labour market and the current day lies in the role of women in the labour market. In reviewing the Victorian casual labour market I highlighted the tendency for women's employment to congregate around the locations of male casual employment and the limitations which this placed upon the mobility of spouses. It would be interesting to consider how far we could find a similar process in operation today. How far, for example, has the structural decline in many of the once dominant industries of the North and other depressed regional economies created a supply of female labour which has attracted employers looking for cheap unskilled labour and so reinforced the immobility of the displaced male workforce in those regions? Further, how far has the supply of female labour created by the poor prospects of employment of the males, only aggravated the original problem both by increasing the supply of labour to an already saturated

¹⁹Employment Gazette. May 1988. p.267-268.

²⁰ibid

²¹ibid. p.273

labour market (of which the poor prospects of the males was a consequence) and increasing the immobility of the male workforce?

It is a worrying thought that attempts by the present government to create a more flexible labour market by, for example, abolishing minimum wage constraints, may be encouraging the return of some of the structures found in the late Victorian and Edwardian labour market. Perhaps the recent government initiated demise of the dock labour scheme, a scheme which had institutionalised the removal of casual employment in the docks, represents an indication of the prospects for a return to these Victorian structures. It may yet be that we will once again see a debate of boy or juvenile labour and the associated evil of casual employment in the 1990's. Certainly, as I have discussed above, supply and demand side factors, and economic and demographic trends would seem conducive to the recurrence of these twin social evils.

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