

**CHILDREN OF THE POOR IN LONDON
1700 – 1780**

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Abstract

Poor children are elusive in historical records, essentially invisible and unheard, and there is a significant gap in the secondary literature for the period 1700 to 1780. This thesis uses a range of largely unexplored material to access the experiences of poor children in London. By placing children in the foreground and examining their experiences by reading archival sources ‘against the grain’, it reveals details of individual lives and substantially changes our understanding of growing up poor in eighteenth-century London. Experiences are explored in five areas where poor children were found in significant numbers: in parish workhouses and as recipients of outdoor welfare relief; in the capital’s charity schools; in the Marine Society, a charity that sent poor boys to sea; in casual work and apprenticeship; and in the courts of the criminal justice system. This project re-appraises the contribution of poor children to the life of the capital, incorporates their experiences into the historical record, and creates a rounded and substantial picture of their lives in a variety of situations. The thesis argues that the deep-seated prejudices of the elite, clearly evident in the rhetoric of eighteenth-century social reform, misrepresented and denigrated the children of the poor, a misrepresentation that has been assimilated into the historiography of the capital. It also suggests that recent historiography has given us an inaccurate account of the functioning of charitable institutions aimed at children and a limited assessment of the capital’s apprenticeship and criminal justice system.

Contents

Tables, charts and illustrations	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Abbreviations	viii
Introduction	1
1700 to 1780	4
Childhood or children?	5
The children of the poor	12
Elite perceptions of ‘the children of the poor’	19
‘Poor’ London	26
A new perspective	32
1. Parish and Workhouse Children	38
Eligible for relief	43
Who is responsible?	48
Workhouse entry and discharge	51
The ‘workhouse family’	55
Experiences of the workhouse child	58
The workhouse regime	60
a. Nursed by the parish	67
b. Workhouse education	72
c. Workhouse labour	74
d. Workhouse religion and discipline	76
A workhouse tragedy	80
Outdoor relief	81
Relief on demand	85
Conclusion	87
2. London’s Charity School Children	92
A new free school	95
Entry procedure	99
‘Objects of charity’	105
Charity school uniform	109
Education versus labour	112
A ‘fine example of an institution’	115

School staff	117
Discipline	122
Public occasions	126
Education and the uses of literacy	129
Conclusion	132
3. Marine Society Children	136
Charities in competition	139
The reality behind the rhetoric	144
The boys' registers	150
The 'criminal' boys	155
Home backgrounds	159
Schoolboy recruits	162
Recruits in employment	164
Conclusion	167
4. Children at Work	170
Casual employment	173
Apprenticeship	179
a. Parish apprenticeship	180
b. Charity school apprenticeship	184
c. Foundling Hospital apprenticeship	188
d. Bridewell Apprentice School	194
A typical apprentice?	199
Apprenticeships for girls	207
Conclusion	212
5. Children and the Criminal Justice System	216
The Age Problem	218
Death or Transportation?	220
Innocent or Guilty?	233
London's Child Thieves	238
Child Witnesses	260
Child Victims	269
a. Clothes Theft	269
b. Murder	272
c. Rape	278
Conclusion	288
Conclusion	291

Tables, charts and illustrations

Tables

1.1	Chelsea Workhouse: Admissions of Children Aged 3 to 14 Years, 1743 – 1780.	52
1.2	Chelsea Workhouse: Reasons for Admissions of Children Aged 3 to 14 Years, 1743 – 1780.	53
1.3	Chelsea Workhouse: Reasons for Discharge of Children Aged 3 to 14 Years, 1743 – 1780.	54
1.4	Chelsea Workhouse: Residents on 5 February 1745, 1755 and 1765.	56
1.5	Mortality-rate for children aged 4 and under born or received in Chelsea Workhouse 1743 to 1769.	69
2.1	Occupations of fathers of boys attending Peter Joye’s Charity School, 1705 – 1707.	106
3.1	Marine Society Recruits, 1770-1780.	152
4.1	Marine Society Boys: Occupations of Parents and Literacy Claimed by the Boys.	176
4.2	Marine Society Boys: Working for their Father or a Close Relative.	177
4.3	Foundling Hospital Children Apprenticed, 1760 – 1770.	190
4:4	Foundling Hospital Children Apprenticed and Fees Paid, 8 July 1767 – 5 June 1771.	190
4.5	Apprenticeship and Work Experience Recorded in the Settlement Examinations of St Luke’s Parish, Chelsea.	201
5.1	Punishments of children aged 8 to 15 and ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ for theft at the Old Bailey, 1740 - 1759	222
5.2	Murder cases involving child victims aged 3 to 15 .	273

5.3	Prosecutions for Child Rape at the Old Bailey, 1730 – 1779.	281
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Illustrations

3.1	Engraving of the Marine Society's Office by J.B. Cipriani (1758).	143
3.2	Engraving by Samuel Wade, Picturing Marine Society Boys, Britannia and Charity in Hanway, <i>Three Letters</i> (1759) and others.	147
5.1	Dr Dodd and Joseph Harris at the place of Execution.	231

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Abbreviations

GL	Guildhall Library
LMA	London Metropolitan Archive
NA	National Archive
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London
OBP	<i>Old Bailey Proceedings</i> : consulted at www.oldbaileyonline.org prior to 1 May 2007
WCA	Westminster City Archive
<i>CSBE</i>	<i>Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examinations, 1733-1766</i> , Tim Hitchcock and John Black (eds), London Record Society 33, (London, 1999).
CWAD	LMA, X/15/37, 'Chelsea Workhouse, Admissions and Discharges, 1743-1799', a transcription of the original records made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003, consulted prior to 1 May 2007 at www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734

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INTRODUCTION

In 1748, seven year-old Francis Eldridge lived in the parish of St John's Hackney in London. His parents, like many poor parishioners in the capital, were not permanent 'objects of charity', but in times of crisis were forced to rely on the parish. Francis had an unsettled childhood. His father absconded more than once and warrants went out for his arrest for refusing to support his family. Francis spent several short periods in the workhouse and watched his mother, Susannah, negotiate with the parish authorities over welfare relief for herself and her four children. Susannah knew her rights, so pushed, manipulated and even made false claims to gain assistance. When the parish was generous, Francis received several pairs of new shoes and various items of clothing, as well as a flock bed and blanket to share with his brothers and sister. At the age of ten, he was sent to the neighbouring parish of Shoreditch for a trial apprenticeship with a weaver, but it was unsuccessful and he returned home. Only children sent out from the workhouse were entitled to parish apprenticeships and Francis had already experienced the stigma of being a workhouse inmate, symbolized by the badge sewn on his clothing labelling him as a 'parish' child. So when circumstances were not desperate, Susannah ignored repeated instructions to take him there for re-admission. They were both astute enough to realize that by avoiding a parish apprenticeship, he could still take casual employment and contribute to the family income. Susannah, nevertheless, valued outdoor relief, and despite not always being entitled to it, made constant applications. After the birth of her fifth child, Francis looked on as his mother's bogus demand for lying-in expenses was refused. When her claim of desertion by her husband was also found to be false, Francis,

like the rest of the family, experienced more straitened circumstances as parish relief was withdrawn. Susannah continued to seek support from the authorities over a number of years but her requests were invariably refused.¹

This story is taken from the archive of the parish of St John's Hackney and in its original form was a series of entries in the minute book of the workhouse management committee. Most social historians dealing with documents of this kind read them from the point of view of the person who wrote them, drawing conclusions about administrators or benefactors and occasionally about the lives of the poor. But historical sources such as this can be read in other ways. Instead of viewing a document through the lens of the official who wrote it, it can be read 'against the grain', in ways not intended by the author.² This enables the historian to adopt a different focus, to see events from an alternative angle, to question the text and to consider what has not been recorded. In the story as told here, Francis Eldridge, a child, was placed in the foreground and his experiences became the point of focus. By collating details from the workhouse minutes over an eight-year period, his life and experiences were retrieved for the first time. By approaching the text in this way, the administration of poor relief in this parish was seen from the recipients' angle, rather than from that of the authorities.

This thesis will attempt to recover the lives and experiences of poor children living in a wide range of London parishes by examining documents relating to parishes,

¹ London Metropolitan Archive, (hereafter LMA), X97/306, 'St John in Hackney Workhouse Management Committee', 13 Aug 1748, 11 Feb 1749, 20 April 1751, 25 May 1751, 22 June 1751, 5 Oct 1751, 25 Jan 1752, 22 Feb 1752, 7 Mar 1752, 2 Dec 1752, 29 Sept 1753, 2 Feb 1754, 26 Oct 1754, 22 Nov 1755, 6 Dec 1755, 13 Dec 1755, 20 Dec 1755, 3 Jan 1756, 24 Jan 1756, 7 Feb 1756, 14 Feb 1756, 28 Feb 1756, 13 Mar 1756, 4 Sept 1756, 9 Oct 1756, 4 Dec 1756, 6 Aug 1757, 16 Feb 1758, 17 Mar 1759. *Justice in Eighteenth-Century Hackney: The Justicing Notebook of Henry Norris and the Hackney Petty Sessions Book*, Ruth Paley (ed), London Record Society 28 (London, 1991), p.201, entry 1146.

² For reading court records 'against the grain' see Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 2003).

charities and institutions and reading them ‘against the grain’. Petitions, lists and registers, which might at first appear unusable, will also be analyzed in this way and cross-referenced with other documents to recover the lives of poor children both as individuals and in groups. Questions will be asked about how the children are portrayed. To what extent do elite sources reflect prejudice or imbalance? Are there inconsistencies or contradictions? Are there new things to be learned? If so, to what extent does any new information differ from that found in the works of generations of historians? Have prejudices or misconceptions been compounded into the historiography? Do old arguments about society’s continuing progress still hold sway?

Information about the experiences of children will also be gleaned from sources containing the words of the poor themselves, pauper autobiographies, court documents, and letters written by them or on their behalf. Once again, no source can be taken at face-value and, like documents written by the elite, each one will need to be unpacked. But children’s experiences are meaningless if they are viewed in isolation so ‘thick description’ will be used, a technique that will explain not just the experiences, but their context within the practices and concepts of eighteenth-century society in London.³ At the time of writing, there is an on-going revolution in the availability of primary source material about plebeian society, both in print and on-line, opening up challenging possibilities for study. By widening the scope of potential sources and by using the experiences of poor children as the point of focus, it should be possible to re-assess our understanding of the systems and structures that surrounded them, and to ask if this new perspective changes anything in the history of London.

³ The term ‘thick descriptions’ was used most famously by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973) He adopted the term from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle.

By these means, this thesis will argue that the deep-seated prejudices of the elite, clearly evident in the rhetoric of eighteenth-century social reform, misrepresented and denigrated the children of the poor in London, a misrepresentation that has been assimilated into the historiography of the capital, giving an inaccurate account of the functioning of charitable institutions aimed at children. It will also suggest that recent historiography has given us an inaccurate account of the functioning of charitable institutions aimed at children and a limited assessment of the capital's apprenticeship and criminal justice systems.

1700 to 1780

The period chosen for this thesis was not the whole of the eighteenth century but the first eight decades when a number of important initiatives were taken on behalf of children and a time when institutions providing for them underwent considerable change. The first eighty years of the century saw the initiation of parish workhouses with gradual expansion of parish relief and changes in workhouse admissions. This was also the period of the inception and development of many of London's charity schools with support from the SPCK. Following the establishment of the Foundling Hospital in 1741, numerous private charities were instigated at mid-century, including several aimed specifically at children. The apprentice system was gradually falling into decline, but the capital continued to provide casual and regular work opportunities for adults and children in a wide variety of occupations and trades. At a time of great concern about property and street crime, the criminal justice system and the punishment of transportation to America was expanded and regularized.

The final year of the chosen period, 1780, forms a watershed or dividing-line,

followed by a period of substantial and accelerating change. The French Revolution and the American War were of enormous social and financial concern for the government. Social class was re-categorized, as the 'middling sort' became 'middle-class' and the labouring poor were designated 'working-class'. The final twenty years of the eighteenth century saw increased urbanization and production, with expansion of a factory system that created new types of employment for both adults and children. Demands on the poor law continued to increase, leading eventually to the institution of the New Poor Law in 1835. In education, the post-1780s period saw the introduction of the Lancastrian monitoring system in schools and the foundation of Sunday schools for the many poor children now employed in factories. Penal reform saw transportation to America replaced by the shipping of convicts to Australia and a wider use of prisons.

The period from 1700 to 1780, therefore, contains specific features and characteristics quite different from those of the following twenty years. It provides an ideal setting for an exploration of the experiences of poor children in a period when no major in-depth research has been undertaken.

CHILDHOOD OR CHILDREN?

The traditional starting point for most social historians writing about childhood or children is Philippe Ariès's *L'enfant et la familiale sous l'ancien regime*, written in 1960 and translated two years later as *Centuries of Childhood*.⁴ This was the first historical study of childhood. Ariès claimed that it was not until the late seventeenth century that a concept of childhood began to emerge. He argued that until that time, infants, who were creatures too fragile to take part in the life of adults, 'did not count'. Only after the age of

⁴ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, translated from French by Robert Baldick (London, 1962).

seven were they absorbed into the adult world.⁵ By the eighteenth century, he argued, society had changed and upper and middle-class children now found themselves at the centre of families where adults were ‘obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood’.⁶

In the 1970s, building on Ariès’s thesis, Edward Shorter, Lawrence Stone and Lloyd de Mause took up further themes relating to parental attitudes and patterns of child rearing.⁷ They approached the subjects from different angles but agreed that over time there was a major change in the concept of childhood and the way in which children were treated.⁸ A decade later, all these historians were taken to task. Linda Pollock, perhaps the most notable critic, considered Ariès’s thesis fundamentally flawed and argued that the ‘history of childhood’ was an area ‘full of errors, distortions and misrepresentations dominated by myths’.⁹ She emphasized continuity rather than change, claiming that the parent-child relationship was a fundamental human experience and that parents had always loved their children.¹⁰

Debates on themes relating to childhood continued into the 1990s.¹¹ Some historians continued to follow Ariès’s notion of change, arguing that childhood and the

⁵ Ibid., p.125.

⁶ See also R.P. Neuman, ‘Masturbation, Madness, and the Modern Concepts of Childhood and Adolescence’, *Journal of Social History* 8 (1975), 1-27.

⁷ Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London, 1976); Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage 1500-1800* (London, 1997); Lloyd de Mause, *The History of Childhood: The Evolution of Parent-child Relationships as a Factor in History* (New York, 1974).

⁸ See also J.H. Plumb, ‘The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Past & Present* 67 (1975), 64-93.

⁹ Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-child Relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge, 1983), p.viii. See also Adrian Wilson, ‘The Infancy of the History of Childhood: an Appraisal of Philippe Ariès’, *History and Theory* 19 (1980), 132-54; Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London, 1984); Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London, 1982).

¹⁰ See also Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bind: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York, 1986), pp.10-11.

¹¹ See Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge, 2001).

child could mean different things in different cultures and at different moments in history. Pollock and scholars considering psychological issues pursued an argument for continuity, maintaining that biological factors are the key to parent-child relationships and child development. By the end of the decade, the debate, which had begun with Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood*, now tended to be dominated by historians whose agenda was the history of the family. Whether the nuclear family was a developing process leading to modernity or whether it was a continuing and enduring structure was discussed at length.¹² Issues about early modern demography, marriage and life cycles also came to the fore.¹³ But by the beginning of the twenty-first century, Naomi Tadmor claimed that the debate was at a 'standstill' and suggested that it be recast, using linguistic analysis, to consider not only the family but also friendship, kinship and patronage.¹⁴

But while the 'history of childhood' continues to be debated and written about theoretically, it tells us very little about the experiences of real children and even less about the children of the poor. Instead, it is the approach of sociologists to the study of children that has encouraged a few historians to research and write about the lives and experiences of the young. The sociology of childhood emerged as a field of study in the 1980s as an effort to expand social, historical and cultural understanding of children, childhoods and age categories; and it is closely linked with the anthropology of childhood. Its perspective is 'child-centred' and it argues that children should be seen as subjects rather than objects, not just as children 'becoming' adults but as 'historical

¹² Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500- 1914* (Cambridge, 1980).

¹³ E.A. Wrigley, *Poverty, Progress and Population* (Cambridge, 2004); J. Gillis, *For Better For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985); Tim Wales, 'Poverty, Poor Relief and Life-Cycle: some evidence from Seventeenth-Century Norfolk', in Richard M. Smith (ed), *Land, Kinship and Life Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984).

¹⁴ Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), p.4.

actors' in their own right, participating in the shaping of social, political, cultural and economic structures.¹⁵ Growing up is seen as the 'history of conflicts', a concept that allows children to engage in historical processes.¹⁶ Harry Hendrick, a historian who examines contemporary welfare policies within a historical context, has taken up this theme and appeals for a child-centred approach to historical writing.¹⁷ He argues that if scholars deny that children have a voice or see them only as passive figures against a backdrop of adult life, they will fail to ask relevant questions and therefore exclude them from history.¹⁸

Over the last fifteen years, only a handful of historians has attempted to write about real children using this kind of approach. An early example is Barbara Hanawalt who, in *Growing Up in Medieval London* published in 1993, used court records, coroner's rolls, and literary sources to capture the lives of London children in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁹ She examined evidence about their treatment and activities and ended each chapter with illustrative stories about individual children, written in what was seen by some as 'a daring historical narrative style'. Her examples of children creating their own peer culture and challenging adult authority demonstrate that

¹⁵ Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London, 1996); Allison James and Alan Prout, (eds), *Constructing and Deconstructing Childhood: Issues in the Study of Childhood* (London, 1997, 2nd edn); Jean Mills and Richard Mills (eds), *Childhood Studies: A Reader in Perspectives of Childhood* (London, 2000); Michael Wynes, *Contesting Childhood* (London, 2000).

¹⁶ Harvey J.Graff, 'Interdisciplinary Explorations in the History of Children, Adolescents, and Youth for the Past, Present, and Future', *The Journal of American History* 85, 4 (Mar.1999), 1538-47.

¹⁷ Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare, Historical Dimensions, Contemporary Debate* (Cambridge, 2003); *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990* (Cambridge, 1997); *Child Welfare and Social Policy: An Essential Reader* (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁸ Hendrick, 'The Child as a Social Actor in Historical Sources: Problems of Identification and Interpretation', in Pia Christensen and Allison James (eds), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (London, 2000), pp.44-45.

¹⁹ Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford, 1993).

children can be taken seriously as active agents in their society.²⁰

More recently, Nicholas Orme went further and tried to see the world from the child's point of view. His *Medieval Children*, written in 2001, teems with boys and girls going about their everyday lives, children who have names and birth dates, rights, needs and individuality. Some of them bemoan the boredom of school, others are rude to their parents, and a few of them are poor.²¹ Orme hoped that his work would lead other historians to see children as a significant factor in society, not just as passive recipients, but also as active influences on what took place.²²

Inevitably in work of this kind, most emphasis tends to be placed on children from upper-class families where sources are readily available. Recovering the lives of poor children is more difficult. Hugh Cunningham has written extensively about childhood and children, focusing particularly on the 'children of the poor', but his approach was to examine the ways in which they were represented in relation to attitudes in class politics, to initiatives in philanthropy and education, and to opinions on the value of children as investment for the future.²³ He acknowledged, nevertheless, that it is possible to capture children's past experiences, 'In sophisticated hands and with adequate documentation it is possible to find out about the experiences of childhood outside the privileged classes ... but not many people have been able to do it'.²⁴

Among recent historians who have successfully researched the experiences of poor children are Anna Davin and Heather Shore. While Davin explored the world of

²⁰ William Corsaro, *Sociology of Childhood* (California, 1997), p.54.

²¹ Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (London, 2001).

²² Orme, *Reviews in History* – 'Nicholas Orme Responds', <http://www.history.ac.uk> Consulted 5 Feb 2003.

²³ Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London, 1995) and *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991).

²⁴ Cunningham, 'Histories of Childhood', *The American Historical Review* 103, 4 (Oct 1998), 1202. See also Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Disordered Lives: Eighteenth Century Families and their Unruly Relatives* (Cambridge, 1996).

childhood as reflected in the poverty of nineteenth-century London and brought alive the experiences of poor children in the homes and streets of the capital, Shore wrote about a subset of the same London children who fell from poverty into outright criminality.²⁵ Davin admitted that the task was not easy. Documents relating to education, work and health in this period are always presented from official points of view, so it was difficult to find information that was not biased by preconceptions. Ideologies of a society interact with what is put into practice so, she commented, ‘ideology is easier to chart than experience’. Davin found many difficult areas, such as the inner life of a family, violence, abuse, children’s fears and beliefs and their views on their own lives, and admitted that while she was able to draw some of her conclusions with confidence, she also had to resort to speculative or tentative impressions. Shore charted and described the rapid rise of juvenile delinquency during the early nineteenth century, attempting to portray juvenile offenders as people by tracing their origins and teasing out their voices and opinions from a range of records.

While Davin and Shore engaged with the experiences of poor children in the nineteenth century, Ilana Ben-Amos’s broad-ranging monograph explored the boundaries between childhood and adolescence in the early modern period. She examined the early life of middle-class and lower-class children at home as they became accustomed to work and recounted their social relationships, leisure activities, religious attitudes, sexual mores and norms and the personal difficulties they encountered, such as the death of a parent or separation from their family.²⁶ Davin, Shore and Ben-Amos all focused on the experiences of poor children in a direct way.

²⁵ Anna Davin, *Growing up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (London, 1996); Heather Shore, *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge, 1999).

²⁶ Ilana Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (London, 1994).

As far as the eighteenth century is concerned, however, poor children still occupy a marginal place in re-constructions of the past and no recent in-depth investigation has been made of their lives. For straightforward depictions of children during this period, we have to return to an earlier historiography of the capital. Dorothy George wrote *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* in 1925, prior to the Ariès debate, and her study is a vivid and scholarly starting point for all histories of London. She made detailed reference to individual lives of poor children and documented the grim experiences of young parish apprentices and child offenders in the metropolis.²⁷ But since the publication of *London Life*, little has been added to our understanding of poor children's experiences and no attempt has been made to incorporate these experiences into the historical record. Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt's two-volume *Children in English Society*, published in 1969 and our most comprehensive account of childhood, reiterated many of George's perceptions.²⁸ Writing largely from the point of view of institutions and philanthropy, Pinchbeck and Hewitt aimed to provide 'a study of social concern for children in England'.²⁹ Their work is imbued with the social attitudes of the times in which it was written, tracing growing community concern and gradual improvement. It tells us comparatively little about the children and their individual lives.

Children, and particularly the children of the poor, have also been neglected in the historiography of eighteenth-century London. Even individual monographs and texts on subjects that relate specifically to children refer to them only in passing. Donna Andrew's *Philanthropy and Police* is a substantial study of eighteenth-century charities, but the

²⁷ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1925, Chicago edn, 2000).

²⁸ Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, Vols.1 and 2 (London, 1969 and 1973).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p.2.

‘objects of charity’, who were often children, are hardly mentioned.³⁰ *The Charity School Movement* by M.G. Jones, published in 1938, focuses on the SPCK’s contribution to the organisation of charity schools and mentions children only briefly.³¹ Institutional histories do provide more information about children, but invariably from the point of view of philanthropists and benefactors. Ruth McClure’s *Coram’s Children*, a detailed but generalised history of the Foundling Hospital, and histories of the apprentice school at the City Bridewell are written from the viewpoint of the Governors.³² Children appeared regularly at the local sessions courts and at the Old Bailey, but crime historians from Peter Linebaugh to John Beattie and Robert Shoemaker make very few references to them.³³ Children in general, and children of the poor in particular, have a negligible role in the historiography of eighteenth-century London. As historical actors, they remain in the wings, referred to occasionally by other players, but rarely taking centre stage in their own right..

THE CHILDREN OF THE POOR

In order to understand the expression ‘the children of the poor’, we need to ask how eighteenth-century people differentiated between children and adults. Concepts of age

³⁰ Donna Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1989).

³¹ M.G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Puritanism in Action* (Cambridge, 1938).

³² Ruth McClure, *Coram’s Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century*, (New Haven, 1981); Edward O’Donoghue, *Bridewell Hospital, Palace, Prison and School*, Vols.1 and 2 (1923 and 1929).

³³ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003 2nd edition); John Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800* (Princeton, 1986); ‘London Crime and the Making of the “Bloody Code” 1689-1718’ in Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Keirn and Robert Shoemaker (eds), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems 1689 – 1750* (Stroud, 1992); *Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror* (Oxford, 2001); Robert Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in London and Rural Middlesex, c 1660 – 1725* (Cambridge, 1991); *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 2004).

and maturity, as anthropologists have shown, have varied through time and across cultures. Boundaries are often blurred and ambiguous.³⁴ Eighteenth-century men and women had a flexible, indeterminate concept of the age and maturity of a ‘child’, and their classification included 24 year-old apprentices as well as three year-old infants.³⁵ ‘Child’ also represented different ages in different contexts and its meaning was interpreted in various ways. In legal terms, for example, the official age of criminal responsibility was eight, although in practice there was flexibility and concessions were sometimes made in the sessions courts and at the Old Bailey for those of ‘tender years’. Early in the century, obscurity in the law resulted in there being two different ages of consent existing simultaneously, ten and twelve.

In the eighteenth century, upper and middle-class children increasingly enjoyed a period of ‘childhood’, typified by long-term schooling, distinctive dress, toys and children’s literature, but children in the poor communities were unlikely to experience this distinct phase. While some poor children attended school, many had to work or assume responsibilities from an early age, so a period of ‘childhood’ within any age parameter is difficult to identify. Even a notional period of indeterminate length bears little relationship to the ‘childhood’ of upper and middle-class children. While there was some trickle-down from the ideas of Locke and Rousseau about education and upbringing, the life experiences, the limited education and the drudgery within casual labour and apprenticeships that epitomized the early years of poor children were vastly different from the experiences and life-style of their richer contemporaries. In the words of Hugh

³⁴ James and Prout (eds), *Constructing and De-constructing Childhood*, pp.18 and 235.

³⁵ Bridewell apprentices were referred to as ‘children’ in the 1710s – see Chapter 4.

Cunningham, 'The lives of the plebeian population allowed little space for the child-oriented home'.³⁶

In this thesis, the age-range considered will basically be 3 to 15 but with a number of references to those who were older. The average age of the Marine Society boys examined in Chapter 3 was 14 but 20 per cent of the recruits were aged 16 to 21. The Bridewell apprentices described in Chapter 4 were referred to as 'children' but those attending the apprentice school before 1767 were admitted at the age of about 14 and remained there until the age of 24.³⁷ Children involved with the criminal justice system presented a particular problem because age information was not given routinely during the period between 1700 and 1780: this issue will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 5. The question of age, therefore, will relate to the sources used but will focus primarily on the ages 3 to 15. 'Childhood', as far as children of the poor experienced it, will be seen as the period when they were subject to adults, their parents, schoolmasters and apprentice masters.

Our understanding of 'the children of the poor' also hinges on our perception of the poor communities and there are two common definitions for 'the poor' of the eighteenth century. The first refers to those members of the population who, unable to cope by themselves, were in receipt of funds from their local parish or from private charity, in other words, 'paupers', those at the bottom of the social pile. The second classifies 'the poor' in more general terms and includes all the labouring classes.

Most historians agree that about 60 per cent of the population in the eighteenth century was poor, although not all experienced the same degree of poverty. The poor

³⁶ Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London, 1995), p.62.

³⁷ George, *London Life*, p.237. A clause in the 1767 Act stated that boys were to be apprenticed to the age of 21 and not 24.

were part of the continuum from the wealthy aristocrat to the beggar, whose experiences and levels of income varied and whose needs were complex and ever-changing.³⁸ About 2 per cent of the population were inmates of parish workhouses, leaving a further 58 per cent to be accounted for and explained. Estimates suggest that between 5 and 10 per cent of the population were permanently on parish relief, with a further 10 per cent treated as casual paupers in times of economic crisis.³⁹ While historians agree that it is impossible to know precisely how many received relief, these figures represent, by any standards, an incredible commitment of resources and organisation. As Joanna Innes pointed out, nowhere else in Europe was tax-funded relief doled out on such an extensive scale.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, these estimates still account for only a relatively small proportion of the poor population. The majority of the poor lived in settled communities, coping as best they could amid the uncertainties of life. Some sought help from private charities or institutions, while others used pawn-broking facilities to cover routine expenses, to regain financial stability after a crisis or to keep destitution at bay.⁴¹ Others managed with the support of kin, friends or neighbours, while the destitute or those without a parish settlement supported themselves by begging or illegal means. Any and every member of the poor population was vulnerable to the consequences of economic depression, seasonal unemployment or the sickness, desertion or death of a parent or spouse, and the swift

³⁸ George Rudé, *Hanoverian London, 1714 – 1808* (London, 1971), pp. 82-83; Penelope Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700 – 1800* (Oxford, 1982), p.134.

³⁹ Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998), p.45.

⁴⁰ Joanna Innes, 'The "mixed economy of welfare" in early modern England: assessments of the options from Hale to Malthus (c.1683-1803)' in Martin Daunton, (ed), *Charity, Self-interest and Welfare in the English Past* (London, 1996), p.165.

⁴¹ Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England, 1700 – 1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003), p.192.

plunge or slow decline into destitution that often followed. Only the most fortunate remained employed, healthy and solvent.

A good, if imperfect sample, of London's settled poor can be found in the 1770s, when nearly 4,000 boys from a range of poor families in London enrolled for sea service with the Marine Society. The Society's officials asked them where they lived and who was responsible for them and recorded the occupations of 2,190 of their parents or close relatives in the Society's registers. London offered a wide range of work opportunities and 1,373 fathers were employed in more than 300 different occupations or trades. Ten fathers were in the workhouse, twelve were 'poor' or 'very poor' and four were in the King's Bench prison for debt. There was a whole raft of weavers, carpenters and sawyers, shoemakers, porters of various kinds, bricklayers, tailors, gardeners, coachmen, soldiers and militia men. Twenty fathers specifically stated that they were journeymen but there could have been more: these included a baker, barber, butcher, pastrycook, pewterer, plumber and a tailor like Francis Place, the 'radical tailor of Charing Cross'. Among the literate were clerks, a schoolmaster, sheriff's officers and customs officials. Two fathers were gentleman's servants, one to Sir Charles Bunbury and the other to Count Dosling. About a hundred craftsmen including makers of instruments, buckles and spectacles, silversmiths, a gunsmith and an organ builder are recorded, together with three apothecaries and two attorneys, fathers with professional qualifications.

In a similar way, the registers list 638 mothers who were employed in a hundred different occupations or trades. Among the destitute was a beggar, twenty who were in the workhouse and eleven who were 'very poor'. A substantial number were charwomen

and washerwomen, weavers, silk winders and spinners. Thirty- five mothers worked in domestic service, and thirty-six were nurses or midwives. Those employed in the clothing industry included seamstresses, tailors, makers of mantuas, gloves and breeches. There were twenty-four shopkeepers, two publicans and six schoolmistresses, upholsterers, a forewoman at the printers and a sexton. One mother was a nurse to Lord Townshend, and two more were servants of the elite, one to Lady Hills of St James's Place and the other to Lady Ashton of Grosvenor Square.⁴²

These parents were just some of the 58 per cent who made up London's poor and lived in settled communities. They included artisans and shopkeepers in steady employment, some of whom were literate; servants of the gentry; and semi-skilled and unskilled labouring men and women. The small minority in workhouses were part of the 2 per cent relying on parish welfare. All these, and many more like them, were the parents of London's poor children, who experienced a range of income levels and dealt with their circumstances in a variety of ways. Their offspring were 'the children of the poor' who are the subject of this thesis.

The theoretical and analytical framework surrounding the lives of the poor employs a variety of terms to identify their methods of survival and explores issues such as life-cycle and household structure. The 'economy of makeshifts', originally applied to the survival strategies of French paupers, has recently been used in an English context to refer to the short-term approaches to survival used by many of the settled labouring poor. Steven King and Alannah Tomkins used this term, but applied it to the most desperate members of the poor population, the narrow band that included those resorting to parish

⁴² National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 'Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships, 1770 – 1780', MSY/O/1-4.

relief and those using crime as a means of ‘getting by’ or making a living.⁴³ Olwen Hufton originally used the term ‘economy of makeshifts’ with reference to all French paupers, noting their ‘aggressive independence’.⁴⁴ In this thesis the term will revert to its original meaning, interpreted widely and incorporating the majority of London’s poor. In the course of their life-cycle or changing circumstances, poor families at all levels were compelled to adopt an ‘economy of makeshifts’ and in practical terms this involved a wide range of strategies. Parents might move their family to cheaper lodgings, discontinue schooling so their children could take casual employment, help at home or work in the family trade. To make ends meet, most bought second-hand clothes, economized on food or participated in the lending and borrowing that goes on in any community. As we have seen, the poor had different ways of making a living and many earned meagre wages with no pension. Even for those on a modest wage, the business of routinely ‘making do’ was part of everyday life. In his boyhood, Francis Place, the son of a publican, raked the gutter to find old iron, which he sold to buy materials to make a paper kite and he sold home-made model sailing boats so he could buy books.⁴⁵ Members of the poor communities, including children, learned to improvise and at times most had to ‘make shift’.

For families not eligible for parish relief, their ‘economy of makeshift’ might have included access to private charity. In her essay, ‘The mixed economy of welfare’, Joanna Innes charted the ‘shifting patterns of thought’ among the elite on the merits of state-funded and private charity that made such a significant contribution to the welfare

⁴³ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750 – 1789* (Oxford, 1974); Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England, 1700 – 1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003), p.13.

⁴⁴ Hufton, p.13.

⁴⁵ Mary Thrale (ed), *The Autobiography of Francis Place, 1771 – 1854*, (Cambridge, 1972), pp.47 and 54.

of the poor during the eighteenth century.⁴⁶ Her exploration of the way public and private charity interacted highlighted voluntary charities, unlinked to government, from which poor children benefited. The essay demonstrated how, by mid-century, Britain equalled the continent in charitable giving.⁴⁷ While the elite were pre-occupied with theorizing and discussing the relative merits of focused charities that provided specific training and skills, and preventative charities that aimed at alleviating poverty and fostering self-reliance, the poor and their children were making practical use of the wide range of charities that were unique to the capital. The very poor had access to parish welfare, which provided care for their children from birth to apprenticeship. Parents whose sons and daughters were eligible for charity school places accessed education and apprenticeship or service placements funded or supported by the schools. Parents whose sons wanted to go to sea had free access to the Marine Society, and single or desperate parents placed their children in the care of the Foundling Hospital. Innes traced elite perceptions and opinions about the poor law and voluntary charities, but links between the records of the poor law and voluntary charities in terms of poor participants have rarely been made. This thesis will demonstrate not only that poor law institutions and private charities formed links to share their resources, but will also show how children, both individuals and groups, made use of several institutions or charities, with not necessarily the overlap that might be expected.

ELITE PERCEPTIONS OF ‘THE CHILDREN OF THE POOR’

How were the poor and their children perceived by the elite? How were they portrayed in

⁴⁶ Innes, pp.139-180.

⁴⁷ Innes, p.154.

elite sources and how do they appear in the historiography today? The poor were much needed in society for they provided essential services for the upper and middle-classes and military and naval manpower in times of national crisis. Subsistence of the poor was vital to the social structure and politicians, magistrates, philanthropists and religious groups went to great lengths to maintain the status quo. A combination of self-interest, anxiety over national security and trade, and genuine humanitarian concern resulted in the creation of laws, proposals and initiatives for the benefit and control of the poor and their children.

Specific concern about vagrant and delinquent children has a long history and when, in 1670, Josiah Child, a wealthy Member of Parliament, wrote *Proposals for the Relief and Employment of the Poor*, he was reiterating a well-worn theme:

The Children of our poor bred up in Beggary and Laziness are by their idle habits contracted in their Youth, rendered for ever indisposed to Labour and serve only to stock the Kingdom with Thieves and Beggars.⁴⁸

More than ten years later, the distinguished lawyer, Matthew Hale, took up the same argument:

Poor Families which daily multiply in the Kingdom ...and do unavoidably bring up their children either in a Trade of Begging or Stealing, or such other Idle course, which again they propagate to their Children, and so there is a successive multiplication of hurtful or at least unprofitable people, neither capable of Discipline nor beneficial Employment.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Josiah Child, *Proposals for the Relief and Employment of the Poor* (London, 1670), p.1

⁴⁹ Matthew Hale, *Discourse Touching Provision for the Poor* (London, 1683), Preface.

The nature of the labouring poor and their children was an ongoing concern and the elite felt compelled to write about them. Daniel Defoe was highly critical of them.

Under stop of Trade, and a general want of Work they are clamorous and mutinous, run from their Families, load the Parishes with their Wives and Children, who they leave perishing and starving ... and feeling they have not Work enough, they will not work at all, and that brings them to wander, starve, beg, steal and be Hang'd. In a Glut of Trade they grow saucy, lazy, idle, and debauch'd.⁵⁰

But even the most desperate members of the poor communities were not all 'clamorous and mutinous' or 'saucy' and 'debauch'd', nor were their children all 'perishing and starving'. As in every society, some were undoubtedly lazy, feckless and dishonest, but others were in dire distress through no fault of their own. Some were considered objects of charity, the 'deserving' poor, a term readily employed when relief was being dispensed. Despite the uncertainties of life, many more were settled in communities, coping alone or with the support of friends or kin.

Deep-seated prejudices within elite society had long been reflected in the laws passed by Parliament in relation to vagrancy, putting poor children to work and offering them only limited education.⁵¹ Debates in the press frequently referred to parents of poor children as vicious, prone to infanticide and abandoning their offspring. Children known as the Black Guard, shoe blacks and street sellers automatically acquired notoriety and

⁵⁰ Daniel Defoe, *The Great Law of Subordination Consider'd* (London, 1724), p.82.

⁵¹ E.g. Statute 43 Eliz Cap 4, binding child apprentices; Statute 7 Jac Cap 1, raising money to bind them and directions on the manner of employment; Acts relating to children and apprentices 1691, 1722, 1747, 1767.

were suspected of crime.⁵² Throughout the century, elite anxieties and fears were aired in pamphlets, letters and sermons, urging order, control and social reform. In well-worn phrases and in unverified, judgmental and disparaging terms, the poor and their children became stereotyped, indistinguishable from one another, in a rhetoric far removed from reality.

This denigration of the poor took many forms. In polite society there was an aversion to dirt and disease and a repugnance to rubbing shoulders with the poor and their children. Henry Fielding, the novelist and magistrate, regarded everyone in London's lower classes as part of 'the mob', disorderly, pugnacious and abusive. Francis Place, in his *Autobiography* and in his collections of papers, gives accounts of the filthy, lewd and disorderly poor of his youth, but he viewed them in retrospect and with the inevitable exaggeration of one who had acquired 'politeness' and now disdained what he had once been.⁵³

Institutions for social reform such as the Society for the Reformation of Manners denigrated the morals of the poor and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge declared the poor in urgent need of religion, labour and discipline. Prior to the building of the Foundling Hospital, a London clergyman proposed the erection of an orphanage in the City so that poor orphaned children 'would be rendered useful Members of the Commonwealth, and not left to remain like Warts and Wens, and other filthy Excrescencies, to the defacing and weakening of the Body Politic'.⁵⁴ The advertising

⁵² Daniel Defoe, *Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business* (London, 1725), quoted in Sean Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast: The Urban Poor in the Cries of London* (Manchester, 2002), p.114.

⁵³ British Library, Add. Ms, 27,825, *Place Papers*, Vol. XXXVII: Manners and Morals, Vol. 1, A. Grossness 1705-1795. B. Grossness Songs. C. Drunkenness 1736-1826; D. Beggars 1706-1826. Mary Thrale (ed), *The Autobiography of Francis Place, 1771 – 1854* (Cambridge, 1972).

⁵⁴ *A Memorial Concerning the Erecting in the City of London an Orphanotrophy or Hospital for the Reception of Poor Cast-Off Children or Foundlings* (London, 1728), p.16.

literature of the Marine Society and the Asylum for Orphan Girls, charities aimed specifically at children, emphasized vagrancy, delinquency and crime, claiming they were rescuing boys and girls from beggary and prostitution. The mission statements of London's charity schools stated that their pupils were children who had been begging and wandering the streets. Thomas Coram, arguably the eighteenth century's most famous philanthropist, and the magistrate, John Fielding, both anxious to justify a thorough reform of London, promoted an image of a capital teeming with abandoned bastards and delinquent children, who were a menace to society and a threat to the social order.⁵⁵

In both art and literature the poor and their offspring were portrayed in derogatory terms. Many of the pictures of street sellers, known as the 'Cries of London', by suggestion and subtle allusion, show the poor and their children as aggressive and dangerous.⁵⁶ The artist and print-maker, William Hogarth, frequently placed poor children in disreputable settings. Two charity school girls drink gin amid the mayhem and squalor of *Gin Lane*, and boy pickpockets are prominent in the crowd watching executions at Tyburn.⁵⁷ Children appear with Tom Nero, a boy from the workhouse of St Giles in the Fields, torturing animals, and a group of urchins sitting in the street near White's gaming house dice and play cards, gambling away everything they possess.⁵⁸ But images used as social critique employ gross exaggeration to make a statement and Hogarth, whose prints promoted industriousness and respectability, was being deliberately provocative. Daniel Defoe's novel *Colonel Jack* follows the experiences of a child-thief living on the streets of London, while his *Moll Flanders* purports to be the

⁵⁵ John Fielding, *A Preventive Plan of Police* (London, 1772-3).

⁵⁶ See Shesgreen, *Images* for an example a false beggar depicted by Marcellus Laroon in *The London Beggar* [plate 3.17], pp.70-71.

⁵⁷ William Hogarth, *Gin Lane* (1750); *Industry and Idleness* Plate 11(1747).

⁵⁸ Hogarth, *Four Stages of Cruelty*, Plate 1 (1751); *The Rake's Progress*, Scene 4 (early 1740s).

autobiography of a bastard child recounting the experiences of her mother, a prostitute.⁵⁹ Picaresque novels, often satirical, depicted the roguish adventures of those of low social class and Defoe was writing for the amusement and titillation of the elite, describing scenes of immorality and turbulence and portraying children from the fringes of society. Artists and novelists created images and had their own agendas, but we need to question these images and search for the reality behind the satirical print, the cartoon and the printed page.

The denigration of the poor and their children, evident in so many sources, has produced stereotyping and imbalance, a misrepresentation that has been absorbed into much of the historiography of London. Dorothy George's *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* was written in 1925 during a period of progressivism and Fabian politics of social improvement. She visualized eighteenth-century London as a disease-infested and vice-ridden city and her descriptions of the misery and degradation of London's poor have dominated and underpinned the work of most historians of recent decades. Squalid, scandalous details of life in a dystopian 'monster' city are frequently reiterated and the historiography of London's poor is characterized by a dogged focus on issues such as riot, drunkenness, prostitution and crime. Roy Porter, one of London's foremost historians, echoing Cobbett's damnation of the capital as the 'great wen', a cancerous sore, described the poor as the pus, 'festering in alleys and warrens'.⁶⁰ More recently, Robert Shoemaker in *The London Mob* called the eighteenth century the most riotous

⁵⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Colonel Jack*, Samuel Holt Monk, (ed), (1722, Oxford, 1965); Moll Flanders (1722, London, 2004). For further examples of literary vignettes of London, aimed to amuse or draw a moral, see Ned Ward, *The London Spy* (London, 1699), John Gay's poem *Trivia* (London, 1716), Jonathan Swift's *Description of a City Shower* (London, 1710), *Low-Life: or How half of the World Knows not how the Other Half Live* (London, 1749, 2nd edn).

⁶⁰ Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London, 1996), p.162; and *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1982) p.16.

period in London's history. Although he traced a development to a more peaceful period, his emphasis was on the gin craze, fighting, slanging matches and those involved in street crime. Portrayals of this kind are interpretations of detailed research but make no allowance for the members of poor communities who were law-abiding, employed and hardworking, or for the many single or sick parents struggling to bring up a family with the help of charity. Nor do they give credit to the thousands of poor children in the capital who, over the course of the eighteenth century, did not create mayhem or indulge in petty or serious crime. Given that those from all social groups who appeared before the criminal court at the Old Bailey during the eighteenth century were only a fraction of those apprehended or undetected, there still seem to have been fewer crime-waves than contemporary inflammatory newspaper reports suggest.⁶¹ While a scholarly approach to the history of crime and an honest portrayal of some of its more colourful characters can be applauded, the tendency of many historians to over-emphasize the sensational and repeatedly highlight atrocious cases and death sentences meted out to children gives a false impression of the dealings of the courts and of the eighteenth-century criminal justice system.

In 1994, Peter Earle described his study, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London 1650-1750*, as 'a snapshot picture of the lives of Londoners in the early years of the eighteenth century'. By using biographical information from the depositions given by witnesses before the London church courts in cases relating to marital relations, probate and defamation, he provided us with a rare glimpse of the working lives of a wide range of men and women living in the capital. Earle acknowledged that life in London

⁶¹ Nicholas Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave: The Debate over Social Reform and Regulation, 1749 – 1753' in Davison, Hitchcock et al, *Grumbling Hive*.

was noisy, dirty and smelly, that the contrasts between wealth and poverty bred prostitution and crime, and that a high proportion of the gin distilled was drunk in the capital, but he also pointed out that

The lives of Londoners were not entirely devoted to booze, sex and vice and not everyone spent all their time in taverns or being jostled in the streets. Women were not all prostitutes, pickpockets or gin-sodden old hags, as one might be forgiven for supposing from the literary and artistic images of the period. Nor were all men lechers, thieves and drunkards. Most people of both sexes lived or tried to live hard-working, respectable lives in this apparently licentious city even if some did conform to lurid stereotypes for most of the time, Londoners had to work and work hard to maintain themselves.⁶²

In recent decades, the historiography of the capital has frequently described poor Londoners in negative terms, so this was an observation that clearly needed to be made. Using the details and data from his sample, Earle portrayed ordinary men and women from the population's largest social group, the settled communities of the capital, in a positive light. This was both unusual and significant, but his study dealt almost exclusively with adults. A balanced appraisal and appreciation of the lives and experiences of the children of the poor is still missing from the historiography of London.

'POOR' LONDON

Before we can begin such as appraisal, we need to see poor children in the context of the capital in which they lived. The population of London in 1700 has been estimated at nearly 600,000, rising to over a million by the end of the century. Until 1750 about a

⁶² Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London 1650-1750* (London, 1994), pp.6-7.

third of this population would have been children under the age of 15.⁶³ Early in the century, the City and Westminster boasted a fine array of houses and public buildings but behind the main thoroughfares was a maze of tenements in alleys, courts and yards, housing the poor and their children. While some City parishes were wealthy, to the north there was a horseshoe of much poorer ones such as St Giles in the Field, Seven Dials, Clerkenwell and Shoreditch. To the east of the Tower, spreading along the northern banks of the Thames from Wapping to Limehouse, were tanneries, distilleries and ship yards; while south of the river were the industrial and dockside areas from Southwark to Deptford. The early development of low-cost housing and taverns in these areas was the direct result of river trades and the demands of sailors. On the opposite side of the City, the West End steadily became an area of conspicuous wealth, with elegant squares, open streets and the housing developments of polite society. On the periphery of this rapidly expanding capital, Chelsea and Marylebone in the west and Hackney and Mile End Old Town in the east were attractive villages at the start of the century, developing later as new roads were made across the fields. London was a city of contrasts and the disparity between opulence and poverty could not have been more marked.

Poor families with children born in London and families who migrated there sought accommodation in the capital's streets and alleys. Dorothy George acknowledged that without statistics and on the basis of 'miscellaneous and incidental' information it was difficult to make rash generalizations about the housing of the poor, but she concluded that overcrowding was general and that most poor people lived near their place of work. She suggested that the standard dwelling was a single rented room, which sometimes doubled as a workshop, and that differences in social status were marked by

⁶³ Ibid., p.19.

the part of the house occupied and the respectability of the street or court. The letting of ready-furnished rooms by the week was common, as tenants were susceptible to unemployment and were constantly moving on. The distinction in status was between the lodger, 'the room-keeper' (who might take in other lodgers) and the 'housekeeper', rather than by the occupation of a greater number of rooms.⁶⁴ But George also argued, 'When we come to consider the parts of London in which the poor lived, the most striking thing perhaps is that these were in many cases also dangerous districts'.⁶⁵ She cited the complaints of shopkeepers, a statement by the magistrate Saunders Welch, and reflections on law and order written by 'disgusted' William Blizard and published by Jonas Hanway, a comment by the Ordinary of Newgate, and several references from the Middlesex Sessions. Henry Fielding's melodramatic pamphlet, *An Inquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase in Robberies* of 1751 was quoted, in which he likened the alleys and lanes of the City and Westminster to a vast wood 'in which the thief may harbour with as great security as wild beasts do in the deserts of Arabia and Africa'.⁶⁶ Finally, George added descriptions of the filthy housing of the poorest classes written by two doctors at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Using these disparate sources, most of which are based on the perceptions of the propertied classes, George created a capital full of streets and alleys of ill-repute, squalid in the extreme.

Much of the low-cost housing in eighteenth-century London was either old or thrown together with poor quality building materials, but the depiction of a collapsing

⁶⁴ George, *London*, p.104.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.91

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.91-8. Henry Fielding, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase in Robberies* (London, 1751), p.76, quoted in George p.91.

shanty-town, filthy and crime-ridden should not be exaggerated.⁶⁷ Conditions were cramped and it is not surprising that meals were taken at cook-shops and that life was conducted in the street. Housing conditions for some were undeniably wretched, but housing was by no means uniform. The great majority of Londoners had a roof over their heads and lived in a house or part of a house.⁶⁸ There were pockets within and outside the City where the poor were found in great numbers but there were poor communities living in a wide range of districts, including the side streets of the West End. In many areas, the settled poor lived alongside the rich, providing them with services and employed in a wide variety of occupations.⁶⁹

As we saw earlier, Marine Society boys in the 1770s were asked who was responsible for them. The registers also recorded where they lived. House numbering began in 1720 and is evident in some of the addresses they gave. Some boys lived in 'rents' north and south of the river.

Lives with his father, a wiredrawer, at 51 Coopers Gardens, Stepney rents, Hackney Road ... with his aunt at Mr Minute's rents, Parrot Yard, East Smithfield ... with his father, a fellowship porter, at number 9 Charman's rents, Blackfriars ... with his father, a plasterer, at number 3 Bull's rents, Southwark.⁷⁰

Others lived at their own or their parent's place of work:

Orphan, lives with his master Nathaniel Reddington, a barber, next to the toothdrawers, Church Lane, Whitechapel ... works with his father, a jeweller, at 6

⁶⁷ Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London*, (London, 2004), p.31.

⁶⁸ Earle, *City*, p.166.

⁶⁹ Jeremy Boulton, 'The Poor among the Rich: Paupers and the Parish in the West End, 1600-1724' in Paul Griffiths and Mark Jenner (eds), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London* (Manchester, 2000).

⁷⁰ National Maritime Museum Greenwich London (hereafter NMM) 'Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships, 1770 – 1780', MSY/O/1-4. MSY/O/1, No. 383, Daniel Lewis, 1771; No.611, Charles Gun, 1771; MSY/O/3, No.7, John Pyke, 1778; MSY/O/2, No 421, James Hill, 1776.

Duke Street, West Smithfield ... his mother keeps a pork shop at number 139
Execution Dock ... his father, a journeyman barber, lives in Tothill Street,
Westminster ... his father a paviour, lives near the Roebuck, James Street,
Grosvenor Square.⁷¹

The capital's taverns and alehouses provided accommodation, a means of contact or a point of reference where no house numbers existed:

Lives at the sign of the Blue Boar, Long Acre ... at the sign of the White Bear in
King Street, Westminster ... his mother, a washerwoman, lives at the sign of the
Bowling Pin, Chancery Lane ... his father, a stucco worker, lives at the Bell,
Newton Street, Holborn.⁷²

While none of these addresses tells us the exact nature of the accommodation, the father or mother of most boys appears to have been employed. These entries give a more orderly and 'normal' impression of poor families living in the capital.

Peter Earle's research into the men and women of London, based on Consistory Court records, included a few parents with young children. The answers given to the question, 'How do you live?' show how they managed to maintain them:

I endeavour to maintaine myself and my family by winding of silke.⁷³

I am by trade a mantua maker and my husband is an upholsterer by which my family consisting of myselfe my husband and two children are maintained.⁷⁴

My husband is a porter and chairman and I sell oysters by which I and my family are maintained.⁷⁵

⁷¹ NMM, MSY/O/3, No. 459, David Handell, 1778; No. 1733, John Cashmore, 1780; No. 531 William Trinmain, 1778; MSY/O/2, No.691, Thomas Ward, 1777; MSY/O/3, No.964, John Murphy, 1779.

⁷² NMM, MSY/O/1, No.293, Thomas Simpson, 1770; No.247, Richard Mons, 1770.

⁷³ GLRO (Now LMA), Consistory Court records, 244 f.368, quoted in Earle, p.196, ref.27.

⁷⁴ GLRO (Now LMA), Consistory Court records, 249 f.151, quoted in Earle, p.196, ref.33.

There is no indication in these statements that these families needed charity, but there were many families with children who did and who made use of parish doles, loans and pawnshops.

Unlike the upper and middling classes, the poor were wage earners, had no property, few personal possessions and did not hold public office. Many historians agree that the steady improvement in material wealth experienced by the upper classes did seep downwards through the classes and was felt to some extent by the poor. The majority of the population of London was therefore in a vulnerable position, with little chance to save and many temptations to spend beyond their means. According to the Consistory Court records used by Earle, relatively poor families who rented accommodation in the capital 'paid one or two shillings a week or between £2 and £5 a year for lodging in one or two rooms, with rather higher rents to the west of the City and rather lower rents to the east'. The lowest rate often quoted for common lodging houses was sixpence a week, or a penny a night, which accords with the lowest figure Earle found in his sample of court records. The very poor who rented accommodation at this rate, had one room, or shared a room, in areas of questionable reputation.⁷⁶

The basic facts given in the addresses and occupations of the parents of poor boys joining the Marine Society and the statements of how other poor parents maintained their children suggest a more ordered life-style among the poor than Dorothy George portrayed. This everyday normality of life in the settled communities of the capital, with its daily routines and varying degrees of hardship and dependence on charitable resources, is missing from the historiography of London. The well-behaved school child,

⁷⁵ Prerogative Court of Canterbury depositions, 24/43 f. 317, quoted in Earle, p.202, ref.91.

⁷⁶ Earle, pp.168-69.

the trustworthy apprentice, the modestly qualified but diligent charity school teacher and the many industrious parents struggling to bring up their family, all of whom can be found in eighteenth-century archives, are rarely mentioned. The eighteenth century has acquired a reputation for being rude and lewd, raucous and riotous, criminal and corrupt, a reputation that is not without some justification, and historians still continue to misrepresent and malign the poor and their children by placing them in a capital engulfed in an apparent nightmare of social disorder.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

If the picture we have of the capital's poor has more to do with elite rhetoric and literary and artistic images than with the reality of their experiences, and if historiography continues to perpetuate myths, then how can we recapture the experiences of poor children from the more orderly and settled communities, separately from these representations? Using an approach new to eighteenth-century history and exploring neglected sources including both elite and pauper scripts, the focus of this thesis will be the experiences of poor children in the capital.

The methodology used in this thesis is not 'child-centred', but nevertheless puts children first. It initially aimed to locate as many sources as possible in the time available where children's experiences were explicitly described or discussed. Decisions about chapter headings, structure and content were determined by the locations and the nature of the sources where most children were found. As a result, in this thesis children's experiences will be examined in five chapters relating to five specific areas: the parish welfare system, London's charity schools, the Marine Society, in a wide range of casual employment and apprenticeship, and in the central criminal court at the Old Bailey.

Individual case studies and examples taken from a wide cross-section of the poor will include children from families seeking education and improvement as well as those who were destitute and troublesome. These cases will attempt to reflect normality, ordinariness, typicality as well as the unusual, so that the experiences retrieved are as representative as possible, rather than just anecdotal. Voices of poor children from the eighteenth century are rarely heard, but children's responses to cruelty and exploitation, and emotions such as fear, curiosity, anger and boredom are not limited to words. Both elite and pauper sources unconsciously bear witness to the sentiments underlying children's actions. In assessing the experiences of children from the poor communities, there will be no attempt to understate poverty or underestimate suffering and tragedy, but rather to restore a balance to distorted perceptions.

As we have seen, poor children who lived in London had access to a unique range of facilities not available to those living elsewhere. In addition to the multitude of rich and poor parishes offering welfare facilities, there were charity schools and hospitals, orphanages and asylums, an extensive range of private charities, and opportunities for casual work and apprenticeship in a variety of urban trades. London attracted the adventurous and the risk-taker, those who sought challenge and those who hoped to better themselves. Some poor families benefited from the facilities on offer, and their children took advantage of charity provision and opportunities for employment. But London created complex problems for many poor families, those who were immigrants to the capital isolated from kin, and those unemployed when economic or family circumstances were in crisis. Many children found themselves orphaned or desperate, with no hope of education and struggling to survive. This thesis asks who the children of the poor were,

how they were perceived by the great and the good, what changed over time and whether poor children had a hand in it.

Chapter 1 deals with the most desperate children and with families seeking support from the parish. Following a preliminary survey of parochial material where the experiences of children were specifically discussed, the decision was made to select three parishes that offered the best records on children. Parochial records from a range of other parishes were used to provide material on outdoor relief. The focus of this chapter, the experiences of children in workhouses and in receipt of outdoor relief, allows us to examine their behaviour and that of their parents within the parish framework, to assess their relationships with the authorities, and to identify opportunities they had for making choices and taking decisions.

The period when young children were growing up was one of the most stressful in the life-cycle of a poor family but some children were fortunate enough to be offered places at London's free charity schools. The purpose and organisation of these institutions have been documented, but we know very little about the children who attended them. The rhetoric of the founders and benefactors claimed that without charitable intervention, their pupils would 'by their wicked actions [be] brought to shamefull untimely Death and Destruction'. The elite extolled the merits of charity schools that prepared children who had previously been 'inured to beggary, pilfering and stealing' for apprenticeship and service.⁷⁷ Chapter 2 uses the Minutes of twenty London charity schools and places charity school children in the foreground of investigation. It demonstrates that gross misrepresentation of their characteristics has been absorbed into

⁷⁷ *A Memorial Concerning the Erecting in the City of London an Orphanotrophy or Hospital for the Reception of Poor Cast-Off Children or Foundlings* (London, 1728), p.11.

the historiography of education in London. This chapter reveals a new level of detail about the schools' entry procedures, the reactions of the poor to education, the interactions between children, parents and school authorities, and the contribution charity school children made to eighteenth-century society.

Service at sea was seen by elite society as a suitable destination for the rebel and the miscreant. The Marine Society, a charity founded in 1756, claimed in its authoritative rhetoric that by sending poor boys to sea it was not only defending the nation in time of war, but was ridding the capital of potential criminals. Thousands of poor boys, described as 'worthless, incorrigible and abandoned' and portrayed to the public as having 'no means of support but theft and beggary', were recruited for service at sea. The image of Marine Society recruits in the historiography is of boys taken from the streets of London, unemployed, destitute and delinquent. Chapter 3 uses sources including the Marine Society's Minutes from 1756 to 1780 and publications by Jonas Hanway concerning the institution. The recruits are the main focus of this chapter and, using the *Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships*, a database was created for the period 1770 to 1780. It demonstrates that the vast majority of boys enrolled were not unemployed street waifs or even 'potential' criminals and that the Marine Society functioned in a way that does not accord with its rhetoric and propaganda.

Employment of poor children is usually associated with parish apprenticeship, but this was a mere fraction of the work opportunities available to children from the poor communities of London. Chapter 4 uses information from the Marine Society Registers to examine children undertaking a wide range of casual employment. Using records relating to apprenticeship from parishes, charity schools, the Foundling Hospital and the

Bridewell apprentice school, it explores children's experiences in a variety of apprenticeship placements. Elite rhetoric decried the children of the poor as 'unprofitable ... neither capable of Discipline nor beneficial Employment', but this chapter demonstrates that London offered a unique range of employment for poor children, who were in great demand within their own families, in local communities and in an increasingly industrialised world. In an attempt to find a typical apprenticeship experience, apprentice and work experiences recorded in the settlement examinations of the parish of Chelsea were explored. Apprenticeship was highly gendered and the experiences of girls were examined in relation to the Marine Society Registers of Girls apprenticed under the bequest of William Hickes.

The elite of the eighteenth century's consumer society was preoccupied with the problem of crime. Chapter 5 examines the experiences of children who became involved with the criminal justice system at the Old Bailey. *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, available as www.oldbaileyonline, is a source quite different from those used in previous chapters and the question of age information in this source is problematic. As Peter King pointed out, 'It is rarely possible to create data on the absolute numbers of juveniles indicted prior to 1791.'⁷⁸ The question of age information and problems inherent to this source will be examined at the start of Chapter 5 and some quantitative material will be produced. The principal value of *The Proceedings*, however, is that it provides a matchless opportunity to access unique information about the lives and experiences of children and records something akin to their actual words. It will therefore be used in this chapter primarily as qualitative material. This chapter focuses on the experiences of those

⁷⁸ Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge, 2006), p.76.

who appeared before the court as defendants, witnesses and victims of crime and it attempts to find out who they were and why they were vulnerable.

By placing poor children in the foreground of investigation, it is possible to retrieve for the first time a range of experiences both typical and extraordinary, but always unique. This thesis, which has emerged directly out of the research, argues that the rhetoric of social reform has misrepresented the children of the poor communities and that this distortion has been assimilated into the historiography of London and its institutions. Seen within the context of eighteenth-century society, the experiences of poor children shed new light on the varied roles played by them as historical actors in the drama that was eighteenth-century London, but also on the real functions of the systems and structures that served and surrounded them.

CHAPTER 1

PARISH AND WORKHOUSE CHILDREN

On 15 July 1761, five year-old Elizabeth Coleman entered the workhouse of St Luke's Chelsea with her parents and her brother Richard. The whole family had the itch. A month later, when her father was well enough to leave, he was given a relief payment of a shilling, new shoes, a coat and a pair of breeches. Thirteen year-old Richard was eligible for a parish apprenticeship, so when he recovered, the overseer sent him for a trial period with a local tradesman. Elizabeth stayed in the workhouse until mid October and was only allowed to leave when the authorities were sure her mother could care for her.¹ The Coleman family had suffered a temporary setback, their stay in the workhouse was brief, and as far as we know they were not admitted again.

Eight year-old Elizabeth Ummell was admitted to the same workhouse on 16 October 1758 with her parents, her sister Sarah, and her brother James. Sarah, who was four, died the following day and her father, a consumptive, a week later. Elizabeth and James remained in the workhouse with their mother until the following summer, when three year-old James also died. Their mother, now a widow needing to support herself, asked to be discharged, but Elizabeth remained in parish care for the next five years until she was eligible for apprenticeship.² For the Ummell family entry into parochial care marked the beginning of a series of tragic events and for Elizabeth an extended period living in an institution as a 'parish' child.

¹ London Metropolitan Archive (hereafter LMA), X/15/37, 'St Luke's Chelsea, Workhouse Register 1743-1799' a transcription of the original records made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003, available on [www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html) (hereafter CWAD), 15 July 1761, 14 Aug 1761, 10 Sept 1761, 10 Oct 1761, 20 Oct 1761.

² CWAD, 16 Oct 1758, 17 Oct 1758, 23 Oct 1758, 18 July 1759, 6 Aug 1759, 2 Sept 1763.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century families like these, who were unable to support themselves, were maintained by outdoor relief from their parish. The able-bodied were provided with work, the desperate were supplied with bread, clothing, fuel, money or the payment of rent, and pauper children were set to work and apprenticed. Almshouses or poorhouses accommodated the infirm. But in the mid 1710s, several workhouses in the East Midlands and Essex came to the attention of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, a religious organisation that had helped establish charity schools. Matthew Marryott, an independent poor relief contractor, demonstrated the financial benefits of a workhouse to a parish, and in 1725, when several more successful institutions had been established, the SPCK published accounts of them, encouraging the establishment of workhouses elsewhere. The Society saw workhouses as a means of catering for the poorest members of society and of instilling morality and a work ethic into the poor by means of religious instruction.³ Central government had largely handed over responsibility for the poor to local authorities so the SPCK took the opportunity to disseminate information and opinion and to foster enthusiasm for workhouses along religious lines.⁴ The Workhouse Test Act of 1723 enabled all parishes, with the consent of the majority of ratepayers, to set up workhouses and it was not long before hundreds were established up and down the country.

The ideology behind these workhouses was largely formulated by the SPCK, a religious organisation influenced by the Pietist movement in Germany, which

³ For the historiography of the Old Poor Law see K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985); Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782* (Basingstoke, 1990) and *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999); Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1949* (Cambridge, 1998); Tim Hitchcock, Peter King, Pamela Sharp (eds), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (London, 1997); Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003); Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004).

⁴ Tim Hitchcock, 'Paupers and Preachers', pp.157-61.

advocated a revival of practical and devout Christianity. The motivation of the SPCK in encouraging workhouses was, therefore, religious and the SPCK sought to persuade local elites that religion was the means by which workhouse inmates could be trained and moulded.⁵ Workhouses were to be ‘nurseries’ for the poor, who were seen as idle, irreligious and corrupt.⁶ The new workhouses would care for the old, orphaned and destitute but, more importantly, would serve as a deterrent to ‘those bred up in the grossest Idleness and Vice’.⁷ Within these institutions, both adults and children would ‘be bred to labour & industry, virtue & religion’, and by these means, ‘the infinite mischief proceeding from idleness & want of employment’ would be prevented.⁸

Parish elites and ratepayers saw this ideology as fulfilling three criteria: firstly, it enabled them to perform their duty to the poor; secondly, it ensured that the ‘deserving’ poor in genuine need would be provided for; and thirdly, it would discourage the ‘undeserving’ poor, the work-shy and dissolute. Unlike the Bishopsgate Street workhouse initiated by the Corporation of London, parish workhouses did not aim to make a profit from the labour of inmates within the institutions. Inmates would ‘be bred to labour and industry’ but this did not mean that malingerers and wastrels capable of finding employment would be admitted. In practice, the majority of adult inmates were admitted because they were sick and they were discharged as soon as they were capable of finding employment.⁹

⁵ Tim Hitchcock, ‘Paupers and Preachers: The SPCK and the Parochial Workhouse Movement’ in Davison, Hitchcock et al (eds), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp.147-56.

⁶ *An Account of Several Workhouses* (London, 1725).

⁷ ‘A Letter from the Reverend Mr Caleb Parfect, Minister at Stroud, to the Secretary of the SPCK’, 9 Nov 1723, in *An Account of Several Workhouses* (London, 1725), pp.36-42.

⁸ *The Case of the Inhabitants of the Parish of St Giles in the Fields as to their Poor and a Workhouse Designed to be Built* (n.d. 1725?).

⁹ For example see: CWAD, Margaret Blunt, 2 June 1743; Sarah Brown, 4 Oct 1743; Honour Dorwan, 24 Sept 1747; Isabell Driver, 8 May 1753; Alexander Lowry, 2 Aug 1756. This forms a consistent pattern in this set of records.

The poor detested the character and intention of these new institutions and when a workhouse first opened in a parish, far fewer paupers sought admission than had previously accepted outdoor relief. Many on the margins of poverty valued their independence and chose to cope alone. In the Old Town Hamlet at Mile End, for example, more than 70 inhabitants received pensions, but when the workhouse opened in 1725 only six women, twelve boys and five girls applied for admission. The other pensioners, as the authorities noted, 'chose at present to subsist by their own Industry, rather than come into the House'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, despite substantial opposition from the poor communities, both workhouse accommodation and parish relief continued to be sought and was highly valued by those in greatest need.

By 1776, there were 86 workhouses in the parishes of London and Middlesex, and about a dozen pauper farms were run privately on the outskirts of the capital for the poor who were 'farmed out' from City parishes without their own institutions.¹¹ That year, there were 13,605 workhouse inmates north of the river in London and Middlesex, and a further 3,288 in the urban parishes of Southwark and Surrey south of the river, giving a total of nearly 17,000, or around 2 per cent of a population of about 800,000.¹² Workhouse inmates aged 0 to 14 years amounted to about a third.

The methodology used in this chapter, as in all chapters of this thesis, was essentially open-ended and source-led. It aimed to locate sources where the experiences of children were explicitly discussed or described. As many examples as possible were gathered in the time available from material that had not previously

¹⁰ *Account* (1725) p.15. See also Greenwich workhouse, where 'many of those who were burdensome to the Parish have exerted themselves, so as to live by their own industry ... and it has served an effectual Means to drive Beggars out of the Town', p.32. Tim Hitchcock argues that applicants for relief fell by 50 per cent - 'Paupers and Preachers: The SPCK and the Parochial Workhouse Movement', in Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Keirn and Robert B. Shoemaker (eds) *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems 1689 – 1750* (Stroud, 1992), p.146.

¹¹ Elaine Murphy, 'The Metropolitan Pauper Farms 1722 – 1834', *London Journal* 27, 1 (2002), 1-18.

¹² Sheila Lambert (ed), *House of Commons Papers of the Eighteenth Century*, Vol 31, 'Abstracts of the Returns made by Overseers of the Poor, 1777' (London, 1975).

been explored in this way. London's poor law records are voluminous, their survival is uneven and their interpretation is problematic. The survival of workhouse records, in particular, is patchy and for the period of this thesis records varied in quality and detail. Wealthy, well-organised parishes tended to be more efficient at record-keeping than poorer ones. The workhouses themselves varied in size and while those in parishes such as St Margaret's Westminster, St Martin in the Fields and St Botolph's Aldgate accommodated several hundred inmates, others housed a mere handful of paupers in rented dwellings with just a few rooms. The parish of St Dionis Backchurch was just one of several City parishes that did not have workhouses at all.

After an initial survey, the decision was made to look in detail at the records of three workhouses that offered the best information on children's experiences: St George Hanover Square in a wealthy West End parish, St Luke's Chelsea in a 'village' parish to the west of the City, and St John's Hackney in a small, poor parish in the East End. The parish of St Martin in the Fields had excellent records but the workhouse records were not considered because the parish was already the subject of a major research project.¹³ Workhouse minutes for many of the City parishes have not survived for the period and a City workhouse was not seen as the most fruitful choice. Some City parishes without workhouses sent a number of children to pauper farms on the edge of the capital, but again, records relating to these were limited. Nevertheless, several City parishes and others elsewhere in the capital offered a wide range of additional sources and provided useful material relating to children receiving outdoor relief. Children were extricated from overseers' accounts, petitions from paupers asking for relief, settlement and bastardy examinations, registers, apprenticeship

¹³ Jeremy Boulton and Leonard Schwartz, 'The Lives of the Poor in the West End of London, 1724-1867'.

indentures, pauper letters and various miscellaneous documents, all of which could not be included in the final text.

London workhouses varied institutionally, geographically and socially. Their characteristics were largely determined by the wealth of the parish, their size and situation, and by migration, which later in the century influenced the proportion of settled and casual paupers accommodated. In general, workhouse minutes reveal little about the individual characteristics of an institution, so it is impossible to say if the records of the three main workhouses researched here were in any way typical. What these records do emphasize is that the experiences of poverty were very similar wherever paupers were accommodated. These records also provide a starting point from which to research the experiences of poor children in the capital.

This chapter will focus on the experiences of children, both as temporary and long-term inmates of the workhouse and as recipients of outdoor relief. The range of problems faced by children with families, by orphans, and by those abandoned by desperate parents will be explored. Using individual stories, this chapter will reflect on the way children were affected by their situations as they gained access to the parish welfare system. It will argue that although parish workhouses were based on a religious ideology and aimed to instil ‘labour & industry, virtue & religion’, in practice they evolved into very different institutions. Equally, while paupers were seen as ‘idle, irreligious and corrupt’, those who presented themselves at workhouse doors rarely fitted this description and had a wide range of needs and problems that parish officials had not initially sought to address.

ELIGIBLE FOR RELIEF

The three-storey workhouse in the parish of St George Hanover Square was purpose-built in 1726. As the first pauper children were received in, they were led across the

entrance yard past a large central workroom and up two flights of stairs to the garret rooms, where there were initially 32 beds for 64 boys, girls and workhouse servants, and one garret room designated a nursery or infirmary. On the ground floor, the east wing housed a kitchen, food store and separate dining rooms for men and women; while in the west wing, there was a steward's room, clothing and bedding stores, and separate schoolrooms for boys and girls. The first floor initially provided 48 beds for 96 adults.¹⁴ This workhouse, designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor and used as a model for others, was built to accommodate between 150 and 200 inmates.

One cold December day in 1729, eleven year-old Mary Jones, 'a Casual poor and with Child', knocked on the door of the new workhouse of St George Hanover Square. Pregnant and alone, she hoped to receive help as a casual pauper. But the overseer ordered her out of the parish and gave her a shilling, with the warning that she would be whipped if she ever returned.¹⁵ Mary had no legal settlement and the overseer, responsible to local ratepayers, had the right to refuse her. If he admitted her into the workhouse, both she and her child would be chargeable to the parish.¹⁶ This was not an isolated incident and thirty years later, a London merchant sharply criticized the way in which those 'with child and near their time have been inhumanely thrust, or bribed by a small Gratuity, to go from one Parish to another, till at last the unhappy Mother and tender Infant have both perished together'.¹⁷ Tragic incidents of this kind continued to occur, but workhouse officials gradually began to re-assign their resources to provide lying-in facilities and nursing care in response to the needs and demands of desperate young girls and poor women, often unmarried,

¹⁴ British Museum, Grace Views, Supp. Portfolio xxix, 23, Nicholas Hawksmoor's Design for the Workhouse of St George Hanover Square.

¹⁵ Westminster City Archive (hereafter WCA), Microfilm C869 – C904, 'St George Hanover Square, Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1780', C870, 31 Dec 1729.

¹⁶ 1662, 'An Act for the better Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom' (13 & 14 Car II c.12).

¹⁷ Thomas Nash, *A Plea for the Poor by a Merchant of the City of London*. (London, 1759), p.13

who arrived at the doors of the capital's workhouses. By 1732, the workhouse of St George Hanover Square had already designated, not just one room, as Hawksmoor's plan suggested, but 'part of the House' as an infirmary to provide both maternity facilities and accommodation for the sick of all ages.¹⁸

Mary Jones was refused admission to the workhouse because she did not have a settlement, evidenced by a certificate issued by overseers or churchwardens and signed by two Justices of the Peace, a document that was highly prized. It entitled poor families, or poor children in their own right, to support if they were deemed 'objects of charity'. A father's settlement, gained by birth, by apprenticeship, or by renting a tenement for over £10 a year, passed automatically to his wife and dependent offspring. Mordecai Moulslow, a tobacconist by trade, sought help from the parish of St Luke's Chelsea. He was ill, almost blind and incapable of work and his wife and three young children were in a 'deplorable condition'. Eight year-old Henry had watched his father's health and eyesight deteriorate, had endured increasing hardship as the family descended into poverty, and now shared his parents' concern for their future. Gaining parish relief or admission to a workhouse meant submitting to intrusive inquiries and Mordecai answered questions about his lodgings, his wages, his relationships and his children before the local Justices of the Peace. Henry may not have been present when his father was examined by Peter Elers and Robert Mann, but he observed his parents' frustration and sense of powerlessness as they waited anxiously to know their fate. Mordecai left the examination with a powerful legal document in his hand, on which he had managed to sign his own name. It stated that his right of settlement by apprenticeship was in the parish of St Giles Cripplegate. The family had to traipse across London, but a certificate issued by the

¹⁸ *An Account of Several Workhouses* (London, 1732)

parish in which they lived confirmed that they were the ‘deserving’ poor and was their passport to the relief system.¹⁹ The Moulslow family was one of many forced to seek support from the parish, not because the breadwinner was idle or corrupt, but because he was unable to work. Henry was not old enough to be apprenticed, his brother and sister were too young to be employed in the workhouse and his mother needed rest and medical care until she was fit enough to leave and find work.

Not all desperate families had settlements in local parishes and many were sent on their way with their certificate, a pass warrant and a long journey ahead of them. Cost of transport by wagon might be borne by the receiving parish if very long distances were involved, but hundreds of families travelled on foot and were on the road in all weathers.²⁰ Pauper or military passes entitled families or individuals to beg for food or money along the way and distinguished genuine pauper families from vagrants. In his autobiography, James Dawson Burns recounts how as a child he was present at the Mansion House when his mother, a vagrant, was examined by the Lord Mayor, and how he heard her lie about her circumstances in order to obtain a travel pass as a soldier’s widow.²¹ From 1740 onwards, families or individuals could stay in local workhouses or houses of correction at the expense of the county rate, or, if there were no institutions, in local barns.²² Seven year-old Benjamin Home, the eldest of five children, travelled to London with his parents from Chelmsford in Essex, a distance of nearly forty miles. Like many families travelling to their parish of settlement, they must have made at least one overnight stop and workhouse

¹⁹ Tim Hitchcock and John Black (eds), *Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examinations 1733-1750* (hereafter *CSBE*) London Record Society 33 (London, 1999), p.29, No.96, 29 Jan 1741.

²⁰ LMA, ‘Repertories of the Court of Aldermen’, Rep. 149, 2 April 1745, pp.213-14, quoted in Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2004), p.148.

²¹ James Dawson Burn, *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy*, edited by David Vincent (1855, London, 1978), p.58.

²² See Joanna Innes, ‘Prisons for the Poor: English Bridewells, 1555-1800’, in Francis Snyder and Douglas Hay (eds), *Labour, Law and Crime: An Historical Perspective* (London and New York, 1987).

authorities again had to adapt their facilities to the needs of these short-stay inmates. Benjamin's father had served his apprenticeship in the parish of St Martin in the Fields, and now returned destitute.²³ This family was admitted into the workhouse, and Benjamin, brought up in Chelmsford where parish children earned money by picking hops in season, had to resign himself to unfamiliar urban surroundings.²⁴

For some children, entering a workhouse in their father's parish of settlement was far from straightforward. Seven year-old Martha, the eldest of four children born to Sarah Wilks and Joseph Tarlton, who had married in the Fleet in 1751, was on the way to another parish when her life was suddenly turned upside down. Her parents had applied for relief at the London parish of St Leonard's Shoreditch but as Joseph's settlement was at Hanbury in Staffordshire, the family was sent there. On the journey, Joseph absconded, leaving his wife and Martha to carry the two youngest children the rest of the way. When they eventually reached Hanbury, they were told that Joseph had another wife living in the workhouse there, and they were forced to return to London to lodge an appeal with the magistrates at Hick's Hall.²⁵ Hardwicke's Marriage Act, passed in 1753, aimed to do away with secret marriages, which made bigamy easy, but it came too late for Sarah Wilks and her family.²⁶ Martha and her three little brothers were now effectively bastards, forced by circumstances to cope with responsibilities well beyond their years. The victims of circumstances, they returned with their mother to London, where parish authorities now had to provide for a woman without a settlement and her three illegitimate children.

²³ WCA, F5060, 'St Martin in the Fields Removal Examinations', 22 June 1771.

²⁴ *Account* (1725), p.62.

²⁵ LMA, P91/LEN/1200 'St Leonard's Shoreditch, Settlement Examinations', 30 July 1759, 5 Nov 1759.

²⁶ Five cases of bigamy bringing a guilty verdict at the Old Bailey in 1753 resulted in branding: OBP, 11 Jan 1753, John Love (t17530111-17); OBP, 2 May 1753, Thomas Kew (t17530502-19); OBP, 2 May 1753, Thomas Yates (T17530502-27); OBP, June 1753, Ann Cypher, (t17530607-14); OBP, 18 July 1753 John Forrest (t 17530718-50).

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Children who were abandoned, orphaned and illegitimate frequently became the responsibility of the parish.²⁷ Parish overseers, duty-bound to make the best use of resources funded by local ratepayers, made every effort to trace parents, but if they were not found, children became long-term inmates of the workhouse. Hard-pressed to find accommodation for children needing long-term care, overseers often sent recently orphaned children to the parish of their deceased parents' settlement. Already distressed by bereavement, these children had to appear before magistrates so their future could be decided, and were then sent to unfamiliar workhouses among strangers.²⁸ Although settlement certificates were highly prized, settlement legislation could disrupt lives and tear families apart. Until 1744, illegitimate children had a legal right to a settlement in the parish where they were born but after this date they took the settlement of their mother. This ruling was not always followed, however, and in 1771, six year-old Sarah Finch, who was illegitimate, was escorted to the parish of her birth, while her two younger sisters went with their mother to the parish where her husband had been apprenticed.²⁹ In their zeal to instill 'labour & industry, virtue & religion', and to prevent 'the infinite mischief' of an idle poor, workhouse authorities had failed to anticipate that so many young children would need long-term care. Such resources were expensive and, in deference to local rate-payers, overseers frequently passed responsibility to another parish.

On 23 July 1746, Catherine Bengal, a fourteen year-old Indian girl without family or a settlement, was forced to throw herself on the goodwill of her local parish.

²⁷ Guildhall Library (hereafter GL), 2678, 'St Botolph without Aldgate - Admissions to Workhouse', 18 Oct 1741, 11 Dec 1741.

²⁸ For examples see WCA, F6063, 'Destinations of St Martin in the Fields Removal Examinations', 11 Apr 1772; 18 Aug 1772.

²⁹ WCA, F5059, 'St Martin in the Fields, Examinations of Removal', 11 Nov 1771. See also WCA, C894, 8 Jan 1767.

Heavily pregnant, she gave testimony to a magistrate at a settlement examination, so he could decide who was responsible for her maintenance. She was born in Bengal (at the time in East India) and had been a slave to an English lawyer there before being sent to London and given, around the age of nine, as a present to Mrs Ann Suthern of St Martin in the Fields.³⁰ The law stated that if a pregnant servant was lawfully discharged, the master or mistress was not bound to provide for her; 'tis a misfortune laid on the parish which they must bear'.³¹ Catherine had been dismissed, as most servants were when their condition was known, and the parish of St Martin accepted responsibility for her during her lying-in. Following the birth of her son, she had to submit to a bastardy examination in the workhouse to make provision for his future, although she was scarcely more than a child herself. Like other young girls in similar circumstances, Catherine would have been obliged to admit to having sex and give details before disapproving magistrates. She was required to name the father of her child and she made her claim against William Lloyd, a lodger in Bennetts Court. Parish officials would attempt to apprehend him and demand payment to secure maintenance for her child and if financial support was not forthcoming she would have to return to service, leaving her child in the workhouse. William Lloyd's attitude and subsequent actions are unrecorded, but it is perhaps significant that Catherine named her son after him.³²

Catherine Bengal was admitted to a workhouse as a foreign immigrant without a settlement, and as the century progressed, larger London parishes became more flexible, offering temporary and casual relief to vagrant families. Paul Slack judged that social welfare was 'demand-led' rather than 'supply-led'.³³ It seems clear that the

³⁰ WCA, F5037, 'St Martin in the Fields, Examination Books, 1745-1749', 23 July 1746.

³¹ *Compleat Parish Officer* (1729, 5th edn). p.114.

³² WCA, F5037, 23 July 1746, 24 Sept 1746.

³³ Slack, *English Poor Law*, p.54.

demands of the poor and their children were such that workhouse facilities had to change. In 1765, at the purpose-built workhouse of St George Hanover Square, which had already been enlarged, two sheds were erected to accommodate the sick and stave off infection, 'especially in hot weather'.³⁴ Children admitted to a workhouse with their family or in their own right now joined some of the most desperate in society, those at the bottom of the social pile. The majority of inmates continued to be women and children, but casuals increasingly included vagrants and beggars seeking temporary shelter, some idle and dissolute, others left destitute by misfortune. Paupers in a multitude of predicaments filled the wards and workrooms and children rubbed shoulders with the honest and the dishonest, the troubled and the troublesome, and were often in close proximity to the newborn or the dying. Children from dysfunctional families shared beds with those whose parents had been hard working but were now ill or unemployed. Sickness, infirmity and death accounted for much of the insecurity in family life and many children entered workhouses with single parents struggling to cope. Thomas Wood was admitted at his mother's request while she went to the country to gather hops, one of many children for whom the workhouse acted as a crèche: once again, this was a role for which workhouses were not originally intended.³⁵ Orphans were commonplace and a substantial number of children grew up without a traditional family. While many children entered the workhouse for a few weeks until circumstances improved or outdoor relief was offered, others saw the workhouse as their permanent home.

³⁴ WCA, C892, 8 May 1765.

³⁵ LMA, X97/306, 'St John in Hackney, Workhouse Management Committee', 10 Aug 1751.

WORKHOUSE ENTRY AND DISCHARGE

The workhouse of St Luke's, Chelsea opened in 1737, in one of the many country parishes that surrounded the capital. The substantial parochial archive may not be typical, but it is comprehensive and consistent, making it one of the most easily analysed of London's workhouse records. The administration in Chelsea was sophisticated and efficient and the workhouse provided comprehensive services with a mortality rate among inmates lower than that in most London institutions. The workhouse, smaller than some, could accommodate up to seventy people.³⁶ The Register for the period 1743 to 1780, records 2,167 pauper admissions to the workhouse, consisting of 725 males and 1,442 females, including 425 children aged three to fourteen (20%). 13 children entered with their parents, 74 with their mother and 338 were admitted either alone or with siblings. Among these, 20 orphans were recorded, although there may have been more. While the figures produced from this Register may not be typical of all workhouses in the capital, they indicate the periods of time some children spent in parish care and bring into sharp focus the problems and serious consequences families and single parents had to face during the economically vulnerable period when their children were growing up.

³⁶ *CSBE*, pp.xiv – xvii.

**Table 1.1: Chelsea Workhouse Admissions
of Children Aged 3 to 14 Years
1743 – 1780**

Sex	Number	
Male	164	
Female	261	
Total entries	425	
Age at entry	No. of children	Average length of stay in days
3 years	27	909
4	41	609
5	43	779
6	31	837
7	34	585
8	40	719
9	41	351
10	41	381
11	41	236
12	25	289
13	37	135
14	24	109
	425	

Taken from *Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743 -1799*,
a transcription of the original records (LMA, X/15/37) made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003.

Available on [www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html).

Consulted 29 June 2006.

Table 1:1 shows that the youngest children tended to remain in parish care the longest. Unemployable outside the workhouse, they were often admitted when single parents were unable to cope. Many of the older children stayed for a shorter period, some admitted a year or two before being bound or sent into service. Others returned from unsuccessful trial apprenticeships. The average length of stay calculated from all admissions of children aged 3 to 14 years was 524 days. 119 children entered the workhouse more than once, indicating that many families experienced recurrent problems. Of these, 44 were boys and 75 were girls. This imbalance suggests that boys, even at a young age, could find some form of casual employment, but young girls, not yet capable of service, were more difficult to employ and therefore to

maintain if they were not helping at home.

**Table 1.2: Chelsea Workhouse: Reasons for Admissions
of Children Aged 3 to 14 Years
1743 - 1780.**

[These categories roughly follow the text of the original]

Comment on admission	
Mother or father unable to keep	66
Deserted by mother or father	23
Parents poor	18
Father in prison	3
Father 'gone for a soldier'	3
Orphan	20
Bastard	8
Foundling	3
Sick	28
Lame/infirm	4
Returned from hospital	6
Too young to be bound apprentice	4
Returned from trial apprenticeship	59
Passed to another parish	10
Passed from another parish	31
Casual	19
Vagrant	5
Miscellaneous reasons for entry	12
No comment given	103
	425

**Taken from *Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743 -1799*,
a transcription of the original records (LMA, X/15/37) made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003.
Available on [www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html).
Consulted 29 June 2006.**

Children admitted to the workhouse because their parents were ‘unable to keep them’ often came from one-parent families. Some were children of widows or of women abandoned by their husbands, and others were children whose mothers were struggling to survive while a spouse or partner was sick or infirm, in prison or serving in the army or at sea. Fathers who were widowed and found it impossible to care for young children also had to leave them in parish care. Many families faced serious problems and children often suffered the tragic consequences of their parents’ circumstances. Children described in the register as ‘deserted’ were sometimes left at

the workhouse or picked up from the streets by constables.

**Table 1.3: Chelsea Workhouse: Reasons for Discharge
of Children Aged 3 to 14 Years
1743 – 1780**

Reasons for discharge	
To mother	88
To father	29
To parents	3
To relative	15
To Foundling Hospital	8
To school	2
To hospital	10
On trial apprenticeship	89
Bound apprentice	53
Into service	20
Gone out/left	23
Ran away	10
Vagrant	3
Passed to another parish	25
Died	40
No reason given	7
	425

**Taken from *Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743 -1799*,
a transcription of the original records (LMA, X/15/37) made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003.**

Available on [www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html).

Consulted 29 June 2006.

A very small minority of children suffered permanent abandonment and most parents in this parish tried to retrieve their children at the earliest opportunity. In 1761, seven children arrived at Chelsea as casuals, all of whom were orphans of soldiers who died abroad during the Seven Years' War and none had an ascertainable settlement. The previous year, the General Court of the Foundling Hospital had agreed to care for children of deceased military men until they were of apprenticeship age and 34 children of soldiers were admitted from London parishes. Unlike most Foundling Hospital children, they retained their own names, and those of the seven children who arrived at Chelsea in 1761 can be found in both the workhouse and the Foundling Hospital registers. Two years later, the Hospital also admitted a 4 year-old child from

this workhouse because she was lame.³⁷ Chelsea workhouse provided a refuge and a home for many children, but those recently bereaved or separated from their family did not always settle into the workhouse regime and, as the table shows, some ran away.

THE ‘WORKHOUSE FAMILY’

The authorities referred to inmates who had been in the workhouse for some time as ‘the workhouse family’. We do not know exactly what they meant by this, but for the purposes of this thesis, the ‘workhouse family’ refers to children and adults who remained in the workhouse for more than a year. The following table shows the make-up and size of the Chelsea workhouse family and the number of short-term inmates resident on the same date in three consecutive decades.

³⁷ CWAD: Entered workhouse 30 May 1761, Diana Mivres, John Clements, John Brigadoss, Elizabeth Charles, John Bell; 16 June 1761, Ann Allsup; 5 Aug 1761; William Watly, 30 June 1761. LMA, X41/5A, ‘Foundling Hospital Apprenticeship Register’, Received 8 July 1761, Diana Myers, 16328; John Clements, 16329; John Brigaduff, 16330; Elizabeth Charles 16331; John Bell 1633. Received 5 Aug 1761, Ann Alsop 16333; William Whatley 16334. (Barbara McDonnald, aged four, who was lame, was sent in 17 Aug 1763).

Table 1.4: Chelsea Workhouse Residents on 5 February 1745, 1755 and 1765

33 on 5 February 1745

63 on 5 February 1755

85 on 5 February 1765

Workhouse 'Family'			Short-stay inmates		
Resident more than a year			Resident less than a year		
Age	Male	Female	Age	Male	Female
5 Feb 1745					
0 -14	4	5	0 -14	4	2
15 - 21	0	0	15 - 21	0	0
22 - 49	0	4	22 - 49	0	4
50 - 69	0	3	50 - 69	0	2
70+	1	2	70+	1	1
	5	14		5	9
5 Feb 1745 Workhouse 'Family'			19		
5 Feb 1745 total inmates			33		
			57%		
5 Feb 1755					
0 -14	11	12	0 -14	1	2
15 - 21	0	1	15 - 21	0	1
22 - 49	0	3	22 - 49	1	1
50 - 69	3	14	50 - 69	3	2
70+	2	4	70+	1	1
	16	34		6	7
5 Feb 1755 Workhouse 'Family'			50		
5 Feb 1755 total inmates			63		
			79%		
5 Feb 1765					
0 -14	10	17	0 -14	3	2
15 - 21	0	0	15 - 21	0	0
22 - 49	2	10	22 - 49	2	7
50 - 69	3	15	50 - 69	0	5
70+	5	2	70+	0	2
	20	44		5	16
5 Feb 1765 Workhouse 'Family'			64		
5 Feb 1765 total inmates			85		
			75%		

Taken from *Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743 -1799*,
a transcription of the original records (LMA, X/15/37) made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003.

Available on [www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html).

Consulted 29 June 2006.

Chelsea workhouse could accommodate up to 70 people. This table presents two different models of how workhouses were used. Chelsea workhouse opened in 1737, so the empty beds of the earliest year reflect the initial reluctance of the poor to enter the workhouse. The larger number of inmates of the later years reflects a rebuilding programme in the late 1750s that increased the workhouse capacity to 120 and also indicates the period in which accommodation was increasingly offered to the casual poor. Despite these differences, the spread of ages of inmates on all three sampled days is similar and the very small number in the 15-49 age range is marked. The majority of both long and short-stay inmates were women and children, who formed between 69 per cent and 74 per cent of the workhouse family. At Chelsea the workhouse family was large, a substantial number of those in residence made up of the older and younger inmates.

The marked absence of able-bodied young men between the ages of 15 and 21 from the Chelsea workhouse family is not surprising. Boys in greatest need were admitted to the workhouse for a period prior to being apprenticed by the parish or sent to sea unless a parent refused to give consent, so most very poor young men would have been dealt with in this way.³⁸ Workhouses aimed to serve as a deterrent to ‘those bred up in the grossest Idleness and Vice’, but, as noted earlier, they were not intended for those capable of finding employment in the capital. Parish rate-payers would not have tolerated welfare being given to able-bodied young men, who would, therefore, have been unlikely to apply for relief. This is well illustrated by a case brought before the central criminal court at the Old Bailey in 1742. Charles Newton was indicted for breaking and entering a house during the night and stealing a range of kitchen utensils. His mother told the court, ‘The prisoner is my Son. I always was a

³⁸ See the case of Susannah Eldridge’s children in the Introduction p.1

very poor Woman, and took an honest Care to get Bread: my Child did the same, when it was in his Power. I applied to Coleman-street Parish to put him Apprentice, or fit him for Sea, but they would do nothing for him'.³⁹ We do not know the full circumstances of Charles Newton, but he was clearly not considered eligible either for a parish apprenticeship or to be sent to sea. He later turned to crime rather than employment as a means of livelihood, drawing fourteen year-old Richard Cooley in with him to commit a burglary. As a result, they were both transported to America for fourteen years.

EXPERIENCES OF THE WORKHOUSE CHILD

The experiences of a workhouse child are perhaps best captured in the story of Robert Blincoe, a parish orphan who entered St Pancras workhouse in the 1790s. Although his personal account comes just outside the period of this study, many children abandoned in workhouses in earlier decades would have shared some of the emotions he described. Robert Blincoe remembered arriving at the workhouse by coach at the age of four accompanied by a woman but, as he recalled no regret at parting from her, he was convinced that she was not his mother. He thought he had 'passed through many hands' and had 'no recollection of ever having experienced a mother's caresses'. When he discovered that the parish overseers had failed to retain the settlement examination recording his parents' names and personal details, he was devastated. His eyes filled with bitter tears as he explained, 'I am worse off than a child reared in the Foundling Hospital. Those orphans have a name given them by the heads of that institution, at the time of baptism, to which they are legally entitled. But I have no name I can call my own'. When other children received visits from friends

³⁹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 17 June 2003), 28 April 1742, Richard Cooley, Charles Newton (t17420428-26).

or relatives, he asked why no one came to him and wept to learn 'no one had ever owned him'. Rumours circulated that he was the illegitimate son of a clergyman and he was given the nickname 'Parson', but he never knew if the rumour was true or just malicious gossip. Feelings of insecurity never left him. When he was six years old and other children were reciting their catechism, his turn came to repeat the Fifth Commandment – 'Honour thy father and thy mother'. He 'suddenly burst into tears, and felt greatly agitated and distressed, his voice faltering and his legs trembling' because he did not know his father or mother, so could not honour them and 'therefore be a good child'.

In an atmosphere of monotony and discontent, surrounded by inmates who were often petulant and miserable, Robert Blincoe yearned for freedom. Even though he was 'well fed, decently clad and comfortably lodged' he envied the beggars who passed by the window. He felt 'cooped up in a gloomy, though liberal sort of prison-house ... like a bird newly caged, that flutters from side to side and foolishly beats its wings against its prison walls, in hope of obtaining liberty'. He watched the gates and measured the height of the wall, longing for a chance to escape. Rumours that master-sweeps were coming to the workhouse to take apprentices caused the other boys to recoil in horror, but Robert hung from the rafters, hoping exercise would make him tall enough to be chosen. His despair had blinded him to the sufferings of climbing boys, and his rejection came 'as a severe blow'. A year later, when he heard he was to be sent to Nottingham to the Lowdham cotton mill, he was 'intoxicated with joy'. First at the gate, he was 'one of the foremost who mounted the wagon, and the loudest in his cheering', totally unaware of the misery to follow. It was only later that he

recognised 'his ingratitude and folly', and looked back 'to St Pancras as to an Elysium'.⁴⁰

Orphans like Robert Blincoe, abandoned very young without personal details, were sometimes named after the place they were found or after the person who found them. Sarah Lane was left in a doorway in St Martin's Lane, Catherine Woodyard was discovered in a wood yard in Long Acre, and Susanna Bird, abandoned at the back door of the workhouse, was named after the keeper of the watch house.⁴¹ Children abandoned because relatives were unable to support them must have felt isolated and rejected as they adjusted to life alone. Nine year-old Charles Rossey, deserted by his mother and terrified at the prospect of being sent to hospital to have an abscess removed, escaped under the workhouse gate. Twelve year-old Thomas Pym, a workhouse child for nearly two years because his parents were poor, escaped over the wall one night, and ten year-old William McLaughlin left in the same way to return to his family.⁴² But most abandoned or orphan children had neither the courage nor the opportunity to run away and had to resign themselves to a lengthy period in an institution.

THE WORKHOUSE REGIME

The workhouse in the parish of St John's Hackney was first set up in 1728 in a rented house on the north side of Homerton High Street, where it housed 15 paupers. In 1741, the workhouse moved to a larger rented building, a Tudor cottage with tall chimneys, narrow roofs and an inner courtyard, providing accommodation for 30 paupers, very small compared with the workhouses of St George Hanover Square and Chelsea.

⁴⁰ John Brown, *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe, an Orphan Boy* (Manchester, 1832), pp.3-23.

⁴¹ WCA, F4003, 'St Martin in the Fields Parish Records, Workhouse Day Book, 1737-42', 25 Mar 1741, No. 8444; 11 June 1741, No. 8596; 10 June 1741, No. 8593; 23 Apr 1741, No. 8513.

⁴² CWAD, 15 Sept 1746, 21 Jan 1747, 1 Sept 1748, 7 Nov 1748, 27 April 1749.

Children admitted into parish workhouses had already suffered deprivation, so might have been grateful for the warmth, dry clothes and medical services provided. But entry into a workhouse could be a distressing and humiliating process and children must have reacted with repugnance to an environment quite different from even the poorest home. Familiar smells of washing and cooking mingled with the reek of sulphur used to treat the itch and the stench of sweat and urine from the infirm. At night the silence could be broken by the screams of childbirth, the moans of the dying or the sobbing of the bereaved. Admission into the workhouse, whether it was large or small, was a depressing and frightening ordeal for any child. At St John's Hackney all paupers, young and old, had to suffer the indignity of being put into a bath and those suspected of being lousy had their hair cut off.⁴³ Children admitted to the workhouse of St George Hanover Square with scabby heads were shaved.⁴⁴

After the shock of entry and the loss of their independence, parents and children had to submit to workhouse rules and settle into the daily routine. In large workhouses, children were separated from their parents for most of the time, allocated to their own wards and to their own places in the workroom. In small workhouses, where deficiencies in accommodation could not be improved, adults and children spent much more time together.

On entry, children received a set of workhouse clothing, a symbol of order and obedience. Clothing issued to workhouse inmates was not necessarily brand new. The Vestry Minutes of St Botolph's Aldgate records payments for clothes bought at Rag Fair for an inmate going to hospital and old clothes for Elizabeth Smith and John Pearce, a cobbler.⁴⁵ At St Margaret's workhouse, instructions were given that 'exact

⁴³ LMA, X97/306, 6 Apr 1751.

⁴⁴ WCA, C873, 17 Feb 1735, 3 Feb 1736.

⁴⁵ GL, 2642/0033, 'St Botolph Aldgate, Vestry Minutes, 1730'. My thanks to Janice Turner for this reference.

accounts be kept for expense of household good, cloaths and linen including old and worn. A particular marker be fixed to prevent them being taken away or embezzled.’⁴⁶ Nevertheless, ‘the provision of clothing under the poor laws [was] one of the most important and significant functions’, an item of major expenditure for the parish and highly valued by both workhouse inmates and those claiming outdoor relief.⁴⁷

In 1726, as workhouses were being established, Matthew Marriot showed specimens of children’s clothing to the workhouse committee of St Margaret’s workhouse in Westminster

Coat, waistcoat & blew mill’d kersey (body of waistcoat lined with linen)	11/6d
For boys of different sizes	8/-
Boys’ leather breeches	1/6d
Gown & petticoat of blew padua serge (body & gown lined with coarse canvas)	11/6
For girls in different sizes	8/- ⁴⁸

Strong, hardwearing fabrics are in evidence here. In 1991, Beverly Lemire suggested that the ‘worthy poor were never provided with more than the minimum of clothing, so as to discourage sloth and reliance on the parish’.⁴⁹ More recently, however, Steven King argued that parishes were generous in supplying clothes, estimating that between 1780 and 1790 the provision of clothing and household textiles by the parish constituted something like 20 per cent of the total relief budget.⁵⁰ Recent research by Peter Jones based on three parishes, including the metropolitan parish of St Martin in the Fields at the beginning of the nineteenth century, confirmed that workhouse

⁴⁶ WCA, E2573, ‘St Margaret’s Parish. Rules and Orders for the Good Government of the Workhouse belonging to the City Of Westminster’.

⁴⁷ Peter Jones, ‘Clothing the Poor in Early-Nineteenth-Century England’, *Textile History*, 37 (I), 17-37. May 2006, p.34.

⁴⁸ WCA, E2632, St Margaret’s Workhouse Committee Minutes (1726-1727), 15 Sept 1726

⁴⁹ Beverly Lemire, “‘ A Good Stock of Cloaths’: The Changing Market for Cotton Clothing, 1750-1800, *Textile History*, XXII, no.2 (1991), p.317.

⁵⁰ Steven King, ‘Reclothing the English Poor, 1750-1840’, *Textile History*, XXXIII, no.I (2002)

clothing was 'plentiful and of a relatively high standard in terms of materials and construction'.⁵¹

As Matthew Marriot's clothes samples suggest, clothing for children was a particularly important item of expenditure. Not only did children constitute a significant percentage of the workhouse population, but they, and indeed adult inmates, were regularly on display as they attended church each Sunday.⁵² As they processed through the streets, workhouse authorities aimed to demonstrate that their institutions were fulfilling their religious and disciplinary functions. The inmates of St Botolph Without, Bishopsgate, attended church every Sunday with the old people placed in the middle aisle, and the children in the gallery, so that the parishioners could see 'the good Order observed by them'.⁵³ Thomas Dunn, the beadle of St George Hanover Square was allowed four guineas 'for beautifying his Staff and having the addition of a George made in silver thereto in consideration of his constant walking the Church before the Children and patients of the house.' This procession of workhouse inmates, and those from other London workhouses, would not have been acceptable to the elite had they been wearing dirty, bug-laden, ragged clothes.

At mid-century, clothing for a boy or girl cost at least 18/6d, more than pauper parents could possibly afford.⁵⁴ Children in long-term care received individual garments regularly as they needed them and parish children were given a full outfit when they were apprenticed. A typical set of boy's clothing consisted of breeches, a coat and waistcoat, two shirts, two pairs of stockings and shoes with buckles, a hat and gloves. Girls wore shifts or frocks with petticoats, stays, check aprons and caps

⁵¹ Peter Jones, 'Clothing the Poor', p.19.

⁵² WCA, C870, 10 March 1730.

⁵³ *Account of Several Workhouses*, 1732.

⁵⁴ Sheila O'Connell, *London 1753* (London, 2003), p.147.

on weekdays and white aprons, capes and bonnets for church on Sundays.⁵⁵ The city parish of St Dionis Backchurch kept a record of clothing expenditure for individual paupers and their families. The accounts of several families show long-term recipients of relief in this parish were issued with new clothes.

Thomas & Mary Gammel

11 August 1758

6 yards of Russia for 2 shifts and 2 caps	3s 6d
6 yards of Russia for 2 shifts and 2 caps	3s 6d
2 yards Check	1s 10d
1 pr Boys Yarn Hose, 1 pr Girls Yarn Hose	1s 4d
2 yards Red Baise for 2 Coats	2s 8d
3 ½ yards Linsey for 2 gowns	3s 6d
1 pr boys' shoes 1/4d, girls 2/-	3s 4d

6 July 1759

6 yards of Russia for 2 shirts	3s 6d
Coat, waistcoat, breeches, hat	7s 0d
2 pr stockings	1s 4d
A pr shoes	2s 8d

6 May 1760

A pr shoes	2s 8d
2 ½ yds sheeting	2s 11d
½ yd check for aprons	1s 6d
3 ½ yds Linsey for a Gown	4s 1d
For making the Gown	8d
2 pr stockings	1s 6d
A bodice & petticoat	2s 0d

19 July 1760

1 pr shoes	2s 4d
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16 August 1760

1 pr shoes	2s 4d ⁵⁶
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In the parish of St George Hanover Square, workhouse children were sometimes apprenticed as footboys, and received 'a frock waistcoat and breeches, drab, a pair stockings and shoes, two shirts and a hat', new clothing costing £2/7/-.⁵⁷ In 1755, John Newman was issued with a certificate to get his son bound apprentice by the Governors of the Bridewell apprentice school and the parish provided the boy with 2 pairs of shoes and stockings, 2 pairs of breeches and 6 shirts.⁵⁸ Alexander McDonald, a poor boy of this parish, was allowed 1 guinea towards clothing himself.

⁵⁵ WCA, E2632 - 34, 'St Margaret's Workhouse Committee Minutes, 1726-1736', E2632, 2 Sept 1729; LMA, X97/306, 3 Nov 1753.

⁵⁶ GL, 4222/1, St Dionis Backchurch Petty Ledgers – payments, vol 1 (1758-62).

⁵⁷ WCA, C880, 12 August 1752.

⁵⁸ WCA, C882, 3 Dec 1755.

⁵⁹ In 1767, the parish of St Botolph's sent children to be nursed at the parish house in Epping Forest and all children under six were 'double clothed'.⁶⁰ Even in the small parish of St John's Hackney, clothing was in plentiful supply. The standard allowance of 40 shillings at apprenticeship was made to Alice Holt to provide her with a gown, a pair of bodices, a stomacher, stockings, shoes, handkerchief and petticoat.⁶¹ Workhouse children, Thomas, James and Henry Tedden, were each supplied with a suit of clothes, 2 shirts, 2 pairs of stockings, 1 pair of shoes and 2 nightcaps; and their sister Lucy with 2 shifts, stays, 2 petticoats, shoes and stockings and 2 nightcaps.⁶² When Sarah Maile went on liking and returned after nine weeks with her clothes 'torn off her back and very lousy', 7/6d was paid for replacements.⁶³

Children without shoes and stockings were recognised as being in great distress and shoes for growing children, constantly in demand, were an expensive item for the parish. As Peter Jones points out, parish officials must have realised that to refuse paupers decent shoes would probably result in their being unable to work effectively and many children, as we shall see in Chapter 4, were in casual employment long before they were apprenticed. Jones suggests that the overall provision of clothing and footwear by the parish at the beginning of the nineteenth century was characterised by 'a mixture of largesse and economic pragmatism'.⁶⁴ The workhouses examined in this research seem to have taken a similar attitude.

At St Olave Hart Street in the City, as in all workhouses, the day began early. All children over the age of four were required to be 'up, have their hand and faces wash'd, and their heads combed with small tooth'd combs ... by six in Summer and

⁵⁹ WCA, C873, 1 Oct 1734.

⁶⁰ GL, 2690/1 'St Botolph without Aldgate, Guardians Minute Book of the Parish Poor Children, 1767-1833', 21 Aug 1767.

⁶¹ LMA, X97/306, 7 March 1752.

⁶² LMA, X97/306, 3 Nov 1753.

⁶³ LMA, X97/306, 4 Dec 1756.

⁶⁴ Peter Jones, p.23.

eight in Winter'.⁶⁵ Children in workhouses, like those apprenticed into domestic service, were guaranteed clean linen, undergarments that were washed once a week, and most parish institutions in the capital had an oven to bake clothes infected with fleas and lice, which was also available as a public service for the poor living in their own homes.⁶⁶ Personal cleanliness was also considered essential. The philanthropist Jonas Hanway, a regular visitor to workhouses, argued that children should keep themselves clean at all times.

I could never hear any good reason assigned, why children of six or seven are not regularly taught to comb their own hair, and not their faces and hands only, but also their feet, mouths and teeth, and keep the rest of their body clean'.⁶⁷

The routine of the day began as inmates assembled together to recite the morning prayer that ended:

Particularly we bless thee for this comfortable provision that is made for us, that we who were naked: that we who were scattered and solitary are settled in one family, trained up in order and industry and taught to know and serve thee our God.⁶⁸

A disciplined regime of 'order and industry' with unfamiliar restrictions must have come as a shock to children used to roaming the streets or playing unsupervised. The workhouse day was punctuated by regular meals, a treat for children who had arrived at the workhouse starving and destitute. Workhouse menus suggest monotonous fare, limited in nutritional value, but overseers' accounts show that fresh vegetables were

⁶⁵ GL, 869A, fos 1,2., 'St Olave Hart Street, London, Viscount Sudbury Charity, Hospital and Almshouse Committee Minutes 1739-69', quoted in Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, p.100.

⁶⁶ GL, 3137, I, 'St Sepulchre's Workhouse Committee Book, 1727-29', p. 29, quoted in Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, p.139.

⁶⁷ Jonas Hanway, *An Earnest Appeal for Mercy to the Children of the Poor* (London, 1766), p.94.

⁶⁸ GL, 869A, fols, 1, 2, quoted in Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, p.100.

served regularly, and inmates had plum pudding at Christmas and additional treats on holy days.⁶⁹ Parents leaving their offspring in parochial care knew they would be adequately fed. In 1736, several children at St George Hanover Square had ‘large blown-up bellies’ caused by the diet, but this seems to have been a temporary problem, and in general regular meals were a valued part of the workhouse routine.⁷⁰

a. Nursed by the Parish

At the beginning of the century, workhouse children who survived infancy were cared for either within workhouses or by nurses in a neighbouring parish. Jonas Hanway deplored a system that thrust the very young ‘into the impure air of the workhouse, into the hands of some careless, worthless young female or decrepit old woman’, and he campaigned persistently to ‘preserve’ the lives of poor children. Between 1757 and 1763, he visited workhouses across London, collecting statistics about the mortality-rate of young children. In 1762, he obtained a parliamentary Act obliging all workhouses within the Bills to keep precise registers including particulars of receptions, deaths and discharges, and to make returns to the Company of Parish Clerks, who were to compile a yearly abstract. Hanway subsequently ‘selected’ details from these registers for publication, but his selection of parishes varied and some figures were ‘exclusive of those [children] delivered to mothers or discharged’,⁷¹ giving a very prejudiced view of what was actually happening. He claimed that the survival rate of young children in London’s workhouses was only one in five and that in some workhouses all young children born or received had died.⁷² There are no records to authenticate his figures apart from the very limited number of workhouse

⁶⁹ LMA, X97/306, 18 Dec 1756. For further details of workhouse food see Alannah Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester, 2006), pp.50-65.

⁷⁰ WCA, C873, 20 Jan 1736; 3 Feb 1736.

⁷¹ See D, George, p.402, Table II B.

⁷² Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, pp. 6, 20, 76, 83 and 97.

admissions registers that have survived, but his assessment has been absorbed into the historiography of the capital.⁷³

We noted earlier that the administration in Chelsea parish was sophisticated and efficient and parish officials appear to have recorded with integrity children born or received in the workhouse and those who were subsequently discharged or died. The following table shows the percentage of children aged 4 and under who died in Chelsea workhouse according to *Chelsea Admissions and Discharges Register*, both in the period prior to Hanway's Act of 1762 and in the period 1762 to 1769 immediately afterwards, when parishes were required to keep precise registers. There was considerable variation from one year to another but the outcome at the end of each period was very similar.

⁷³ George, pp.401-05.

**Table 1.5: Mortality-rate for children aged 4 and under born or received in
Chelsea Workhouse 1743 to 1769**

Year	No. received	No. died	No. discharged	% died
Before Hanway Act				
1743	2	1	1	50
1744	3	1	2	33
1745	5	2	3	40
1746	3	1	2	33
1747	3	0	3	0
1748	7	3	4	43
1749	11	3	8	27
1750	0	0	0	0
1751	6	1	5	17
1752	8	3	5	38
1753	12	6	6	50
1754	13	7	6	54
1755	10	7	3	70
1756	4	2	2	50
1757	4	4	9	31
1758	11	3	8	27
1759	5	0	5	0
1760	2	0	2	0
1761	8	2	6	25
1743-61	117	46	80	39
After Hanway Act				
1762	16	5	11	31
1763	8	5	3	62
1764	5	3	2	60
1765	10	4	6	40
1766	13	5	8	39
1767	11	5	6	45
1768	14	7	7	50
1769	3	0	3	0
1762-69	80	34	46	42
	314	126	206	41

Taken from *Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743 -1799*,
a transcription of the original records (LMA, X/15/37) made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003.
Available on [www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html).
Consulted 29 June 2006.

The parish of St Marylebone lay outside the area of compulsory enforcement of the terms of Hanway's Acts. Alys Levene's recent research on children in St Marylebone workhouse shows that between 1769 and 1781, children aged 5 years and under left the workhouse in the following ways:

Died	21.2 %
Discharged	50.6 %
To nurses	19 %
Passed or eloped	6.9 %
Remained until apprenticed	1.5 % ⁷⁴

Chelsea Admissions and Discharges Register, 1767 to 1769 inclusive,⁷⁵ shows that 34 children aged 5 years and under were born or received, of whom 24 were discharged and 10 died, a mortality rate of 29.4 per cent, so similar to that of St Marylebone.

In 1778, a parliamentary committee made returns relating to 17 parishes without the wall, 23 Middlesex and Surrey parishes and 10 Westminster parishes, a total of 50. These returns read as follows:

Total number of children received in 11 years	9,727
Died	2,042
Returned to parents	4,600
Apprenticed	2,794 ⁷⁶

The children who died in these parishes between 1767 and 1778 amounted to 21 per cent, well below the overall figure of 41.3 per cent given for the Bills of Mortality at the turn of the century.⁷⁷

It would be unjust to malign the reputation of a philanthropist who made extraordinary efforts on behalf of poor children, but Hanway was a social reformer with an agenda. For him, 'domestic police referred to formulation and operation of

⁷⁴ Alys Levene, Forthcoming article, 'Children, childhood and the workhouse: St Marylebone, 1769-81 (2008), Table 3.

⁷⁵ There is a gap in *Chelsea Admissions and Discharges Register*, which resumes again 1782-99.

⁷⁶ *Journals of the House of Commons*, 1777-78, vol. 36, pp.944-46, in www.bopcris.ac.uk/bop1700/ref14832.html. Consulted 13 Dec 2007.

⁷⁷ According to the Bills of Mortality, between 1730 and 1749 burials of children under five were 74.5 per cent of all children christened. This proportion steadily decreased and from 1790 to 1809 was 41.3 per cent - D. George, *London Life*, p.39.

good regulations for the economy and preservation of the people'.⁷⁸ In his view the poor had an essential role in society for national, economic and mercantile purposes. The rising generation was vitally important and he believed the lives of young children should be preserved and protected. Hanway was involved in many philanthropic endeavours and wrote copiously in pamphlets and newspapers on a wide range of issues. Like many well-intentioned philanthropists in the past, as indeed today, he exaggerated problems to galvanize authorities into action or to gain financial support, so creating propaganda to further philanthropic ends. We will never know exactly how many children died in London's workhouses but numbers may not have been quite as horrific as Hanway, and in turn Dorothy George, have led historians to believe. Some workhouses were cramped and crowded but the services of a midwife and even basic facilities were preferable to giving birth without support and assistance or on the street. Prior to the Act of 1751, the consumption of gin may have had some impact on the mortality rate of very young children, but limited knowledge of obstetrics, hygiene and medication for small babies were likely to have accounted for far more infant deaths both inside and outside workhouses.

Following Hanway's Act, many parishes sent children to be nursed outside London. In 1767, St Botolph's parish sent children to their parish house in Epping Forest, where an inspection later that year showed them all to be 'healthy and well.'⁷⁹ Two years later, inspections were recorded again, both at Epping and Barking, with great interest shown in the children's health.⁸⁰ Hanway also recommended that children under the age of seven, with no prospect of being taken out of the workhouse, should be placed in the Foundling Hospital. Mary Cooper and William Keyser were

⁷⁸ James Stephen Taylor, *Jonas Hanway: Founder of the Marine Society: Charity and Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1985), p.159.

⁷⁹ GL, 2690/1, 21 Aug 1767, 9 Oct 1767.

⁸⁰ GL, 2690/1, 6 Sept 1769.

among the children sent soon after birth to the Foundling Hospital from St Mary's workhouse in Lambeth. They benefited from Hanway's recommendation, remaining in the Hospital's care until they were six, when they were both re-claimed by their parents.⁸¹ But not all parishes took Hanway's advice. Children from St Sepulchre's in the City, for instance, continued to be sent to nurses in Highgate until they were eight. The workhouse committee had decided 'after Maturely Deliberating . . . that the Present Method of providing for the poor Children [was] most advantageous for them and also for the Parish'.⁸² For young children, wherever they grew up, illness was common and life was not assured: it was a case of the survival of the fittest.

b. Workhouse Education

For the children under six who were sent to nurses outside London, their period of years in the country inevitably came to an end and their re-admission to a workhouse at the age of seven or eight was often traumatic. Even the authorities admitted as much.

The time when these children were to be brought home was a dreadful period to the children, and to the feeling Mind, yet, as the expences of their Nursing, Cloathing and Schooling in the Country so very much exceeded the Expence at the Workhouse, great objections were made by many of the Inhabitants to the Expence they were put to, little schools were established at the Workhouse.⁸³

When parish workhouses were first initiated in the capital, the SPCK recommended that children should have basic education based on religion. Boys and girls at St

⁸¹ LMA, A/FH/09/3/1, Foundling Hospital 'Parish Register' 1767-1798; LMA, P85/MYR1/284, 'St Mary Lambeth, Account of children at nurse including details of those sent to the Foundling Hospital 1770-1772'.

⁸² GL, 3142, 'St Sepulchre's Guardians of the Parish Poor Children', 28 March 1773.

⁸³ *Sketch of the State of the Children of the Poor in the Year 1756 and the Present State and Management of All the Poor in the Parish of St James Westminster in January 1797* (London, 1797), p.5.

George Hanover Square were more fortunate than most, for they had their own schools within the workhouse where they were taught to read, write, say their catechism and sing psalms.⁸⁴ But workhouse children in many parishes were taught to read by a 'literate' inmate, such as the 'good scholar' at James Robertson's pauper farm in Hoxton, who was paid to teach reading, 'if the children were so inclined'.⁸⁵ Bibles and primers were provided at St Margaret's Westminster, and children there may have fared better under the guidance of a woman who was given £3 'as encouragement'.⁸⁶ The seven children in Limehouse Hamlet workhouse, all considered 'young and helpless' and unable to work, were 'sent to a School in the Neighbourhood at the publick Charge' until they were eight, when they were bound apprentice.⁸⁷ Facilities, standards and opportunities varied from parish to parish, but the nature of workhouse admissions and discharges was such that most children probably gained little more than the basic elements of reading. Jonas Hanway was not impressed by the standard of education in workhouses and published a damning assessment:

Children often read the scriptures with about as much understanding of them as a parrot could have, and as a task which is extreme irksome, insomuch that they may never look into the book after they leave school.⁸⁸

The level of literacy among workhouse children is difficult to assess and specific evidence about children in long-term care is rare. During the decade 1770-80, about 4,000 boys were recruited by the Marine Society to serve at sea, and 5 per cent of them came from 34 named parish workhouses across the capital. Recruits were asked about their literacy skills 'so that a proper report could be made to the masters they

⁸⁴ WCA, C871, 11 June 1731; C871, 21 June 1732; 15 Nov 1732.

⁸⁵ Murphy, 'Metropolitan Pauper Farms', p.8.

⁸⁶ WCA, E2633, 30 Nov 1727, 14 Dec 1727; E2634, 24 May 1732.

⁸⁷ *Account* (1725), p.15.

⁸⁸ Hanway, *Earnest Appeal*, p.119.

served'.⁸⁹ John Biney, who entered St Martin's workhouse at the age of three, spent five years with a nurse in Kilburn and five more back in the workhouse before joining the Marine Society.⁹⁰ He and his contemporaries John Yeates and James Suthern, who were recruited with him, all claimed they could read.⁹¹ Of the ten boys recruited from the workhouse of St James's Piccadilly, who had been in parish care for between one and four years, five claimed to be able to read and write, and two just to read.⁹² In all, nearly 200 boys were recruited from 34 workhouses across the capital during the decade and more than half told Marine Society officials they could read and about a third of these claimed to be able to read and write. Once again, Hanway's negative and well-publicised comment seems to have exaggerated a problem that parish officials were attempting to address.

c. Workhouse Labour

The tension between the demands of labour and the desirability of education for the poor was aggravated by political pamphleteers and the mood of the times, and this affected attitudes within parish workhouses. At St Botolph's Aldersgate in 1769, for example, the majority of children were employed in the workhouse and only 'a few' went to school.⁹³ As noted earlier, unlike the workhouse run by the Corporation of London, parochial workhouses did not aim to make a profit, but they did attempt to keep elderly inmates and children capable of work employed. In most parishes children capable of work were put to task and in larger workhouses there were formal

⁸⁹ *The Bye-Laws and Regulations of the Marine Society and the Account of the Marine Society* (London, 1775).

⁹⁰ WCA, F4301, 'St Martin in the Fields Annual Registers of Poor Children, 1767 - 1773', 18 Apr 1767, 29 Apr 1767, 3 Sept 1771; National Maritime Museum, (hereafter NMM) 'Register of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships, 1770-1780', MSY/O/1-4. MSY/O/2, 11 Oct 1776, No. 409.

⁹¹ NMM, MSY/O/2, 11 Oct 1776, No. 410; 23 Oct 1776, No.474.

⁹² WCA, D1866 and D1867, 'St James's Piccadilly, Minutes of Governors and Directors of the Poor 1767-1774', and NMM, MSY/O/1, 12 Nov 1770, Nos. 215, 216, 217; 16 Nov 1770, No. 219; 11 Jan 1771, Nos. 400 and 401; 17 Apr 1771, Nos. 631, 632, 633; 5 Sept 1771, No. 706.

⁹³ GL, 2655/1, 'St Botolph Aldersgate, Register of Poor Children not Apprenticed', 1769.

workshops with women employed to teach the necessary skills.⁹⁴ Robert Blincoe at the old St Pancras workhouse regarded himself as ‘not at all overdone, as regarded work’, but hours of employment of children varied from one workhouse to another.⁹⁵ Nine year-old girls at St George Hanover Square were employed for ten hours a day, six days a week, making buttons for shirts and waistcoats. They were unskilled so the quality of buttons varied, but Daniel Vial, a local tradesman, paid the workhouse committee 2/6d a week per person, providing materials free of charge, so the arrangement benefited the parish. As the scheme developed, the girls and a few boys were allowed 1/- a week ‘for their encouragement’.⁹⁶ The hourly rate for a boy chopping firewood at this time is reckoned to have been a penny-halfpenny, so, measured against the hours served in the workhouse, 1/- a week was not generous. It could, nevertheless, purchase three quarts of beer, four suppers of bread and cheese or a dozen best Seville oranges, so workhouse children would not have complained. If their parents demanded it from them, it could provide coal, candles and firewood for over a week.⁹⁷ Boys from St Helen’s Bishopsgate were employed outside the workhouse in the weaving trade, some as draw boys or silk winders, and others running errands. They were paid 2/6d a week for their services, which they handed in to the workhouse master, who kept a record of each boy’s earnings so money could be distributed as they asked for it.⁹⁸ The workhouse boys from St George Hanover Square chosen to go fruit picking three days a week for two months ‘at a rate of 3d a

⁹⁴ WCA, C876, 15 May 17; C877, 8 Feb 1743.

⁹⁵ John Brown, *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, p 12.

⁹⁶ WCA, C871, 16 Aug 1732, 3 Jan 1733. In 1735 overseers at St Luke’s Chelsea asked Vial to operate a similar system there.

⁹⁷ Liza Picard, *Dr Johnson’s London: Life in London 1740-1770* (London, 2000), pp.294 -95.

⁹⁸ GL 3251, ‘St Helen’s in Bishopsgate, Moneys Received from the Boys, 4 March 1769 – 22 June 1771’.

day each' must have enjoyed the country air and freedom from the monotonous workhouse routine.⁹⁹

The highlight of the week for workhouse children who had relatives living in the parish was undoubtedly Sunday afternoon. This was the time when visitors could call or children could join friends outside the workhouse. Orphans, like Robert Blincoe, or those without family close by must have felt particularly lonely at this time. Sunday morning also provided a break from the weekday routine and workhouse children attended church, where they came under the critical eye of the parish elite. Every Sunday boys and girls from St George Hanover Square were led to church by the Beadle, dressed in his laced greatcoat, buckskin breeches, scarlet stockings and carrying a staff bearing a silver head of the King. In 1731, all children 'able to walk to church and back' attended services 'twice every Sunday and at noon every Saints day or Holliday'. No concessions were made for their youth and children had to sit still and join in the responses where they could. Inevitably, from time to time they misbehaved, irritating influential members of the congregation renting pews, who complained about their noise and 'great irregularity in making responses'.¹⁰⁰

d. Workhouse Religion and Discipline

The philosophy of the SPCK stated that no one could be devout and idle, so prayer was theoretically part of every workhouse regime. Nevertheless, an institution that regarded the poor as 'irreligious and corrupt', treated its inmates in patronizing terms, and tried to force religion upon them was liable to run into difficulties. Religious matters were not always taken seriously and children at St John's Hackney witnessed

⁹⁹ WCA, C880, 17 June 1752.

¹⁰⁰ WCA, C870, 10 March 1730; 29 Dec 1731; C880, 29 July 1752.

adult inmates behaving ‘irreverently and indecently by smoking and otherwise misbehaving’ during prayer time. In a spate of disruptive behaviour at this workhouse in 1752, Sarah Mailes and her daughter gave ‘trifling excuses’ for refusing to attend prayers. Their disobedience cost them their next meal.¹⁰¹ Although published regulations of workhouses stated that there should be ‘frequent and regular prayers’ and that the children should be ‘catechized once a month’, the functioning of workhouses was often far removed from these regulations.¹⁰² In reality the atmosphere and discipline depended on the attitudes and goodwill of staff and inmates.

In every workhouse there were adults and children who misbehaved or rebelled against authority. Children who committed minor offences were often given ‘proper punishment immediately’ on the instructions of the workhouse governor. At a time when children were regularly beaten by both parents and schoolmasters, eleven year-old Edward Williams, who had often run away from the workhouse, cannot have been surprised to receive ‘moderate correction’.¹⁰³ In general, officials in parish workhouses had no legal authority to administer corporal punishment, so anyone committing a serious offence was referred to magistrates or, in City parishes, to the Lord Mayor in his capacity as a magistrate. William Worsley, recently apprenticed by the parish, stole from his master, and Samuel Lawson, who ran away from his employer, had to face the ordeal of appearing at the petty sessions before being whipped.¹⁰⁴ Workhouse disciplinary measures included the withdrawal of extra food and privileges and in some workhouses recalcitrant inmates were subject to solitary confinement in the ‘dark room’ or the ‘dark hole’. Workhouse children witnessed

¹⁰¹ LMA, X97/306, 23 May 1752.

¹⁰² WCA, C873, 25 June 1734.

¹⁰³ WCA, C880, 29 July 1752; 14 Aug 1751.

¹⁰⁴ WCA, C892, 19 Oct 1765, C894, 9 Sept 1767.

adults, including their parents, suffering humiliating punishments for unruly behaviour. Ann Nightingale, for being drunk and disorderly, was made to stand publicly on a stool during the dinner hour for three days, without dinner or extra allowances, with a paper fixed to her describing her offences.¹⁰⁵

Children's experiences in workhouses depended to some extent on local circumstances and workhouse staff, but were also affected by the behaviour and attitude of their parents and other adult inmates. Particularly in small workhouses where inmates lived close to one another, children observed adults refusing to work and complaining about the food or the neglect of their material expectations.¹⁰⁶ Others witnessed their parents pleading with parish officials, trying to gain their rights while retaining a little self-respect. Those in long-term care must often have shared feelings of gratitude and relief, but also those of distrust and resentment, frustration and despair.

Children who grew up in parish institutions and were part of the workhouse family learnt to relate to older inmates as well as to their peers. Boys who had grown up in the workhouse sometimes went to sea together in peer groups. Among those who joined the Marine Society in the 1770s were seven boys from St Giles's workhouse who sailed on the *Lenox*, six from St Margaret's on board the *Resolution*, and six from St Martin's who joined the *Arethusa* or the *Courageux*.¹⁰⁷

Eighteenth-century workhouses, funded by rate-payers and run by local parish authorities, did not deliberately set out to be unpleasant. Facilities were relatively depressing and deprived: standards of hygiene and cleanliness sometimes fell below the level hoped for by the authorities and expected by inmates. Inevitably, records

¹⁰⁵ WCA, E2633, 7 Mar 1727.

¹⁰⁶ LMA, CLA/005/01/003, 'Guildhall Justice Room, Minute Book', 22 April 1762, 7 May 1762. LMA, X97/306, 12 Jan 1754.

¹⁰⁷ NMM, MSY/O/1, 4 Feb 1771, Nos. 507-12; 15 Jan 1771, Nos. 413-19; MSY/O/2, 11 Oct 1766, Nos. 408-10 and 23 Nov 1766, Nos. 472-75.

tend to highlight problems and it is not difficult to find examples of inadequacy, dishonesty or incompetence. In 1756, for example, Ann Burger, an inmate of the workhouse of St George Hanover Square who had been employed to make up gowns for inmates, was indicted at the Old Bailey for stealing 20 yards of linen and 40 yards of serge, 40 pairs of worsted stockings, 6 pairs of shoes and other workhouse equipment.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in 1764, the churchwardens of St John's Hackney were informed that the aged, sick and children in the workhouse were not being properly nursed or provided with proper linen. On investigation, it transpired that the workhouse manager did not have a woman in the house to inspect and look into the nurses. He alleged that the price paid by the parish for maintaining the poor and the excessive cost of all that was necessary made it impossible for him to provide suitable linen. New arrangements were made immediately.¹⁰⁹ It is reasonable to conclude, however, that most incidents recorded in detail represented the exception rather than the rule within these institutions and that there were other parishes, like Chelsea, that managed their workhouses with a degree of efficiency and humanity.

As noted earlier, workhouse records are problematic and historians hold a range of opinions about the way in which workhouses were managed. While Steve Hindle argues that workhouses were coercive institutions, Steven King, Lynn Hollen Lees and Tim Hitchcock see them as generous in their provision. This chapter has attempted to describe experiences of children within a number of institutions but it is extremely difficult to re-capture the atmosphere and mood of an eighteenth-century workhouse. In 1755, an event took place at Aldgate workhouse that does encapsulate something of the workings and character of this institution. The resulting trial at the

¹⁰⁸ OBP, 3 June 1756, Ann Burger (t17560603-5).

¹⁰⁹ LMA, X97/308, 'St John Hackney, Minutes of Churchwardens and Workhouse Regulations', 24 March 1764

Old Bailey records, in something akin to paupers' actual words, the shock and outrage of inmates, young and old, who felt powerless to prevent a tragedy that was waiting to happen.

A WORKHOUSE TRAGEDY

Eleven year-old Alexander Knipe was born in Aldgate workhouse, so was a long-standing member of the workhouse family there. One Sunday afternoon, with John Trevilian, who was thirteen, and a number of smaller children, Alex was playing quietly in the workhouse, when Mabell Hughes entered the room. Mabell's husband and her two children had died long ago, and she, growing old and unable to provide for herself, had entered the workhouse 'in the hard winter of 1739'. She had been 'appointed to look after the boys ...and see that they did not behave contrary to the rules of the house', and was responsible for the children winding silk. Grumpy, irritable, and generally disliked, she regularly 'beat the poor children', who often played tricks on her.

Alex Knipe was sitting on a chest as she approached and without warning she beat him about the arms and head with an oak stick and gave him a sharp kick in the groin. Everyone in the workhouse, including Mabell Hughes, knew that Alex had been born with a hernia. Crying in pain, he sought help and showed his bruises to John Cox, an older man, who had been in the workhouse for just a year, and then he told Philip Watson, another elderly inmate, that Mabell Hughes had thrown him down and stamped on him. Philip Watson advised him to go to bed and try to sleep. In the early hours of the morning, Alex went downstairs and Mary Primmer, who had been present at his birth, found him lying by the front door, groaning and saying, 'O mamma, I cannot stand. I am dying'. Mary and another inmate, Penelope Gilmore, carried him back to bed and covered him up warmly. John Trevilian, who shared a

bed with Alex, afraid he would die in his arms, lay on the floor and fell asleep. When the bell rang for the children to get up at half-past five, Alex was dead, his hernia ruptured.

Two months later, Mabell Hughes was tried at the Old Bailey and eight of the workhouse inmates, including John Trevilian who witnessed the assault, gave evidence against her. Sarah Cole, the workhouse mistress, the only member of staff to appear, said Alex ‘was a very mild temper’d child, he would not hurt a worm’. She declared that Mabell Hughes ‘had no occasion to beat him’, but disclaimed responsibility for the long-term violence that had been meted out to the workhouse children. On 10 September 1755, Mabell Hughes was found guilty of murder and was hanged at Tyburn five days later. She was 77 years old, and in the opinion of the chaplain of Newgate Prison, she ‘scarce escaped from being an idiot as unfit to have management of children as to tame lions’.¹¹⁰

The Aldgate inmates who appeared at the trial offer a rare glimpse of a workhouse family and demonstrate the solidarity that existed among its members. Their evidence at the trial not only shows the hostility they felt towards Mabell Hughes, but also indicates that, even before the incident involving Alex, they regarded her treatment of the children as unreasonable. Affectionate relationships existed between young and old within this ‘workhouse family’ and they shared intense anger and sadness at the tragedy that had occurred.

OUTDOOR RELIEF

Apart from the core workhouse family and those admitted for short periods, many children, with and without relatives, lived independently outside institutions but

¹¹⁰ *Ordinary of Newgate’s Account*, 12 November 1755, pp. 5-6; *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, (hereafter, OBP), 10 Sept 1755, Mabell Hughes, (t17550910-41).

maintained by the parish. Orphans, James and William Berry, received an allowance of 12/- a month from St Martin's parish towards maintenance with their grandparents, who were required by law to look after them.¹¹¹ Other children in this parish were cared for by a 'Mrs glaspowl', who 'Kieps Grait many orphans in the bak of the Rond Court', although the scrap of paper recording her address reveals nothing about the standard of lodging she provided.¹¹² At St Luke's Chelsea, orphans were boarded out but were admitted to the workhouse about two years before they were eligible for apprenticeship.¹¹³ Some families received regular weekly pensions or had their rent paid, while others came to the workhouse just for meals. Parents of children with holes in their shoes were granted money for cobbler's bills, while others received essential items such as 'a pound of soap to clean children's linen', money to retrieve belongings from pawn, or a coffin, shroud and the services of the sexton to bury a child.¹¹⁴ The needs of children on outdoor relief were high on the agenda of parish authorities and children who were sick or in distress received relief for a limited period. Fourteen year-old Elizabeth Mayo had smallpox and received a 5/- relief payment from her parish, while Alexander McDonald, a poor boy, was allowed one guinea towards clothing himself.¹¹⁵ A parish nurse petitioned for lying-in relief on behalf of bastard-bearer Sarah King, who 'lay only upon straw', at risk to herself and her newborn child.¹¹⁶ Even Margaret Healey, a casual pauper, managed to get clothing costing 12/4d and expenses of £2/1/8d for hospital admission for herself and her daughter.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ WCA, F5003, 'Removal Examinations 1709-1712', 1709; *The Parish Officer*, pp.21-22 and 99.

¹¹² WCA, F3571, 'St Martin in the Fields, A Poor Rate Collector's Book, 1712'.

¹¹³ CWAD.

¹¹⁴ GL, 9083, 'St Sepulchre's Workhouse Committee Minutes & Orders Book 1728 - 48', 4, 9 and 25 June 1728; GL, 11948/1, 'St Dionis Backchurch, Vouchers of Churchwardens Accounts and Correspondence, 1753-56', Martha Harrison.

¹¹⁵ WCA, C871, 16 June 1731; C873, 1 Oct 1734.

¹¹⁶ LMA, X26/1, 18 Feb 1735.

¹¹⁷ GL, 4222/1, 'St Dionis Backchurch, Petty Ledger 1758-62', 24 Jan 1759.

Parish relief was often a matter of personal negotiation between paupers and parish officers. As Paul Slack pointed out, ‘far from being impersonal... the relief of the poor was a matter for face-to-face management by overseers among their neighbours’.¹¹⁸ Some parents saw receiving doles as a disgrace and struggled to stretch their meagre income, refusing to have their children sent away to apprenticeships in other parishes. In 1705, in the parish of St Andrew’s Holborn, all paupers on parish relief had to wear a badge. That year a ‘parish’ child had her pension stopped, although it was restored on appeal, despite her mother still refusing to wear one.¹¹⁹ The Badging Act of 1697 stated that all paupers ‘on the parish’ must wear a badge in red or blue cloth on the shoulder of the right sleeve in a visible manner and that failure to do so would result either in relief being withdrawn or whipping and committal to Bridewell for three weeks’ hard labour. Historians have long questioned the pattern of enforcement of these badges and although a number of London parishes purchased badges during the eighteenth century, this does not necessarily mean parish officers continuously insisted they should be worn.¹²⁰ Badges were in use at St George Hanover Square in 1733, and in 1753 officials demanded ‘that the poor constantly wear the Badge, in failure of which they be not further relieved’, but there are few examples of this kind for London parishes.¹²¹ The significance of badging appears to have been ambiguous, and while some paupers may have felt wearing the badge was a mark of inclusion, separating them from the ‘undeserving’ poor, others may have interpreted it as a reflection of their inability to support their family. Many who refused to wear the badge were women, and the

¹¹⁸ Slack, *English Poor Law*, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ Le Hardy and Reckitt, *Calendar to the Buckinghamshire Sessions Records*, vol. 2, p.144; Hardy, *Middlesex County Records*, p.291, quoted in Steve Hindle, ‘Dependency, Shame and Belonging: Badging and the Deserving Poor, c.1550-1750, *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004), 31.

¹²⁰ Hindle, ‘Dependency’, pp.6-35.

¹²¹ WCA, C873, Badges mentioned in Minutes during 1733; C880, 21 Mar 1753.

mother of the child in St Andrew's Holborn may have been proudly refusing to admit she could not rear her child 'carefully'.¹²²

On the other hand, many paupers believed they were entitled to parish relief and had no qualms about asking for it.¹²³ Sarah Cheese, a regular short-stay inmate of Chelsea workhouse, made constant demands on the facilities and goodwill of the parish, so much so that the overseer wrote, 'returned like a bad penny' against her name in the register.¹²⁴ Phoebe Hams, when questioned about the father of her last child, told the justices of St John's Hackney that it was none of their business, declaring that if they insisted she should name him she would leave her three children in the care of the parish. A warrant was ordered to commit her to the house of correction as an 'idle and disorderly person'. In the meantime, her daughter, Margaret, in the care of the parish, received a full set of new clothes. A few months later, undeterred, Phoebe offered to take her son, Richard, out of the workhouse provided parish overseers allowed him some clothes. Richard duly received a new coat, waistcoat and breeches, shoes, stockings and a new shirt.¹²⁵

Children on outdoor relief observed their parents' behaviour and attitudes. They learnt whether parish officials were regarded as generous or not, and shared their parents' frustration if goods or money were not forthcoming, or their satisfaction if they had successfully 'played the system'. Even those who were not entitled to relief put pressure on parish overseers. James and Ann Leakning arrived in the capital from Ireland with their two children in August 1751. Initially, they persuaded a local resident in the parish of St John Hackney to take them in, but when James abandoned his wife and children, the family made demands on the parish. James Leakning, now

¹²² Hindle, 'Dependency', p.31.

¹²³ Lees, *Solidarities of Strangers*, p.38.

¹²⁴ CWAD, 12 Feb 1782.

¹²⁵ LMA, X97/306, 21 Sept 1751, 7 Dec 1751. Paley, *Justicing*, pp.178-79, Nos.1058 and 1063.

classed as a vagrant, was placed under an arrest warrant, while Ann and the children, trespassing on the goodwill of the overseers, managed to spin out their stay. After much wrangling, they were finally discharged and removed to Dublin by the cheapest possible means. They had received relief from the parish for eight months and the overseers had little hope of re-imbusement from Ireland, where poor relief was much less generous.¹²⁶

RELIEF ON DEMAND

Churchwardens nevertheless had wide-ranging discretion in the distribution of relief to genuine applicants, and paupers living outside the parish, some at a considerable distance, applied to their parish of settlement for money to maintain their children. In 1735, Abraham Robinson, who had a settlement in the parish of All Hallows Lombard Street, received a regular payment of 2/- a week. Over the next few years his circumstances improved, he married and had three children. By chance, he met Robert Jennings, a steward to the Earl of Northumberland, resident at Armin in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Jennings, impressed by Abraham's honesty and industriousness, offered him a position as ferrymen on the estate, with a house, an acre of land, and wages of 17/- a year. In the late summer of 1749, Abraham moved north with his wife and family, hoping that they could now turn their backs on the parish and retain independence. But soon after their arrival, his wife fell ill and Abraham, unable to man the ferry, made beehives and dressed flax at home so he could look after her. Six months later, he wrote to the churchwardens of All Hallows:

29 March 1750

Honourable Gentelmen this with a humble petition to you which by Reason of
a verry Great misfortune Hath forced me to be troublesome to you for I have

¹²⁶ LMA, X97/309, 24 Aug 1751, 5 Oct 1751, 30 Nov 1751, 15 Feb 1752, 22 Feb 1752, 4 Apr 1752, 18 Apr 1752. Paley, *Justicing*, p.184, No.1090, 24 April 1752.

Lost the Dearest friend that I had in this world or ever is like to have my wife is Dead and hath left me with three small Children the oldest six years old and the youngest tow So that we are Left quite Distute of Hope without your Ready aid and assistance which I was in hopes if she had lived would Have Done without. if it pleases your Honours ... to allow us tow shillings a week for I think to look to my childer my self except washing. Honourable Gentelmen if you think it easier for us to come I am verry willing. My wife died the 14th of this instant and I have been very bad of the ague and feaver ever since so that any troubles are verry Great almost too Heavy for me to bear. I hope you will all agree upon the matter and desire a return as you think good.

From your afflicted parishonr

Abraham Robinson

As a parent, he was desperate to support his children. He knew his right of settlement entitled his family to assistance and sought a sympathetic ear from churchwardens who knew of him. His letter, written in terms of deference, stressed his children's plight and his own determination to maintain them, but at the same time he used the veiled threat of an expensive journey home as a lever of negotiation if help were not forthcoming. The churchwardens recalled his earlier need for outdoor relief and when confirmation was received from Robert Jennings that Abraham was 'an object worthy of notice' and would find it impossible to support himself without 'a little milk for his children', the 2/- pension was agreed.¹²⁷

A compelling letter sent by a less literate pauper begged relief for her sick child:

¹²⁷ GL, 18982, 'Pauper Letters, All Hallows Lombard Street', 29 March 1750, 21 April 1750.

Onred sur

iam sorey to trobell you with this unwillcom nus of my child bee sick for three months on and of and now is bad again and mister canon dont chuse to attend him any longer as iam not at work nor dont have any all thee sumer as i cant pay him. Sur I hope you will think of my child for his dangers ill iam apon my cruchis and lickly to remain. miss elsmore will tell yoo thee same when she comes

I remain your afflickted sevnt

Hanner Rumbell ¹²⁸

This mother and her child were known to the churchwardens and she too employed a strategy of negotiation by enlisting support from a parishioner whose testimony might influence their decision. Both these pauper letters, appealing for help for children, reflect the extent to which the poor regarded their settlement right as a vital part of their strategy of economy and were prepared to put pressure on parochial officials to achieve their ends. The children of both Hanner Rumbell and Abraham Robinson benefited from parish relief and learnt that charity had not only to be sought but also negotiated.¹²⁹

WORKHOUSE EXPANSION

Over the course of the century, workhouse populations across London increased. By the 1780s, many parishes had adapted their accommodation and some had built new workhouses. St George Hanover Square expanded from its original 200 and eventually housed up to 700 inmates. Chelsea workhouse, after a rebuilding programme in the late 1750s, was able to take up to 120 inmates but did not need to

¹²⁸ GL, 19233, 'Pauper Letters, St Dionis', c.1758.

¹²⁹ For further examples of pauper claims on the parish see Thomas Sokoll (ed), *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837* (Oxford, 2001).

completely rebuild until the nineteenth century. St John's Hackney remained small but in 1751 the parish erected a number of sheds to accommodate additional inmates until the parish finally bought the site in 1768.

South of the river, in the parish of St. Saviour's Southwark, the original workhouse accommodated 120 inmates but proved so inadequate that by 1777 there were only 10 beds for 70 children. The poor of the parish 'made claims that the workhouse was full, and that they would therefore be provided with outdoor relief'. This led to a dramatic rise in poor rates so a new workhouse was built to accommodate 600 inmates.¹³⁰

Lynn Hollen Lees has shown that the workhouse system not only expanded but also became more generous in attitude and payments. Workhouse provision also changed and more families and children were accommodated on a casual basis.¹³¹ As the experience of the parish of St Saviour's in Southwark clearly illustrates, the expectations, desires and actions of the poor contributed to these changes. By asking, demanding and by presenting themselves on the doorstep of workhouses, they demonstrated their need for pregnancy and lying-in facilities, nursing for the new-born, crèche facilities and temporary care for the sick. Workhouses gradually became short-stay hostels for those without settlements, and continued to be permanent homes for orphaned, abandoned and disabled children. The accompanying outdoor relief system provided poor families and children in their own right with generous support in terms of rents, pensions and material goods. Relationships were forged between workhouses and other institutions and charitable organisations, such as the new

¹³⁰ *An Account* (London, 1732). *Journals of the House of Commons, 1773-74*, vol. 34, p.523, in www.bopcris.ac.uk/bop1700/ref14832.html. Consulted 13 Dec 2007.

¹³¹ Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1949* (Cambridge, 1998).

London hospitals for the poor, the Foundling Hospital and the Marine Society that offered poor boys a career at sea.

This chapter has examined the experiences of children as temporary workhouse inmates, as members of the workhouse family and as recipients of outdoor relief. Experiences varied, but in both rich and poor parishes, workhouse minutes and registers, settlement and bastardy examinations and outdoor relief accounts record children facing the same adversities and privations: their experiences of poverty were similar wherever they struggled to survive. Their parents viewed the resources available from the parish in different ways. Some saw the acceptance of relief as humiliating and degrading and tried to avoid it at all cost, but for most, not only was it available, it was also invaluable and essential. The fate of children within the welfare system was subject to the complex inter-relationship between the behaviour of their parents and the attitudes and abilities within the institutional structures. Many parents were not simply passive recipients, but negotiated with officials, manipulating and pushing the system to the advantage of themselves and their children.

Placing children in the forefront of investigation enables us to see them within the parish welfare system, subject to adult authority and with limited opportunity to express opinions and make decisions. Nevertheless, children growing up within the framework of the Old Poor Law cannot be seen just as submissive and dutiful recipients of relief. Within the workhouse, they watched adults question authority and challenge workhouse discipline. They became participants in the activities of the workhouse family and inherited perspectives and attitudes from their parents and other inmates. Outside the institution they witnessed their parents negotiate for relief and formed opinions about the justice or injustice of payments, and long-lasting impressions of the parish welfare system with its value and its weaknesses. As they

entered apprenticeship, as will be shown in a forthcoming chapter, attitudes filtered through into their behaviour and within the limits available to them, pauper children expressed opinions, exercised choice and rebelled against a system in which they were vulnerable and often exploited.

Parish relief formed a necessary resource for many of the very poor and their children but this source of income and support formed only a fragment of a broader patchwork of resources needed. A limited number of children who were long-term inmates in London's smaller workhouses attended local charity schools. On 16 December 1716, when John Olave was about seven, two churchwardens took him to Cripplegate Charity School. He was a foundling, discovered near the church of St Olave in Silver Street and named after the parish, so the churchwardens had to appear in person before the school trustees to certify that he had a legal settlement. Only then was John admitted into the school.¹³² The parish paid eleven shillings for the school's distinctive uniform that he had to wear when he attended church each Sunday: a grey coat with pewter buttons, a black cap with a red tassel, a band or collar, cloth breeches, stockings and shoes with buckles.¹³³ Discipline at the school was strict and pupils were expelled for misbehaviour or truancy.¹³⁴ Occasionally parents pleaded with the trustees and a pupil was allowed to continue on the promise of regular attendance and good behaviour.¹³⁵ John attended Cripplegate Charity School for four and a half years, but on 23 June 1721, he overstepped the mark and was expelled 'for very gross behaviour'.¹³⁶ But no one came to plead for a foundling and there was no second chance for a parish child. John Olave returned to the workhouse in disgrace.

¹³² GL, 7013/1, 'Cripplegate within the Ward Schools, Committee Minutes, 1712- 1892', 5 Dec 1716.

¹³³ Ibid., 30 April 1714.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 25 Aug 1768; 5 Nov 1772.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1 June 1780.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 23 June 1721.

CHAPTER 2

LONDON'S CHARITY SCHOOL CHILDREN

On 7th July 1713, children from more than a hundred charity schools in and around London joined in the public thanksgiving for the Treaty of Utrecht after the Spanish War of Succession. They assembled on an eight-tiered gallery erected in the Strand to be on show as Queen Anne passed on her way to St Paul's Cathedral. Although the Queen was indisposed and did not attend, nearly 4,000 children, boys and girls, sang hymns as part of the Thanksgiving celebration.¹ The following year when George I made his entry into the City of London, charity school children were again placed in full view, this time before the King in the churchyard of St Paul's Cathedral. As his Majesty and the Prince passed in their coach, the children sang the twenty first psalm. It was later reported that 'His Royal Highness the Prince was pleased to say, that the charity children was one of the finest sights he had ever seen in his life, and he only wished his own children had been with him to have seen them at the same time'.²

Education and schooling are important aspects of the culture of childhood but London's charity schools and their children have received little attention from historians. The only substantial reference work on the subject is *The Charity School Movement* by M.G. Jones, written nearly seventy years ago. Jones described a movement, instigated by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge at the end of the seventeenth century, initiating charity schools throughout England and Wales that dominated the education of the poor.³ In her interpretation, these schools acted as bastions against Popery, but above all were a means of imposing social discipline on

¹ Rev.T.B.Murray, *Account of Efforts of the SPCK on behalf of National Education*, (London, n.d.) quoted in J.H.Cardwell, *The Story of a Charity School: Two Centuries of Popular Education in Soho, 1699-1899* (1899), pp.53-54.

² Cardwell, quoting Robert Nelson reporting to the SPCK in London (1714), p.56.

³ M.G.Jones, *The Charity School Movement: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Puritanism in Action* (Cambridge, 1938).

the poor.⁴ In 1968, Joan Simon in an article entitled ‘Was there a Charity School Movement?’ questioned the way the education of the poor was organized. She maintained that while the SPCK encouraged and supported the new subscription schools founded in London, it had no powers to carry through any widespread educational programme and simply developed existing institutions and customary methods of dealing with poor children.⁵ Historians writing articles in the 1990s concentrated on other aspects of charity schools. Craig Rose examined them in the political and religious context of the age. He investigated their alleged Jacobite influence and analyzed the Anglican ethos of the schools, which he interpreted as a direct means of evangelizing the poor amid increasing irreligion, anti-clericalism and Dissent.⁶ Tim Hitchcock considered the relationship that was perceived to exist between religion and social behaviour. He explored the role of the SPCK, with its broad range of ideological perspectives, as it served as a channel for ideas and information. In his view, the SPCK supported charity schools and encouraged workhouses using religion to instill social discipline into the poor.⁷

These articles are now more than ten years old, but more importantly, all the literature on charity schools, from M.G. Jones onwards, has focused almost exclusively on the perceptions and aspirations of benefactors and parish worthies. As a result, we know a great deal about the religious views of the founders of these institutions, but almost nothing about the experiences and expectations of the children who attended them and of the parents who trusted their offspring to their care. This

⁴ Jones, pp.35, 110-11, 4-6, 13-14, 31-32.

⁵ Joan Simon, ‘Was there a Charity School Movement? The Leicestershire Evidence,’ in Brian Simon (ed), *Education in Leicester, 1640-1940* (Leicester, 1968).

⁶ Craig Rose, ‘Evangelical Philanthropy and Anglican Revival: the Charity Schools of Augustan London, 1698 – 1740’, *London Journal* 16 (1991), 35-65. See also Craig Rose, ‘“Seminaries of faction and rebellion”: Jacobites, Whigs and the London Charity Schools, 1716-1724’, *Historical Journal* 34, 4 (1991), 831-55.

⁷ Tim Hitchcock, ‘Paupers and Preachers: The SPCK and the Parochial Workhouse Movement’ in Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Keirn and Robert Shoemaker (eds), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp.145-66.

chapter will place the children of London's charity schools in the forefront of investigation and, by doing so, will throw light on the way they gained access to education and on their experiences within the schools. It will show that the rhetoric of the founders and benefactors of charity schools and the children's subsequent portrayal in historiography does not accord with the children who actually attended them. This chapter will also examine the interactions between children, parents and school authorities, and the practical advantages and implications of the education the children received.

Although Joan Simon has used the varied nature of schools catering for children of the poor to undermine the notion of a 'charity school movement', in this chapter a broad definition will be applied to include schools funded by subscription, by endowment and by individual sponsorship. These were free schools co-ordinated by the SPCK, which provided books, recommended teachers and acted in an advisory capacity. The curriculum was based on the catechism and in educational terms these schools were all complete in themselves. They did not teach classics nor were they designed as stepping-stones to grammar schools or any other type of school.⁸ The

⁸ London charity schools in these categories do *not* include London's most famous school for poor children, Christ's Hospital. Charles Lamb, a pupil in 1782, commented that Christ's Hospital had not 'degenerated into a mere charity school. ... Here neither, on the one hand, are youth lifted up above their family, which we have supposed liberal though reduced; nor, on the other hand, are they liable to be depressed below its level by the mean habits and sentiments which a common charity school generates' – Brimley Johnson, R., (ed), *Christ's Hospital; Recollections of Lamb, Coleridge, Leigh Hunt* (London, 1896), pp.7 and 9.

Craig Rose's PhD thesis, 'Politics, Religion and Charity in London c.1680 – c.1720' (Cambridge, 1989) was 'based on the widest study of charity school records yet undertaken'. I gratefully acknowledge use of his extensive research. Beyond this, my research includes records of the following:

- Aldersgate Ward School
- Cripplegate Within the Ward Schools
- Green Coat School - St Margaret's Hospital
- Greenwich Charity School for Girls
- Peter Joye's Charity School, St Anne's Blackfriars
- St Anne's Charity School, Soho
- St Dunstan in the West Parochial Church School
- St Martin's Free School
- St Saviour's Girls' Charity School, Southwark

geographical limits of ‘London’ will be loosely defined to include parishes from many parts of the present Greater London.

A NEW FREE SCHOOL

During the autumn of 1698 Samuel Mitchell, a bookseller who lived in the parish of St Margaret’s Westminster, had several serious discussions with Robert Maddock, the local cheesemonger. For some time they had both been concerned about the behaviour of the poor children in the parish, who were unoccupied and often troublesome. The two tradesmen had mulled the matter over and, mindful that it was their Christian duty to offer charity to the poor, put their proposal of opening a free school to other tradesmen of their acquaintance. They immediately gained support from the draper, Richard Ff Tyler, Thomas Wisdome, a dealer in leather goods, and John Holmes, who sold ‘sope’ and candles. By mid-November, the five of them had jointly subscribed a sum of £5 to rent a house in Broad Sanctuary, not far from St Margaret’s Church. By the end of the month they had appointed themselves trustees, employed a carpenter to set up a classroom, chosen a schoolmaster and formulated a set of rules for their new free school.⁹

On the evening of 2 December 1698, eleven year-old George Davis was one of the first boys to appear before them with his mother. Beside him stood Richard Jones, who had already turned fourteen, but he ‘only knew his letters’ so his parents were keen for him to have a place. John Browne, not yet seven, was thought too young, and was sent to enquire at James Palmer’s Almshouses, where there was another free

St Sepulchre’s Holborn Boys’ School

⁹ Westminster City Archive (hereafter WCA), 1648/1-11, ‘Grey Coat Hospital Fair Minutes, 1698 – 1791’; WCA, 1648/2062, E.S.Day, *An Old Westminster Endowment, being a History of the Grey Coat hospital as recorded in the MinuteBooks* (London, 1902).

school for boys.¹⁰ When forty boys had been enrolled, the trustees arranged another meeting with parents and boys when the school rules were read, so there would be no misunderstanding about the terms of the charity. The parents, eager to take advantage of the new initiative for free education, all agreed to abide by them. George heard that if he should ‘prove Rude or Stubborn, or Quarrell and fight or be found Guilty of lying, Stealing or Swearing’, he would be ‘corrected’, and that if he played truant he would be expelled. Perhaps he glanced along the row to see how other boys felt, or eyed Mr Ashenden, the schoolmaster, warily. Two boys who had the itch were sent home, and suddenly, not only obedience, but neatness and cleanliness loomed large. Religion also seemed to be important, for his parents had agreed that he would attend church every Sunday. A few days later, they all met again and the boys received stockings, shoes with buckles, a ‘band’ or collar and a knitted hat. Next day all the parents and boys had to attend a special sermon at St Margaret’s Church.¹¹

The school, later known as the Grey Coat Hospital, opened on 9 January 1699, and for George life changed dramatically. It was winter, so the school day began at eight o’clock and ended at four when it was dark. In summer, he would have to be there two hours earlier and lessons would continue until six o’clock in the evening. Each morning and afternoon, George was required to pay his respects to Mr Ashenden, to sit in his appointed place and not stir without good reason, and to be silent and orderly when he went to church.¹² Devout and sober behaviour, good manners and cleanliness were expected. Each day began and ended with prayer. George could already read, so on the first day he took his place as Mr Ashenden ‘ranked children in severall fformes according to their learning’. The forty boys, with

¹⁰ Attached to James Palmer’s Almshouse, founded in 1654 east of Brewer’s Green, was the Black Coat School for 20 boys, www.westminster.gov.uk/libraries/archives Consulted 20 April 2007.

¹¹ WCA, 1648/1, 16 Dec 1698, 28 Dec 1698, 3 Jan 1699, 9 Jan 1699.

¹² For a set of charity school rules see ‘Rules for the Children of Camberwell Charity School’, Nat. Soc. SR2/1/1, 11 Mar 1722, quoted in Rose, ‘Politics, Religion and Charity’.

an age range of eight to fifteen and of differing attainments and abilities, were all taught together by Mr Ashenden in the same classroom.

As in all types of schools at that time, those who could not read used the hornbook, which was not a book, but was a piece of board with a handle. The face of it was vellum or paper, inscribed with the alphabet in lower case and capitals letters, and often with the Lord's Prayer or the Creed. The board was covered with a sheet of translucent horn to protect it from dirty hands as it was passed from one child to another.¹³ At whatever level they began, George and his contemporaries followed a curriculum based on the catechism, essentially religious, rigid and repetitive. Outside school, chapbooks were available for a few pence on the streets of London, but Mr Ashenden regarded them as loose and immoral, and saw ballads, sung regularly on street corners, as a source of corruption.¹⁴ In school, George had to recite the catechism, learnt by rote, and every Wednesday and Friday morning, he walked in a crocodile with the other boys to church. The aim of the school was to build up moral and religious habits, seeking to turn its pupils into humble, diligent and industrious members of society.

As charity schools became established in London, the SPCK published *The Christian Schoolmaster* an official handbook for teachers outlining a four-year course. The aim was for children to master basic reading in the first year, learn to read passages from the New Testament in the second, read from the Bible and begin to write in the third; and tackle some basic arithmetic in the fourth. Reading was taught with the use of spelling books and primers such as *Reading Made Easie* 'wherein all the Words of the English Bible are set down in Alphabetical order, and divided into

¹³ For illustrations of English hornbooks see George A. Plimpton, 'The Hornbook and its Use in America', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 26 (1916) 264-72, www.dinsdoc.com/plimpton-1 Consulted 9 March 2005.

¹⁴ Holmes and Szechi, *Age of Oligarcy* (London and New York, 1993), p.189.

their distinct syllables'.¹⁵ Children recited spelling strings and sentences learnt by rote. John Lewis's *Exposition of the Catechism*, written for the SPCK and a popular charity school text, provided a question-and-answer format to enable the children to 'give a Ready and Audible account upon their examination'.¹⁶ Schoolmasters were encouraged to 'sweeten children's labours now and then, by the choice of some pleasant but profitable book' and to read occasional Bible stories. No evidence has come to light to suggest that charity school pupils used the books that John Newbery and others published especially for children from 1740 onwards.

The trustees of the Grey Coat Hospital had prepared instructions for Mr Ashenden on his dealings with the boys:

The master shall studey and indeavour to win the love and affection of the children thereby to invie and encourage them rather than by correction to force them to learn: Reason as well as experience having plainely shewne that too greate severity does rather dull, than sharpen the wits and memory; and such education being rather slavish is the principall cause why so many children rejoyce at all opportunities to neglect their learning which they find to their grief and vexation when they come to yrs of Discretion.¹⁷

This ideal was not easy to maintain, for while some boys looked forward to starting school with friends and took advantage of the opportunity to learn, others found hours in a disciplined environment irksome and longed to be running in the fields. Thirteen year-old John Winter, who had appeared with George on the first evening of enrolment, was a capable and co-operative pupil, already able to 'read in the Bible' when he started school. His parents, with deference and humility, asked permission

¹⁵ Thomas Lye, *Spelling Made Easie* (London, 1673).

¹⁶ James Talbot, *The Christian Schoolmaster, or the Duty of those who are Engaged in the Instruction of Children Especially in Charity Schools* (London, 1707).

¹⁷ WCA, 1648/2062, p.8.

for him to visit his uncle in the country one day a month and the trustees agreed. After eighteen months at the school, John was old enough to be apprenticed, so the trustees arranged a placement with a local shoemaker. They recorded with satisfaction and pride that his father was ‘well pleased with the choice and the boy himself [was] of the same mind’. George, on the other hand, was restless from the start and behaved badly. On several occasions his mother accused Mr Ashenden of abusing him. In April 1699, she complained again but George was shown to be at fault, and as he was very unruly, he was expelled. One of the first to apply, George Davis was the first to be dismissed. His period at school had lasted just three months.¹⁸

ENTRY PROCEDURE

The Grey Coat Hospital, was one of the earliest subscription schools and when the trustees declared their intention of offering free education to poor children of the parish, they described the children as those

who wander about and begg by which means and the Evill customs and habits they contract thereby they become (for the most part) the Curse and Trouble of all places where they live, and often by their wicked actions are brought to shamefull untimely Death and Destruction.¹⁹

Statements of trustees’ intentions are rare, but when, about a year later, another charity school was proposed in the neighbouring parish of St Anne’s Soho, the trustees there, applauding the success of the Grey Coat initiative, also set out their intentions:

This parish aboundeth with such poor Children, who for want of being better engag’d were seldom out of the Feilds, where from the Company that

¹⁸ WCA, 1648/1, 16 Dec 1698; 28 Dec 1698; 3 Jan 1699; 5 April 1699.

¹⁹ WCA, 1648/1, 1698.

frequents those places, they generally learn and contract such evil Customs and Acquaintance whereby they become not onely a perpetual Grief and Vexation to their friends, & annoyance to all about them, but often bring their own Lives also, by their wicked actions, to Shamefull & Untimely Ends.²⁰

These two statements are typical of the judgmental rhetoric used by elite authorities and philanthropists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. John Bellers, Quaker and social reformer, in putting forward his ideas for a College of Industry, described London's poor children as those 'brought up to trades of begging and stealing ... from babyhood, they contracted the evil habits which prepared them for the "hangman's harvest"'.²¹ This kind of rhetoric and the platitudes of founders of institutions became commonplace and were accepted by the upper-class public, who had little real understanding of the lives of the poor.

The trustees of the Grey Coat Hospital and those of the charity school of St Anne's Soho, clearly stating that their 'objects of charity' were children from backgrounds of indiscipline and intolerable behaviour. M.G. Jones, in her much-quoted study of charity schools, imitated the judgmental tone of the charity school trustees. She portrayed children who attended charity schools in the early years as 'rough' children from the slums and alleys of the City and Westminster; children described by Defoe and others as blackguard boys, as wicked, idle thieves, robbers and pickpockets; those brought up to beg and steal, and those left on the streets who thus gained settlement.²² More than this, Jones described the intake of charity schools at the beginning of the eighteenth century as the 'scum of the parish'.²³ But her research was based principally on the SPCK archive rather than charity school

²⁰ 'St Anne's Soho, Minutes of Meetings of Managers', 10 Nov 1699, quoted in J.H Cardwell, p.99.

²¹ John Bellers, *Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry* (London, 1695), p.11.

²² Daniel Defoe, *Everybody's business is Nobody's Business* (London, 1725), quoted in Jones p. 31.

²³ Jones, p.160.

records, so children were a minor aspect of her study. Close examination of school records suggests that the children who actually attended London's charity schools were rather different.

As we have already seen, the first eleven applicants appeared before the trustees of the Grey Coat Hospital a month before it officially opened, and all parents and boys met the trustees at least twice and attended church before their sons started school.²⁴ At the charity school of St Anne's Soho, the trustees made 'All Enquiry possible into the Circumstances and Conditions of the Parents and Nurses', who were then ordered to appear at the school room 'to be further examin'd and admitted into the school or rejected'. All trustees attended 'to give their assistance in the Choice of the Children'. Clothing was distributed the day before school began and parents there too had to attend a sermon, 'upon pain of forfeiting the Benefit their children may receive'.²⁵

The entry procedure at these two schools, mirrored in other charity schools in London, shows that trustees met prospective parents and children several times prior to admission.²⁶ The SPCK stated that charity school education was for children 'whose Parents or Relations are not able to afford them the ordinary means of Education'.²⁷ Parents were questioned to ensure they were 'objects of charity', which traditionally included standards of morality as well as financial need, and the children had to be recommended by subscribers or trustees.²⁸ Children admitted to Raine's School, built in 1719 by the brewer, Henry Raine, needed recommendations from six

²⁴ WCA, 1648/1, 16 Dec 1698; 28 Dec 1698; 3 Jan 1699.

²⁵ 'St Anne's Soho', 24 Nov 1699; 8 Dec 1699, Cardwell, p.101.

²⁶ For example, see St Martin's Free School Westminster, St Saviour's School for Girls, Southwark.

²⁷ *The First Circular Letter from the Honourable SPCK to their Clergy Correspondents in the Several Counties of England and Wales (16 Nov 1699)*, quoted in Cardwell, p.125; see also *Account of the Charity Schools* (London, 1705), p.7.

²⁸ GL, 9445, 'St Sepulchre's Holborn Boys' School, Subscribers' and Trustees' Minutes, 1740-1787', 2 Mar 1773. Quoted in Rose 'Evangelical', p. 40: Shoreditch, HAD, P/L/CS/1,f.3; Camberwell, Nat.Soc., SR2/1/1, 18 May 1712; Broad Street Ward School SJCF; and Rose, 'Raine's Foundation: an East London charity school 1716-1780' (Bristol MA, 1985).

leading parishioners, and both there and at the Green Coat School in Westminster, formal petitions for entry were required.²⁹ Recommendations were verified and parents' circumstances were checked. In 1702, for example, William Smallman was recommended as an 'object of charity' to the trustees of St Martin's Free School. They examined his mother and found she was married to a sickly man with three children. Satisfied that they were 'honest, industrious people and worthy to be relieved', the trustees agreed to admit William.³⁰ While trustees were sympathetic to the needs of the poor, they were also proud of their schools and appear to have used petitions and recommendation as a preliminary filter. At meetings with trustees, prospective parents had to appear clean, cooperative and respectful. Even if they were not among the members of the poor communities who attended church regularly, they had to give an impression of at least tacit religious observance.³¹ Although charity school minutes speak of 'Choice of the Children', trustees actually chose the parents. The trustees of St Martin's Free School considered they chose with care, for parents and friends were strictly charged, 'to keep their children from accompanying and playing with idle and wicked boys when at home' and to bring them up in the Christian religion.³²

At many schools, parents seeking admission for their children had to have a settlement in the parish where the school was situated.³³ Cripplegate Ward School required parents to bring a certificate from the churchwardens of their parish

²⁹ Rose, 'Raine's', p.38. WCA, 1656/185 - 224, 'Green Coat School, St Margaret's Hospital Westminster, Petitions for Admissions, 1724 - 1833'.

³⁰ WCA, F3306B 'St Martin's Free School, Fair Minutes', 10 Sept 1702.

³¹ For assessment of popular observance of religion see Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-1740* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.173-94.

³² WCA, F3306B, 26 July 1699.

³³ WCA, 1648/1, 24 Mar 1702; WCA, F3306A, 'St Martin's Free School, Draft Minutes', 30 Sept 1708; WCA, 1656/2, 'St Margaret's Hospital, Fair Minutes', 13 July 1756. Quoted in Rose, 'Evangelical' p. 40; St James Westminster, SJ, I, ff.1-2; Rose, 'Raine's', p.38.

confirming that they were inhabitants.³⁴ Proof of age was usually required and certificates of baptism, an indication of parents' religious affiliation.³⁵ In 1705, Peter Joye, a merchant of Dutch ancestry, opened a charity school with its own admissions policy. Parents there did not have to have a settlement in the parish and preference was given to 'any poor children of foreigners or foreign extraction born or living in the parish, particularly those of Low Countries'.³⁶ St Sepulchre's School in Holborn had strict rules about its catchment area. In 1744 and again in 1754, parents of several boys living outside the Liberty, or district surrounding the school, were told that unless they moved within fourteen days, their sons would be refused admittance to the school. Several parents complied with these demands and found accommodation for themselves or their children within the Liberty.³⁷

The anonymous author of *Low-Life: or One half of the World Knows not how the Other Half Live*, humorously described, for the benefit of elite readers, what he claimed to have observed in a twenty-four-hour period in London. With tongue in cheek, he spotlighted:

Poor people who have large families, but no money or business, contriving as they sit in deep reflection at home, how to get some of their helpless infants into the charity schools, that they may know their duty towards God and towards their neighbour.³⁸

Clear evidence of the desire for education among poor parents must have existed for it to be lampooned in this way. Many charity schools had waiting lists and those that

³⁴ GL, 7013/1, 'Cripplegate Within the Ward Schools, Committee Minutes, 1712-1892', 19 Jan 1716.

³⁵ WCA, 1648/53, 'Rules and Qualifications'. Quoted in Rose, SJCF, 1B/3/1, f.102; Rose, 'Raine's', p.25.

³⁶ GL, 9192/1, 'Peter Joye's Charity School, Trustees' Minute Book, 1717-1787', 22 Feb 1717. Quoted in Rose, 'Evangelical', p.40, Langbourn and Cornhill Ward Schools also admitted children from all parts of London - Sir John Cass Foundation 1B 5/1; 1B/5.

³⁷ GL, 9445, 11 July 1744; 3 Oct 1744; 19 June 1754.

³⁸ *Low-Life: or How half of the World Knows not how the Other Half Live* (London, 1749, 2nd edn) p. 84.

were over-subscribed allocated places to recommended children by lottery. As places were limited, trustees also discriminated against parents thought capable of seeking education for their children elsewhere. The Grey Coat Hospital trustees regarded Charles Durham, the son of a waterman, as the responsibility of the Waterman's Company; and since William Wynne's parents were both employed, his father as a labourer and his mother in the brew house, they did not regard him as an 'object of charity'.³⁹

A few London charity schools offered boarding facilities where parents were sometimes required to contribute to their children's education.⁴⁰ The Green Coat School, an endowed institution for 24 boys, asked parents to provide basic clothing, knife, fork and spoon, a chamber pot and 2 combs.⁴¹ In 1702, when the Grey Coat Hospital first offered boarding, parents had to pay a shilling a week. After a few initial objections, they agreed, apparently expressing 'their joy at the provision made for their children and faithfully promis[ing] to pay their money weekly'.⁴² This arrangement continued for the next three years, when the trustees decided that parents 'not on parish pay' should provide basic clothing consisting of '2 shirts or shifts, 2 handkerchiefs, 2 pairs of shoes and stockings, 1 pair knitted gloves and a Bible'.⁴³

Soon after the Grey Coat Hospital became a boarding school, ten children from St Margaret's workhouse were admitted, and from that time, every fourth vacancy was allocated to a parish child, although not necessarily one from the workhouse.⁴⁴ They were known as the 'parish' children and their parents were 'on

³⁹ WCA, 1648/1, 24 March 1702.

⁴⁰ 'From 1725 the St James Westminster School operated as a hospital and Raine's from 1736', Rose, 'Evangelical' p.60, footnote 56.

⁴¹ WCA, 1656/3, 'St Margaret's Hospital Fair Minutes', 1746.

⁴² WCA, 1648/1, 9 Jan 1702.

⁴³ WCA, 1648/1, 7 March 1704 and 1648/53.

⁴⁴ WCA, 1648/1, 9 Sept 1701; 1648/10, 1 Jan 1771. See also LMA, CLA/071/PS/01/009, 'Children in the Grey Coat Hospital on the Parish Account at six shillings each per Calendar Month', 1704-10 and 1755-61.

parish pay'. A similar arrangement was put in place at St Martin's Free School where, in 1718, boarding facilities were extended to include parish orphans.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in many charity schools, workhouse children were less prominent than those 'on the foundation' and although there was some variation in admissions policies, overall the poorest children appear to have been discouraged.⁴⁶ A few workhouse children were admitted to Peter Joye's school but trustees' minutes name them individually as if their admission was unusual.⁴⁷ In 1714 the trustees of Broad Street Ward School resolved 'that the Children of all poor people within the Ward not receiving Alms from any Parish shall hereafter have a preference & be Admitted upon Application before any Parish children'.⁴⁸ Emanuel Hospital, known as the Brown Coat School, offered places to children from the parishes of St Margaret's Westminster, Hayes and Chelsea, but these children had to be 'decently clothed with all apparel by their relations or friends (except an upper coat at the cost of the charity)'.⁴⁹ The endowment required parish officials to select 'children of poor inhabitants who do not receive alms'.⁵⁰

'OBJECTS OF CHARITY'

The pious intentions of school governors and trustees may initially have been to offer education to the poorest children in the parish, but in reality application for places would ultimately have been determined by economic circumstances and domestic need. The poorest parents required their children to contribute to the family income or

⁴⁵ WCA, F4314, 'List of Orphans at Charity School, 1721'.

⁴⁶ Alannah Tomkins suggested that in Oxford 'children of paupers did not tend to occupy a school place at the same time that their family needed regular parish payments or support', *The Experience of Poverty, 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester, 2006), p.196.

⁴⁷ GL, 1706, 'Peter Joye's School, Trustees' Minute Book, 1707-1744', 3 Mar 1714; 21 Oct 1714; 2 Oct 1740; GL, 9192/1, 30 Sept 1756; 30 Mar 1758.

⁴⁸ Rose, 'Evangelical' p.40.

⁴⁹ LMA, CLA/071/AD/02/003/2, 'Extract from Emanuel Hospital Papers: Committee Rough Minutes 1673-1801', 20 July 1735.

⁵⁰ LMA, P74/ LUK/3, 'St Luke's Chelsea, Workhouse Minutes', 11 Feb 1735.

help at home so could not even consider full-time education. Perhaps these children were among those who, soon after the Grey Coat Hospital opened, abused the pupils in their new uniform as they walked to church for evening prayer, and whose parents subsequently claimed total ignorance of the incidents.⁵¹ Even among children who were admitted there were a few whose absences from school were the result of poverty.⁵² Some children were forced to limit or abandon their education because they were needed at home. James Wilson spent only a year at Peter Joye's School before he was discharged to the workhouse.⁵³

The majority of charity school children, then, seem to have come from families who, although 'objects of charity', were still able to make reasonable provision for them. Information about the occupations of parents is rare, but Peter Joye's School register for the years 1705 to 1707 shows that the fathers of pupils there were a mixture of unskilled workers and skilled artisans, in both low-paid and reasonably well-paid occupations.⁵⁴

**Occupations of fathers of boys attending
Peter Joye's Charity School, 1705 to 1707**

Glass grinder	Turner	Frenchman
Lapidary (2)	Sawyer (4)	Frenchman and lapidary
Printer	Porter (2)	Dutchman and flan maker
Tailor (12)	Baker (2)	Dutchman and tailor
Tailor, deceased (4)	Fisherman	Dutchman, deceased (2)
Hatter	Cobbler	
Hat dyer		

Guildhall Library, MS.1706, 'Peter Joye's School, Trustees' Minute Book, 1707-1744'

⁵¹ WCA, 1648/1, 10 Jan 1700, 24 Jan 1700.

⁵² LMA, A/NWC/1, 'St Saviour's Girls' School, Trustees' Minute Book', 11 Mar 1706. Quoted in Rose, GL, 7013/1, f.114; St Olave's, V/1/1, 20 Feb 1735.

⁵³ GL, 1706, 26 Mar 1708.

⁵⁴ GL, 1706, 26 Mar 1708. For further examples see Rose, 'Raine's Foundation', pp.41-42 and Appendix 2.

This mixture of circumstances is also indicated in the 1740s, when writing and accounts at this school were taught only to boys ‘whose friends will provide them with Book Pen & Inks’.⁵⁵ Parents near the top borderline of eligibility as ‘objects of charity’ probably felt the humiliation of accepting charity more than most. The parents of Robert Green and Mary Thomas thanked the trustees of the Grey Coat Hospital for their children’s education, but informed them that ‘through providence’ they were now able to provide for them themselves.⁵⁶ In 1708, Daniel Marriot, no longer an ‘object of charity’, left Peter Joye’s School to join other poor but middling-sort boys at Christ’s Hospital.⁵⁷

The petitions for entry to the Green Coat School in Westminster provide a rare and more detailed insight into parental backgrounds, demonstrating the problems and misfortunes that could befall poor families, some of whom had known better times. This school admitted boys chosen from the sons of ‘poor and decayed housekeepers and others having legal settlement in the parishes of St Margaret and St John’.⁵⁸ William Lowe, applying for a place on behalf of his son John, was a former pupil. His petition carried six signatures and thankfully acknowledged ‘the blessings and benefit he there received’. It described him as a ‘poor working man that has five small children, that by losses in his business, sickness in his family and other misfortunes is incapable of maintaining and providing for them’.⁵⁹ Three separate petitions were made on behalf of Henry Byam. One, written for his mother, described her as ‘in a deplorable condition with three small children to maintain without any relief or support from her husband’; the second came from a school trustee; and the third, fluently handwritten by Henry’s uncle, acknowledged his brother’s loss in trade and

⁵⁵ GL, 1706, 25 June 1741.

⁵⁶ WCA, 1648/1, 13 Aug 1703; 1645/5, 31 Jan 1721.

⁵⁷ GL, 1706, 26 Mar 1708.

⁵⁸ WCA, 1656/185 - 224.

⁵⁹ WCA, 1656/194/1, Lowe.

‘unhappy management’ of affairs.⁶⁰ Petitions came from Cornelius Gill, a china and glass trader with six children, ‘unable to provide for and give his son necessary education’, and from John Allen, whose circumstances were so much reduced that his son was in the workhouse.⁶¹ These petitions illustrate a point in the life cycle when parents of young children were at their most vulnerable, but unlike many petitions from the poor, these were not narratives of despair, nor were petitioners shamefaced at the prospect of receiving charity. Petitions stressed the reduced circumstances and right to settlement of the applicants, but were at pains to demonstrate their ‘hard labour’, ‘diligent endeavours’, ‘credit and reputation’ and ‘payment of all parochial duties’. They emphasized the parents’ honesty, industriousness and good reputation, but there was neither a religious tone to the petitions nor any mention of religious affiliations. This does not accord with Craig Rose’s suggestion that religion was a significant factor in parental demand for education. Instead, a number pointed out the aptitude of the child, his ‘good capacity’ or his ability to read and write.

Children usually entered charity schools between the ages of 8 and 12, and some had basic literacy on admission. Of the first eleven children to register at the Grey Coat Hospital, seven were already able to read and three knew their letters.⁶² St Martin’s Free School opened with 50 pupils, and 12 boys unable to read received particular mention. The trustees had decided that they would be ‘instructed by other boys who can [read] and that some small matter be given to encourage them to be dilligent in teaching them’.⁶³ From 1709, Peter Joye’s School did not admit children ‘in ye horn book’, those who were still learning their letters.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ WCA, 1656/196/1, Byam.

⁶¹ WCA, 1656/224/1, Gill; 1656/216/1, Allen.

⁶² WCA, 1648/1, 2 Dec 1698; 9 Jan 1699.

⁶³ WCA, F3306B, 5 Sept 1699.

⁶⁴ GL, 1706, 8 Oct 1709.

The charity schools referred to in this chapter are just a few of the hundred or more that existed in London at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and for which records still survive. While it would be unreasonable to make sweeping statements on the basis of necessarily limited sources, the evidence here suggests that children attending charity schools came, for the most part, from families of the respectable and deserving poor. Where details exist, the children's parents were small shopkeepers, craftsmen, or unskilled workers in more or less regular employment. Some children came from large families or had parents who were sick or had fallen on hard times. M.G. Jones suggested that the parents of many charity school children were 'in receipt of poor relief', but the parents of most of those attending the schools examined here were not 'on parish pay'.⁶⁵ The majority of these charity school children did not come from workhouses, nor were they from destitute families at the bottom of the social pile. They were certainly not 'the scum of the parish'.

CHARITY SCHOOL UNIFORM

The poor parish of St Saviour's Southwark was on the south bank of the Thames. In 1674, Elizabeth Newcomen, the widow of a well-known City mercer, died, leaving her large estate to her godson during his lifetime and then to the parish. This legacy included a charity school for girls, run by wardens and a committee of trustees who could nominate children for places. During the eighteenth century, the school's ongoing expenses were covered by subscriptions from middling-sort parishioners. Notice of vacancies was given in church on two Sundays and poor parents who wished their children to be admitted had to enquire further from Edward Gore, the

⁶⁵ Jones, p.85.

coffin maker, where they should make their application.⁶⁶ Each girl was presented to the trustees by a subscriber who donated twenty shillings. Consequently, most subscribers took pride in the pupils they recommended. Elenor Simpson's mother had put her daughter's name down for a place at the school and must have been considered industrious and deserving by the subscriber, who deemed Elenor an 'object of charity'. But when, in March 1707, Elenor was presented at a meeting of trustees,

There was an influx of subscribers with applicants for the school. A great many of 'em came and presented poor girls, as others did it by proxy. There was presented in all 71 girls; to reduce the number to 50 there were 50 prizes rolled up and 21 blanks and all jumbled together in a hat. Then Martha Cleer, Mistress, being called in, drew 'em and named every child as she drew a lot in order and they were written down by Mr Normandy.⁶⁷

The result of the lottery that day must have left girls disappointed. Those who genuinely wanted to learn and those for whom school would have been a means of escape from the drudgery of household chores or caring for younger children, must have watched the Mistress draw their blank lottery papers in dismay. For those like Elenor, who were chosen, there was the immediate excitement of trying on the brand new school clothes.

Charity school clothing came in a range of colours and in Westminster alone, there were schools where children wore grey, blue, black, green and brown uniform.⁶⁸ The red clothing worn by the children of the Red Coat School in Stepney was very

⁶⁶ LMA, A/NWC/1, 11 Mar 1706.

⁶⁷ LMA, A/NWC/1, 25 Mar 1707.

⁶⁸ Grey Coat Hospital, Blue Coat School in Duck Lane (not to be confused with Christ's Hospital) Black Coat School, Green Coat School, Brown Coat School.

unusual, because colours were usually drab to emphasize humility.⁶⁹ Girls wore a gown, bodice and petticoat, with a white ‘tippet’, a large collar that covered the shoulders, and an apron. Their hair was concealed under a cap and they were supplied with woollen stockings and shoes with buckles. Boys wore a jacket, waistcoat and breeches, with a distinctive band or collar, and a cap with a tuft or string. After about 1717, most charity children had to wear a badge as an aid to identification and discipline when they were not on school premises.⁷⁰

In many charity schools children wore their caps and tippets or bands with their own clothes during the week and the full uniform only on Sundays.⁷¹ At St Martin’s Free School for Girls in 1700, it was

Order’d that the Children do wear their Gowns Petticoats and Stockins only on Sundays and Holy Days, and on such Wednesdays as they go to Trinity Chapell to have the Sermon, and their Caps and Bands everyday;
And that the said Children do constantly bring their Gowns and Petticoats Shoes and Stockins to the School the next day after wearing them in order to be laid up.⁷²

All poor parents appreciated the free clothing, but as Elenor Simpson’s mother watched her daughter try on the uniform for St Saviour’s School, she was probably adding up the items that she could pawn. Seven months later, the trustees’ minutes recorded

That Elenor Simpson be discharged from ye school, her mother having come and scolded ye Mistress and Mr Thornbury for giving ye child due correction

⁶⁹ Phillis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, *Charity Costumes of Children, Scholars, Almsfolk and Pensioners* (London, 1978), p.122.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23 and 144. For example, GL, 6999/1, ‘Aldersgate Ward School, Committee of Managers’ Minute Book, 1748 – 1783’, 11 Jan 1757, 2 Apr 1779.

⁷¹ For a full discussion of charity school clothing see Cunnington, *Charity Costumes*, pp.144 -65.

⁷² Quoted in Cunnington, p.147.

for coming late and having also pawned her child's clothes and slighted ye charity.

Mrs Simpson's offence was not an isolated incident and clothing was a major expense and problem for charity school trustees.⁷³ William and Thomas Smith, early entrants to the Grey Coat Hospital, were taken away by their mother with the school clothing. The trustees recorded that she eventually returned it, 'with much reluctance and many opprobrious speeches'.⁷⁴

By 1717, girls at St Saviour's were not given clothing until their parents signed a guarantee to return it if they were discharged or taken away.⁷⁵ Demanding security for clothing became common practice in many charity schools.⁷⁶ Parents, relatives or parish officers of children at Aldersgate Ward School had to give 'security for the clothes to the value of 1 guinea' before a child could be admitted.⁷⁷ Ann Woodfin, a model pupil at Aldersgate, returned to thank the trustees 'for her clothing and education and having staid her full time was permitted to keep her best clothes'.⁷⁸ Occasionally, children refused to wear the school clothing and were expelled: they had to accept the uniform or lose the opportunity for education.⁷⁹

EDUCATION VERSUS LABOUR

Boys who gained places at charity schools were taught separately from girls, often in different schools. Boys had priority and were usually the only ones taught to write,

⁷³ For further examples of pawning of charity school clothes see: GL 7013/1, 'Cripple-gate within the Wards School, Committee Minutes, 1712-1792', 6 Aug 1725, 5 Nov 1772. For a full discussion of the significance of charity school clothing, see Sarah Lloyd, "'Agents in their Own Concerns'? Charity and the Economy of Makeshifts in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds), *The Poor in England 1700 – 1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003), pp.100-36.

⁷⁴ WCA, 1648/1, 30 Dec 1698, 29 Sept 1702.

⁷⁵ LMA, A/NWC/1, 4 June 1717.

⁷⁶ GL, 7013/1, 11 May 1721. Further examples in Rose, 'Evangelical', GL, 1706, 7 Oct 1718; GL, 7013/1, f.95; SJCF, 1B/3/1, f.7; Nat. Soc., SR2/1/1, 18 May 1712, rule no. 9.

⁷⁷ GL, 6999/1, 31 Jan 1750; see also, April 1755.

⁷⁸ GL, 6999/1, 3 Aug 1781.

⁷⁹ WCA, F3306B, 15 Mar 1704; GL, 1706, 26 Mar 1708; LMA, A/NWC/1, 3 Jul 1713.

although at St Martin's in 1705, both boys and girls had to 'write pieces to be laid before the Trustees' four times a year; and in 1710 writing tables were provided at St Saviour's School for girls.⁸⁰ Later in the century girls at Cripplegate Ward School were taught the fundamental rules of arithmetic, a superior accomplishment normally only afforded to boys.⁸¹ Particularly in larger schools, some boys were given instruction in arithmetic, geometry and navigation to qualify them for sea service. Selected boys from St Sepulchre's, Farringdon Ward School, St Dunstan-in-the-West and St Andrew's Holborn were offered free tuition at Neale's Mathematical School in Hatton Garden.⁸²

Throughout the eighteenth century, there was considerable controversy over the charity school curriculum. Children of the poor had long been seen as a burden on the parish and work was regarded as a cure for idleness. The experimental spinning school run by Thomas Firmin and the emphasis on child labour at the London Workhouse at the end of the seventeenth century exemplify the long-held view that poor children should be employed from an early age. A large body of mercantile opinion saw the poor as a vital national source of cheap labour. It viewed education that encouraged social improvement, making the poor unfit for their role as 'hewers of wood and drawers of water', as detrimental to the progress of the nation. Bernard Mandeville stridently condemned charity schools, fiercely asserting that the lower orders must be kept poor and must not be educated.

To make the Society happy and People easy under the meanest Circumstances,
it is requisite that great Numbers of them should be Ignorant as well as Poor.
Knowledge both enlarges and multiplies our Desires, and the fewer things a

⁸⁰ WCA, F3306A, 8 April 1705; LMA, A/NWC/1, 7 Mar 1710; GL, 9192/1, 27 June 1771; St Anne's Soho, in Cardwell, 5 July 1714; 14 Feb 1717; 19 Oct 1767.

⁸¹ GL, 7013/1, 27 Nov 1777; 11 Dec 1777.

⁸² WCA, 1648/1, 13 March 1710; GL, 9445, 16 Sept 1743; Jones, p. 81.

Man wishes for, the more easily his Necessities may be supply'd. Reading, Writing and Arithmetick, are very necessary to those, whose Business require such Qualifications, but where People's livelihood has no dependence on these Arts, they are very pernicious to the Poor, who are forc'd to get their Daily Bread by their Daily Labour.⁸³

Over the course of the eighteenth century, charity school children were subject to the economic and political mood-swings of the day, and what they were permitted to learn and how they were employed changed to accommodate 'both ideological and vocational elements' within upper class attitudes, often modifying the original intentions of benefactors.⁸⁴

The Grey Coat Hospital introduced spinning in 1700, long before the SPCK recommended manual work to be included in the curriculum. The profit was used for school maintenance. The trustees reported that 'the children do spin very well. Henceforth [they will] get a daily task and when they have done that they may be at liberty either to write or play and if they work any longer they shall be considered for it.'⁸⁵ At St Anne's Soho in 1704, the older girls knitted stockings and made their own clothes and shirts for the boys. All the girls made samplers and were taught to embroider letters and figures in silk and wool, a skill they could then apply to the marking of clothes. Smoothing irons were purchased so girls could learn laundry work, and it was their job to wash the schoolrooms.⁸⁶

⁸³ Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits, Vol. 1: An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools* (London, 1724), pp.287-88.

⁸⁴ Geoffrey Best, *Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Church of England* (Cambridge, 1964), p.119.

⁸⁵ WCA, 1648/1, 29 Oct 1700; 24 Mar 1702.

⁸⁶ St Anne's Soho, 30 Oct 1706; St Anne's Cash Book, 4 June 1706; 25 Sept 1704; 30 Aug 1704, in Cardwell, p.44; GL, 9192/1, 22 Feb 1717.

A 'FINE EXAMPLE OF AN INSTITUTION'

In 1724, as public opinion swung in favour of harnessing the labour of the poor and the SPCK considered the advantages of residential workhouses over charity schools, existing schools were encouraged to include labour in their curriculum.⁸⁷ *The Account of Several Workhouses* of 1725 mentioned the girls' charity school in St James's Westminster, which was turned into a working school where girls were 'lodged, boarded and set to Work at Spinning Flax, Knitting, Sewing, Washing and such other parts of Housewifery as may prepare them to be good Servants'.⁸⁸ *The Account* also featured the Greenwich Charity School for girls as a fine example of an institution that combined manual work with a religious curriculum. This school had been set up by a group of charitable ladies in 1700 and was funded by subscription. From the outset, children were not issued with clothing: instead, material was purchased so they could be taught to make their own clothes. Although the parents were initially opposed to the plan, they soon realised their children were learning marketable skills.⁸⁹ By 1724, about 200 girls had gone into service with local families and the school had a reputation and a waiting list. The girls who attended this school were indeed fortunate, for they not only acquired useful skills through purposeful employment, but also experienced a more enlightened regime than existed in many charity schools. In 1724, a gentleman in Greenwich wrote a letter to a friend in London, subsequently published by the SPCK, commending the female trustees who managed the school, in his words, 'with utmost Perfection'. He explained that discipline was maintained, not by fear and corporal punishment, but by a different approach.

⁸⁷ Jones, p.92.

⁸⁸ *Account* (1725), p.23.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.23-30.

The names of the children are enter'd on a Table, hung up in the School; against each Name there are seven Holes, with a Peg in the first one of them. When a Child commits a Fault, the Peg is remov'd one Hole from her Name, and she is admonish'd accordingly. Upon the second Offence, she is led up to the Table; and, upon removing the Peg to another Hole from her Name, admonish'd again, with an Injunction to get a Psalm, or a Piece of a Chapter by Heart, which the Child must take care to do, or the Peg is carried on to a fourth or fifth Hole, by which she is look'd upon as a high Criminal upon Record in the School, till some Atonement by Task, or otherwise, has prevail'd with the Mistress to remove the Peg back again, and to wipe out all past Faults.

For offences such as swearing, lying and stealing, the girls were 'dress'd up in a Fool's Cap and Coat, and made to sit in the middle of the School for an Hour or more, which they have in great Abhorrence'. If they stole from someone in the school, they had to 'ask Pardon of the Person offended, which they do with great Reluctance; but this they rather do, than be turn'd out of the School'.⁹⁰ The girls at Greenwich appear to have valued their education and applied themselves 'to learn all that is taught in the School, with the utmost Chearfulness'.

In 1734, the Grey Coat Hospital went against the trend of including manual work in the curriculum, as recommended by the SPCK. The profits arising from spinning proved very trifling and 'greatly hindered the children's learning', so those who taught spinning were given notice and the 24 spinning wheels were sold for £1.⁹¹ It was always difficult to find work suitable for children, and girls were easier to employ in schools than boys. In 1746, the SPCK recommended that boys at St

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.24-26.

⁹¹ WCA, 1648/1, 1 Jan 1734. Jones, p. 93.

Sepulchre's should work as well as learn to read and write. The trustees approved the proposal, but reported 'many difficulties' in organizing it. Nothing further was recorded until 1754, when a scheme was agreed with the Workhouse Committee and 25 boys were sent to the workhouse to make nets. Apparently they were not all enthusiastic and Robert Gardiner was suspended for bad behaviour. The trustees agreed that any other boys behaving in a 'stubborn, idle and disorderly manner at the workhouse' would be discharged forthwith.⁹² Only girls' schools managed to combine domestic labour and learning with any success. Children were unskilled workers, there was little market for defective goods, and a lack of competent instructors and trustees with technical expertise meant that manual labour in schools did not persist. Jones suggested that 'victory for the 3 Rs alienated public opinion' and that enthusiastic support for charity schools was never regained.⁹³ But while charity schools in the country at large declined in popularity, many London schools continued to flourish.

SCHOOL STAFF

The experiences of charity school children and the effectiveness of the education they received were, to some extent, determined by the quality of the schoolmaster or mistress at the time. The full-time teachers recommended by the SPCK for appointments in London schools had to produce evidence of moral and intellectual qualifications, but they varied greatly in ability and application. The average salary of a schoolmaster in a London charity school was £30 a year plus housing and fuel, and was £24 a year for a schoolmistress.⁹⁴ Although some were highly valued by the SPCK and by their schools, the general impression created by school minutes is not

⁹² GL, 9445, 4 and 11 Feb 1746; 27 Feb 1754; 19 June 1754.

⁹³ Jones, pp. 94-95.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 100. Further details in Rose, 'Philanthropy', pp.50-51.

altogether favourable. Francis Parent, Master of the Grey Coat Hospital, and his wife Susanna, who acted as matron, were discharged for neglecting their duties and being absent from the school. The children's education had been neglected and the boys had not received instruction in accounts for six months, or in writing for nearly a year.⁹⁵

Mr Somershall, who served as Master of St Martin's for many years, was one of several applicants for the job. The school minutes record the somewhat arbitrary procedure by which he was appointed: the names of three candidates were 'writ upon little Billets and put into a Hat, and shook, and then drawn by one of the trustees'.⁹⁶

By contrast, the charity school founded by Samuel Starling, Alderman of the City of London, in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate to teach poor boys 'to fit them for Servants or Apprentices' was unusual in requiring the schoolmaster to be a Bachelor of Arts from Cambridge University.⁹⁷ Children did not, however, necessarily fare better under a master with superior qualifications. Charles Wright, recommended by the Master of Christ's Hospital as a man 'of sober character, honest, well-skilled in navigation, astronomy and ... capable of instructing youth therein' was appointed with an above average salary of £40 a year, but resigned four months later.⁹⁸

In 1777, a serious case involving a charity school master was heard at the Old Bailey. Rev. Mr Benjamin Russen, Master of Bethnal Green Charity School, was charged with raping one of his pupils, ten year-old Ann Mayne. Ann was questioned at length and in great detail in the court and, at a time when the majority of those accused of rape were acquitted, Benjamin Russen was found guilty and sentenced to

⁹⁵ WCA, 1648/7, 24 Oct 1738.

⁹⁶ WCA, F3306B, 1 Jan 1701.

⁹⁷ William Maitland, *The History of London from its Foundation to the Present Time*, Vol. 2 (London, 1772) p.1010. My thanks to Janice Turner for this reference.

⁹⁸ WCA, 1648/1, 5 Sept 1732; 12 Sept 1732; 30 Jan 1733.

death.⁹⁹ A pamphlet giving a full account of this scandalous trial subsequently appeared entitled *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing!*¹⁰⁰

Some charity school children were taught by elderly masters past their best but unable to retire because they did not receive a pension.¹⁰¹ The first master at St Anne's Soho, in poor health when he was appointed, died three months later; Mr Ashenden at the Grey Coat Hospital, old and sick, died in 1714 and the children attended his funeral; and a master who had taught at St Sepulchre's for 50 years died in his post at the age of 95.¹⁰² The general picture is not encouraging, but it must be remembered that the unusual and scandalous tend to dominate the records and, as far as we know, the majority of charity schoolmasters probably fulfilled their roles adequately and unremarkably. Among those who were notably able were Henry Dixon, appointed to St Andrew's Holborn in 1711, and Sims of Cripplegate, the 'father of the charity school masters', regarded at the time as an educational enthusiast.¹⁰³

In 1719, a most intriguing incident occurred at the Grey Coat Hospital. It is the longest entry in any of the sets of minutes researched and was recorded in detail on behalf of the irate trustees. The boys who witnessed the events must have watched, wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

Mr. Richard Farewell, one of the Governors, required to inspect the boys learning and work, reported that last Tuesday he went into the school room and asked Mr. Aymes how the children went on with their learning and the

⁹⁹ OBP, Benjamin Russen, 15 Oct 1777 (t17771015-1).

¹⁰⁰ *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing! Being a full and circumstantial account of the trials of Rev. Mr Russen, late master of the charity school at Bethnell Green*, reproduced in Chadwyck-Healey, compilation volume 20, quoted in OBP, 15 Oct 1777, Benjamin Russen (t17771015-1), Associated Records.

¹⁰¹ WCA, 1656, 21 Aug 1760. Further examples: St Anne's Soho, 15 Oct 1716; 24 Oct 1762, in Cardwell, p.31-34.

¹⁰² Cardwell, p.8; GL, 9445, 27 Jan 1750.

¹⁰³ Jones, p.108.

improvement they had made. His answer was They writ all alike. Mr. Farewell desired to see Tateham's book and then asked if they all writ as well as that. Aymes answered no nor a quarter as well. Mr. Farewell asked how do they write all alike. Aymes very roughly answered They writ all alike for all that. Mr. Farewell replied you are a rascal to use me so. Aymes told him he had nothing to do there. He knew his character well and he wanted the Pretender, with a great deal more to that effect.

Mr. Farewell came from the schoolroom into the Governors room and told the Governors how he had been used. Aymes, not satisfied with insulting Mr. Farewell, came into the Governors room and there declared as he was a steward of the House, he was obliged in conscience to declare the ill usage of ye poor children – that they were fed with stinking meat, that it was every day flung about the Hall, that it was like horse flesh not fit for dogs to eat and that Skinner, one of the boys, brought a piece to him that stunk so it made him bring up his dinner. The Governors sent for the matron and nurses that served the children and ordered the leftover meat to be brought. They all smelt to it and approved it to be very sweet and good meat. All declared the rest to have been so. Only about 4 ounces was ever left over and reheated for their breakfast. Having thus proved what Aymes said to be false, spiteful and malicious, he fell into a violent outrage, saying that all the Governors were a parcel of pitiful fellows, he did not care a fart for them all; that they mismanaged their trust and kept a prison instead of a Hospital; it was all a cheat and he would expose them in the Daily Courant. Then turning to the boys in the hall he said, 'Ye poor white arsed Negroes, aye poor slaves and prisoners work then in slavery, whip 'em, whip 'em, make them work till they

die'. Then he retired to ye school door and there declared 'You are Governors such as you are, I am Master of the house and will go where I please, do what I please, and have what I please in it'.¹⁰⁴

Richard Farewell (or Farwell) was a well-respected magistrate. When he died in 1747, he left a legacy of £100 to St Margaret's Hospital, where he was also a Governor, and a monument was erected in his memory.¹⁰⁵ As a responsible trustee, he had the right to enter a classroom and enquire into the progress of the pupils, but Aymes may have seen him as officious and meddlesome. Perhaps Mandeville was right when he lampooned school trustees and sarcastically wrote, 'But if there be the least satisfaction in governing the Children, it must be ravishing to govern the Schoolmaster himself'.¹⁰⁶ A trustee wandering in, demanding to see work of pupils of mixed age, ability and motivation would have been irritating and frustrating for any schoolmaster. Spinning was still in operation at the Grey Coat Hospital in 1719, so time for education was limited. Aymes was dismissed, but was he, as the trustees thought, an ill-mannered, insubordinate troublemaker, or were his claims about the quality of the food and the management of the school a heartfelt cry for improvement and reform?

As we have seen, boys and girls were taught separately, and like some schoolmasters, some schoolmistresses were long-serving. Mrs Mary Harbin, from 'ye sign of the Coffee Mill and Sugar Loafe in St James Street', an alehouse which probably acted as an employment centre for those looking for work, was appointed on a salary of £30 a year and the 'conveniency of a lodging'. She was responsible for the girls at St Martin's School for 16 years and girls taught by her were fortunate. Under her tuition, they learned to write and her 'extraordinary care and diligence in teaching

¹⁰⁴ WCA, 1648/5, 2 June 1719.

¹⁰⁵ WCA, 1656/2, 14 June 1748.

¹⁰⁶ Mandeville, *The Fable*, pp.280-81.

the Girlls and making the Childrens Linnen and stockings' was rewarded by a presentation of two guineas.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, 'Complaint haveing been made to the Trustees by severall Subscribers and others', that she had not prayed in school for King George I and had refused to take the oaths the law required and, because of her Jacobite leanings, she resigned.¹⁰⁸ Her successor was Mrs Mary Worthington, a married woman and mantua maker from the parish. The minutes record her qualifications, 'She says she has read several books and treatises of divinity, writes an indifferent good hand, can knit, mark, sew and apt to teach having bin well educated and a constant member of the established church'.¹⁰⁹ Before her appointment, together with the two other candidates, she had to produce a sample of her handwriting.¹¹⁰

DISCIPLINE.

In many schools, facilities were meagre and inadequate teachers were compelled to deal with large numbers. Children are astute in assessing the weaknesses of adults in authority, and in 1737, the girls of St James's School in Westminster played havoc with a new schoolmistress, who collapsed under the strain and resigned after only three weeks in her post. Eight years later, an assistant mistress at the same school gave in her notice, unable to cope with 'the unruly behaviour of the Children'.¹¹¹

Children who seriously misbehaved in school expected to receive corporal punishment, common in all types of schools, and in charity schools used frequently for boys and occasionally for girls. In 1711, a boy at Camberwell School was flogged

¹⁰⁷ WCA, 3306A, 8 Apr 1705.

¹⁰⁸ For the political aspects of charity school see Rose, "Seminaries of Faction and Rebellion" and 'Politics, Religion and Charity'.

¹⁰⁹ WCA, F3307, 'St Martin's Charity Schools, the Foull Minutes of the Schools Proceedings', 29 Nov 1716.

¹¹⁰ WCA, F3307, 10 Jan 1717.

¹¹¹ SJ, ii. f.304 and SJ, ii. f. 376, quoted in Rose, 'Evangelical', p.53.

‘for a grievous offence committed against his Mistress in throwing his book at her head & Spitting in her face’.¹¹² In 1707, eight girls at St Saviour’s School, who had committed ‘serious offences’, were whipped.¹¹³ Six boys from the Green Coat School, who went out without permission and returned late at night, were whipped in the presence of the trustees; and a group of Grey Coat Hospital boys, who had ‘committed very notorious Disorders’, received ‘publick correction in the hall in the view of all the rest of the boys’.¹¹⁴ Punishment could be severe and even excessive. Mr Reed of St Anne’s Soho, strongly recommended by the SPCK, was called to account for his ‘immoderate correction’ of his pupils.¹¹⁵ Seven year-old Thomas Kendall, admitted to Peter Joye’s School in 1712, was not ready to cope with the strict discipline imposed and was taken away by his parents after just a week ‘for fear of whipping’.¹¹⁶

The ultimate sanction was expulsion and inevitably some children’s education ended as a result of their own bad behaviour. There were plenty of children willing to fill empty places. John Armstrong was expelled from St Martin’s when he ‘stole severall books out of ye school and, formerly guilty of many disorders and ill practices, still remain[ed] incorrigible’.¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Smith was dismissed from St James’s School in 1713 ‘for misdemeanours with Boys’, and two more girls were expelled in 1718 for ‘Lewd Behaviour’.¹¹⁸ At St Saviour’s, Sarah Ibbott lost her chance of education when the mistress ‘utterly despaired of ever teaching her anything or bringing her to any good behaviour’.¹¹⁹ The most common offence was

¹¹² Nat. Soc., SR2/1/1, 19 Aug 1711, quoted in Rose, ‘Evangelical’, p.53.

¹¹³ LMA, A/NWC/1, 30 Sept 1707.

¹¹⁴ WCA, 1656/2, 22 Jan 1738; 1648/7, 1 July 1735.

¹¹⁵ St Anne’s Soho, 16 March 1712, in Cardwell, p.33.

¹¹⁶ GL, 1706, 31 Dec 1712.

¹¹⁷ WCA, F3306B, 26 Feb 1702.

¹¹⁸ SJ, i. f. 142; SJ, ii. f. 72, quoted in Rose, ‘Evangelical’, p.53.

¹¹⁹ LMA, A/NWC/1, 2 Sept 1726; 3 Aug 1725; 7 Sept 1725.

truancy and children who rejected the opportunities offered by charity schools were usually dealt with severely. Truancy was regarded as shameful and first-time offenders at St Martin's School had to wear 'a coat with Yellow Sleeves and a Slip of Yellow down the back Seam', yellow being the colour of disgrace.¹²⁰ In exceptional circumstances, trustees used their discretion and showed leniency. Thomas Bareford, absent for three months from Peter Joye's School, had been sorting feathers for his widowed mother, a muff maker, so was allowed to continue his education.¹²¹ Grace Phelps, who ran away from St Saviour's in winter and lay 'severall nights at the glasshouse' with destitute children who slept there regularly, was given another chance.¹²² A pupil at the Grey Coat Hospital who played truant for several days and then appeared before the trustees 'humbly confessing his fault and being very sorrowful for it', was re-admitted.¹²³

Children's experiences and progress through school could be adversely affected by the attitude of their parents. Some parents were summoned to answer complaints about their children and others came to defend them or intercede on their behalf.¹²⁴ Parents who failed to send their children to church were summoned to give explanations.¹²⁵ The relationship between parents and trustees was problematic, not least because of the cultural gulf between the poor and the middling-sort trustees, who saw themselves as members of polite society. Trustees expected gratitude and deference, and what seemed to them 'rude' 'abusive' or 'insulting' may, to some parents, have been no more than asserting their rights or defending their children against unaccustomed authority. As a direct result of their parents' interference,

¹²⁰ D.H.Thomas, *A Short History of St Martin in the Field High School for Girls* (London, 1929), p.78.

¹²¹ GL, 9192/1, 1 Jan 1761.

¹²² LMA, A/NWC/1, 10 Jan 1709.

¹²³ WCA, 1648/1, 2 Sept 1701.

¹²⁴ For example, WCA, 1648/1, May 1699; 9 May 1699.

¹²⁵ GL, 7013/1, 12 April 1716; 1 June 1780. LMA, A/NWC/1, 6 Sept 1709; 4 Oct 1709.

truculence or aggression, some children forfeited their opportunity for education.¹²⁶ Others continued only after their parents' submission and apology. At the Grey Coat Hospital, the mother of Thomas Jones 'fat boy', as he was known (to distinguish him from Thomas Jones 'finger'), 'came begging Pardon for her Rude Behaviour [and] humbly desired her son might be re-admitted', agreeing that in future he would be at the entire disposal of the trustees.¹²⁷ Robert Thurley and Thomas Whittingham, suspended from St Sepulchre's for their and their mothers' bad behaviour, were re-admitted after an apology and promise of improvement.¹²⁸ The trustees at St Saviour's School were perceptive enough to acknowledge that children should not always be blamed for their parents' behaviour. Ann and Elizabeth Wade's mother had behaved with 'passion and indiscretion', but the girls were allowed to continue.¹²⁹ Although school trustees ultimately wielded the power, school minutes show that at these encounters parents, and mothers in particular, were neither tongue-tied nor browbeaten. Some parents hectored the trustees, stoutly defending their children; while others apologized, pleading humbly for re-admission; and a further group showed appreciation of schooling that had obviously been prized. In poorer areas of London, parents' initial desire for education was often outweighed by other needs and children were forced to leave school early. Charity school records are littered with names of children expelled for persistent truancy or bad behaviour, and names of parents intervening, often aggressively, on behalf of their children, but it has to be remembered that these were the minority who attracted attention and on whom the

¹²⁶ WCA, 1648/1, 5 April 1699; GL, 7013/1, 5 March 1722, 25 Aug 1768; GL, 9445, 3 Oct 1744; LMA, A/NWC/1, 19 Nov 1717, 6 Feb 1721, 8 Oct 1723, 19 Oct 1723, 6 June 1725; GL, 6999/1, April 1755.

¹²⁷ WCA, 1648/1, 16 Oct 1705.

¹²⁸ GL, 9445, 19 Aug 1755, 26 Nov 1755.

¹²⁹ LMA, A/NWC/1, 12 May 1730.

trustees had to spend a disproportionate amount of time. Most children passed through the schools without incident, their progress and abilities unrecorded.

PUBLIC OCCASIONS

As London's charity school children looked back on their schooldays, they would have recalled a wide range of experiences. Some remembered a rebellious period when they attempted to escape the restrictions of the classroom, only to be hauled back in disgrace and beaten by the master. Some looked back on a period of pleasure when they socialized with their peers, or recalled with gratitude a schoolmaster or mistress who had provided them with skills in needlecraft or the tools of literacy. Others perhaps still felt defiant or mortified as they recalled their mothers haranguing a schoolmaster or grovelling apologetically. Most had seen their parents questioned and judged as to their worthiness, before they themselves were labelled 'objects of charity'.

For certain groups of children, particular incidents stood out. Boys at the Grey Coat Hospital in 1700, ridiculed by other boys in the parish as they walked in uniform to evening prayer, must have realized, perhaps for the first time, with pride or dismay, that attending a charity school set them apart.¹³⁰ Contemporaries of Mary Pearson, who died while a pupil of St Martin's School for girls, recalled the evening when six of her school friends carried her corpse wrapped in a shroud for burial, while the remainder stood at the graveside, each clasping a nosegay. It was Good Friday, and after the brief committal, they returned to school for a draught of ale and a 'cross-bun'.¹³¹ For a few charity school boys, the highlight of their time at school was being chosen to make the draws for the public lotteries at the Guildhall before a noisy,

¹³⁰ WCA, 1648/1, 10 Jan 1700; 24 Jan 1700.

¹³¹ WCA, F3307, 14 April 1720.

enthusiastic crowd. Those from the Green Coat School were ‘shirted three times a week’ and had ‘powder and oyl for their hair every day’ so they were presentable. They drew the ‘benefit tickets’ for the Westminster Bridge Lottery in 1740 and shared eight guineas between them, the proceeds of a collection from the prize-winners.¹³²

For many of London’s charity school children the most vivid memories were of the annual procession and service, initiated by the SPCK and held in Whitsun week from 1704 until 1877. This event drew large crowds and the children were the focus of attention. At St Anne’s Soho in 1830, a school examination due to take place the day before the procession, had to be postponed ‘because the children were in such a state of excitement’.¹³³ A century earlier, children eagerly anticipated a day that was different and offered special treats. The first service was held in St Andrew’s Church in Holborn. Orderly files of children processed across London, entering the church in alphabetic order of parishes, but the venue proved too small and there was great disappointment for the children from Wapping and Whitechapel who were shut out.¹³⁴ As numbers increased, the event was transferred to larger churches and from 1782 was held at St Paul’s Cathedral. Each year charity school children received a new set of clothing for the occasion and those apprenticed by their schools joined in the procession. Charity school uniforms, depicted in the statuettes that often graced the entrances to schools, were in a style worn by adults at the time of the school’s foundation. Trustees were resistant to change, so by the end of the century, the uniforms were old-fashioned.¹³⁵ In 1784, when 5,000 children assembled in St Paul’s Cathedral, an observer described the scene:

One of the most beautiful and touching of all London sights...

¹³² WCA, 1656/2, 23 July 1740. Boys from the Grey Coat Hospital were employed in the same way from 1723.

¹³³ Cardwell, p.53.

¹³⁴ Cardwell, p.49.

¹³⁵ Cunningham, *Charity Costumes*, pp.66 and 119-22.

In endless ranks pour in the children clothed in all sorts of quaint dresses. Boys in knee breeches of Hogarth's school days, bearing glittering pewter badges on their coats, girls in blue and orange, with quaint little mob caps as white as snow, and long white gloves covering all their little arms.¹³⁶

While this had obvious appeal for spectators there must have been a number of children who felt ridiculous in fancy dress.

For the children, music, rather than the sermon, was the highlight of the service. London charity school children were renowned for their singing. Some schools employed special music teachers and children sang music specially written for them in the great churches of the capital, re-furbished after the Fire.¹³⁷ At St Paul's in 1784, standards and banners bearing the names of the schools were erected above the children's heads. At a given signal from a flugelhorn they all stood up and the service began with the *Old Hundredth*. Handel's Coronation Anthem, *Zadok the Priest*, was performed and the service ended with his *Hallelujah Chorus*. The Dean of Westminster, commenting on the music, said, 'The union of 5,000 treble voices raises admiration and astonishment. It is a choir impossible to collect by any other means'.¹³⁸ The SPCK encouraged trustees to make the event enjoyable for the children and those at several schools ordered gingerbread, 'for the children's comfort on the way home'. The day ended with a special meal of 'mutton and spinach and ale'.¹³⁹ Children who attended London charity schools had opportunities to participate in public events not available to children elsewhere in England and Wales and occasions such as these created vivid and lasting impressions.

¹³⁶ George Thornby, *Old and New London* (London, 1784), quoted Cardwell, p.50.

¹³⁷ WCA, 1656/2, 11 May 1739; WCA, 1648/1354, 'A Psalm and Hymn to be sung by the Poor Children of Grey Coat Hospital' on 12 Jan 1724 and 1648/1355 on 15 Feb 1778.

¹³⁸ Thornbury, quoted in Cardwell, p.50.

¹³⁹ LMA, A/NWC/1, 20 May 1708; WCA, 3306A, 2 June 1715; St Anne's Soho in Cardwell, p. 52.

EDUCATION AND THE USES OF LITERACY

Charity school education offered poor children opportunities their parents could not otherwise afford. Craig Rose has suggested that for plebeian parents, ‘not the least important factor’ in their decision to send their children to charity schools was that they would be educated ‘in the most popular creed of the day’.¹⁴⁰ The religious aspect may have been significant for some, but in practical terms, the free clothing and apprenticeship fees offered by many schools were valuable resources for poor families, and the advantages of even basic literacy were considerable. Parents showed a keen demand for charity school education and their motives for seeking it must have been mixed. Literacy may not have altered a child’s long-term prospects of employment, but the advantages of being able to read and write, particularly in an urban environment, were many. The illiterate were often characterised not only as unknowing, but also as unthinking, and on a personal level, a poor person’s ability to sign his name rather than make his mark brought confidence and pride. The concentration needed to acquire literacy and the accompanying verbal confidence encouraged within the school curriculum were advantages in everyday life. Some charity school children must have been the first to bring literacy to their families, and some working for their parents must have used their abilities in their trade.

Literacy gave access to a wealth of secular printed material readily available in the capital: ballads, advertisements, pamphlets and newspapers. Poor children in religious families could access Bible stories and the literature of their faith. As children’s books became increasingly available to the middle classes, it is difficult to believe that poor children did not have access to second-hand or discarded copies. Perhaps some came across one of the earliest publications for children, *Curiosities in*

¹⁴⁰ Rose, ‘Evangelical’, p.65.

the Tower of London, two tiny booklets priced at 4d with woodcut illustrations of the animals that could be seen at the menagerie in the Tower.¹⁴¹ Even at a humble level, basic reading and writing could bring satisfaction and pleasure. For the fortunate and ambitious, literacy could open gateways to knowledge and new opportunities. For the less fortunate, being able to write added another dimension to their ability to deal with authority and take control of their own lives. Many paupers who, later in life, wrote letters begging for assistance or demanding money from parish overseers must have learnt their skills in charity schools. Literacy, even at a basic level gave power to the poor.

In an increasingly industrial society with a complex job market, employers in London in more specialized trades sought and valued those, even among the poor, who could cope with simple arithmetic, handle money, take measurements and follow diagrams. As we have already seen, poor boys recruited for the Marine Society for service in the Navy at the end of the century were asked about their literacy skills.¹⁴² Approximately 4,000 poor boys were recruited between 1770 and 1780; 55 per cent claimed some form of literacy and 5 per cent of the total were enrolled straight from charity schools. They served sea captains, pursers, chaplains and ships' carpenters and their ability to read, or to read and write, were considered relevant and were entered on their naval record.¹⁴³ Charity school girls who acquired practical skills for use in service were eagerly sought by the middle classes, and those who could read offered employers a potential bonus. Literate household servants were less likely to be swindled by unscrupulous tradesmen, and they could deal with bills and bargain for household resources. London offered employment on a scale not found elsewhere and

¹⁴¹ Thomas Boreham, *Curiosities in the Tower of London*, 2 vols. (London, 1741).

¹⁴² NMM, *The Bye-laws and Regulations of the Marine Society and the Account of the Marine Society*, (1775).

¹⁴³ Dianne Payne, 'Rhetoric, Reality and the Marine Society', *London Journal* 30, 2 (2005), 66-84.

thousands of charity school children went into apprenticeships in a range of trades, organized or approved by school trustees. Girls could be apprenticed into a trade and some were, but most went into service, for which charity schools paid no premium. Charity school children were in demand and met with approval as valuable assets to the nation's work force.

Taking the figures published by the SPCK and approximate totals for the population of the capital during the eighteenth century, Craig Rose suggested that London's charity schools catered for about 7 per cent of the population.¹⁴⁴ This estimate roughly accords with the numbers of actual children reported present at public occasions, such as the 4,000 at the Thanksgiving for the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and the 5,000 at the Annual Service at St Paul's in 1784. But while these figures provide a good measure of those attending on specific days, they should be seen as a minimum and certainly as an underestimate of children who accessed charity school education. Apart from the many who went to school only briefly, so adding to the ongoing total of charity school children, there were hundreds of others who attended charity schools for Dissenters, Catholics, Quakers, French Protestants and the Welsh living in London.¹⁴⁵ Even more significantly, in a population where 70 per cent of males were literate, the relatively small percentage attending free charity schools begs the question, 'Where did other children of the poor go to school?' Countless dame schools, run by modest members of the communities of the capital, provided regular or spasmodic basic education for a few pence for those whose

¹⁴⁴ Rose, 'Evangelical', p.36.

¹⁴⁵ For Dissenters' charity schools see Jones, pp. 131 and 373; Rose 'Evangelical', pp.54 -56. For Catholic charity schools see Michael Murphy, *Catholic Poor Schools in Tower Hamlets (London) 1765-1865* (Roehampton, 1991). For a Quaker school see Tim Hitchcock (ed), *Richard Hutton's Complaints Book*, London Record Society 24 (London, 1987). For French Protestant charity schools see Keith Le May, 'The Westminster French Protestant Charity School: Apprenticeships of Former Pupils 1750-1815', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society* 27 (2001), 561 – 572. For the Welsh charity school in London see Sarah Lloyd, "'Agents of their Own Concern'?".

parents could afford it, but there is little information about these schools. Once again, the historiography of London is largely silent.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined London's charity schools in a new way by placing the focus, not on benefactors or religious rationale, but on the recipients of charity, the children and their parents. Elite rhetoric derided the underprivileged, dealing judgmentally with the children of the poor, and the evidence here strongly suggests that children admitted to charity schools have been misrepresented. They were not, as the historiography has condemned them, the 'scum of the parish', but, for the most part, the children of the settled and industrious poor. The demand for charity school education was high and the motives of parents of poor children were mixed, but literacy, even at a basic level, appears to have been sought and valued, particularly for its uses in urban society. Charity children's apprenticeship prospects may not have been hugely enhanced, but literacy gave power to the poor in a way that had never been envisaged by charity school benefactors and subscribers.

Not all charity school boys entered an apprenticeship. Some took advantage of a different opportunity available in the capital. On 1 March 1771, thirteen year-old John Davies, a charity school boy, left his home in Half Moon Alley and made his way into Bishopsgate Street. There he joined thirteen other boys of similar age who, like him, were about to set out on a 70 mile four-day march to Portsmouth.¹⁴⁶ Between 1756 and the end of the century, hundreds of boys from London's charity schools took this route; boys like John Thorpe from Blackfriars in 1758 and Christopher Terry from the Westminster Blue Coat Charity School in 1760.¹⁴⁷ In the 1770s, they were followed by charity school boys from the parishes of St Martin in the Field, St James's, St Saviour's, Cripplegate, Greenwich, Bermondsey and more.¹⁴⁸ But John Davies soon discovered that none of the other thirteen boys in his group had come straight from school. Two had worked with their fathers, one as a watchmaker and the other making bricks and tiles. Michael Clark and George Smith were errand boys, and Richard Tilman had been apprenticed to a breeches maker. The tallest boy, William Danzer, was seventeen, and he had been working on the river at Henley-on-Thames.¹⁴⁹

With a long trek ahead, John and his new companions marched to London Bridge where watermen rowed them up the Thames to Putney.¹⁵⁰ From there they set off towards Kingston on the first twelve-mile leg of their journey. The Portsmouth Road was an important route, for it linked the capital to one of the nation's principal naval bases. Coaches of sailors, boisterous and often drunk on the proceeds of prize-

¹⁴⁶ Ogilby, *Britannia*, (strip map) 1675 shows Cornhill to Portsmouth as a distance of 73 miles.

¹⁴⁷ Roland W.W. Pietsch, 'Ships' Boys and Charity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: The London Marine Society, 1756-1772', database accompanying his unpublished PhD thesis (London University, 2003).

¹⁴⁸ NMM, MSY/O/1-4, 'Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships' (1770 – 1780).

¹⁴⁹ NMM, MSY/O/1, Nos. 574-587.

¹⁵⁰ This account is based on the set of accounts presented to the Marine Society by James Porter, one of the Society's conductors, who regularly marched recruits to Portsmouth. It records the route and stopping places and was entered in MSY/A/3, 'Fair Minutes of the Marine Society', 29 Sept 1770.

money, came up the road and many more sailors tramped the route on foot in both directions. Inns and alehouses provided them with clean straw overnight in their outhouses and did good business from their custom.¹⁵¹ Like other poor travellers, John and his companions had meals at the alehouses and slept on straw on the floor with the sailors. From Kingston they tramped beside the deeply rutted road through Mousall and up the long five mile ascent to Hindhead Heath, following the narrow, winding stretch of road round the edge of the Devil's Punchbowl, a large hollow of heath and heather, nearly 350 feet deep in places.¹⁵² For boys born and bred in London, the forests and wide open countryside of Hampshire, with early morning mists and heavy dew, must have contrasted sharply with the capital's dour, shabbier buildings and the acrid, smelly streets to which they were accustomed.

On the second day, they marched along the steep, stony section of the road as it descended into the cobbled main street of the market town of Guildford, and spent the night in an outhouse of one the town's many coaching inns. But the most taxing part of the journey was still to come and as they trudged downhill through wild country to Liphook and on through Rake, they would certainly have met sailors on the road, who perhaps shouted encouragement or words of warning. They halted at Petersfield for the third night and after a supper of bread, cheese and beer, they must have slept soundly. Next day, they pressed on and with Portsmouth only 17 miles away, they still had to make the weary ascent to the highest point in Hampshire, followed by a final steep climb up Portsdown Hill. From there they had their first sight of their destination, Portsmouth harbour.¹⁵³ Their journey completed, John and eight of his companions made their way to the 'Royal William', while the remaining

¹⁵¹ For a detailed account of the Portsmouth Road, see Charles Harper, *The Portsmouth Road and its Tributaries: Today and in Days of Old* (London, 1895).

¹⁵² Harper, p.203.

¹⁵³ See also Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, (London, 1838). Nicholas and Smike made the journey from London to Portsmouth and Dickens describes parts of the route.

five went to four other ships to which they had been assigned. They were just a few of the thousands of boys recruited by the Marine Society for service at sea.

CHAPTER 3

MARINE SOCIETY CHILDREN

On 5th December 1759, a large crowd gathered at the theatre in Drury Lane. The actor David Garrick had promised to perform one of his favourite roles in *The Tragedy of Zara*.¹ In the audience were merchants, bankers, businessmen and their wives, and 18 small boys aged about 14.² Each boy was dressed in dark blue kersey sea jacket, waistcoat and breeches, check shirt, yarn hose, hardwearing shoes – brand new clothes complete with a pocket-handkerchief.³ The boys were on show and had been strictly forbidden to ‘holler’ at the play.⁴ The performance began with a prologue addressed to the ladies and gentlemen in the audience and part of it went like this:

Ye sons of freedom, view this little band,
They owe their safety to a fost’ring hand,
Snatch’d from the paths of vice and branded shame
You point the road to honesty and fame.⁵

The ‘fost’ring hand’ was the Marine Society and the play was one of several benefit performances, aimed to raise money for this charitable organization that was founded in 1756 and sent poor boys to sea. Contemporaries, with some justification, called the mid-eighteenth century ‘the age of charity’, and many modern historians have agreed.⁶ In Paul Slack’s authoritative survey of welfare policies from the fifteenth to the eighteenth

¹ National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (hereafter NMM), ‘Marine Society Fair Minutes, 1756 – 1780’, MSY/A/1-5. MSY/A/1, 1 Oct 1759.

² *ibid.*, 22 Nov 1759.

³ *ibid.*, 24 Nov 1757.

⁴ NMM, MSY/A/1, 29 Nov 1759.

⁵ *ibid.*, 6 Dec 1759.

⁶ *A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of the Asylum for Female Orphans, Anniversary Meeting of Guardians, Monday 16 May 1768, Rev Thomas Francklin, D.D. Rector of Brasted* (London, 1768), p.21.

centuries, he suggests that in the absence of national reform the decades of the mid-century saw voluntary groups of philanthropists taking the initiative to make provision for the poor. Slack argues that this period witnessed the emergence of new, vigorous charities, echoing social welfare themes from earlier centuries, and allowing a generation that had lost faith in the state to make a uniquely positive impact on the lives of the poor.⁷ Among the charities established in this blossoming of institutions was the Marine Society.

Until recently, the most detailed research on the Society was contained in Donna Andrew's *Philanthropy and Police*, published in 1989, and in James Stephen Taylor's biography of the Society's founder, Jonas Hanway.⁸ Building on earlier social histories in which the Society figured as a fragment of a larger story, both Andrew and Taylor explore eighteenth-century charities from the point of view of the elite, the philanthropists and patrons. Andrew describes the Marine Society's work as the 'rehabilitation of young hooligans', but makes little reference to the 'objects of charity', the boys themselves.⁹ The older works that underpinned these more recent studies, such as Dorothy George's *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, refer briefly to the Marine Society's recruitment methods and identify its aim as 'saving boys from a life of vagrancy and crime'.¹⁰ Similarly, in our most comprehensive history of childhood, the two-volume *Children in English Society*, Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt reiterate this perception, providing a more detailed model of the Marine Society and its recruits,

⁷ Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early-modern England* (Oxford, 1999), p.138.

⁸ James Stephen Taylor, *Jonas Hanway, Founder of the Marine Society: Charity and Policy in Eighteenth – Century Britain* (London, 1985).

⁹ Donna Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1989), p.114.

¹⁰ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1925, Chicago, 2000), p.146.

based on the Society's published historical accounts and publicity. They conclude that Marine Society boys were 'both destitute and delinquent', but that in the 1770s, the Society became 'noticeably less interested in helping the vagrant-delinquent boy and more ready to assist the honest poor in distress.'¹¹ In a similar vein, Wiley Sanders, in an edited series of archival documents on delinquency, suggests that it was only during the first few years of its existence that the Marine Society was interested in reclaiming delinquent boys.¹²

The perception of the Society's recruits as criminals and outcasts, however, has, if anything, become more thoroughly embedded in more recent scholarship. Roland Pietsch's recent thesis, 'Ships' Boys and Charity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: The London Marine Society (1756-1772)', describes the Marine Society as 'not merely a recruitment project, but something that was deeply rooted in the concern about London's troubles with youth unemployment, misbehaviour and crime'.¹³ Modern historians, referring to the Society in passing, tend to describe the recruits variously as orphaned, unemployed, as waifs with criminal tendencies, as delinquent street children, as the sons of criminals, and the Marine Society as a private initiative set up to deal with juvenile crime.

In the wake of this confusing and conflicting range of references and interpretations, this chapter will re-assess the characteristics of the boys recruited by the Marine Society by using a source that offers a wide range of personal information about

¹¹ Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, Vols. 1 & 2 (London, 1969 and 1973), pp.113 and 115.

¹² Wiley B. Sanders (ed), *Juvenile Offenders for a Thousand Years: Selected Readings from Anglo-Saxon Times to 1900* (North Carolina, 1970), p.54.

¹³ Roland W.W. Pietsch, 'Ships' Boys and Charity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: The London Marine Society (1756-1772)' (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, London University, 2003), Abstract.

them, the largely unexplored ‘Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King’s Ships’.¹⁴ These uniquely detailed documents show that during the eighteenth century the vast majority of recruits were not unemployed street children or boys with criminal tendencies, but came from a wide cross-section of London’s poor but settled communities, and that the Society served an altogether different purpose from that of dealing with juvenile crime.

CHARITIES IN COMPETITION

As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, parochial workhouses and charity schools, with support from the SPCK, offered welfare and education to children of the poor. At the same time, however, moral purpose, religion and the work ethic were uppermost in the rhetoric of these institutions. While the motives of these benefactors were genuinely charitable, their ‘objects of charity’ were referred to in arbitrary, judgmental terms or in the powerful image of idle, disreputable children heading for the gallows. The new, vigorous private charities that emerged in the capital during the eighteenth century also aimed to make a positive impact on the lives of the poor, but they too had multiple objectives and agendas.

The Marine Society was one of the most successful private charities in eighteenth-century London. It was founded at the beginning of the Seven Years’ War to provide naval recruits and so had instant appeal to a population keen to solve its military and social problems in one fell swoop. It offered poor boys a career at sea and aimed to instill in them a sense of religion and patriotism. Jonas Hanway, the Society’s founder and

¹⁴ NMM, ‘Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King’s Ships, 1770 – 1873’, MSY/O/1-15.

author of most of its publicity, acknowledged its multiple aims and its appeal to a wide variety of motives. He wrote,

This society ... assists the warrior and the merchant; it acts the part of a zealous citizen, the tender parent of the poor, and the true friend of the public.¹⁵

This diversity of purpose was part of the reason for the Society's success in attracting patrons.

But at mid-century, other new charities such as the Asylum for Orphan Girls and the Magdalen Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes were established alongside the Marine Society, providing welfare, but claiming public support on the basis of their ability to discipline disruptive and immoral tendencies. A sermon preached as part of the advertising campaign for the Asylum for Orphan Girls, claimed, in melodramatic terms, that this new institution was taking in girls who had been:

Lurking amidst the Haunts of despairing Wretchedness, exposed to the inclemencies of the midnight Air, feeding on Husks and Rinds, sleeping in Cinder-heaps and Dung-hills; prepared thus, by their extreme Want, as well as the total darkness of their minds, to plunge into every kind of Crime without Remorse; and Ripening into Theft, Prostitution, Robbery and Murder.¹⁶

The advertising campaign for the Magdalen Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes included published accounts of case histories detailing penitents' emotions and inner thoughts, the accuracy of which is of course questionable. The melodramatic and emotional sermons of William Dodds, the fashionable London preacher, were tailored to his audiences and

¹⁵ Jonas Hanway, *An Account of the Marine Society* (London, 1759, 6th edn).

¹⁶ *On the Female Character and Education. A Sermon preached on Thursday 16 May 1765 at the Anniversary Meeting of the Guardians of the Asylum for Deserted Female Orphans by John Brown, Vicar of Newcastle* (London, 1768), p.21.

became key documents of the charity, re-published in the Hospital's annual reports. In 1759, in a remarkable sermon at St Lawrence's Guildhall, Dodds used a monologue spoken by a fictional prostitute to address his congregation, a charity-inciting device that Sarah Lloyd has described as 'a piece of philanthropic ventriloquism'.¹⁷ Charities needed to command attention and could only flourish if middling-sort and elite patrons were impressed by their rhetoric and retained interest. Private charities dealing with children and the young were in competition and acrimony between opposing patrons was not uncommon. 'Ridiculous feuds' between charities were recorded in the press.¹⁸

The Marine Society's substantial printed publicity, including pamphlets, posters, published letters, sermons and newspaper advertisements, appealed for funds and subscriptions. Approaches were made through networks of friends and business acquaintances, and strong links were established with City Livery Companies. The Society's literature aimed to convince its mainly middling-sort patrons, not only of the charity's long-term benefits to the nation's security and trade, but also of its more immediate impact on everyday life.¹⁹ The Society's publicity played on the fear of crime among the propertied classes, and used the perceived crime wave of the early 1750s to reinforce its message.²⁰ By encouraging panic about plebeian disorder, the Society highlighted its own beneficial function. As depicted in its own propaganda, the Marine Society was tackling a social problem by sending boys to sea and ridding the capital of potential criminals.

¹⁷ For an analysis of the exact meanings and connotations behind the literature of the Magdalen Hospital see Sarah Lloyd, "'Pleasure's Golden Bait': Prostitution, Poverty and the Magdalen Hospital in Eighteenth-Century London', *History Workshop Journal* 41 (1996), 59-60.

¹⁸ Andrew, *Philanthropy*, p.127; *Gentleman's Magazine* (May 1758), p.215.

¹⁹ Andrew, *Philanthropy*, p.129.

²⁰ Nicholas Rogers, 'Confronting the Crime Wave: The Debate over Social Reform and Regulation, 1749 – 1753' in Davison, Hitchcock, Keirn and Shoemaker (eds), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: the Response to Social and Economic Problems 1689 – 1750* (Stroud, 1992), p.85.

In dramatic rhetoric, the Society described its recruits as, ‘vagabond boys who are in filth and rags and have no means of support but theft and beggary’, ‘boys who have been betrayed into faults... obnoxious to the law..... in danger of being victims of the sword of justice’.²¹ In 1757, a year after the charity’s inception, Jonas Hanway, in a newspaper advertisement, announced that the Society had cleared the land of 500 thieves and robbers and the magistrate, John Fielding, praised the Society for ‘having preserved so many hundred friendless boys from absolute destruction’.²² Hanway’s published letters to patrons carried a frontispiece, showing barefoot urchins transformed into ships’ boys in smart uniform.

²¹ NMM, MSY/A/1, 7 Jan 1762; MSY/A/4, 4 July 1771.

²² NMM, MSY/A/1, 8 Dec 1757.



Illustration 1: Engraving of the Marine Society's Office by J.B. Cipriani (1758)

THE REALITY BEHIND THE RHETORIC

If we leave this advertising rhetoric aside for just a moment and turn to the Marine Society's Fair Minute Books, in private the Society's committee acknowledged that it dealt with what it described as 'several classes of people'. The minutes of the 1770s refer specifically to parents who found it extremely difficult to get their children into the world and for whom the taking of their son off to sea was a great charity.²³ They speak of 'poor widows and other poor labouring people with numerous families' and 'apprentice masters consenting to indentures being cancelled because a boy was disinclined or unable to follow a trade'.²⁴ But as early as May 1757, the Marine Society resolved 'to relieve the industrious poor', offering voluntary enrolment to any stout, hardy and vigorous boy who wanted to enter the sea service.²⁵ Many of the earliest recruits were undoubtedly destitute: these boys and those who came from outside London needed the temporary accommodation the Society provided before they went to sea. But boys from more settled backgrounds were recruited alongside them from the start. If a boy lived in London, his father or mother had to attend when he enrolled and had to present a certificate signed by a member of the clergy, a JP, churchwarden, overseer or respected person confirming that their son was not already apprenticed.²⁶ These officials were unlikely to have issued documents to vagabond boys they had never met before. Early on, 150 boys, most chosen from those who could read and write, were taught to read music and play the fife, and the committee made plans to employ boys they were recruiting

²³ NMM, MSY/A/3, 19 July 1770.

²⁴ NMM, MSY/A/4, 4 July 1771; MSY/D/1, 'Fair Minute Book of the General and Extraordinary Courts 1777 – 1784', 12 Feb 1778.

²⁵ NMM, MSY/A/1, 7 May 1757.

²⁶ NMM, MSY/A/1, 5 May 1757, 14 April 1757.

from London's charity schools once the Seven Years' War was over.²⁷ The occupations or trades of the fathers of many recruits recorded in the registers for the years 1756 to 1763, the first period of recruitment, suggest a range of skilled and unskilled employees among the settled poor, whose sons would not all have been in dire circumstances without the Society's intervention.²⁸ Jonas Hanway himself expressed sympathy for 'distressed orphans' who wandered about 'like forsaken dogs', but concluded that, particularly during wartime, stout lads, capable of good service, rather than urchins, should be encouraged to go to sea.²⁹

By July 1757, just a year after its inception, the Society was no longer accepting delinquent recruits sent by the magistrate John Fielding. He saw sea service as a punishment and had indiscriminately recommended unsuitable boys.³⁰ Only 19 recruits sent by him appear in the registers for 1756 - 1763, together with three from the magistrate Saunders Welch, and 18 from the Lord Mayor.³¹ After 4 April 1758 and following considerable controversy over recruitment, Fielding hardly ever attended a committee meeting again.³² The Society clearly wanted, and from its earliest days recruited, not only destitute boys, but also those who were fit and well motivated, who would not be rejected by naval officers at the ports.

Whether Marine Society philanthropists really believed London was heaving with young thieves and beggars to the extent their propaganda suggests, is uncertain. Their initial aspirations and perceptions may have been modified by their experience of the

²⁷ *ibid.*, 2 June 1759; Jonas Hanway, *Three Letters* (London, 1758); MSY/A/1, 4 Jan 1759.

²⁸ For detailed analysis see Roland Pietsch, 'Ships' Boys', pp.172-79.

²⁹ Jonas Hanway, *Rules, Forms and Regulations of the Marine Society: Historical Account* (London, 1759); Hanway, *Three Letters* (London, 1758).

³⁰ NMM, MSY/A/1, 21 July 1757.

³¹ Pietsch, 'Ships' Boys', p.161.

³² *ibid.*, p.109.

boys they enrolled. But what is clear is that even after recruiting from a range of backgrounds, they still maintained their advertising rhetoric. Even in 1770, fourteen years after the Society's establishment, they were still describing their recruits as 'for the most part, the miserable dregs of mankind'.³³ Two years later, the Society became an incorporated company and an historical account was issued, available to anyone who called at the office.³⁴ On the front cover was a patriotic and romantic image. On one side, ragged boys gathered outside a house with broken windows, accompanied by an anguished mother and her pig, a symbol of nastiness and inferiority. On the other side, new recruits stood before the sturdy Marine Society warehouse admiring their smart new uniform, as a ship lay at anchor ready for their departure in the service of their country. The 'before' and 'after' nature of this print was clear for all patrons to see, assuring them that the Society's work was in line with national policies and would transform pauper children into useful seamen.

³³ NMM, MSY/A/3, recording a letter to the East India Company, 1 Oct 1770.

³⁴ Hanway, *Regulations of the Marine Society: Historical Account* (London, 1772).

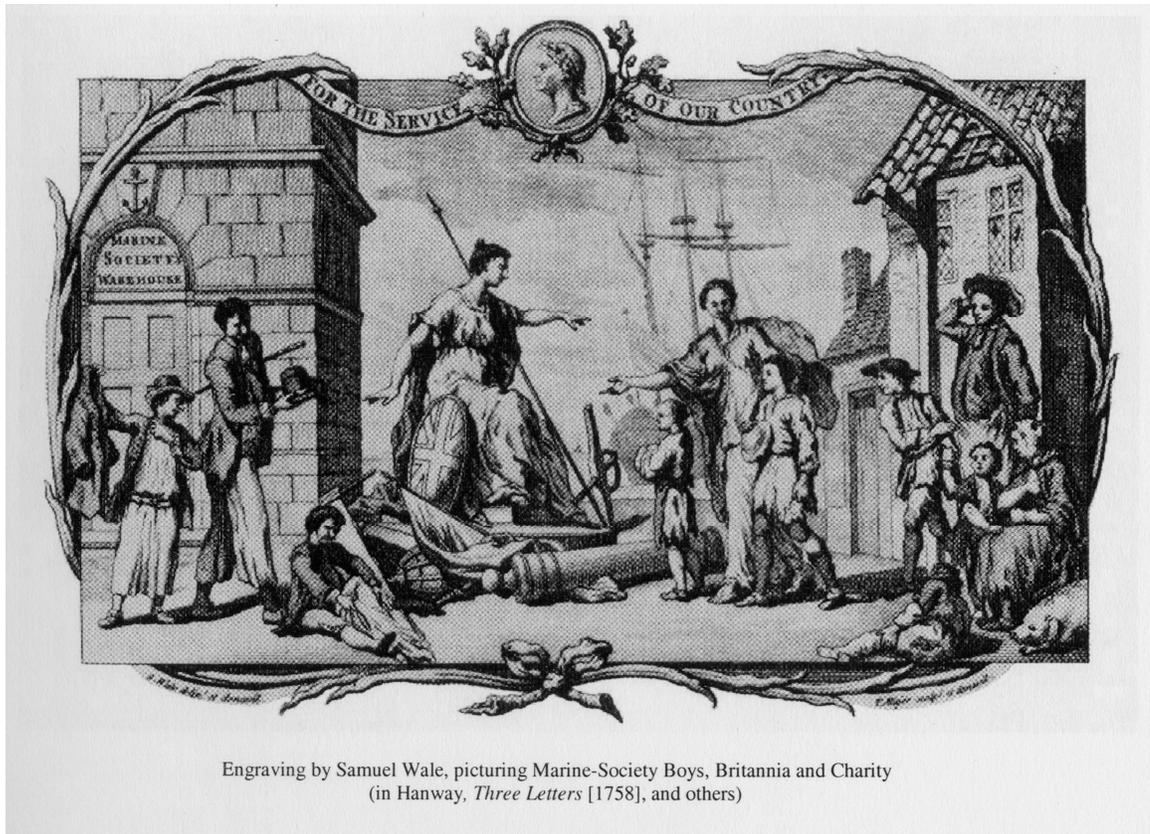


Illustration 2: Engraving by Samuel Wade, Picturing Marine Society Boys, Britannia and Charity in Hanway, *Three Letters* (1759) and others.

In this official history, patrons would have read:

We now lie open to a nursery of thieves, bred up in this metropolis, with the effects of blood and rapine, and the untimely death of many victims to the gallows. The employment of such boys, may prevent their being branded by any marks of infamy, that may render them unfit to be employed with reputation, or restore some young delinquents to the world, purified from their stains.³⁵

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp.42-45.

Apocalyptic rhetoric such as this throws light on Marine Society philanthropists who saw the solution to a 'social problem' in relation to their perception of how they thought society ought to be. The 'children of the poor', as portrayed in philanthropic discourses in the eighteenth century, were disorderly, idle and dirty, 'a threat to the future of the human race unless something was done about them'.³⁶ Crime was seen as an ever-present menace within society, so turning 'thieves in embryo into useful sailors' and rescuing them from 'the paths of vice and branded shame' was deemed to be part of the Marine Society's function.³⁷ Boys from the poor communities of the capital were surrounded by temptation, many had time on their hands and some created mischief, others lacked parental support or control, and the lives of most were disadvantaged and difficult. The Society may have argued that these boys were in danger, in order to justify their charitable cause, in the same way that the Lambeth Asylum for Orphaned Girls, founded in 1759, suggested that early intervention would prevent young girls becoming prostitutes.³⁸ But even assuming some boys had the 'potential' to be delinquent, the blanket terms and emotive imagery of the Society's rhetoric does not reflect the much wider range of boys that the Society enrolled. As many as fifty boys were sent on larger naval vessels and it seems highly unlikely, either in peace or in wartime that ships' captains would accept large groups of boys with the characteristics the Marine Society rhetoric ascribed to them.

³⁶ Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), p.4.

³⁷ *Public Advertiser*, 15 March 1756, quote from John Fielding while he was still active with Marine Society; NMM, MSY/A/1, 29 Nov 1759.

³⁸ Andrew, *Philanthropy*, p.119, and Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (New York, 1998), p.47.

On 10 February 1774, at St Andrew's Church in Holborn, Samuel Glasse, Chaplain to George III, preached an Anniversary Sermon before the President, governors and patrons of the Marine Society.³⁹ He told the story of the Society's well-timed benevolence, whereby, 'multitudes have been saved from destruction, as brands plucked out of the fire'. He praised the philanthropists who 'wished to render those useful to mankind who were . . . not a burden only, but a terror to society'. He continued,

It is well known that the objects of our attention and regard are some of the most destitute and forlorn of the human race ... they, whom the generality of their fellow-creatures consider as worthless, incorrigible and abandoned, or on whom, at best, they look down with pitiless contempt ... forsaken, many of them, by remorseless parents and in hourly danger of falling early victims to violated laws, they are without hope, and apparently rejected of God and man. Such betake them to us, plead their own miserable cause, exhibit their own sad spectacle of woe; and implore, with irresistible eloquence, our charitable compassion.⁴⁰

This was stirring stuff, designed and guaranteed to loosen purse strings. The sermon, only the second to be preached for the Society, immediately became a valuable part of its advertising campaign.⁴¹ It was printed in booklet form, together with the annual recruitment statistics and was sold to anyone with sixpence in his pocket

³⁹ In 1779, Samuel Glasse, with Hanway and others, set up a Marine School for the sons of officers. It closed in 1783 due to lack of subscriptions – see John H. Hutchins, *Jonas Hanway, 1712-1789* (London, 1940), p.104.

⁴⁰ *A Sermon Preached before the President, Vice President and Governors of the Marine Society, St Andrew's Holborn, 10 Feb 1774, Samuel Glasse, Late Student of Christ Church Oxford and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty* (London, 1778), p.3.

⁴¹ The Society was successful in raising funds so did not need to use sermons regularly for this purpose.

Looked at closely, it seems clear that the derogatory language used in the Marine Society's literature to describe its recruits was a well-intentioned but quite deliberate ploy, aimed to make maximum impact on patrons, playing, not only on anxieties about enemies abroad, but also on fears of disorder at home. This advertising rhetoric and the Society's prints have created a distorted view of the nature and background of the recruits and, consequently, have perpetuated a 'myth' about their characteristics.

THE BOYS' REGISTERS

So what were the Marine Society boys really like? The 'Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships' give the names and personal details of thousands of boys, mostly between the ages of 12 and 15, recruited to learn the duties of a seaman. The entries, made from information given, sometimes by the boys themselves, provide a rare insight into their lives and experiences. The earliest registers, from the Society's foundation in 1756 until 1763, show recruitment during the Seven Years' War and have been recorded on a database by Roland Pietsch.⁴² After the war, the Society virtually closed down as the demand for large numbers of boys declined. But a substantial bequest from William Hicke, a merchant in Hamburg, enabled it to continue its work and, as the threat of war in America increased, boys were recruited again in 1770.⁴³

The research for this chapter is based on the registers for the years between 1770 and 1780, recorded on my database.⁴⁴ The registers show the second stage of Marine Society recruitment during a decade of both peace and war. In comparison with those of the earlier years, these registers offer far more information on the backgrounds of the

⁴² Pietsch, 'Ships' Boys'.

⁴³ NMM, MSY/A/2, 6 April 1769.

⁴⁴ NMM, MSY/O/1 – 4.

boys, with data about their stature, health, and literacy, details concerning their employment prior to recruitment and their addresses in the capital. The registers for this decade complement those recorded by Roland Pietsch and form a bridge to the future years of the Society after incorporation. These registers are also the first decade of those from which Roderick Floud took data for his investigation of height and nutrition. He showed that Marine Society recruits were remarkably small in stature.⁴⁵

The registers of the sample decade contain the names of 4,011 boys, the majority of whom came from London.⁴⁶ Among them were a number of boys with the same name, including some who were sent to sea by the Society, discharged at the end of a voyage, and re-enrolled later. It is not possible to determine the exact number of boys who enrolled twice, as boys' circumstances altered between enrolments and their parents frequently changed accommodation or workplace. Nevertheless, 114 boys have been definitely identified as double entries, and a further adjustment of 6 has been made to allow for numbering errors in the registers. The calculations that follow, therefore, are based on a total of 3,891 boys recruited during the sample decade.

⁴⁵ While Roderick Floud used these registers to gauge the height of poor Londoners, he was not essentially interested in identifying their specific social background or level of security within the broader London community. As a result, while the Society boys were, on average, remarkably short for their age, this does not speak to their social standing. See UK Data Archive, SN 2131, 'Long-Term Changes in Nutrition, Welfare and Productivity in Britain: Physical and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Recruits in the Army and Royal Marines, 1760-1879, deposited by Roderick Floud, 7 July 1986; Roderick Floud, Kenneth Wachter and Annabel Gregory, *Height, Health and History: Nutritional Status in the United Kingdom, 1750-1980* (Cambridge, 1990); R.W. Fogel, S. Engerman, R. Floud, 'Secular Changes in America and British Stature and Nutrition' in R.I. Rotberg and T.K.Rabb (eds), *Hunger and History* (Cambridge, 1985); R. Usher, 'A Tall Story for Our Time', *Time Magazine* 148, 16 (14 Oct 1996); Leonard Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation* (Cambridge, 1992) pp. 150-151. For a recent analysis of the importance of this work for our understanding of the information contained in the registers see Roland Pietsch, 'Ships' Boys', pp. 156-159. Some of the methodological difficulties of using height as a proxy for health and nutrition are discussed in H.J.Voth and T.Leunig, 'Did Smallpox Reduce Height? Stature and the Standard of Living in London, 1770-1873', *Economic History Review* 49, 1 (1996), 541-60; Markus Heintel and Joerg Baten, 'Smallpox and Nutritional Status in England, 1770-1873: On the Difficulties of Estimating Historical Heights', *Economic History Review* 51, 2 (1998), 360-371.

⁴⁶ NMM, MSY/O/1 -4.

Table 3.1: Marine Society Recruits 1770 – 1780

Lives/connections	%
Living with parents, relatives or at place of employment	76
School boys	5
Workhouse boys	5
Orphan and destitute	7
On the streets	3
'Criminal' connections	4
	100

**Calculations from NMM, MSY/O/1-4,
'Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships, 1770 – 1780',
based on a total of 3,891 boys**

Although orphaned boys amounted to 21 per cent of the total, the majority of these lived with a relative or in their place of employment. Only 7 per cent were specifically labelled 'orphan and destitute' and many of these were in casual employment. Most of the 5 per cent recruited straight from school were also living with parents or relatives and the 5 per cent from workhouses were in the care of the parish. The registers therefore show that the vast majority of the recruits, including many of the orphans, had some form of lodging and adult supervision. Just 3 per cent were found on the streets and 4 per cent had 'criminal' connections.

At recruitment, the Society enquired about the boys' literacy skills, 'so that a proper report could be made to the masters they were to serve'.⁴⁷ 37 per cent claimed to be able to read and write, and 18 per cent to read only. Although it is not possible to verify these claims of literacy and there is no way of knowing exactly what level of reading and writing the boys had attained, the majority of recruits came from London,

⁴⁷ *The Bye-laws and Regulations of the Marine Society and the Account of the Marine Society* (London, 1775).

where there was more opportunity for education than in rural areas. Marine Society recruits were a random collection of boys from the poor communities and they gave information freely: they had little to gain and had no reason to lie.

Of the 5 per cent of boys sent directly from the parish workhouses, some had spent short periods in parish care when their families were in difficulties, while others, admitted in early childhood, had grown up in the institution.⁴⁸ Henry Cecil, for instance, found abandoned at the age of three, was taken into the workhouse of St Martin in the Fields, and remained there until recruited by the Marine Society at the age of 14.⁴⁹ John Biney and John Yeates, Henry's contemporaries in the workhouse, were 12 when they joined him on board the *Arethusa*, all three boys, according to the workhouse register, enlisting 'by their own consent'.⁵⁰ The Society claimed that all its recruits were volunteers and there is evidence to support this. Boys from workhouses who claimed to have been sent against their will were returned and parish officials were reprimanded.⁵¹ There is little evidence that workhouses used the Society as a place to send miscreants.

The boys listed as beggars, vagabonds, vagrants, or described as friendless, strolling or taken off the streets – the children who would best fit the Society's advertising rhetoric - amount to only 3 per cent of the total. That there was acute poverty in the capital is undeniable and these boys were among some of the most destitute in London. Robert Pryce, aged 14, who was found begging, had no home and his father had

⁴⁸ Groups of Marine Society boys have been traced in the workhouses of St James's Piccadilly, St George Hanover Square and St Martin in the Fields.

⁴⁹ NMM, MSY/O/2, No.408, 11 Oct 1776.

⁵⁰ NMM, MSY/O/2, No.409 and 410, Oct 11 1776; WCA, F4301 and F4302, St Martin in the Fields Annual Register of Poor Children. The Marine Society Registers state that Biney and Yeates were 14 years old.

⁵¹ NMM, MSY/A/1, 20 April 1758, 23 March 1758, 24 August 1758.

gone to sea.⁵² John Carter had been abandoned by his mother and his father was dead, and John Squires was listed as ‘a friendless boy known to nobody in town’.⁵³

Just 4 per cent of the total had specific criminal connections. 11 boys came from prisons, all for unspecified offences. A handful came from the Rotation Office and the Compters, and of those who came recommended by the Lord Mayor, aldermen, justices and magistrates including John Fielding, some had committed ‘petty faults’ or were disorderly.⁵⁴ Others had their indentures cancelled, but many were simply orphaned or distressed.

Between February 1769 and April 1770, John Fielding, on his own initiative, had raised £2,000 from subscriptions to send boys to sea, for what he described as ‘a Preventative Plan of Police’. Notices in the *Public Advertiser* in the early months of 1769 announced that, ‘Near three hundred friendless boys and distressed boys who flocked from brickfields, bulks, coal-wharfs, glass-houses and other places of shelter were fitted out and apprenticed to masters of merchant-men and other vessels’.⁵⁵ But these boys were not recruited by the Marine Society, and when the second period of enrolment began in September 1770, as the registers show, the vast majority of recruits were boys living at home with their parents or in their place of employment.

⁵² NMM, MSY/O/1, No. 392, 8 Jan 1771.

⁵³ NMM, MSY/O/2, No. 1055, 5 Dec 1777; MSY/O/1, No. 352, 3 Jan 1771.

⁵⁴ Two boys were sent from Bridewell – GL, 33011/23, ‘Bridewell and Bethlem Court of Governors’ Minutes’, 26 Aug 1778, No 484, James Stokes and No 485, John Addington sent to Bridewell from the Lord Mayor on the oath of Adam Stokes for being disorderly persons and suspected pilferers. NMM, MSY/O/3, Sept 1778, No 597 James Stokes aged 14 and John Eddington aged 13 sent from Bridewell to the Captain of the *Burford* in Portsmouth.

⁵⁵ *Public Advertiser*, 9 Feb 1769 (and subsequently) quoted in George, *London*, p.147.

THE 'CRIMINAL' BOYS

The Fair Minute Books for the Society's early years do record considerable concern with boys who were troublemakers and, as we have seen, there was a breakdown in the Society's relationship with John Fielding over his recommendation of unsuitable boys.⁵⁶ But the relatively small number of problems the Society encountered was symptomatic of the teething troubles of many similar organizations, rather than a reflection of the criminal tendencies of the children it recruited. The theft of the Society's clothing perhaps says more about the gullibility of the philanthropists at the hands of poor street-wise boys than it does about youth crime. The number of boys who ran away or deserted ship were a minority that could be regarded as natural wastage. Jonas Hanway, in a letter to his brother in 1769 about boys who absconded, wrote:

I compute that 12 to 15 in the 100 have played this trick, but these consisted chiefly in boys beyond the age of 15 and such as had learned some occupation. These could not defraud us of more than the clothes on their backs so that in this view we cannot complain and though we stand instructed it ought not by any means to intimidate us.⁵⁷

It is possible to search for evidence of so-called 'criminal' boys sent to the Marine Society in sources other than the registers. At the Guildhall Justice Room, for instance, on 2 September 1777, James Birch confessed to stealing ten guineas and a banknote. James had never been in trouble before and his father, a watchmaker, intervened, requesting that he be sent to the Marine Society.⁵⁸ The registers confirm that a week later James arrived

⁵⁶ Pietsch, 'Ships' Boys', pp.105-12 discusses this.

⁵⁷ MSY/A/3, Letter recorded in Minutes, 21 Sept 1769.

⁵⁸ LMA, CLA/005/01/001-6, 'Guildhall Justice Room Minute Books, 1752-1777', 2 Sept 1777.

in Portsmouth to serve on the *Worcester*.⁵⁹ But James is the only boy sent from the Guildhall during the sample decade whose recruitment is recorded. Thirteen year-old George Parsons, charged with stealing a threepenny cheesecake, and Jacob Sibley, who had been sleeping rough, were both sent to the Marine Society, but neither appears in the registers.⁶⁰ Five others recorded as sent, do not seem to have arrived.⁶¹

This unexplained inconsistency also appears in other sources. The Wood Street Compter supplied temporary subsistence for adults and children picked up off the streets for minor offences or vagrancy. In 1781, Mr Kirby, responsible for the vagrants there, submitted his bill for the previous year for supporting 'poor vagrants until they were able to be passed to their respective parishes... [or] sent to the Marine Society'.⁶² His bill gives the names of more than 40 boys supposedly sent to the Society, but only 9 of these appear in the registers.

In 1778, at the Old Bailey, William Keltie was found guilty of stealing clothes, and William Beans, a chimney sweep's apprentice, of absconding with two sugar loaves. In court, both boys produced witnesses to their good character, and were sent to the Marine Society.⁶³ But neither Keltie, Beans, nor three other boys mentioned in the

⁵⁹ NMM, MSY/O/4, No. 927, 9 Sept 1777.

⁶⁰ LMA, CLA/005/01/006, 4 Feb 1778; 13 Feb 1778.

⁶¹ LMA, CLA/005/01/005, 3 Sept 1777, Will and Marcus Malone and Louis Smith were accused of 'attempting to pick pockets' and 'sent to the Marine Society'; GJR/M6, 28 Jan 1778, John Wilbank and Haughton Batley were accused of 'attempting to pick pockets', and Batley of stealing a linen handkerchief. Both were 'sent to the Marine Society'. None of these boys appear in the Marine Society Registers following their appearance at the Guildhall, although a Marquiss Malone is listed in 1780 and Hoten Battley in 1779. Peter King, 'Press Gangs and Prosecution Rates, 1740-1820', in Norma Landau, *Law, Crime and English Society 1660-1830* (Cambridge, 2020), refers to GJR/M5 in his discussion of offenders 'sent on board a tender'.

⁶² CLRO, Misc Ms. 288/8. 'Mr Kirby's Bill for Subsistence Money etc for Poor Vagrants etc sent to Wood Street Compter by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen' (recorded 15 May 1781) quoted in Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2004), p.179.

⁶³ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, (hereafter OBP) 15 Jan 1778, William Keltie (t17780115-11); 21 Oct 1778, trial of William Beans (t17781021-11) and (s17781021-1).

summaries of *The Proceedings* for the same year, appear in the registers.⁶⁴ George Perkins, aged thirteen and found *not* guilty of theft, said in court that he was willing to go to the Marine Society, but there is no mention of him either.⁶⁵

Here then, in just three different sets of sources – the Guildhall Justice Room Minute Books, the Wood Street Compter record and *The Old Bailey Proceedings* – are ten boys who were actually enrolled, but nearly fifty others who were sent to the Marine Society but do not appear in any of the Society's records.⁶⁶ Considerable publicity was given to recruitment statistics, and the Society proudly advertised its success to patrons and in the press. Totals of recruits for the sample decade include all double entries and ignore several sets of numbering errors in the registers. So, while annual recruitment figures may not have been deliberately exaggerated, they provide a more than generous account of those recruited. It would therefore be surprising if as many as 50 boys had been enrolled but omitted from the records.

We shall never know the reason for these discrepancies, but we can speculate. Street-wise boys brought before a magistrate or locked up in the Compter may have agreed to join the Marine Society in order to be released, knowing that their consent meant very little. If they absconded, constables and night watchmen in the capital did not have sufficient manpower or competence to search for them. It is also possible that the phrase 'sent to the Marine Society' simply meant signing up for some kind of sea service with an available ship. On the other hand, ships under sail depended on disciplined teamwork. During the Seven Years' War, men from the gaols frequently found

⁶⁴ OBP, 3 Dec 1777, Thomas Colthorp and Thomas Metchum (t17771203-77), 15 Jan 1778, William Bolton (t 17800115-65); 15 Jan 1778, Punishment Summary (s17780115-1).

⁶⁵ OBP, 9 Dec 1778, George Perkins (t 17781209-23).

⁶⁶ These boys do not appear in the sample Registers, in MSY/Q/1, 'Registers of Apprentices sent on Merchant Ships' or in MSY/S/2, 'Registers of Landmen Volunteers' for the same decade..

themselves at sea, but even at this point of crisis, there was ‘a filtering process to weed out the seriously undesirable’.⁶⁷ N.A.M. Rodger claims that the Georgian Navy rarely accepted hardened criminals into sea service, admitting only debtors from the prisons, and smugglers because they were experienced seamen. An attempt by London magistrates in 1759 to send the Black Boy Alley Gang, a notorious bunch of pickpockets, to sea was firmly opposed.⁶⁸ In peacetime, when the Navy could be much more selective, the Marine Society may also have had a filtering process to sift out potential troublemakers. A veto of this kind would help to explain the absence of the boys sent from the Old Bailey and Wood Street Compter.

Whatever the reason for the discrepancies, it is clear that the Marine Society was not acting as a dumping ground for boys sent by magistrates, nor was it a receptacle for boys with criminal tendencies from the Old Bailey. In fact, the only boy with Marine Society connections who appeared before the court at the Sessions House was John Bacon. John joined the Marine Society in 1780 at the age of 14 and served on the *Victory*.⁶⁹ Three years later, while working as a servant in Saffron Hill, he appeared at the Old Bailey accused of stealing 480 halfpennies, some of which he had used to buy a handkerchief and a pair of shoes and stockings. His employer told the court that he himself had occasionally given him a shilling or two, and that John’s father ‘treated him with a great deal of cruelty’. John was found guilty of simple grand larceny, often punished by transportation, but the court was lenient and sentenced him to be whipped

⁶⁷ Guy Liardet, ‘The Hardship and Hell-Raising Image of the Eighteenth-Century Sailor’, *The Times*, Nov 25, 2003.

⁶⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), pp.158, 170 and 171.

⁶⁹ NMM, MSY/O/4, No. 1692, 10 May 1780.

twice in one week, and then discharged.⁷⁰ If John's offence constitutes the most serious crime committed by a boy from the Marine Society, then it confirms that the Society's general description of its recruits as 'obnoxious to the law' and 'the miserable dregs of mankind' is nothing more than the powerful rhetoric and propaganda of an organization anxious to play on the anxieties of its patrons in order to raise money for charitable ends.

HOME BACKGROUNDS

But if the vagabond and criminal poor did not form a substantial portion of the Society's recruits, we need to ask who did. What do we know about the 74 per cent of boys living at home or in their workplace, whose details and addresses are recorded in the registers?

They came from a strikingly diverse set of neighbourhoods. They came from Westminster and Whitechapel and, south of the river, from Lambeth and Greenwich. Some came from the outlying areas of Islington, Hackney and Bethnal Green. Many lived or worked in poor parishes such as St Giles in the Field, in the courts and alleys around Bishopsgate Street near the London Workhouse, and in poor tenements in the East End. Boys living in the same street or neighbourhood occasionally joined the Marine Society together. In the weaving community of Spitalfields, more than 20 families from the courts around Quaker Street sent their boys to the Society, and the sons of nearly 30 families from Long Alley in Moorfields appear in the registers during the 1770s alone.

But some of the recruits came from more respectable streets and the fathers of some boys were settled tenants or householders. The Westminster Historical Database comprises lists of rate-paying householders and tenants who voted in Parliamentary elections, and it includes the fathers or close relatives of 15 Marine Society boys from the

⁷⁰ OBP, 26 Feb 1783, John Bacon (t17830226-69).

sample.⁷¹ The rateable value on their properties ranged from £3 to £16, and although this suggests perhaps only a small tenement in a court or alley, it does show families who were established and were by no means destitute.⁷² John Mandry lived in Gardiners Lane, Westminster, where he cleaned guns. His property had a rateable value of £9 and his wife, Sarah, worked at the Ship tavern, just off the Strand. Their son had been employed as a plasterer's boy and enlisted with the Marine Society for a second time in 1771.⁷³ But only a limited number of these lists of voting Londoners has survived and the Westminster Historical Database does not include women householders, so it is possible that there were other Marine Society boys whose parents were established tenants or owned property in Westminster, or indeed in parishes elsewhere in London.

The Marine Society *Rules and Regulations* republished in 1775 stated that no boy was to be sent to sea with clothing provided by the Society if he had friends who 'appeared in a capacity of fitting him out'. In these circumstances, fifty shillings would be demanded for clothing and bedding. The existence of this rule suggests that a number of boys in these circumstances were recruited at this time, and this is further confirmed by the *Regulations* published in 1792, when the sum demanded was increased to three guineas. The Society's 'Subscriptions Lists, Donations, Legacies and Cash Received' for the years 1769 to 1804, show that a number of workhouses gave forty shillings, rising to fifty shillings and eventually three guineas with each boy sent, and that some apprentice masters gave two guineas when indentures were cancelled. Parishes saving the cost of

⁷¹ Charles Harvey, Edmund Green and Penelope Corfield, *Westminster Historical Database 1749-1820* (Bristol, 1998).

⁷² The rateable value of new tenements with 1-3 rooms, often in a court or alley (1650-1750) was between £10 and £50 - Christopher Chalkin, *The Rise of the English Town, 1650-1850* (Cambridge, 2001), p.30. In Westminster in 1784, some of the smallest houses had rateable values averaging £11 10s - *Westminster Historical Database*, p.22.

⁷³ *Westminster Historical Database*, P1774, No. 5137 and P1780; NMM, MSY/O/1, No.210, 12 Nov 1770 and No. 713, 6 Sept 1771.

indentures and masters relinquishing apprentices might have felt obliged, or even been required by the Society, to pay. The small number of parents whose contributions are recorded in this particular set of accounts perhaps speaks of the culture of parental expectation and of parents' rather different relationship with the Society, which presented itself as a national charity.⁷⁴

Hundreds of boys, then, from a range of poor backgrounds lived at home with parents or relatives. The details of Francis Sepe and William Staggs are typical.⁷⁵

Name	Francis Sepe
Age	13 years
Height	4' 4"
Literacy	rw [able to read and write]
Smallpox	p [has had smallpox]
Lives/Connections	Father works with Mr. Pool, tobacconist, Fore Street. Lives at 11 London Wall
What employment	Drew beer
When sent	9 April 1776
Ship	Hornet
Officer	Boatswain
Port/dockyard	Woolwich

Name	William Staggs
Age	14 years
Height	4' 7"
Literacy	r [able to read]
Smallpox	p
Lives/Connections	Father labourer in Kings Yard Deptford has 7 children, Recommended by Mr Paterson
What employment	Worked on board east Indiamen in ye river
When sent	2 Feb 1775
Ship	Carcass
Officer	Gunner
Port/Dockyard	Deptford

⁷⁴ *The Bye-laws and Regulations of the Marine Society* (London, 1775 and 1792). NMM, MSY/U/1-4, 'Subscriptions Lists, Donations, Legacies and Cash Received, 1769-1804'.

⁷⁵ NMM, MSY/O/2, No. 261, 9 April 1776; No 82, 2 Feb 1775.

Almost all the boys' parents are listed as employed, but it is difficult to gauge social classification from occupational labels that include a host of roles and levels of status. What can be said is that a wide variety of occupations is represented - trades thought at the time to be disreputable, unhealthy and badly paid, as well as some requiring more specific skills or literacy. A few Greenwich Pensioners appear on the registers, fathers who had served their country and were deemed among the 'deserving' poor, but over all, very few recruits came from sea-faring families. Five fathers are listed as in prison for debt, four were blind and unable to work, nine were in the workhouse and fourteen were specifically labelled 'poor' or 'very poor'.⁷⁶

SCHOOLBOY RECRUITS.

Just over 200 boys were at school when they joined the Marine Society and a further 100, 70 per cent of whom were literate, are classified as 'never out', meaning they had never been employed. Most London charity schools took only children whose parents had a parish settlement and enquiries were often made prior to admission to confirm that the parents were honest and industrious.⁷⁷ Evidence from charity school minutes suggests that, despite their more inclusive mission statements, charity school trustees did not accept parents or children who were 'the miserable dregs of mankind'.⁷⁸ At the same time, charity schools organised by the SPCK were not available to all children, so, as we saw in Chapter 2, many would have gained literacy elsewhere. One recruit came from Bancroft's School, a small charitable boys' boarding school founded in 1737 in Mile End

⁷⁶ For Marine Society girls – see Chapter 4.

⁷⁷ GL, 7013/1, 'Cripplegate within the Ward Schools Committee Minutes, 1712-1892', 19 Jan 1716. A certificate from the churchwardens of the parish confirming that the parents had a settlement in the ward was required prior to entry. WCA, F3306B, 'St Martin's Free School, Trustees' Fair Minutes', 10 Sept 1702. Before considering a child, trustees examined parents to check they were 'honest, industrious people and worthy to be relieved'.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 2.

Road, sponsored by the Drapers' Company.⁷⁹ Others, whose parents were able to pay a small sum, may have attended one of the schools run by the parents of the poor for the benefit of poor children in the local community, of which we know virtually nothing. The mothers of five recruits ran their own schools at the following addresses:

20 Black Lion Court, Tooley Street

Dog Row, Mile End Turnpike

At Mr Palmer's, carpenter, Cow Cross, St Sepulchre's parish

Shoe Lane, Holborn

Near Broadway, Church Street, Deptford.⁸⁰

The sons of all these women claimed to be able to read and write and while the three oldest boys were in casual employment, the youngest, twelve year-old Charles Toll, labelled 'never out', had never been employed. The educational accomplishments of many of the Society's recruits and their access to some form of education suggest an origin of families of the respectable and settled poor, rather than the so-called vicious and criminal.⁸¹

In 1759, when the Marine Society agreed to provide the Navy with 150 fifers, the first group of boys were sent to a house the Society had acquired at Tothill Fields in Westminster.⁸² But soon after tuition began, some of the boys became uncooperative. It was late autumn and there was no fire in the house. Cold fingers and hassle, or even violence, from a fife master frustrated by pupils unable to learn or play without mistakes,

⁷⁹ MSY/O/2, No.774 George Westrop, 1777.

⁸⁰ MSY/O/2, No.300, John Cook, 1776; No. 591, Charles Tool, 1776; MSY/O/3, No.1270, James Page, 1779; No.1386, Samuel Hickman, 1779; No.1619 Edward Bride, 1780

⁸¹ These schools were clearly quite separate from those run for the children of artisans described in Mary Thale (ed.), *The Autobiography of Francis Place, 1771 – 1854* (Cambridge, 1972), pp.40-47.

⁸² Hanway, *Three Letters*, p.93.

caused the boys to vote with their feet and ‘they left him’. Children they may have been, but they were astute enough to recognize that withdrawing their services from a project the Society was anxious should succeed was likely to make an impact. These boys were not passive recipients of charity, but felt they had a reasonable degree of authority over their conditions and their fate. Their ‘strike’, because that is in effect what it was, forced the Society to take action. The Fair Minute Book makes no mention of punishment, but cauldrons of coal for the winter season were ordered immediately and the next group of boys learnt under improved conditions.⁸³

RECRUITS IN EMPLOYMENT

The vast majority of recruits were not schoolboys, but they were employed. About 500 were errand boys. Many worked with weavers or plasterers, some laboured in the brickfields and rope grounds, and a large number drew beer. Some earned money on the streets selling fruit, watercress, matches, sprats, oysters or dog meat. Others were shoeblacks, lamplighters and chimney sweeps. They carried milk, delivered handbills and sold ballads; they fed horses and drove cattle or sheep to market. 1,389 specific occupations or trades of fathers of recruits are recorded in the registers and 174 boys worked for their fathers before joining the Marine Society. The occupations of 622 mothers are also recorded and 26 boys worked with or for them. 288 boys were cared for by grandparents or other close relatives, and 25 boys worked alongside them. Some, recruits had already been to sea and experienced tropical climate, shipwreck or foreign prison.

⁸³ MSY/A/1, 13 Oct 1759; 8 Nov 1759.

Employment of boys prior to apprenticeship was often casual and seasonal, and some boys inevitably became destitute, but many must have made a small but vital contribution to their family income. At the beginning of the second phase of recruitment in 1770, the Society made reference in one of its publications to the enrolment of ‘boys occasionally employed on errands or in markets, brick-kilns, glass-houses, or by hackney coachmen, draw boys and such like ... [who are] often unemployed and without livelihood’.⁸⁴ But this volume was produced specifically to impress patrons and prospective donors, and as a marketing tool to attract funds and justify expenditure. The registers, on the other hand, provide a rare glimpse of the employment of thousands of boys in the capital in the eighteenth century. They show, particularly in cases of boys working with parents or relatives, a far broader range of occupations than is implied in the Marine Society publicity.⁸⁵

The Marine Society did not accept boys who were already apprenticed, but was prepared to enrol them if their indentures were officially cancelled. Nearly 100 boys were recruited in this way during the sample decade. Many, through no fault of their own, had found themselves in difficulties. Four boys, originally apprenticed by the Foundling Hospital, for example, were sent to the Marine Society because their masters had either absconded or died, and others were discharged because of ill treatment.⁸⁶ Samuel

⁸⁴ *The Origin, Progress and Present State of the Marine Society* (London, 1770), pp.23-4.

⁸⁵ Examples of fathers’ occupation or trade: baker, bookbinder, bricklayer, cabinetmaker, gunsmith, ship’s steward, spectacle maker, stonemason and toymaker.

⁸⁶ Foundling Hospital boys whose masters had absconded or died, taken from LMA, A/FH/A/12/3/1, ‘Apprentice Register, 1751-1851’ include:

Joel Hucks, 13467; MSY/O/1, No. 517, 4 Feb 1771.

George Weston, 14676; MSY/O/1, No. 638, 9 Jan 1772.

Zaccheus Adams, 10904; MSY/O/1, No. 740, 18 Dec 1771;

James Hind, 1489; ‘Register of King’s Merchant Ships’, MSY/Q/1, 2 Sept 1772.

Foundling Hospital boys who had their indentures cancelled prior to recruitment:

Hugh Ford, 13344; MSY/O/2, No. 6, 7 Sept 1772.

London, the Society's oldest recruit, was apprenticed to John Meriton (Marton), a Freeman of the Waterman's Company.⁸⁷ He was recommended by Sir William Dolben, responsible with others for a Parliamentary bill encouraging men to volunteer for sea.⁸⁸ In common with many watermen's apprentices, Samuel undertook part of his training at sea, and joined the Society for a year before returning to the river as a qualified Freeman.⁸⁹ He was not 'worthless and without hope' or 'a terror to society', but was gainfully employed, using the Marine Society as a valuable stepping-stone to a secure career.

As we have already seen, the circumstances of poor families varied and a rise in food prices, economic depression or personal experiences within the life cycle could bring a sudden change in their situation.⁹⁰ In London, families, including those who were coping alone, had access to a unique variety of welfare options and poor families took advantage of any resources that were available to them.⁹¹ The Marine Society was a charity available to boys from the whole range of London's poor communities. It provided free clothing and training on board ship. Rating as a seaman could follow quickly and entitlement to pay came earlier than in land-based, seven-year apprenticeships. In wartime there was the chance of bounty at the end of a voyage. At the

Thomas Revel, 16227; MSY/O/1, No. 644, 26 April 1771.

Isaac North, 1671; MSY/O/1, No. 212, 12 Nov 1770.

Samuel Joyle, 2357; MSY/O/1 No. 668, 28 May 1771.

Thomas Ballard, 15893, MSY/O/4, No. 278, 5 May 1778.

⁸⁷ GL, 6289, 'Apprentice Bindings for the Company of Watermen and Lightermen, 1717-1783', Ref. 1867, 16 Feb 1764.

⁸⁸ 'Bill to Encourage Men under Certain Regulations and Bounties Voluntarily to Engage themselves for that Service on HM Ships whenever they shall be Duly Called For', 11 July 1781 in *Journals of House of Commons* (London, 1803).

⁸⁹ NMM, MSY/O/1, No 485, 28 Jan 1771 and GL, 6289, Ref 1867, 27 March 1772.

⁹⁰ See Tim Wales, 'Poverty, Poor Relief and Life-Cycle; Some Evidence from Seventeenth-Century Norfolk' in R.M.Smith, *Land, Kinship and Life Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984).

⁹¹ Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700 – 1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000), p.13.

Marine Society's annual dinner, boys who paraded in the procession received two shillings' worth of food, a rare feast for boys from the poor communities and another Marine Society marketing tool that may well have encouraged boys to enrol. The Society's advertising rhetoric may have stated that the recruits were 'vagabond boys in filth and rags', but parents from the settled communities clearly disregarded it. Like parents of charity school children, they let it wash over them like water off a duck's back, seizing an opportunity not to be missed. For boys running errands for a mere pittance, the Marine Society offered a chance of something better. For those working in unhealthy trades, here was a fresh start and the inviting prospect of travel and adventure. For boys or families labelled specifically as 'poor' in the registers, the Society provided a lifeline.

CONCLUSION

By placing the Marine Society boys in the forefront of enquiry and by analysing and cross-referencing the registers with a range of other sources, this chapter has shown that the recruits have been misrepresented by elite rhetoric and that this distortion has been assimilated into the historiography. It also reveals that the Marine Society served a different function from that claimed in its propaganda, recruiting, not street waifs and potential criminals, but boys from a more plausible range of poor families, far more acceptable to the navy.⁹² The earlier registers, recruiting for the Seven Years' War and including approximately 50 per cent of boys from London, contain fewer personal details, but they also strongly suggest a similarly broad intake. Again, the number of boys with

⁹² A similar conclusion has emerged in another source. Between 1802 and 1814 'the generality of white soldiers in India were not quasi-criminal, Foreign Legionnaire types, but broadly representative of their age and class cohorts within the home population' - see Joel Mokyr and Cormar ó Gráda, 'Height and Health in the United Kingdom, 1815 - 1860: Evidence from the East India Company Army', *Explorations in Economic History*, 33 (1996), quoted in Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600 - 1850*, (London, 2003, 2nd edn), pp.334 and 420, footnote 63.

specific criminal connections is very small. The Marine Society registers provide an unusually rich source of information about the children of the poor, and tell the story of a charity dealing with a wider cross-section of society and a more normal and supportable intake than the Society's rhetoric allows and than has generally been recognised. The charity appears to have provided an ongoing valued service used by the many poor communities of London.

This modification and reshaping of our view of the Marine Society raises serious questions about other eighteenth-century philanthropic institutions. Philanthropists were undoubtedly humanitarian and responsible in their concern for the poor, but, as this chapter has demonstrated, London charities were in competition for limited funding and the Marine Society was not the only one to overstate its value or to deliberately denigrate its objects of charity. By the end of the eighteenth century, the rhetoric of social reform had created an image of idle, dishonest and immoral boys and girls ripe for the gallows or prostitution, but for the intervention of the bountiful hand of philanthropy that rescued them from 'Cinder-heaps and Dung-hills' and 'snatch'd' them 'from the paths of vice and branded shame'. To an elite population, already fearful of crime, an image of dissolute and disaffected youth would easily have translated into the concept of 'juvenile delinquency' that emerged at the turn of the century. This new social problem, the development of which has been charted by Peter King and Heather Shore, placed hundreds of poor children in the hands of the criminal justice system, while leaving fundamental issues of poverty, discrimination and inequality within society unscathed.⁹³

⁹³ Heather Shore, *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth Century London* (London, 1999); Peter King, 'The Rise of Juvenile Delinquency: Changing Patterns of Perception and Prosecution', *Past and Present* 160 (1998), 116-66; and *Crime, Justice and Discretion, Law and Social Relations in England 1740 – 1820* (Oxford, 2000).

Once a boy joined the Marine Society, it was hoped he would continue with a career at sea, but this was not always possible. Jonas Hanway and the Committee took particular trouble to make alternative arrangements for one of their early recruits. John Perry, the son of a labourer from the poor district of Snows Fields near Bermondsey, joined up on 20 January 1757 and he sailed from the Nore, a sandbank at the mouth of the Thames Estuary, near Sheerness. When he was thirteen, he signed on for a second voyage, this time on the 'William and Anne', and sailed with Richard Moreton and Francis Kember, two members of the Marine Society's select group of fifers.⁹⁴ But by the time John was nineteen, his eyesight was failing and in March 1765 the Marine Society received official notification that he had no chance of regaining his sight. Jonas Hanway wrote to his brother to enquire if there were funds in the Chest of Commissioners of Chatham that could be used to help support the boy. Nothing was available so the Marine Society recommended that he be admitted as a pensioner to the Greenwich Hospital for disabled seamen, where he would be provided with a permanent home.⁹⁵ In August 1765, John returned to London in tailcoat, breeches and blue cocked hat, the distinctive livery of the Greenwich Hospital, to thank the Marine Society for the attention they had paid to him.⁹⁶ He was exceptionally fortunate to receive charity of this kind, for there were few ways, apart from begging, that a blind boy could make a living. In London, most boys of his age, and many who were younger, had already left home and made the transition into the adult world of employment, either in casual work or in apprenticeship.

⁹⁴ Pietsch, 'Ships' Boys', accompanying database of MSY/H/1 and 2, 'Entry Books of Boys Admitted, 1756-1763': John Perry No. 483, 20 Jan 1757; John Perry No.2380; Richard Moreton, No.2381; Francis Kember, No.2382, 11 Apr 1758.

⁹⁵ MSY/A/2, 'Fair Minutes of the Marine Society', 21 Feb 1765, 7 Mar 1765, 14 Mar 1765, 24 April 1765.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1 Aug 1765; Felix Barker, *Greenwich and Blackheath Past* (London, 1993).

CHAPTER 4

CHILDREN AT WORK

In 1699 William Spiers was apprenticed for seven years to his uncle, a barber surgeon and periwig maker, in the parish of St Giles in the Field. William was to learn a trade and, as his indentures stated, ‘at convenient seasons to play on the violin’. Some four years later, William had received no training but instead had been sent by his uncle to play his violin in public houses and ‘for company that would accept his musik’ at marriages and fairs. When the money he earned did not fulfil his uncle’s expectations, William was abused. So the boy took the law into his own hands and, remarkably for the time, ‘of his own accord’, told Justice Thomas Addison about his circumstances. Addison saw cause for his complaint and granted him a warrant to appear before the justice at the Middlesex Sessions. There William’s indentures were cancelled.¹

Experiences of this kind were all too common in eighteenth-century London. Sessions papers are littered with references to apprentices at all levels being discharged or having their indentures cancelled. Apprentices forced to act as drudges or errand boys, denied food and clothing, lodged in overcrowded and dirty conditions and subject to cruel treatment, sometimes deliberately, appeared regularly at the Quarter Sessions. Some complaints were the result of the misfortune, bankruptcy, desertion or death of a master. Equally, apprentices, notorious throughout history for their unruly behaviour, were also dismissed for their own idleness and dishonesty, in a system riddled with problems.

The apprenticing of poor children so they would have a future means of livelihood had long been an important aspect of English social policy. From Elizabethan times, the

¹ LMA, MJ/SP, Middlesex Sessions Papers, May 1704/1. It was not until the 1747 Act that poor apprentices with fees lower than £5 could appeal if masters failed to teach them a trade.

Old Poor Law, which administered taxation and determined the various modes of distribution to the poor, was the responsibility of the state. In practice, social welfare in the form of workhouses, outdoor relief and the apprenticing of parish children was organised at a local level by churchwardens, overseers and justices. Steve Hindle's recent substantial study, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c. 1550 – 1750*, surveys the workings of the Old Poor Law from a rural perspective. Poor children living in rural areas were usually apprenticed into husbandry and housewifery. Hindle, taking a pessimistic view of the Old Poor Law, described it as a coercive system, in which negotiations between poor parents and parish officials were reinforced with policies of deterrence and where parents who refused to apprentice their children were penalized.² His study, however, bears little relation to the urban experience of apprenticeship and particularly to that of apprenticeship in London.

Historians of London seeking information on the workings of the Old Poor Law in an urban setting invariably turn to *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* by Dorothy George. She too shared a pessimistic view and portrayed a dark, repressive image of social welfare, a tradition continued in her generation in the work of Dorothy Marshall, and later by Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt.³ George focused on the inadequacies of the welfare system, highlighting widespread exploitation and ill-treatment of parish apprentices, citing sensational mid-century cases of violence and murder, and emphasizing the efforts of Jonas Hanway to improve appalling conditions suffered by

² Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c. 1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004).

³ Dorothy George, *London Life in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 1925, Chicago edn 2000); Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (London, 1926); Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 2 Vols. (London, 1969). For later studies of London's poor see George Rudé, *Hanoverian London 1714 – 1808* (London, 1971); Leonard, Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation* (Cambridge, 1992).

London's most vulnerable children.⁴ Modern historiography continues to reiterate her viewpoint and her examples. As a result, the experiences of London's parish apprentices are used, perhaps unconsciously, to characterize those of all poor children, rather than being seen as just one feature of the working lives of children from the poor communities of the capital. Children eligible for parish apprenticeships were those in workhouses, those who were orphaned or destitute, and members of the most desperate families. They were part of the 2 per cent of the population whose lives were in real crisis. By focusing exclusively on this 2 per cent, we leave aside families in the remaining 58 per cent of the poor population, who were also vulnerable to economic or personal catastrophe, but did not need ongoing support from the parish. The vast majority of poor families had no access to parish apprenticeship and had to find their own means of launching their children into the world. Their circumstances are rarely accounted for or explained.

Previous chapters have shown that the stereotypes created by the rhetoric of parish worthies, charity school trustees and Marine Society philanthropists persuaded the upper classes that without intervention the children of the poor were 'unprofitable ... neither capable of Discipline nor beneficial Employment', 'the Curse and Trouble of all places where they live', and by nature, 'worthless and incorrigible'. The image of London created by this rhetoric is one of a disorderly capital teeming with disreputable and beggarly children roaming the streets, an image that has, over the generations, been compounded into the historiography. This chapter will question this image, demonstrating firstly that London was an exceptional city in which casual employment

⁴ George, *London*, pp.178 – 201 and Chapter 5, pp.213-61. OBP, 9 Sept 1767, James Browning, Elizabeth his wife, John their son (t17670909-1); Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, 1981), p. 135; OBP, 14 July 1762, Sarah Metyard, Sarah Morgan Metyard (t17620714-30).

was a common experience in the lives of many of the capital's poor children. Long before they were of apprenticeship age, thousands of children took casual employment in a wide variety of occupations and urban trades. Secondly, by reading documents 'against the grain', it will explore the experiences of children, not just in parish apprenticeship through the lens of a crisis, but also in other types of training opportunities more representative of those taken by a wider range of poor children. Thirdly, by using details given by examinees at settlement examinations concerning their childhood employment, it will attempt to identify a more typical apprenticeship experience than that often portrayed. Finally, this chapter will show that although apprenticeship was highly gendered, girls were sometimes apprenticed and in a variety of other ways made their transition into the adult world.

CASUAL EMPLOYMENT

During the eighteenth century, London's population, trade, industry and commerce expanded and developed rapidly. Thousands of children were born into the poor communities and many more migrated to the capital with their families in search of employment. London offered work opportunities in a wide range of occupations and trades peculiar to an urban environment and many poor children contributed to their family economy by taking casual work long before starting an apprenticeship. In 1990, Hugh Cunningham, in a seminal article on child labour, suggested that between 1680 and 1851 there was a high level of *unemployment* of children, particularly in agricultural areas.⁵ This has since been challenged by Peter Kirby, who concluded, 'Ultimately most

⁵ Hugh Cunningham, 'The Employment and Unemployment of Children in England c.1680 -1851', *Past and Present* 126 (1990), 115 -150. See also Pinchbeck, Vol. 1, pp.310-11.

of the problems associated with the study of British child labour prior to the nineteenth century stem from the scarcity of reliable national statistics'.⁶

As far as child labour in London is concerned, no substantial study has been done for the eighteenth century prior to the period when large numbers of children worked in factories.⁷ George's examination of casual employment focused mainly on children employed in workhouses and on those working in the weaving and shoemaking trades.⁸ More recently, Maxine Berg, in her nationwide study, *The Age of Manufacture 1700 - 1820*, commented that with the ubiquity of domestic and workshop manufacture, the capacity of poor children to work was intensely exploited, but she offered no further insight into the organization of casual employment of children in London.⁹

One way of addressing this apparent lack of information is to look again at the 'Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships'. As we saw in Chapter 3, these registers offer a wealth of unique information about the backgrounds of poor boys in London. The registers for the years 1770 to 1780 show that prior to recruitment the vast majority of boys, mainly between the ages of eleven and nineteen, were in casual employment in the capital.¹⁰ Making allowance, once again, for double entries and numbering errors in the registers, the total number of boys recruited in the decade has been taken as 3,891. At recruitment, nearly 200 boys were still at school, another 100 were 'never out' in any workplace, about 120 were on the streets, and a further 150 had so called 'criminal connections', although not all of these were unemployed. The

⁶ Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750 - 1870* (London, 2003), p.133; and 'How Many Children were "Unemployed" in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century England?', *Past and Present* 187, 1 (2005), 187-202.

⁷ For a broad overview and comparison, see Marjatta Rahikainen, *Centuries of Child Labour: European Experiences from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 2004).

⁸ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1925, Chicago edn, 2000), pp.181-85, 192-96, 197-20, 222-23.

⁹ Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures 1700 - 1820* (London, 1985), p.19.

¹⁰ NMM, MSY/O/1- 4, 'Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships, 1770 - 1780'.

remaining 3,000 or more were in casual employment in London.

These boys worked in the weaving and clothing industries, in services and manufacture, in building trades, in agriculture, and in marine occupations. About 500 were errand boys, more than 350 drew beer and nearly 300 worked as draw boys or wound quills for weavers. 170 were employed in the brickfields and in building and plastering trades, essential services for the expansion and redevelopment of the capital. Another 90 had jobs at the packthread and rope grounds, where lightweight cord and ships' ropes were produced. Some boys were employed in ubiquitous trades such as butchery, bakery and shoemaking; while others worked in trades feeding the consumer market, such as clock and watch making, glass scalloping and silver spinning. About a dozen boys took on a job peculiar to London, lighting the new lamps in the main streets of the city, and others became post boys or worked in the paper and printing trades, which provided means of communication within and beyond the capital. A small number of the poorest children were chimney sweeps or street hawkers and a handful begged on the streets. The capital's alehouses acted as an informal network in the labour market and many boys probably made contacts there.¹¹ The names of more than 450 alehouses appear in the registers, either as signposts to where boys lived or worked, or where they were known. Many of the casual jobs the boys undertook were dirty, repetitive and exhausting; some were dangerous, others were seasonal, and most required little skill. Most boys probably earned very little but their contribution was essential to their family's budget.¹²

¹¹ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged* (London, 2003, 2nd edn.), p.64.

¹² Children employed by weavers earned between 2/- and 4/6d a week – George, p.182.

Table 4.1: Marine Society Boys: Occupations of Parents and Literacy Claimed by the Boys

r = reads rw = reads and writes

Father's occupation	No. in sample	r	rw	Some form of literacy
		<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
coachman	28	35	50	85
chairman	23	9	65	74
porter (all types)	69	23	49	71
carpenter	61	16	51	67
tailor	44	18	45	63
gardener	31	23	42	55
soldier	26	27	23	50
labourer	72	24	25	49
bricklayer	36	3	39	42
sawyer	21	19	19	38
weaver	123	23	15	38
sailor/on board ship	35	11	14	25
shoemaker	80	1	6	7
Mother's occupation				
nurse	33	12	64	76
servant	35	26	51	77
charwoman/chairwoman	91	21	38	59
washerwoman	172	17	41	58
weaver	21	10	14	24
silk winder	20	10	10	20

NMM, MSY/O/1-4, 'Marine Society Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships, 1770 – 1780'

Table 4.1 shows the most common occupations of parents of boys recruited by the Marine Society and the boys' claims to literacy. Of the total sample of 3,891 boys, 18 per cent claimed to be able to read and 37 per cent to read and write, making an overall total of 55 per cent. The figures here suggest that the children most likely to be literate were those whose parents' employment offered personal services to individuals and who, consequently, might with additional tips or bonuses have earned a reasonable wage. Children least likely to be literate were those whose parents worked in over-stocked

trades.

A number of boys worked for or with their fathers or close relatives, assisting, for example, in the trade of a gunsmith, spectacle maker, bookbinder, jeweller, toymaker, gingerbread baker, perfumer and shroud maker. Others worked with relatives who were barbers, carpenters and wheelwrights. Sons of coachmen tended horses, sons of agricultural labourers worked in the fields, and sons of sailors went to sea. Not all occupations or trades of parents and relatives were given in the registers and in making calculations in the following table, only parents or relatives in specific occupations or trades were counted; those working or living with tradesmen or possible employers were not included.

Table 4.2: Marine Society Boys: Working for their Father or a Close Relative

	Total sample 3,891	
	Number of parents or relatives in specific occupations or trades	Number of boys working for or with their parents or relatives
Father	1,391	310
Mother	638	41
Grandparents	20	
Uncle	70	24
Brother	46	12
Aunt	32	2
Sister	26	1
Cousin	10	2
	2,233	392

NMM, MSY/O/1-4, 'Marine Society Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King's Ships, 1770 – 1780'

Table 4.2 shows that 8 per cent of the total number of boys recruited worked for their father and at least 10 per cent for their father, mother or close relative before going to sea. About a third of these were employed in the weaving trades and a significant number

worked with parents in individual crafts or trades.

The average age of Marine Society boys was fourteen, but 1,340 recruits were aged between fifteen and nineteen. Only 100 of these were apprenticed and as far as we know, none of the remaining 1,240 had been bound by the parish. It appears, therefore, that despite being of apprenticeship age, these boys had continued in casual employment. Recruits who joined the Marine Society in the years between 1770 and 1780 had no obligation to serve again after their first voyage, so these older boys were, in effect, signing on for another form of casual employment and an experimental period before deciding on a career at sea.

The fact that a total of 3,000 boys between the ages of eleven and nineteen, randomly recruited from the poor communities, were in casual employment before going to sea is a strong indication that there must have been many more and that casual child labour was a common experience for London's poor children. It is clear that long before the age of apprenticeship many worked alongside adults, quite frequently their parents or relatives. As a result, although apprenticeship looms very large in archival documentation and was a life-changing event, it should be seen as part of a longer-term process of gradual integration into the adult workforce that for many children began years earlier. More significantly, these registers also suggest that many boys from the poor communities recruited over the age of fourteen had never served an apprenticeship but continued to take casual employment. This argument will be developed and supported by further evidence later in the chapter.

APPRENTICESHIP

Apprenticeship, an important transition in the lives of many of the capital's children, was problematic at all levels. Those placed out by wealthy parents with eminent masters, who provided full training for substantial fees of between £200 and £600, were obliged to serve for seven years in a relationship that was not necessarily congenial. Artisans, who could afford indentures of perhaps £10 or £15, had no guarantee that their children would be well taught or that the master would remain solvent. Parents of children from the poor communities faced more serious problems and their economic circumstances determined what was available to them. Many poor families coped without having to resort to charity and some, from their own meager resources, apprenticed their children to local tradesmen, neighbours or relatives informally or perhaps for a small fee of between £5 and £8.¹³ Parents whose children had not been compelled to work at a young age and had attended one of London's charity schools, often had the apprenticeship fee, or part of it, paid by the school in an approved placement. Children at London's Foundling Hospital were apprenticed by the Governors, and every year a number of parents from the poor communities petitioned for their sons to receive a charity apprenticeship at the Bridewell apprentice school. In many London parishes a few fortunate families had access to apprenticeships from private charity.¹⁴

On entering apprenticeship, children usually left home and took their place in

¹³ George, *London*. pp.373-74, footnote 32 gives examples of children apprenticed by their parents and abused.

¹⁴ For example, WCA, E3559, 'Apprenticeship Indentures relative to Grinsell's Charity, 1678-1738'; WCA, E3108, 'Cutler's Charity Account Book concerning the binding out of apprentice boys of the Grey Coat Hospital, 1695-1721; LMA, X97/306, 'St John's Hackney, Workhouse Management Committee', 12 Jan 1754 mentions Elizabeth Touch bound with 40/- paid out of Mr Bannister's Gift; GL, 77736/1, 'St Katherine Coleman, Weekly Pensions 1753-54', mentions the Gift of Henry Dixon, £4 from the Company of Drapers to apprentice a poor boy of 15 years born in the parish, with a further £4 after he has been admitted into the Freedom.

another household, lodging perhaps with other apprentices in the accommodation or workshop of their employer. For the capital's poor children, experience of a working environment prior to apprenticeship empowered them with knowledge about the conditions and treatment they should expect. This knowledge, their dealings with adult employers, and their experiences of at least one occupation or trade gave them some understanding of how they might negotiate their apprenticeships.

In London, there was a variety of ways to access training associated with apprenticeship. The survey that follows is by no means comprehensive but highlights four different types of apprenticeship available to poor children according to their circumstances.

a. Parish Apprenticeships

Parish apprentices were usually bound to a master in a neighbouring parish. Although many had spent a period in the workhouse separated from their family, this transition to a new workplace was a life-changing experience. Male parish apprentices were bound until they were twenty-four and females until twenty-one, a custom Jonas Hanway regarded as 'absurd' and 'tyrannical'. After much campaigning, he managed to get a clause inserted into the 1767 Act 'for the better regulation of the Parish Poor Children ...' so that the apprenticeships of parish boys ended when they were twenty-one.¹⁵ Even so, parish apprentices who were bound early had to serve for a longer period than some of their contemporaries.

As depicted by Dorothy George, parish apprentices were drudges and pot boys, or pauper children working in disagreeable trades, exploited and vulnerable to neglect and

¹⁵ George, *London*, p.237.

abuse. There is certainly much truth in this. Francis Blandy, to take just one example, was apprenticed in 1742 by the parish of St Andrew's Holborn to a leather dresser in the parish of St James Westminster to serve until the age of twenty-four. Four years later, his master's business 'failed and [he] went away one night ... and took [Francis] with him as far as Newcastle, where he left him without any person to take care of him'. The boy, almost starved, eventually made his way home to his mother.¹⁶ But the sufferings and abuse of parish apprentices, some of whom were treated far more cruelly than Francis Blandy, are only part of the story. Lynn Hollen Lees suggested that most poor people had choices and were able, in a limited way, to manipulate the parochial system to their advantage.¹⁷ In exploring experiences of parish apprenticeships, we need to ask how children fitted into this framework. Were they 'passive recipients' or did they too have 'choices' and manipulate the system to their advantage?

From birth, children had to rely on adults to handle their affairs, but the period leading up to apprenticeship was not necessarily one of unremitting oppression when all children were passive recipients without a voice. It is clear from numerous examples that parish apprenticeship was not only a period of negotiation between parish and apprentice master, but also involved a multiple interchange between parish, master, parent and child. Thirteen year-old Thomas Richins, for example, was brought back to the workhouse from a trial period 'on liking' by the overseer, who considered his master unsuitable. Thomas went on trial for a second time but made his attitude quite clear by running away and his master consequently complained. His parents, who could not afford to apprentice him

¹⁶ Middlesex Sessions Records (22 April 1748, Cal.) quoted in George, *London*, pp.418-19.

¹⁷ Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London 1988), p.192; Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: the English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.37-38.

themselves, intervened and asked the parish authorities to bind him immediately.¹⁸ In this case, all parties had their say, although ultimately, Thomas had to submit to adult authority.

Parish children sent 'on liking' operated within what Natalie Davis called a 'shifting zone', where, by adopting a variety of strategies such as running away, being deliberately uncooperative or offering a straight complaint if they had the confidence or temerity to make it, their behaviour oscillated between conformity and resistance.¹⁹ Some, by sheer defiance, and others, by more measured negotiation, gained a hearing. Overseers, parents and masters had power 'over' children, but children had power 'to' disrupt or complain, in the hope of eliciting a response in their favour. While the parochial system attempted to discipline children and prevent idleness, the period 'on liking' gave a flexibility that made action possible and for a short while parish children had a choice.

Mary Hill, from the parish of St George Hanover Square, was sent 'on liking' but adopted a focused strategy and ran away, refusing to be bound on account of her mistress's bad character.²⁰ By running away and making a case for her behaviour, she forced the parish officers to enquire into her circumstances. Eight year-old Ann Holt's first trial period with a weaver was unsuccessful so she was sent elsewhere to learn housewifery. A month later, her mistress returned her to the workhouse complaining that she was very idle and would do nothing but 'just whatever she had in mind'. When Ann

¹⁸ 'Chelsea Workhouse Admissions and Discharges, 1743-1799', transcribed from LMA, Microfilm X/15/37 by Tim Hitchcock in 2003, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea>, (hereafter CWAD)10 and 15 Mar 1744, 11 and 16 May 1744, 5 and 6 June, 26 June and 2 July 1744.

¹⁹ Natalie Davis and Arlette Farge (eds), *A History of Women in the West: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes* (Cambridge, 1992), p.4.

²⁰ WCA, C869 – C904, 'St George Hanover Square Workhouse Committee Minute Books', C880, 3 June 1752.

admitted that this was true she was severely reprimanded and shut in the dark hole without food for the rest of the day.²¹ Eight months later, she was sent to a harness maker and silk winder, but after the statutory month, her master complained that she had refused to work as directed, had spoiled the work she did, and had abused her mistress in a most violent manner. Ann was again put in the dark hole and confined there for several days on a diet of bread and water. A month later, the Beadle was sent to enquire if a velvet weaver would take her to learn to wind silk both by hand and engine, and she was bound.²² Both Mary Hill and Ann Holt made vigorous protests, in the hope of improving their situations and were prepared to take risks and endure discomfort to make their voices heard.

In the parish of St John Hackney, a group of workhouse boys made a joint protest and refused to go 'on liking', saying they did not like the trade. The law stated that children refusing to be bound should be sent to the house of correction until they were willing.²³ In this instance, a warning would probably have guaranteed co-operation, but the boys must still have felt momentary power and satisfaction at having forced the authorities to take action.²⁴ In parishes across London, children frequently rejected masters during their trial period and, in view of the low indenture fees, parish officers may have anticipated trouble and therefore been lenient. At the workhouse of St George Hanover Square in 1767, efforts were made to encourage children to behave by offering them financial rewards. In due course, eighteen apprentices, and many more in subsequent weeks, appeared with their masters and were rewarded on a sliding scale

²¹ LMA, X97/306, 'St John in Hackney, Workhouse Management Committee', 30 May 1752, 6 June 1752, 20 June 1752, 4 Nov 1752, 2 Dec 1752.

²² LMA, X97/306, 25 Aug 1753, 22 Sept 1753, 13 Oct 1753, 3 Nov 1753.

²³ *The Compleat Parish Officer* (London, 1729, 5th edn.), p.105.

²⁴ LMA, X97/306, 6 April 1751, 13 Apr 1751.

according to their length of service. Rewards of two shillings and sixpence for two years' service and ten shillings and sixpence for seven years were not insignificant for poor apprentices and carry just a hint of bribery.²⁵ What is clear is that workhouse children had opinions and a voice, and were prepared to use them.²⁶

b. Charity School Apprenticeships

While parish children were able, to a limited extent, to negotiate their apprenticeships, children apprenticed from London's charity schools found themselves with little bargaining power. Every year, hundreds of parents who could demonstrate that they were the 'deserving' poor took advantage of apprenticeships funded by London's charity schools. Children placed in trade apprenticeships or put out to service from charity schools were usually expected to have continued their education for a minimum length of time, usually until they were fourteen. The indenture fee depended on the school they attended.²⁷ The Grey Coat Hospital arranged apprenticeships or service for all its children and paid for indentures with watermen, gardeners, tobacco pipe makers, weavers, shoemakers and in many other modest trades.²⁸ Fees paid by charity schools in the 1720s and 30s ranged from £2 to £5.²⁹ Peter Joye's charity school did not find apprentice masters, but paid fees if parents found suitable placements and presented

²⁵ WCA, C894, 13 Nov 1767.

²⁶ For further examples of parish apprentices returned for misbehaviour see: WCA, C894, 9 Sept 1767; C902, 31 Jan 1776; 12 June 1776; C880, 9 May 1750, 6 Nov 1751, 8 Apr 1752, 6 May 1752, 3 June 1752, 24 Jan 1753, 7 Mar 1753; C882, 26 Dec 1753, 10 May 1754, 15 May 1754; C902 12 June 1776. CWAD shows 59 apprentices returned between 1743 and 1780.

²⁷ Jones, p.51.

²⁸ WCA, 1648/839, 'Grey Coat Hospital: Admissions, apprenticeships, leavers'.

²⁹ WCA, 1648/1 -11, 'Grey Coat Hospital Fair Minutes', 1648/3, 15 April 1712 ; WCA, F3306B, 'St Martin's Free School, Trustees' Fair Minutes', 11 Sept 1701; GL, 7013/1, 'Cripplegate within the Wards Schools, Committee Minutes', 16 May 1715. The Grey Coat Hospital trustees estimated that between 1698 and 1724, 1,108 children were bound apprentice - see WCA, 1648/1354, 'A Psalm and Hymn ... Sunday 12 January 1724 and the number of children apprenticed since 1698'.

indentures. John Chessey was bound apprentice to an indigo blue maker in the Fleet Market, and as his friends were able to pay ten pounds, the trustees agreed to allow £4 for what appears to have been a superior apprenticeship.³⁰ St Saviour's School for girls, in the poor parish of Southwark stipulated that only pupils who had behaved well and remained at school until the age of fourteen were to be allowed 20 shillings to buy clothes, provided the trustees approved the placement their parents or friends had found for them.³¹

London's charity school children, like parish apprentices, were bound into humble occupations, but the important difference was the quality of the masters or mistresses. No system is watertight, but the schools tried to arrange or approve placements where the religious principles and standards of discipline and obedience taught in the schools were maintained. A number of children, like Thomas Watkins, a pupil at St Martin's School, were apprenticed within their own family. When Thomas reached apprenticeship age, his father, a shoemaker, made a formal request to be his apprentice master. The trustees, 'having received information that Mr Watkins [was] a very honest, sober, industrious man and he [kept] good order in his family and that his son [would] in all probability be very happy in so good a master', agreed Thomas should go on trial. A week later, after Mr Watkins and Thomas had appeared before the trustees and 'declar[ed] their good liking of each other', the indentures were signed. Thomas was bound for seven years and his father received the £5 premium paid by the school.³² Similar investigations were presumably made into other potential apprentice masters before charity school children were bound.

³⁰ GL, 9192/1, 'Peter Joye's Charity School, Trustees' Minute Book', 20 March 1761.

³¹ LMA, A/NWC/1, 'St Saviour's Charity School for Girls', 20 May 1718.

³² WCA, F3306B, 4 June 1702, 11 June 1702.

A few children received an apprenticeship premium from a benefactor or through a specified charity gift to their school.³³ Herbert Ball was apprenticed to Dr John Grandy, the purser of *HMS Queen*, who bestowed the 40 shilling premium as a gift to the Grey Coat Hospital.³⁴ George Middleton was bound at Joiners' Hall to Joseph Hollis, where the premium of £4 was the gift of Charles Rampaine Downford.³⁵ Those apprenticed by charity schools with approved and vetted masters had a chance of reasonable treatment and instruction. Although the indenture fees were similar to those paid by parishes, as far as employers were concerned, charity school apprentices were used to discipline, had been taught habits of cleanliness and had acquired a degree of literacy. While the middling sort would be unlikely to employ a parish apprentice, charity school children were in demand.

While the apprenticing of parish children involved a multiple interchange between parish, master, parent and child, and parish children were allowed to return from several trial periods, the situation for London's charity school children was very different. School trustees recorded with satisfaction names of parents who expressed gratitude for their child's placement, but parents who objected to the arrangements the school had made were dealt with severely. In 1739, a number of parents of children at the Grey Coat Hospital 'presumed to intermeddle and interrupt' with apprenticeship arrangements that had been made. The trustees' outrage at their audacity is tangible in the Minutes, which state that any child whose parents 'concerned themselves with the Disposal of their children' should be 'absolutely expelled this Hospital and totally debarred from all

³³ See also advertisements on behalf of children in Donna Andrew, "'To the Charitable and Humane": Appeals for Assistance in the Press' in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes, *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: from the 1690s to 1850* (London, 1998), pp.94-95.

³⁴ WCA, 1648/2, 10 Aug 1707.

³⁵ WCA, 1648/4, 25 June 1717.

Benefit and Advantage therefrom which he or she or they would or might otherwise be intitled to'.³⁶ As we saw in Chapter 2, charity schools were oversubscribed by a different type of applicant from those trustees described in their mission statements, and parents made demands they had not expected. The presence of greedy, grasping parents or those who were assertive or over-anxious, wanting the best for their children, may have encouraged trustees to be more controlling. Withdrawal of an apprenticeship was the ultimate sanction employed against parents who regularly, and on a range of issues, confronted and disputed with trustees. There was no shortage of children to fill empty places, so opposition to trustees' decisions almost invariably resulted in dismissal with no second chance.³⁷

The presence of parent power essentially drives out child power, and children's voices are rarely heard in relation to charity school apprenticeships. Children were in no position to negotiate and were always the losers but a few did, nevertheless, rebel against authority, as the trustees' minutes of the Grey Coat Hospital show:

Richard Jones, put out on trial with Mr King, a cane chair maker of St Paul's Churchyard, left his master after a very strange manner and behaved himself here this night very unmannerly and objecting against the said trade without giving sufficient reason for doing so. To be dismissed.

James Haley, seemingly satisfied to go as an apprentice, refused even to go on trial with Mr Davy. To be dismissed from the Hospital, he having been here upwards of 8 years.

Elizabeth Morgan was by order instructed to go on tryal to Mr Lock, a Governor

³⁶ WCA, 1648/1, 27 March 1739.

³⁷ For further examples see: WCA, F3306A, 'Trustees of St Martin's Free School, Draft Minutes', 8 April 1705; GL, 6999/1, 'Aldersgate Ward School, Committee of Managers' Minute Book', April 1755.

of the Hospital. But the girl having refused the gentleman's service, and contrary to the said order hath entered into the service of one Reeves, a Gardiner in Castle Lane Westminster. The girl be for ever expelled this Hospital for such her disobedience.³⁸

c. Foundling Hospital Apprenticeships

Children apprenticed from London's charity schools were subject to the decisions of trustees and most had support from their parents, but children abandoned to institutions had to rely on philanthropists to arrange their apprenticeships and to support them in the longer term. In 1741, the Foundling Hospital opened in London and many desperate single parents and very poor families left their children as babies in its care. Parents who later reclaimed their children had to take responsibility for their apprenticeships, but between 1742 and 1777, the number of children reclaimed each year was not usually more than three or four. The vast majority of Foundling Hospital children were apprenticed by the Hospital Governors.³⁹

Children who spent their formative years under the protection of the Foundling Hospital and were apprenticed from there fared far better than many bound by the parishes. The Hospital Governors made a serious attempt to create an apprenticeship system that operated in the children's interest. Early on, it was decided that the character and circumstances of all prospective masters and mistresses would be carefully scrutinized and that no money would be given with any child apprenticed from the Hospital. In practice, this was an ideal impossible to sustain and the issue of

³⁸ WCA, 1648/1, 3 Sept 1700; 1648/5, 30 July 1723; 1648/7, 24 May 1737.

³⁹ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.124.

apprenticeship fees was a source of constant controversy and concern.⁴⁰ The first children were apprenticed in 1751 and were between the ages of ten and twelve, and until about 1756, children were placed out at an average rate of eighteen a year. Boys were usually employed in agriculture or suitable trades, while most girls went into domestic service. The intention was to keep control over the children during their apprenticeships to ensure that arrangements were satisfactory.⁴¹ Apprentices had the right to appeal to the Governors if all was not well, but masters could return them to the Hospital for reprimand or punishment. In 1752, agreement was reached that masters would pay £5 a year to their male apprentices during the last 3 years of their time, a benefit not available elsewhere.⁴² Transfers from one master to another needed the permission of the Governors, although it was not until 1787 that this became a legal requirement.⁴³

Between 1756 and 1760, children were accepted into the Hospital indiscriminately, admitted at the rate of about 100 a week. As these children reached apprenticeship age, the numbers to be put out rose dramatically. The apprenticeship records for 1760 to 1770 show the numbers of children apprenticed each year.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.125.

⁴¹ Instructions to Apprentices from 'General Committee Minutes', 17 April 1754, quoted in McClure, pp. 163- 64.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.126.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.149.

Table 4.3: Foundling Hospital Children Apprenticed, 1760 – 1770

Year	Number of Children Apprenticed
1760	42
1761	47
1762	39
1763	37
1764	93
1765	253
1766	256
1767	479
1768	1176
1769	1430
1770	550

Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century*, p.132

As Table 4.3 shows, the ideal of apprenticeships without fees was not being observed during the period when children were apprenticed in the largest numbers.

Table 4.4: Foundling Hospital Children Apprenticed and Fees Paid, 8 July 1767 – 5 June 1771

Number of children apprenticed with fees	3369
Average per year	842
Sum given	£14,594
Average with each apprentice	£4 6s 8d

LMA, A/FH/A/12/23/1, 'Papers relative to Children's Apprenticeships: Apprentices returned and Complaints, 1775 – 91'

Most Foundling Hospital children were nursed outside London and from 1760, a considerable number were apprenticed to the husbands of their nurses, an arrangement that was made legally binding so the children could acquire a legal settlement, essential to future security. These children were under the supervision of country inspectors, who vetted the suitability of couples in their area. As numbers to be apprenticed continued to increase, the Governors were forced to consider mass apprenticeship and by 1760, they

were accepting applications from manufacturers willing to take large groups of children into their industries. The Governors' initial determination to monitor all their apprentices now came under severe strain. What had been relatively straightforward in the early stages became an impossible task. It was not until 1775 that the number of children apprenticed decreased to about thirty a year and it was again possible to monitor more effectively.⁴⁴

In London, the Governors had difficulty finding suitable masters, but they made enquiries into the circumstances of those petitioning to take children. A letter sent from Kingston in response to such an enquiry shows how careful they had to be:

I reciev'd a Letter in Regard To the Character and Surcumstance of Samuel Andrews which he is a man that Bears But a very Indefferrant Character In the nebourhood whare he Lives and as to his Surcumstances I Beleve is Lowe for he goes to the Gentlemans houses Round about Kingston Beging at thare gates therefore donte think a proper person to Take any Chile apprentice

Edmund May.⁴⁵

The Hospital steward investigating Ann Jenkinson's prospective mistress discovered that Mrs Smith, whose business was heading pins, lived in a 'very mean neighbourhood'. The parish apprentices she employed would only be able to earn seven or eight shillings a week, working from 6 o'clock in the morning until 9 or 10 at night, and were likely to be unemployed at the end of their time. The steward was of the opinion that those who worked for Mrs Smith had no opportunity to acquire proper habits or cleanliness and he reported that both the house and its inhabitants had 'the appearance of

⁴⁴ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.149.

⁴⁵ LMA, A/FH/A/6/1/16/12/13, 'Correspondence to the Secretary', 29 June 1764.

dirt and negligence to a great degree'.⁴⁶ Inevitably, despite the Governors' care, serious mistakes were made. Some cases of neglect or abuse must never have come to light, and others were discovered too late.⁴⁷

For Foundling Hospital children, the shock of leaving the protective environment of the Hospital at apprenticeship must have been considerable. Most had been nursed in rural areas and then returned to London or to one of the branch hospitals for basic education and instruction in domestic or vocational skills. Most were unprepared for the disorganized and often distressing conditions of urban life and had to make rapid adjustments. Those apprenticed according to the Governors' ideal, without a fee, found themselves in modest or, occasionally, affluent situations where at best they were taught a useful trade and their services were valued. Those who remained in the country with their nurses gained both employment and the love and security of an adopted family. Even those apprenticed with poorer families, who had been accepted only with fees, experienced a measure of monitoring and supervision that was not available elsewhere.⁴⁸

The Governors, unlike charity school trustees, had no problems with interfering parents as so few children were claimed. Before Foundling Hospital children were released to apprenticeships, they were taught to 'behave honestly, justly, soberly and carefully in everything, to everybody', and especially towards their master or mistress, so as apprentices they may have been more co-operative than some. Nevertheless, the Governors received regular complaints from apprentice masters who attended the

⁴⁶ LMA, A/FH/A/12/23/1, 11 Oct 1786.

⁴⁷ LMA, A/FH/A/3/2/1 'General Committee Rough Minutes', 1 May 1771, Elizabeth Owen; 25 Sept 1771, Jemima Dixon, who died as a result of cruelty.

⁴⁸ R.S.Tompson, 'Review of Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century*', *American Historical Review* 87, 4 (Oct 1982), 1087-88. Tompson refers to the provision of inspectors as a 'major breakthrough'.

Hospital, from reports of inspectors and from correspondence, about truculent apprentices who, like some parish apprentices, were deliberately uncooperative in the hope of being moved elsewhere. Despite being reared in a disciplined environment and leaving the Hospital often innocent of the real world, some Foundling Hospital children soon learned to assert themselves, to be manipulative and to make their presence felt.

Apprentice master, Lawrence Hall, wrote concerning Elizabeth Maynard, who had already appeared before the Governors once and been punished:

19 Finchfield Street

19 Dec 1778

I beg pardon for intruding on so honourable a society of gentlemen on account of so worthless a child as will this day appear before you; gentlemen. After the punishment was inflicted upon her the last time she was before you, it had no more effect than it would have had on a thief that had been reprieved nine times from the gallows, for she told her mistress that same day she did not mind it; for the Boys were beat a great deal worse than she had been beat. And ever since that day she has been more impudent and more hardened than before.⁴⁹

Thirteen year-old Jane Trevor had only been apprenticed to Francis Collis, a tailor, a short time when he first came to the Hospital to complain about her. Six months later he returned, claiming that she was 'so refractory that no punishment would alter her behaviour'. Clearly desperate, he asked the Governors to take her back into the Hospital until her apprenticeship was transferred, offering to pay for her subsistence until another placement was found.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ LMA, A/FH/A/6/1/124/1 'Correspondence Book of the Secretary', 19 Dec 1778.

⁵⁰ LMA, A/FH/A/12/23/1, 21 Feb 1787.

d. Bridewell Apprentice School

Every year a number of parents from the poor communities of the capital petitioned for their sons to be admitted to the Bridewell apprentice school. In 1700 Bridewell Hospital, which stood between Fleet Street and the River Thames, was a dual-purpose establishment, a school for apprentices and a house of correction, directed by the same administration. At that time, the apprentice school accommodated more than 130 boys who entered at the age of about fourteen, applying by petition with the support of a Governor. The only surviving indentures of about 40 apprentices for the period between 1707 and 1720 show that the majority of boys came from London and that their fathers were employed in a variety of modest trades.⁵¹

From the point of view of parents who petitioned for their sons to attend the apprentice school, Bridewell Hospital had much to offer. Each boy lived with his master's family and up to six other boys in accommodation that had to be maintained and kept in good repair. He was provided with 'wholesome and sufficient meat, drink and apparel, washing, wringing and lodging and all other necessaries whatsoever – until he [was] made free of the City'.⁵² He was guaranteed tuition in a trade, which might be glove-making, shoemaking, weaving, pin making or hemp dressing, although weaving far outnumbered the other 'arts'.⁵³ Each boy was assigned to an artsmaster, who was under the control of the Governors, and transfer was automatic if the artsmaster retired or died. There was stability among the staff, several of whom were of long tenure. Discipline within the school was strict but was controlled by the Governors and if a boy had cause to

⁵¹ GL, 33143/2, 'Indentures, 1707 – 1720'.

⁵² GL, 33142, Bundle 2, 'Bridewell Artsmasters' Bonds, 1675 – 1706'.

⁵³ GL, 33011/17 - 23, 'Bridewell and Bethlem Court of Governors' Minutes, 1695-1780', 19 Mar 1714.

complain, he had the right to be heard.⁵⁴ In addition to learning a trade, each boy was taught to read and write, received moral training and was required to attend chapel. At the end of his period of apprenticeship, a boy gained the Freedom of the City and, subject to his good behaviour, the chance of receiving Lock's Gift of £10 to help him set up in business. The Bridewell apprentice school had an ongoing record of many 'sober and diligent' boys achieving their Freedom and Lock's Gift. Parents invariably hope their sons will behave and take advantage of opportunities offered, so even given reports of hooliganism among the apprentices and the school's close proximity to the house of correction in a run-down part of town, poor parents unable to afford indentures would have seen a Bridewell apprenticeship as a superior and valuable asset for their sons, perhaps the best form of apprenticeship in London.⁵⁵

Once boys were indentured at Bridewell, it was rare for them to leave before completing their time and the Governors do not seem to have been troubled by uncooperative parents. Information relating to the apprentice school in the minutes of the Governors of Bridewell is difficult to interpret and, as with many records of this kind, disciplinary problems and sensational events take precedence over the more mundane.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that the apprentices did not give the Governors an easy ride. Unlike young parish apprentices and Foundling Hospital children trying to negotiate a better deal for themselves, the behaviour of the Bridewell boys could be interpreted, not so much as a rebellion against individual masters, as a protest against apprenticeship

⁵⁴ Five artsmasters were dismissed for cruelty or inappropriate behaviour: GL, 33011/19, 4 Jan 1717; 33011/22, 13 Nov 1755; 33011/18, Sept 1705; 33011/19, 31 Aug 1716, 33011/22, 25 Oct 1754 and 12 Dec 1755; 33011/23, 29 June 1769.

⁵⁵ GL, 33011/20, 12 Nov 1725 and 18 Feb 1726. 33011/19, 5 Dec 1718; 33011/22, June 1753.

⁵⁶ See Edward O'Donoghue, *Bridewell Hospital, Palace, Prison and School*, Vol. 2 (London, 1929), p. 190.

itself. Bridewell boys entered the school as children and were treated as such, but they soon grew into young men.⁵⁷ Like parish apprentices, some who completed their time before 1767 were apprenticed for ten years.⁵⁸ Cooped up throughout adolescence, some inevitably rebelled against restrictions imposed upon them. The Misdemeanour Book shows dozens of apprentices who absconded, some for a few hours, others for weeks at a time. Richard Ekerman ran away seventeen times but, like most of the apprentices, he returned to face a period beating hemp like the Bridewell prisoners or a whipping in front of his peers.⁵⁹ Samson Shakemapple and Edward Cooper ran away to Canterbury and sold their blue uniforms to fund their adventure.⁶⁰ The sensation of power and freedom, however brief, must have been irresistible. Samuel Ellis, one of many who appeared before the Governors for spoiling his work, giving saucy language to his master and keeping late hours, committed the ultimate outrage by getting married before his time expired.⁶¹

A fire-engine stood in the Hospital precinct, and the older Bridewell apprentices were trained to use it. When the bell rang, high-spirited and reckless, they escaped the confines of the Hospital to quench the blaze and rescue householders. Later, in the absence of control, they enjoyed a night on the town, drinking in taverns with other unruly apprentices and 'disorderly women'.⁶² Scandalous behaviour from apprentices was not new in London.⁶³ The capital's taverns, boxing and wrestling booths, the bear

⁵⁷ LMA, CLA/66/01/006, 'Committee to enquire into the Behaviour of Children in Bridewell, 1710-1718' refers to the apprentices as 'children'.

⁵⁸ For example Daniel Vaughan, apprenticed 12 April 1704 – 6 Mar 1714. For his involvement and death in a Mug House Riot see also OBP, 6 Sept 1716, Robert Read (t17160906-1).

⁵⁹ GL, 33144, 'Bridewell Misdemeanour Book, 1710 -1718'.

⁶⁰ GL, 33144, 22 May 1715.

⁶¹ GL, 33144, 19 March 1714, 27 May 1715, 16 March 1716, 13 April 1716, 22 Feb 1717.

⁶² GL, 33011/19, 2 Dec 1715.

⁶³ Mary Thale (ed), *The Autobiography of Francis Place* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 73-78.

garden and the annual fairs, often scenes of disorder, held many attractions for them. In 1715, when the government was particularly sensitive to Jacobite riots, the Governors were summoned by the Secretary of State to explain the involvement of a number of Bridewell boys in an affray.⁶⁴ Fearing further riotous behaviour, the Governors padlocked the Hospital gates on festival days, but in 1718 on Bonfire Night, a group of apprentices attempted to blow up the padlock with gunpowder and went on the rampage, terrifying members of the public, yelling political slogans and demanding money with menace, before leading a rioting mob of nearly 200 through the streets of the City.⁶⁵ Their break-out from the Hospital, their defiance of authority and their power to make things happen spoke volumes for the frustrations felt by all London's poor apprentices bound for what must have seemed an eternity.

Despite their protests, however, Bridewell apprentices knew the value of their indentures, and Lock's Gift of £10 was highly prized, an incentive to some apprentices to avoid serious trouble. Over the years, the vast majority of apprentices completed their time and gained their Freedom. Richard Ekerman, with seventeen entries in the Misdemeanour Book, petitioned four times to receive Lock's Gift, but all his requests were refused.⁶⁶ Others negotiated with more success and the Governors were not impervious to humble petitions. Samson Shakemaple, who ran away to Canterbury, received the Gift, and Jonathan Trevisa, involved in the riot of 1718, was eventually awarded his Freedom and Lock's Gift in 1753, thirty-five years later.⁶⁷

In 1768, three Bridewell apprentices were caught up in an ugly incident at an

⁶⁴ GL, 33011/19, 4 Nov 1715.

⁶⁵ GL, 33011/19, 5 Dec 1718.

⁶⁶ GL, 33011/20, 2 Oct 1724, 19 Feb 1725, 10 Feb 1727, 24 Mar 1727.

⁶⁷ GL, 33011/20, 12 Nov 1725 and 18 Feb 1726. 33011/19, 5 Dec 1718, 33011/22, June 1753.

alehouse, where a woman and three men were assaulted. They were whipped, stripped of their Hospital clothing and expelled.⁶⁸ Two of the boys petitioned to be re-instated.

Gentlemen

I humbly hope you will pardon my boldness in Troubling you with this but being in great distress I therefore beg your Worships in your great goodness to admit me again into your house. I have applied to my master Mr. Heafford but he don't chuse to employ me, I have likewise applied to serve in Spitalfields and other places, but can get no work nor employment of any sort. And not having any friends but what are very poor and they are as far as Oaksey in Wiltshire, I therefore am reduced to the greatest distress and unless you worships will be so good as to take me into consideration and I will endeavour by my future behaviour never more to deserve what I have so justly suffered.

William Fisher

Gentlemen

Permit me with all due submission to acknowledge the justice of the sentence passed upon me for misdemeanours, as well as the deep sense I shall ever retain of the offence given to my generous benefactors At the same time deign with your wanted goodness to regard my deplorable state now banished your protection of the hospital roof, an orphan, friendless and destitute, bereft of all comfortable views in life and abandoned to misery and want unless in tender compassion you kindly reinstate me in my former happy station; if I should once more be replaced nothing more shall be wanting either in assiduity in my business, or obedience in

⁶⁸ GL, 33011/23, 22 Apr 1768.

my behaviour to convince you with what profound respect and esteem

I am and ever shall remain, gentlemen, your highly favoured and most devoted
servant

William Andrews.⁶⁹

These two letters show the value Bridewell apprentices placed on the training they received and on the importance of completing their indentures. More significantly, the boys' subsequent reinstatement is testimony to the kind of negotiation that was possible between poor apprentices and those in authority.

A TYPICAL APPRENTICESHIP?

Apprenticeship was one way in which children could make the transition into the adult world and the four types of apprenticeship described serve to illustrate some the opportunities available in London. The bald facts of many children's apprenticeships are recorded in institutional minutes and hundreds of bundles of indentures have survived but, beyond these, the lives and experiences of the vast majority of poor children have vanished into oblivion. Concrete evidence of apprenticeship experiences is hard to come by outside session papers and the *Old Bailey Proceedings*, sources that offer hundreds of vivid and sometimes harrowing snapshots of the lives of the poor. There is no denying that hardship and cruelty were common in an apprenticeship system riddled with fundamental flaws, and it would be grossly unjust to ignore or sideline the sufferings of large numbers of children. Nevertheless, we have no assurance that these experiences were typical of a wider population of the poor. If we acknowledge that we do not yet have a spectrum of apprenticeship experiences, then we should at least try to seek out

⁶⁹ GL, 30011/23, 9 Mar 1768.

those that are more representative of the norm. In order to do this, we need to look beyond the date on the indentures and approach the subject from a different angle, using alternative sources. Inevitably, we shall still have only a partial view, but we may gain a new understanding of the experiences of poor children beyond the date they were bound and of apprenticeship itself.

Serving an apprenticeship or being hired as a servant for a year were both means by which individuals could gain a settlement, entitling them to relief in time of need in a home parish. Settlement examinations, formulated by magistrates from paupers' responses to questions, were kept by the parish and reveal information about the lives and backgrounds of the persons concerned, often referring to a period of childhood apprenticeship, domestic service or hiring on a yearly basis. A right of settlement passed automatically from a man to his wife and children, so information relating to a husband's apprenticeships was often given at these examinations by wives or widows. Some single women, who were apprenticed in childhood, gave information in their own right and a few used their fathers' indentures as a means of gaining a settlement. By using settlement examinations, it is possible to retrieve information about apprenticeship or childhood employment and to trace experiences over a number of years.

The Poor Law examinations for the parish of St Luke's, Chelsea consist of settlement and bastardy examinations bound together and a total of 469 examinations have survived for the years 1733 to 1766. Of these, 375 are settlement examinations. They include information about the working lives of the poor and some make reference to childhood apprenticeship or yearly hired service in parishes in London, Middlesex, Essex and Surrey (now parishes in Greater London).

Table 4.5: Apprenticeship and Work Experience Recorded in the Settlement Examinations of St Luke's Parish, Chelsea

Total Number of Settlement & Bastardy Examinations	469		
Bastardy Examinations/index/blank	94		
Number of Settlement Examinations	375		
Petitioners born in London, Middlesex, Essex, and Surrey (now parishes in Greater London)	235		
Apprenticed		87	37%
Never apprenticed / yearly hired at 16 years or younger		26	11%
No childhood experiences recorded		122	52%
Petitioners born outside London, Middlesex, Essex, and Surrey (now parishes in Greater London)	140		
Apprenticed		37	26%
Never apprenticed		13	9%
No childhood experiences recorded		90	64%

Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examination, 1733-66,
 Edited by Tim Hitchcock and John Black (London Record Society 33, 1999)

Of the total of 235 petitioners, 87 petitioners (or spouses referring to their husbands' settlements) were born and apprenticed in London. Of these, 83 were male and 4 female. 3 were parish apprentices and 5 had been apprenticed to their fathers or close relatives. 55 of the 87 apprentices had served their full term (63 per cent). 28 of the 55 who served their time gave the trade in which they had been apprenticed at the time of their examination, so appear to have continued in their business (51 per cent).

A variety of childhood apprenticeships are represented in these examinations,

including shoemaking, bakery, bricklaying and boat building. Children bound to watermen often completed their service at sea. John Edenbury, apprenticed to a gardener, completed his time and as a young man rose to be principal gardener at the country house of Earl Cowper, living in as a yearly hired servant with wages of £17 a year.⁷⁰ John Kimberly, apprenticed at the age of thirteen by a charitable gift belonging to Eton College, also completing his time and was made free of the Haberdashers' Company. Both these apprentices made a promising start; but John Edenbury, faced with the financial burdens of a wife and six children, was forced to turn to the parish in middle age, while John Kimberly found himself unable to make a living as a basket maker at the age of thirty.⁷¹ Matthew Sutton completed his apprenticeship as a silversmith and then 'jobbed' and 'did journey work' for a while.⁷² Capital was needed to set up a business and like most poor apprentices he had little or no chance of becoming a master. Some of those recorded in the examinations who served their time were unable to continue with their trade for reasons of unemployment in overstocked trades, sickness, injury or death. Being apprenticed as a child was no guarantee of employment or future security.

Of the 87 apprenticed in childhood, 32 failed to serve their full term. 11 of these quit to go into the army, where they would have received a regular income. William Hawker, apprenticed to a necklace maker by the parish at the age of fourteen, served only five years before absconding after being beaten and abused, and subsequently made his living 'honestly by jobbing about in different places for near 20 years'.⁷³ John Shanno, bound to a watch-case maker, served just two weeks short of full term, but 'always

⁷⁰ *Chelsea Settlement and Bastardy Examinations, 1733-66*, (hereafter *CSBE*), Tim Hitchcock and John Black (eds.), London Record Society 33, (London, 1999) 407.

⁷¹ *CSBE*, 197

⁷² *CSBE*, 292

⁷³ *CSBE*, 256

worked as a labourer'.⁷⁴ Apprenticeships failed for a variety of reasons and a change of occupation did not always bring good fortune. William Turner served six years of his apprenticeship with a distiller and then went to sea, where he was 'blown up on board a man o' war'.⁷⁵

Over the course of the eighteenth century, small workshops continued to be the norm in London but many businesses became larger and more impersonal.⁷⁶ Except in a number of skilled trades, the apprentice system was beginning to collapse. Formal indentures involved trouble and expense that many were anxious to avoid. 26 Chelsea examinees born in London, of whom 6 were single women, stated explicitly that they were 'never apprenticed'. Ann Davey, who arrived in London at the age of fourteen, was 'never apprenticed or hired by the year' but worked for a weekly wage of 4/6d or 5/-; and William Sexton, who was 'never bound', worked as a labourer for most of his life.⁷⁷ James Thompson 'had always been a soldier from the time he was capable of serving in the army', which from 1705 was thirteen, and Ephraim Hillary went to sea at the same age.⁷⁸ Miles Rains and Thomas Hathaway were hired as yearly servants from the age of sixteen.⁷⁹

122 examinees born in London made no mention of childhood experiences, but claimed a settlement on the basis that they had worked as hired servants in the parish for a year. 26 of these were single women and 8 were widows. Most, both male and female,

⁷⁴ *CSBE*, 393

⁷⁵ *CSBE*, 262

⁷⁶ Robert Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 2004) p.17.

⁷⁷ *CSBE*, 347, 199.

⁷⁸ *CSBE*, 188, 227/231.

⁷⁹ *CSBE*, 17 and 68.

had been hired yearly as household servants.⁸⁰ The absence of any reference to apprenticeship, even among male petitioners, strongly suggests that they had never been bound. Adding these 122 petitioners to the 26 who specifically stated they were never bound, gives a speculative total of 148 or 63 per cent of examinees born in London who were never apprenticed. This underlines the extent to which apprenticeship was less common among the communities of the poor than the legalities make it appear.

Chelsea examinees born outside the London area show a similar overall pattern of childhood apprenticeship and employment to those in the capital. Among the 90 examinees for whom no childhood experiences were recorded are 24 who came originally from Ireland, where the parochial system was less generous. Only one Irish examinee referred to a childhood apprenticeship.

These examinations clearly demonstrate that apprenticeship in childhood, even in favourable circumstances, was no guarantee of future employment and that anyone could suddenly plummet into destitution. As we saw in Chapter 1, those forced to turn to the parish were not necessarily among those who began life at the bottom of the social pile and only three of the petitioners at St Luke's Chelsea claimed to have been parish apprentices. Many petitioners were never apprenticed but, like hundreds of Marine Society recruits, took weekly-paid casual work or hired themselves out to employers on a yearly basis from an early age. Apprenticeship gave some examinees an initial means of livelihood that for various reasons they were unable to sustain and others quit early, desperate to earn a wage. Leaving aside the minority of poor apprentices who suffered severe deprivation and brutality, the Chelsea settlement examinations present what could be described as a 'worst-case scenario', where those apprenticed as children, and in some

⁸⁰ Wages ranged from £4 - £20 a year.

cases completed a full term, later succumbed, often through no fault of their own, to abject poverty and were forced to rely on the parish.

In our attempt to find ‘a typical apprentice’ or at least apprenticeship experiences more representative of the norm, an ‘ideal-case scenario’ is needed for comparison: a situation in which children were placed with competent and caring masters, with satisfactory conditions and accommodation, and where they acquired skills and eventually independence. This was probably afforded to only a few, but we know of a number of poor children apprenticed in London who succeeded in various ways. The Westminster magistrate, Saunders Welch, is said to have begun life in a workhouse and been apprenticed to a trunk-maker in London, perhaps bound by the parish.⁸¹ Joseph Lawrence, apprenticed as a climbing boy in 1755, continued to sweep chimneys until he retired in 1815. As a master, he was humane: he taught his apprentices to read and write and insisted on weekly scrubbing so they could attend church in a reasonably clean condition.⁸² Children apprenticed by charity schools had the advantage of literacy and in 1719, the trustees of the Cordwainer Ward School were informed that James Barber, a former pupil, had been appointed master of a charity school in Leeds. Edward Green, a boy educated at St Martin’s School, eventually became its master.⁸³ David Thompson, who entered the Grey Coat Hospital in 1777 at the age of 7, was chosen by the Hudson Bay Company in 1784 to go to North America. David went initially as a clerk and later, after being tutored in surveying, achieved renown by making the survey that formed the

⁸¹ J.T.Smith, *Nollekens and his Times* (1829), edited by W. Whitten (London, 1920 edn.), p.100.

⁸² K.H.Strange, *The Climbing Boys: A Study of Sweeps’ Apprentices, 1773-1875* (London, 1982).

⁸³ GL, 1775, f, 121, Nat.Soc., SR2/1/1. 19 Aug 1711, quoted in Craig Rose, ‘Evangelical Philanthropy and Anglican Revival: the Charity Schools of Augustan London, 1698 – 1740’, *London Journal* 16 (1991) 53.

basis of the boundary between Canada and the United States.⁸⁴ Foundling Hospital children succeeded in life in varying degrees. Richard Stanton served his full term and inherited his master's business, while Daniel Hay was a success in his own right 'in the Glazing, Plumbing and Painting Branches'. One of the girls learned to be a shroud maker and was employed by an 'eminent Undertaker', and a number of Foundling apprentices were taken on as paid employees of the Hospital when they had served their time. Perhaps the charity's greatest success was Julian Mariner, who was apprenticed to the Hospital's apothecary. Eventually, having married well and risen in the world, he became the first foundling to be elected a Hospital Governor.⁸⁵

It is not possible to identify 'a typical apprentice', but the experiences of the majority of poor children are likely to have been somewhere between the two extremes described. Few children from the poor communities had a choice of trade but not all those apprenticed faced dire conditions and unreasonable masters. The Chelsea settlement examinations provide one set of figures and more research is needed before generalizations can be made, but these examinations do suggest that for some poor children, apprenticeship was a period in their lives that bore little relationship to what followed. Life was precarious and completion of an apprenticeship, however it was organized, was no guarantee of future employment.

⁸⁴ WCA, 1648/2062, Elsie Day, *An Old Westminster Endowment* (London, 1902), p.13.

⁸⁵ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.240.

APPRENTICESHIPS FOR GIRLS

Much of the discussion of apprenticeship in this chapter has dealt in categories that were, for the most part, highly gendered. Casual work and apprenticeships were relatively easy to find for boys, who could be useful in many trades, but girls could be employed in their own homes, helping with child-minding, washing and cleaning, without an apprenticeship fee, and this may have considerably reduced the number being apprenticed.⁸⁶ 'As an institution', apprenticeship 'was not seen as the usual route for girls', but there were exceptions: girls were apprenticed from workhouses and others were indentured in 'female' trades, such as mantua making and millinery.⁸⁷ Elite rhetoric demanded that idle children must be put to work so, like boy parish apprentices, girls were bound by written contract. The indentures of Rebecca Clark, a parish apprentice of St Giles Cripplegate bound to a carpenter in 1741, specified that she was to be taught the art and mystery of carpentry, while Mary Carpenter, bound from Lambeth workhouse to a breeches maker, was to 'learn the business and also household work'.⁸⁸ Three orphaned girls from the parish of St George Hanover Square were apprenticed in 1767: Elizabeth Gee to the owner of an iron shop, Mary Brewer to a cook and Martha Sundy to a sword hilt maker.⁸⁹ Indentures of female parish apprentices were often less specific than this and workhouse girls were often apprenticed to tradesman but worked for their wives in domestic service. Although many children were apprenticed at the age of about fourteen, workhouses tended to send their inmates out earlier, particularly those who were orphaned, abandoned, or whose family circumstances suddenly made them

⁸⁶ Berg, *Manufactures*, p.155.

⁸⁷ Deborah Simonton, 'Earning and Learning: Girlhood in Pre-Industrial Europe', *Women's History Review* 13, 3 (2004), 363-86.

⁸⁸ George, *London*, p.231.

⁸⁹ WCA, C894, 2 Dec 1767.

chargeable to the parish. These children often served for as long as ten years.

Parents of girls not receiving parish relief might employ them at home or send them into service with a relative, acquaintance or local tradeswoman to give them experience of the working world. For girls entering service this way there was no fee. Most poor girls working in domestic service had an initial period of drudgery, carrying heavy loads of wood, coal and laundry, emptying and washing chamber pots, boiling clothes, sheets, menstrual rags and diapers. In some households girls might also be required to knit or spin.⁹⁰ Middling-sort employers required servants with a moral upbringing, who were disciplined and had been taught standards of cleanliness and in London there was a marked preference for charity school children who had received a religious education.

When she was twenty-seven, Ann Way, a housekeeper, described her period of service:

I have heard and believe that my father and mothers names were Thomas and Dorothy Way and that they lived over against St Andrews Church in Holborn and that I was born there and that they dyed in my infancy and that by the care of my aunt Sarah Pauling I was nursed and put to [the Charity] School in the parish ... And about sixteen years since Jane Lillingston took me out of the Charity School in order to be a servant to her and Henry Rhodes ... I lived with them for ten years without any wages and from that time I have four pounds per annum.⁹¹

Some girls, like Ann Way, spent several years in the same household and parish girls, bound by indentures, had no option but to remain with the same master or mistress. But

⁹⁰ Simonton, 'Earning and Learning', p.376.

⁹¹ 'Prerogative Court of Canterbury Depositions', PROB 24/59 fos 297v-299, quoted in Earle, *A City Full of People, Men and Women of London 1650 -1750* (London, 1994) pp.188-89.

service was a verbal arrangement and many girls hired themselves out by the year. More mobile than boy apprentices, they took active decisions about changing their mistress for an improved position or increased pay.⁹²

In an article entitled 'Earning and Learning: Girlhood in pre-Industrial Europe', Deborah Simonton suggested that during the eighteenth century a girl's period in service was regarded as training for future life, a preparation for being self-supporting and for marriage, a 'placing out' that was an important transition and a recognized stage in the life-cycle. Learning and semi-independence were integral to a construction of adolescence she termed 'girlhood', a period between childhood and adulthood when girls gained skills and learned behaviour within another household.⁹³ In well-run households, where servants were treated reasonably and experiences were positive, poor girls could acquire lifelong skills, but for many parish apprentices, for whom the parameters of 'childhood' were already vague, and for those placed in circumstances of exploitation and abuse, the transition to adulthood must have had little value, a seemingly endless period of hardship and distress.

In 1771, in response to the bequest of William Hicke, a wealthy merchant, the Marine Society turned its attention to girls. The Society proposed to apprentice 'poor vagabond' girls into trade with vetted and recommended masters or mistresses at a rate of about twenty each year.⁹⁴

These girls shall be such as shall appear upon the best enquiry not to be objects of the parochial or any other charitable establishment, and consequently the forlorn

⁹² Simonton, 'Earning and Learning', p.381.

⁹³ Simonton, 'Earning and Learning', pp.363-65.

⁹⁴ NMM, MSY/A/4, 'Marine Society Fair Minutes, 1756 – 1780', MSY/A/1-5. MSY/A/2, 6 Apr 1769; MSY/A/4, 17 Nov 1772.

hope of human nature, if possible in more deplorable circumstances than boys of the same class. A house or apartments in a house shall be taken for their use. The girls shall be kept under the eye of a woman of character until placed out.⁹⁵

Whether or not the house and the ‘woman of character’ materialized is unknown, but the reaction of parents to the Marine Society’s offer of charity apprenticeships for girls was not at all what Jonas Hanway or the Society expected.

One of the first girls to be apprenticed in April 1771 was fourteen year-old Susanna Richards, who was ‘in great distress owing to ill-usage from [her mother’s] second husband’, and was recommended by the schoolmistress of St Anne’s School in Aldgate. Susanna was apprenticed to a clear starcher and milliner for three years, with an indenture fee of £2 and £2/4/- for clothing paid immediately, and a further £1 to be paid after a year.⁹⁶ Susanna, however, does not appear to have been a ‘poor vagabond’, but a girl of fourteen not employed outside her home, but known to the parish schoolmistress, so quite possibly a charity school child.

Three months later, Jonas Hanway reported that ‘after many efforts in inviting poor vagabond girls to partake of Hickes’s bequest’, he had found ‘an unaccountable repugnance to the acceptance and therefore proposed to invite the children of poor families in order to come to the knowledge of proper objects’.⁹⁷ Hanway was forced to admit that he and the Society had misjudged their potential ‘objects of charity’.

In September, Martha Jacobi, aged thirteen and the eldest in a family of seven girls, was recommended by the vestry clerk of St Margaret’s Westminster. Martha, who

⁹⁵ NMM, MSY/A/2, 6 April 1769.

⁹⁶ NMM, MSY/T/1, ‘Registers of Girl Apprentices under Hickes’s Trust, 1771-1775’, No. 2, 5 April 1771; NMM, MSY/A/4, 28 March 1771.

⁹⁷ NMM, MSY/A/3, 25 July 1771.

had been helping her mother with the younger children, was apprenticed to a mantua maker for five years, with fees paid in instalments. Under similar arrangements, the Society apprenticed Martha's sister, Mary, to her mother, a widow continuing her husband's peruke-making business.⁹⁸ The Marine Society obviously considered her mother a trustworthy and industrious member of the settled poor, not vicious and prone to abandoning children, as parents of poor children were often portrayed. Again, Martha and Mary Jacobi were not the 'vagabond' girls the Society had targeted.

Nearly all the girls elected for apprenticeships during the following four years, for which records exist, were working at household tasks in their own homes and the Society apprenticed several to their mothers. Although all the girls were considered deserving, only one was an orphan and only one was found on the street. The Society, with genuine concern, gave a Bible to each girl apprenticed containing a set of instructions on how she should conduct herself, but the demeaning tone, so typical of the age, illustrates the entrenched attitude of the Society's philanthropists to what they saw as the innate characteristics and potentiality of their objects of charity, the children of the poor:

It having pleased the Almighty to make us the instrument of his providence, it is proper to remind you that you are chosen ... to be faithful, obedient and to learn the trade. Drunkenness is fit only for a hog ... more shocking and more dangerous to women. It is by such means that women are thrown off their guard and become prostitutes ... and expose themselves to every drunken or cruel man; beside the fatal disease which ... cuts them off in the prime of their life.⁹⁹

In 1773, the Marine Society raised the apprenticeship fee for girls to £10 but

⁹⁸ NMM, MSY/T/1, Nos. 4 and 5, 24 Sept 1771.

⁹⁹ NMM, MSY/A/4, 24 Oct 1771.

insufficient petitions were delivered that year, so the election for placements was deferred. During these years, the Society recruited hundreds of boys for sea service, but the poor communities were clearly reluctant to offer girls for apprenticeship. Many poor families chose to keep their daughters at home to provide unpaid help with domestic tasks, and while some were pleased to accept charity so their daughters could be apprenticed in the family trade, others refused to accept apprenticeships elsewhere that would bring no immediate benefit or return.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the experiences of children of the poor in both casual work and apprenticeship. Placing children in the forefront of enquiry, it has created a new perspective on life in the capital. Contrary to the rhetoric of social reform that portrayed London as a city overrun with idle, disreputable children, this chapter has suggested that for children from the poor communities employment in a wide range of casual jobs was a common experience. The opportunity of employment prior to apprenticeship empowered them with knowledge of the treatment they should expect in the workplace, enabling some to negotiate with adults during their apprenticeships. This chapter has also shown that parish apprenticeship with dire conditions and unsuitable masters was not the only option available to children of the poor as the historiography has often implied, but that a variety of apprenticeship placements existed, organized by a range of charitable institutions. The analysis of the Chelsea settlement examinations has demonstrated that childhood apprenticeship, although an important means of transition into the adult world, was no guarantee of future employment and often bore little relationship to what followed in adulthood. Like the Marine Society Registers, these examinations confirm that

hundreds of children in the capital received no specific training and continued in casual employment, hired by the year or paid by the week. Finally, this chapter has shown that although girls went into service and helped at home, apprenticeship was highly gendered, and that Marine Society philanthropists misjudged the needs of girls from the poor communities, offering them well-intentioned advice that was patronizing and inappropriate.

Girls sent to apprenticeships from parish workhouses were unlikely to receive any advice at all. Working as a servant, even in a modest home, presented temptations to a child who was penniless and those who stole from their master or mistress found themselves before a justice in the local sessions and occasionally at the court of the criminal justice system. In May 1750 Ann Carr, an illegitimate child, was sent out 'on liking' for two weeks from the workhouse of St George Hanover Square. This was her first trial period as a parish apprentice but it ended in failure and she was returned. The parish overseer may have decided she was not ready for apprenticeship, for it was two years before she was sent out again. In April and May 1752 Ann served two more unsuccessful trial periods and in June, ran away from yet another placement. She seems to have been a difficult child, uncooperative and unwilling to settle. The following March she was sent on her fifth placement but by December, guilty of misbehaviour and running away again, she returned to the workhouse. In May 1754, William Thomas and his wife, Hannah, agreed to take her as a servant in their house, but within days she had robbed her mistress of a silk gown, a cloak and hat, two linen caps and two linen handkerchiefs. William Thomas found her in Mayfair wearing the clothes, which he 'pulled off her back', before taking her before a justice for committal to Bridewell. The parish paid the charge of 12 shillings for her prosecution at the Old Bailey and gave William Thomas 10/6d for losses he had sustained. At her trial, Ann said 'nothing in her defence nor called anybody to her character'. When asked how old she was, she replied, 'I do not know my right age, but believe about 13 or 14'. She was found guilty and sentenced to transportation to America for seven years. She sailed on the convict ship 'Tryal' along with 128 other felons and arrived in Maryland in September 1754.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ WCA, C880, 9 May 1750; 23 May 1750; 6 Nov 1751. C881, 8 Apr 1752; 6 May 1752; 3 June 1752;

24 Jan 1753; 7 Mar 1753. C882, 26 Dec 1753; 10 May 1754; 15 May 1754; 5 June 1754; 12 June 1754. OBP, 30 May 1754, Ann Carr (t17540530-28). P.W. Coldham, *More Emigrants in Bondage* (Baltimore, 2002) Ann Carr, ref. T53/45/116, T53/45.

CHAPTER 5

CHILDREN AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

On 28 April 1742, fourteen year-old Richard Cooley was indicted at the Old Bailey for breaking and entering a house in the early hours of the morning and stealing a copper saucepan, a stew-pan, a pottage pot and cover, a brass boiler, two large pewter dishes and seven pewter plates. At his trial, John Holder who had known Richard eight or nine years, spoke on his behalf and told the court, 'His own Father is dead, but he lives with his Mother, who has marry'd a second Husband. He is a Copper Smith, and works at Home. As to the Boy, I never heard any Harm of him, nor ever knew that he wrong'd any Body.' Elizabeth Delacourt added, 'I live next Door to his Mother, and don't know that he ever was from her. She us'd to send him to School, but since she married a second Husband, he has been upon liking with his [step] Father. He us'd to clean the Brasses for him.' Richard Cooley's mother gave evidence in support of her son, saying, 'He has had a good Education in reading and writing, and what I could afford to give him. He always stayed within Doors, but sometimes he has been drawn away.'¹

No study of the experiences of poor children would be complete without reference to those who, like Richard Cooley, fell foul of the law or were themselves victims or witnesses of crime. In previous chapters, children's lives have been explored against the background of an institution such as a parish workhouse, a charity school or the Marine Society. Prisons were institutions serving the criminal

¹ OBP, 28 April 1742, Richard Cooley (t17420428-26).

justice system but writing about children and imprisonment is extremely difficult because age information was not systematically recorded before the 1790s.

The central criminal court at the Old Bailey provides a viable alternative. It is, of course, a very different kind of institution from those described in previous chapters and the number of children who were involved with the criminal justice system there was small. Nevertheless, *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, the text of the trials that took place there, published as www.oldbaileyonline in 2003, offers detailed information about children's experiences and, of more significance, includes something akin to their actual words. Even though there are problems concerning age information, *The Proceedings* provides a matchless opportunity for research focusing on children and its exceptional value as a qualitative source justifies its inclusion in this thesis.

Sir William Blackstone, in *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, explained that in civil law the period of youth was divided in three: infancy, from birth to seven years; childhood, from seven to fourteen; and puberty from fourteen upwards. Infants up to the age of seven were not punishable for any crime. Those aged eight to fourteen were punishable if they were found 'doli capax', capable of crime or mischief, and children of eight could be sentenced to a range of punishments, including death. Those over fourteen were classed as minors and were liable to be punished in the same way as adults. This chapter will explore trials of child defendants and witnesses aged eight to fifteen, using the same age-range as the other chapters, and child victims aged three to fifteen.

The period between 1700 and 1780 presents a problem for historians examining the experiences of children involved with the criminal justice system because age information was not given routinely until the 1790s. This chapter will deal firstly with this problem and attempt to make some assessment of the number of child defendants between the ages of 8 and 15 who appeared at the Old Bailey and how they were sentenced. The remainder of the chapter will use *The Proceedings* as a qualitative source to examine the experiences and backgrounds of children who appeared in court. Firstly, it will ask who the child defendants were and, using details from trial texts of two sample decades, it will investigate their experiences and backgrounds. Secondly, it will examine child witnesses, their interrogation in the court, the way their credibility was judged and their social background. Finally, this chapter will explore the experiences of children who were victims of crime, those who suffered clothes theft, murder and rape. It will explore their experiences, asking who they were and why they were vulnerable.

THE AGE PROBLEM

Although age information was not given routinely until the 1790s, ages of some children do appear in the text of *The Proceedings*. Accessing an accurate total of child defendants with age information for the period between 1700 and 1780 proved problematic. Children who were summoned before the court were uncommon and errors in the original tagging of www.oldbaileyonline meant that the searches undertaken for children with age information proved to be inaccurate and a rough estimate had to be made. In order to provide a framework within which child defendants could be examined quantitatively a sample was taken of two decades,

the 1740s and 1750s. These decades were searched under keywords 'boy' and 'girl' and from the resulting 1,105 trials, those with 'boy' and 'girl' defendants were extracted, a total of 280 cases.² The vast majority of crimes for which children were indicted by the court was theft, which included pickpocketing, stealing goods from houses and shops, breaking into property and highway robbery. Among the 280 trials, 6 were found with other indictments and these were extracted, leaving a total of 274 trials of 'boys' and 'girls' for theft. Among these were the trials of a total of 76 child defendants, whose ages were stated to be between 8 and 15, of whom 52 were male and 24 female.

In order to estimate the number of child defendants with stated ages between 8 and 15 indicted for theft during the whole period 1700 to 1780, a series of searches on individual years was made. It soon became clear that very little information could be gleaned about children in this category for the 1700s, 1710s and 1720s, decades during which publication and survival of *The Proceedings* was intermittent, and when trials, even when published, contained fewer details. Most individual years showed only 2 or 3 cases with specific age information on child defendants, and this number of relevant cases per year increased marginally in later decades from the 1740s to the 1770s. Allowing for inconsistent survival and reporting in the early decades of the period, a necessarily rough estimate of the number of trials in *The Proceedings* involving a child defendant identified as aged 8 to 15 is approximately 150 for the period 1700 to 1780. Of these, it was possible to pinpoint 135 in *The Proceedings* online, by means of a variety of keyword searches. This represents approximately 90 per cent of the estimated 150 defendants in this

² 'Child' and 'infant' were used frequently to refer to victims but not for defendants.

category. It is these 135 child defendants who form the main evidential support for this chapter.

Apart from these children whose ages were stated, the vast majority of defendants who were not adults were referred to simply as 'boy' or 'girl'. While it is impossible to state categorically that there were no children between the ages of 8 and 15 under these headings, many children were asked how old they were during court proceedings and age was often used as a mitigating factor in their defence. It is therefore possible or even likely that the majority of children between the ages of 8 and 15 mentioned in *The Proceedings* were those for whom age information was given. Most cases used as examples in this chapter will be children with age information: only occasionally will reference be made to defendants whose ages were not given, and they can be identified through internal evidence as falling within the 8 to 15 age category.

DEATH OR TRANSPORTATION?

In his study of juvenile delinquency, Peter King pointed out, 'Sentencing and punishment policies towards juveniles are almost impossible to analyse quantitatively until the late eighteenth century because the ages of offenders were not systematically recorded in the courts before that time'.³ He is quite right, but in order to examine how child defendants at the Old Bailey were sentenced, some quantitative material has been produced here for the two sample decades, the 1740s and 1750s. Bearing in mind the lack of routine age information and the additional

³ Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge, 2006) p.115.

complication of interpreting ‘boy’ and ‘girl’, the statistics derived from these decades must be seen as an approximate guide to sentencing practice.⁴

During the early eighteenth century, the legal system and attitudes to crime and punishment underwent considerable change. The Transportation Act of 1718, whereby felons could be sent to America for extended periods was seen by justices as fulfilling two important aspects of the criminal justice system: it introduced a punishment that served both the interest of society and that of the offenders. Felons could be punished seriously without being executed and without burdening domestic institutions: at the same time, transportation gave offenders a chance to re-establish themselves and contribute to the imperial economy.⁵ Under the terms of the Act, those sentenced to death could be granted a royal pardon on condition of being transported for fourteen years or life. In the following table, the sentencing is recorded as it appears in the text of *The Proceedings*.

⁴ Peter King has researched two three-year periods after 1792, dealing with juvenile defendants aged 0-16 and 17-19. His 'highly gendered' juveniles were nearly all boys and the punishments in his samples were whipping and imprisonment.

⁵ John Beattie, 'London Crime and the Making of the "Bloody Code", 1689-1718' in Davison, Hitchcock et al (eds), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp.57.

**Table 5.1: Punishments of children aged 8 to 15 and ‘boys’ and ‘girls’
for theft at the Old Bailey
1740 - 1759**

Source: *Old Bailey Proceedings, 1740-1759*

Age group/category	Number	Whipped or branded	Transported	Death respited	Death	Acquitted
Male children aged 8 to 15 with age information given in <i>The Proceedings</i>	52	8 (16%)	25 (48%)	4 (7.5%)	4 (7.5%)	11 (21%)
Female children aged 8 to 15 with age information given in <i>The Proceedings</i>	24	3 (12%)	10 (42%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	10 (42%)
Subtotal	76	11 (15%)	35 (46%)	5 (6%)	4 (5%)	21 (28%)
Defendants described as: 'Boys'	121	10 (8%)	84 (69%)	1 (1%)	5 (4%)	22 (18%)
Defendants described as: 'Girls'	76	7 (9%)	49 (65%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	19 (25%)
Subtotal	197	17 (9%)	133 (67%)	2 (1%)	5 (3%)	41 (21%)
TOTAL of all defendants in the table	273	28 (10%)	168 (62%)	6 (2%)	9 (3%)	6 (23%)
All defendants indicted for theft 1740-1759, for whom punishment information is available	6903	704 (10%)	3536 (51%)	0 (0%)	297 (4%)	2366 (34%)*

* www.oldbaileyonline gave no acquittal figures. This figure was calculated by taking the total number of specified sentences away from the total number of defendants indicted.

In 1994, V.A.C. Gatrell commented, ‘Of the five child-hangings from 1770 up to the 1830s, which are repeatedly cited from J. Lawrence’s *A History of Capital Punishment* (1932), p.18, only that of John Bell, who murdered another boy cruelly

for gain, can be proved.’⁶ This thesis has attempted to examine death sentences imposed on children in relation to outcome and findings for the period 1700 to 1780 confirm Gatrell’s view that child-hangings were extremely rare.

The sentencing of child defendants at the Old Bailey and the issue of child-hangings in London during the period of this thesis have never been satisfactorily explored. We know that throughout most of the eighteenth century, between 50 and 60 per cent of adult defendants sentenced to death were pardoned and that most of these were subsequently transported, but no specific research has been done on child defendants. In 1735, Mary Wotton, a child of nine, apprenticed by the parish fourteen months earlier, broke open her mistress’s drawer, took twenty-seven guineas, ran away and was found at Rag Fair. Dorothy George stated, ‘She was sentenced to death.’⁷ But was Mary Wotton hanged and what happened to other children condemned to death during the eighteenth century?

Table 5.1 shows the punishments meted out to children aged 8 to 15 and to ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ as shown in *The Proceedings* but reprieves from death sentences do not always appear in the text. *The Complete Book of Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775* and *More Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775* by Peter Coldham list alphabetically the names of those transported and include dates of trials, names of transportation ships and lengths of sentences.⁸ In order to confirm that those sentenced to transportation actually went to America, the names of the 35 children aged 8 to 15 and the 133 ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ from the two sample decades were

⁶ V.A.C.Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1898* (London, 1994).

⁷ D. George, *London Life*, p.229.

⁸ Peter Coldham, *The Complete Book of Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775* (Baltimore 1988) and *More Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775* (Baltimore, 2002).

compared with names on the transportation list and the vast majority were found. Of the 4 male children aged 8 to 15 listed under 'death respited' on Table 5.1, 3 were aged 12, 13 and 14 and were transported to America for fourteen years. The other male child, aged 13, was sent to America for life.⁹ The one female child in the 8 to 15 category, aged 11, was transported for seven years.¹⁰ The 'boy' and the 'girl' listed under 'death respited' were also transported for seven years.

What happened to the 4 children aged 8 to 15 and the 5 'boys' condemned to death? 2 of the 4 male children sentenced to death by the court were Richard Cooley, aged 14, and John Hetherington, aged 15, and they were both transported.¹¹ Anthony Dunn, aged 14, died in the cells of Newgate a few days after sentencing but would probably also have been reprieved for transportation.¹² The fourth defendant aged 8 to 15 sentenced to death was Henry Gadd, otherwise known as Scampey, a member of a violent criminal gang indicted four times at the Old Bailey. A witness told the court that Gadd was 'about fourteen or fifteen'. He appears to have been executed with other members of the gang on 24 December 1744.¹³ James Guthrie, the Ordinary of Newgate from 1725 to 1746, described him as 'the most obstinate and inconsiderate little villain that I ever saw, since I had the honour to serve the city'.¹⁴

⁹ OBP, 16 Jan 1741, Charles Shooter (t174110116-2); OBP, 12 Sept 1744, Joseph Fitzwalter and John Peirson (t17440912-51); OBP, 5 Dec 1753, Stephen Barnes (t17531205-9).

¹⁰ OBP, 6 Sept 1753, Mary Rimer/Rhimes (t17530906-27).

¹¹ OBP, 28 April 1742, Richard Cooley (t17420428-26); OBP, 16 April 1740, John Hetherington (t17400416-14).

¹² OBP, 5 July 1749, Anthony Dunn (t17490705-62). OBP, *Ordinary's Account* (oa17490804).

¹³ OBP, 5 Dec 1744, Henry Gadd (t17441205-35 to t17441205-37; t17441205-49 & 49; s17441205-1; o17441205-1).

¹⁴ Andrea McKenzie, *Tyburn's Martyrs: Execution in England 1675 to 1775* (2007) p.65.

3 of the 5 'boys' condemned to death were found on the transportation list.¹⁵ Of the other two, William Duell, convicted of theft and rape, was aged 16.¹⁶ He was hanged on 24 November 1740, but:

having suffered at Tyburn, his body was brought to Surgeons' Hall to be anatomised; but after it was stripped and laid on the board, and one of the servants was washing it, in order to be cut, he perceived life in him, and found his breath to come quicker and quicker, on which a surgeon took some ounces of blood from him; in two hours he was able to sit up in his chair, and in the evening was again committed to Newgate, and his sentence, which might be again inflicted, was changed to transportation.¹⁷

Duell's name subsequently appeared on the transportation list. The other 'boy' sentenced to death was Thomas Shehan. His execution was carried out and his details appeared in the Ordinary's Account of 1750. He was twenty years of age.¹⁸

Both Duell and Shehan are outside the age-range of this thesis.

The sample decades show that more children aged 8 to 15 found guilty of theft were punished by transportation than by any other means. Transferring the 7 children aged 8 to 15 who were reprieved for transportation to the list of 35 already sentenced to this punishment creates a total of 42 transported - 32 male and 10 female children, 55 per cent of those aged 8 to 15 indicted for theft. Transcripts of the trials rarely included all the evidence for the defence but where details were

¹⁵ OBP, 15 Oct 1740, Edward Madder (t17401015-59); OBP, 9Sept 1747, John Swannick (t17470909-1); OBP, 5 July 1749, William Shepherd and John Fryer (t17490705-4).

¹⁶ A full account of the life of William Duell prior to his execution and his crime can be found in *The Ordinary's Account* printed and sold by John Applebee, Fleet-street. MDCCXL.

¹⁷ William Duell, *News from the Dead: or a faithful narrative of an extraordinary combat between Life and Death, exemplified in the case of W.D.* (London, 1740) *Complete Newgate Calendar*, vol 3 p.110, <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/etext/newgate3/duell.htm> (Consulted 27 Oct 2007).

¹⁸ OBP, 12 Sept 1750, Thomas Shehan (t17500912-60).

given, it appears that young defendants who were transported had not only stolen, but had shown some measure of deceit or cunning. Among the youngest children transported was eight year-old Charles Billingsly, an errand boy who stole two silver spoons and lied about their origin to a pawnbroker, and ten year-old Thomas Macklin, accused of stealing thirteen linen handkerchiefs, a charge he denied. In court, the judge said to Thomas, 'You are acquainted with the place you are in, are you not?' 'No, sir', he replied. The judge retorted, 'I am afraid you are, and that you have been there several times'.¹⁹ Twelve year-old Abigail Butler accused the prosecutor of threatening to kill her if she would not lie with him. The jury did not believe her.²⁰

John Fielding was responsible for many hundreds of sentences and regarded transportation as 'the wisest and most humane punishment. For it removes the evil, separates the individual from his abandoned connections, and gives him a fresh opportunity of being a useful member of society'.²¹ In 1743, thirteen year-old Thomas Broxton was indicted for stealing a pebble snuff-box, which he admitted he had stolen and sold. 'The Jury recommended him to the Court for corporal Punishment; but the Court was of Opinion, that it was doing the Boy a great Piece of Service to send him abroad'.²² Despite the rhetoric of justices, transportation was a dreaded and life-changing punishment and labour conditions in America were

¹⁹ OBP, 28 July 1744, Charles Billingsly (t17440728-6); OBP, 15 Jan 1748, Thomas Macklin (t17480115-3).

²⁰ OBP, 5 April 1749, Abigail Butler (t17490405-41).

²¹ R.A.Roberts (ed), *Calendar of Home Office Papers* 4, 39, 1773-75 (London, 1899), quoted in Peter Coldham, *Emigrants in Chains: A Social History of Forced Emigration to the Americas of Felons, Destitute Children, Political and Religious Non-conformists, Vagabonds, Beggars and other Undesirables, 1607 – 1776* (Stroud, 1992), pp.28-29.

²² OBP, 14 Jan 1743, Thomas Broxton (t17430114-8).

usually harsh. On the face of it, therefore, it appears that the eighteenth-century criminal justice system treated young children extremely severely.

However, the sample decades offer no concrete evidence that any death sentences on children aged 8 to 15, apart from that on Henry Gadd, were carried out.²³ Moreover, research both inside and outside the sample decades revealed that between 1717 and 1766, 14 children with stated ages, 3 more described as ‘little’, and 2 older teenagers were sentenced to death at the Old Bailey, but all were in fact reprieved and transported. Among these children was Mary Wotton, cited as sentenced to death by Dorothy George. The names of all the following children appear in Peter Coldham’s *The Complete Book of Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775*.

Henry Banister, aged 13, sentenced to death in 1717 before the Transportation Act of 1718 for stealing a canvas bag and money, was transported to Carolina for fourteen years in May 1719.²⁴

Samuel Armstrong, aged 11, sentenced to death for shoplifting, sailed on the *Alexander* to Nevis or Jamaica in July 1722.²⁵

James Lanman, aged 11, sentenced to death with Samuel Armstrong for shoplifting, also sailed on the *Alexander* to Nevis or Jamaica in July 1722.²⁶

John Peaverly, aged 12, sentenced to death in 1731 for stealing a purse and forty-eight guineas from a house, was transported to Maryland for fourteen years. He sailed on the *Patapsco* in April 1732.²⁷

Elizabeth Ran, ‘a little Girl’ who broke open some drawers with a chisel and stole more than 20 guineas, was condemned to death in 1733. She was reprieved for transportation for fourteen years and sailed on the *Caesar*, but died during the voyage.²⁸

George Dawson, a member of a gang who gave evidence against several other young boys, was sentenced to death for shoplifting but sailed on the *Caesar* to Virginia in 1733. The text

²³ Using the Ordinary’s Accounts, Andrea McKenzie in *Tyburn’s Martyrs* cites Roderick Awdry (1714), Bernard Fink (1731), Charles Patrick (1732) and Anthony Westley (1752) as aged 15 when they were hanged, but there is no confirming evidence of these ages in *The Proceedings*.

²⁴ OBP, 16 Oct 1717, Henry Banister (t17171016-1).

²⁵ OBP, 28 Feb 1722, Samuel Armstrong (t17220228-19). Conditional pardon, SP 44/81 f.63.

²⁶ OBP, 28 Feb 1722, James Lanman (t17220228-19).

²⁷ OBP, 28 April 1731, James Peaverly (t17310428-75).

²⁸ OBP, 5 Dec 1733, Elizabeth Ran (t17331205-27).

of his trial reads, 'Dawson says he is but 14 Years old, but by the Parish Books of St. Martin's, it appears he's above 17'.²⁹

Thomas Armson, 'a little boy', had worked in Harrow for just a week when he stole money from his master's house. He spent £4 buying a horse and some clothes and was arrested in Watford. Sentenced to death, he was 'reprieved for transportation' and sailed for Virginia on the *Caesar* in December 1734.³⁰

Mary Wotton/Wootton, aged 9, a parish apprentice sentenced to death in 1735 for stealing twenty-seven guineas from her mistress, was transported for fourteen years and sailed on the *Dorsetshire* to Virginia in 1736.³¹

Charlotte Gregg, 'a little Girl', was sentenced to death for stealing a large amount of money in a leather bag in 1737. Three months after sentencing,

On 12 January 1738, a report was made to his Majesty in Council of the Eighteen malefactors under Sentence of death in the Cells of Newgate, when Charlotte Gregg, a little girl, convicted of stealing Money to the amount of £21 9s 6d in the House of Ann Howell, on 8 October received his Majesty's most *gracious* Reprieve.³²

John Hetherington, aged 15 and an apprentice, was sentenced to death for stealing silver buttons and a large amount of money from his master's house. He was transported in May 1740.³³

Anthony Dunn/Dun, aged 14, sentenced to death for robbery with violence died in the cells of Newgate a few days after receiving sentence in 1749 but would probably have been transported.³⁴

Charles Shooter, aged 12, indicted for stealing a purse and money from a house was condemned to death with a recommendation for mercy. He was transported for 14 years and sailed on the *Mediterranean* in April 1741.³⁵

Richard Cooley, aged 14, indicted for breaking into a house and stealing a quantity of kitchen utensils, was sentenced to death. He was transported for 14 years and sailed on the *Justitia* in 1743.³⁶

Charles Newton, no age given, indicted with Richard Cooley, was also sentenced to death. He too was transported for 14 years and sailed on the *Justitia* in 1743.³⁷

Joseph Fitzwalter, aged 13 and sentenced to death for highway robbery, was 'recommended to the court as an object of his Majesty's mercy' and transported for 14 years in January 1745.³⁸

²⁹ OBP, 21 Feb 1733, George Dawson (t17330221-15 & s17710410 -1).

³⁰ OBP, 11 Sept 1734, Thomas Armson (t17340911-41).

³¹ OBP, 11 Sept 1735, Mary Wotton (t17350911-8). Mary Wotton is cited by Dorothy George as having been sentenced to death, *London Life*, p.229.

³² OBP, 12 Oct 1737, Charlotte Gregg (t17371012-4). *The Ordinary of Newgate, His Account of the Behaviour, Confession and Dying Words of the Malefactors Who were Executed.*

³³ OBP, 16 April 1740, John Hetherington (t17400416-14).

³⁴ OBP, 5 July 1749, Anthony Dunn (t17490705-62) and (oa17490804).

³⁵ OBP, 16 Jan 1741, Charles Shooter (t174110116-2).

³⁶ OBP, 28 April 1742, Richard Cooley (t17420428-26).

³⁷ OBP, 28 April 1742, Charles Newton (t17420428-26).

³⁸ OBP, 12 Sept 1744, Joseph Fitzwalter (t17440912-51).

John Peirson, aged 14, sentenced to death for highway robbery, was ‘recommended to the court as an object of his Majesty’s mercy’ and was reprieved for transportation. He sailed in January 1745.³⁹

Stephen Barnes, aged 13, found guilty of breaking and entering a house but ‘recommended for mercy’, was transported for life in 1753.⁴⁰

Mary Rimer/Rhimes, aged 11, stole one guinea and was sentenced to death but recommended for mercy. She received a conditional pardon from the king:

Mary Rhimes, having been capitally convicted, at the Old Bailey; - The King, in Consideration of some Circumstances humbly represented to Him in [her] Behalf, is graciously pleased to extend His Royal Mercy to [her], upon Condition of Transportation for - Seven years.

She sailed on the *Whiteing* in December 1753.⁴¹

John Bevan, aged 15, was sentenced to death in April 1766 for burglary. He was transported for fourteen years and sailed on the *Justitia* in September of that year.⁴²

In 1743, fifteen year-old William Chetwynd was indicted for murder, a capital offence, but a special verdict was recorded in *The Proceedings* while the case was reconsidered. The *Newgate Calendar* records that this was, ‘A curious case of a schoolboy who killed another boy during a quarrel about a cake. The case was argued before the twelve judges, who deemed Chetwynd to have been guilty of manslaughter only; whereupon he was set at liberty, after being burned in the hand.’⁴³

As stated earlier, V.A.C.Gatrell indicated that erroneous information about child-hangings from the period 1770 to the 1830s continues to be re-iterated. An execution in 1777 was recently described in the following way. ‘Fifteen year-old

³⁹ OBP, 12 Sept 1744, John Peirson (t17440912-51).

⁴⁰ OBP, 5 Dec 1753, Stephen Barnes (t17531205-9).

⁴¹ OBP, 6 Sept 1753, Mary Rimer/Rhimes (t17530906-27) and Conditional Pardon 9 Oct 1753.

⁴² OBP, 9 April 1766, John Bevan (t17660409-64).

⁴³ OBP, 12 Oct 1743, William Chetwynd (t17431012-28); *Newgate Calendar* vol 3, pp.129-131.

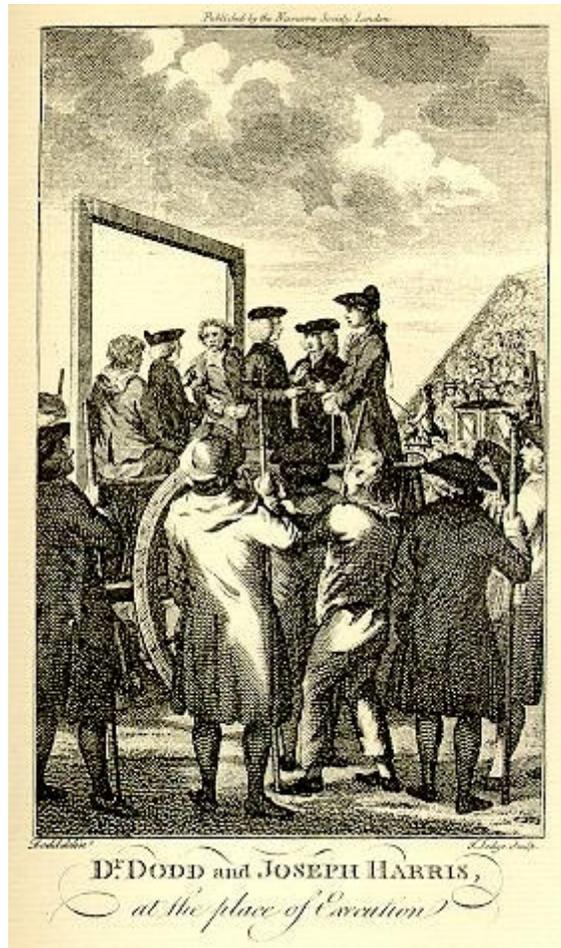
A similar case of manslaughter was recorded on an unnamed boy of unspecified age who was an apprentice at the Bridewell apprentice school. Two boys were involved in a ‘fair fight’ as a result of which, one boy died. OBP, 7 Dec 1743 (t17431207-37). See also OBP, 10 May 1722, Elias Ozier (t17220510-2) Elias Ozier, aged 16, was also found guilty of manslaughter. This trial describes the fight that took place ‘as was usual a Week or two before the Holidays’ between the boys of St Ann’s parish, Westminster and those of St Giles. A chimney-sweep was accidentally killed.

Joseph Harris who had stolen two half-sovereigns and some silver, rode to Tyburn with his head in the lap of his weeping, desolate father'.⁴⁴ At his trial at the Old Bailey on 15 May 1777, Joseph Harris was indicted for armed highway robbery and throughout the text of his trial he was referred to as 'a man'.⁴⁵ His execution took place on 27 June 1777, the same day as that of Dr William Dodds. *The Newgate Calendar* refers to Joseph Harris as 'another criminal executed at the same time' and shows him in the print overleaf.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Lucy Moore, *The Thieves' Opera* (London, 1997), p.198.

⁴⁵ OBP, 15 May 1777, Joseph Harris (t17770514-6).

⁴⁶ Complete Newgate Calendar, Vol 4,
[www.http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/etext/completenewgate.htm](http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/etext/completenewgate.htm) consulted 5 Oct 2007.



Source: Complete Newgate Calendar, Vol 4

The most frequently-quoted case when child-hangings are discussed is that of ten year-old William York who, in a brutal and pre-meditated manner, murdered a five year-old girl, who shared a bed with him in a poorhouse in Suffolk in 1748. He was sentenced to death at Bury assizes but two or three of the judges ‘out of great tenderness, and caution’, advised the chief justice to send a series of reprieves in case more evidence was forthcoming. Eventually, nine years later, in the summer of 1757, William York received His Majesty’s pardon on condition that he entered

the sea service immediately.⁴⁷ In 1965, Brendon E. Knell commented, ‘It would appear that there was a good deal of dithering over this case. Surely, there would be a great deal more dithering in non-murder cases, especially if the crime was that of theft?’⁴⁸ As we have seen, it has not been possible to provide a watertight quantitative analysis for the period of this thesis, but approximately 90 per cent of children between the ages of 8 and 15 have been traced and this research has found no concrete evidence that any child in this category, other than Henry Gadd, was put to death for theft or murder between 1717 and 1766, nor has it found evidence of any ‘dithering’ or the publicity that any such cases would have attracted. With few child defendants in the first three decades of the eighteenth century and Gatrell’s comment on the 1770s, it seems highly unlikely that any child between the ages of 8 and 15, apart for Henry Gadd, was put to death for theft or murder in London between 1700 and 1780.⁴⁹

The only fifteen year-old found to have been executed, apart from Henry Gadd, was James Booty in 1722, an extreme case of child rape.⁵⁰ James Booty’s father, a barber and peruke maker, died, leaving him in the care of his mother. He

⁴⁷ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, Book 4, Chapter 2, <http://www.lonang.com/exlibris/blackstone>. Consulted 22 March 2007. Andrew Barrett and Christopher Harrison (eds.), *Crime and Punishment on England: A Sourcebook* (London, 1999), pp.158-160; *Gentleman’s Magazine* vol. XVIII (May 1748), 235 gives a detailed account of the case.

⁴⁸ B.E.F Knell, ‘Capital Punishment: its administration in relation to juvenile offenders in the nineteenth century and its possible administration in the eighteenth’, *British Journal of Criminology*, 1965, 5: p.205.

⁴⁹ According to OBP ‘Crime, Verdict & Punishment Search’ and ‘Advanced Search’, between 1700 and 1780 only two defendants aged 8-19 were sentenced to death for theft: Elizabeth Gould, ‘between 16 and 17 years of age’, received a conditional pardon and was transported on the *Tryal* - OBP, 18 Sept 1765, Elizabeth Gould (t17650918). James Felton, ‘about 18 years of age’, was sentenced to death for theft and was executed 3 months later - OBP, 22 Oct 1766, James Felton (t17661022-40 & o17661217-1). One further defendant aged 8-19, Thomas Wilford, aged 17, was put to death for murdering his wife, aged 22 - OBP, 25 June 1752, Thomas Wilford (t17520625-31 & oa17520702). The original tagging may have missed others who appear in the Ordinary’s Accounts.

⁵⁰ OBP, 10 May 1722, James Booty (t17220510-34).

was sent by the parish 'on liking' to a cabinet maker, but a female servant of his master, under pretence of mending his coat, 'went to the workhouse where he lay and gave him the Foul Distemper'. Not daring to tell his mother or seek a cure, he listened to his master's journeymen who said that lying with any person who was sound would cure those in his condition.

The Extream Anguish of Body he was in, Excited him to try the Experiment and he injured no less that four or five Children between four Years old and six, before he committed the act for which he was executed. He carried his master's daughter, Ann Milton a Girl of five years to the Top of the House, and there with great violence abused her and gave her the Foul Disease.

His mother tried to find the girl who caused the problem 'but although she was known to live in Westminster after she left his Master, yet she was never able to find her. Thus was the young Creature removed from the World by an ignominious Death at Tyburn on 21 May 1722, being then *something above* fifteen years old.'⁵¹

INNOCENT OR GUILTY?

Theft, by far the largest category of offence committed by children, was also the most common crime of adults indicted at the Old Bailey.⁵² Acquittals of adult defendants meant either that they were innocent or that the evidence against them was insufficient to convince the jury; but where children were concerned, this was not so. In the two sample decades, all 21 male and female children aged 8 to 15 who were acquitted or dismissed had confessed to committing the crime and there were

⁵¹ *Select Trials at the Sessions House in the Old Bailey from 1720*, vol 1, (1742); *The Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals who have been condemn'd and Executed*, vol 1 (1735) pp.150-53.

⁵² In the sample decades 66% of all crimes committed were theft.

witnesses to confirm that they had indeed committed it. A few examples will illustrate the point. Eight year-old Richard Pugh was indicted for stealing items of clothing. The prosecutor made a plea on his behalf,

I hope, gentlemen, you will be favourable to him on account of his age, he is a neighbour's child. I never knew any harm of him before; I missed the things and charged him with taking them, for he had been at my house the night before; upon which he cried and confessed that he took them, and had pawned them to one Mrs Aris in Baldwin's-Gardens.

The pawnbroker told the court, 'This boy has been bringing these things to me ever since March at different times: he brought them in the name of his mother.'⁵³ Nine year-old James Willis was brought before the court for selling stolen goods to thirteen year-old Ann Davis. Both children must have anticipated some kind of punishment, but the jury concluded, 'As the boy was not capable of distinguishing between good and evil, so no felony, and if no felony, no accessory, wherefore they are both acquitted'.⁵⁴ Twelve year-old Benjamin Remmer, who ran errands for Joseph Barnardiston, a stationer, was found guilty of stealing one moidore and 28 guineas from his till. At the trial Bardardiston said, 'It has given me a great deal of pain to prosecute him. I hope his tender years will meet with compassion'. No punishment was given.⁵⁵ John Purser was indicted for stealing a gold necklace and locket valued at fifteen shillings. 'As the Boy was but eleven Years of Age, and the

⁵³ OBP, 12 Sept 1744, Richard Pugh (t17440912-2). Under the text of this trial, for the benefit of eighteenth-century readers, the law regarding young defendants was made clear. 'Children under nine years cannot be guilty of this kind of felony, but they may of some acts that imply malice in themselves, such as setting fire to a house, &c.'

⁵⁴ OBP, 13 Jan 1758, James Willis, Ann Davis (t17580113-15).

⁵⁵ OBP, 25 Feb 1756, Benjamin Remmer (17560225-27). See also OBP, 25 Feb 1756, James Lockhurst (t17560225-35).

Prosecutor had his Things again, the Prosecutor, with the Consent of the Court, declin'd the Prosecution, and the Boy was committed to his Friends, with a Promise of their Care of him for the future.'⁵⁶ Fourteen year-old John Toe, a parish orphan and 'an innocent sort of boy', had been used by William Miller, 'a notorious thief who happened to lodge at the same house', and was freed without punishment.⁵⁷ The facts behind these numbers begin to alter our understanding of the way in which the criminal justice system dealt with children.

Even more significant are the facts behind the number of defendants labelled 'boy' and 'girl' in the sample decades who were also acquitted. Of the 41 defendants acquitted, 20 were either innocent or the evidence against them was insufficient to convince the jury. 12 cases, as they appear in the text of *The Proceedings*, offer ambiguous evidence for the prosecution. The remaining 9 defendants had actually committed the crime and there was evidence to prove it. Ann Lambourn, for example, had stolen a silver teaspoon but 'the Prisoner's Mistress acknowledged that the Girl had given her another Spoon in the Room of it', and she was acquitted.⁵⁸ James Hicks confessed to stealing a quantity of silver lace from the Prince's canopy at the Drury Lane playhouse. Two women gave evidence to his good character, the silversmith who bought the lace was reprimanded by the court and the boy was acquitted.⁵⁹ John Lee 'confess'd before Sir Thomas De Veil' at the sessions that he had stolen some old iron but the judge

⁵⁶ OBP, 15 July 1747, John Purser (017470715-1). OBP, 19 Feb 1766, Owen Cheslyn (t17660219-8) is a similar case, in which a boy stole a watch but was 'acquitted without going into evidence, on account of his youth, being 10 years of age'.

⁵⁷ OBP, 9 Sept, 1742, John Toe (t17420909-16).

⁵⁸ OBP, 7 Sept 1743, Ann Lambourn (t17430907-59).

⁵⁹ OBP, 3 Sept 1740, James Hicks (t17400903-52).

reprimanded the dealer who bought it, saying, 'in my Opinion you are more guilty than the Boy. 'Tis such as you that incourage such little Thefts, in the Receiving of Stolen Goods.'⁶⁰ In cases with adult defendants, character witnesses played a crucial role in trials and it seems that young defendants, whose relatives or friends supported them in court, sometimes received lighter sentences. What appears to have been happening is that the court was using acquittals as a means of showing leniency in the light of the youth of these defendants, despite their admitted responsibility for the crime being tried.

During the sample decades, 11 children aged 8 to 15 were sentenced to whipping or branding, viewed as less drastic and life-changing punishments than transportation. Among them was Robert Payworth, aged thirteen, indicted for stealing leather shoes, men's stockings and five linen handkerchiefs. He sold them to a woman, who said, 'Get whatever you can, I'll buy it, for I buy anything'. A family friend testified, 'His father and mother are honest people, and they have brought him up in a very pretty way: I don't think the child would have done such a thing had he not been set on by somebody'. The defendant was sentenced to be branded with a cold iron and was sworn to give evidence against the woman, who was subsequently transported.⁶¹ The court also made allowance for thirteen year-old John Cambridge, who suffered from epileptic fits, one of three children in the

⁶⁰ OBP, 2 July 1746, John Lee (t17460702-8).

⁶¹ OBP, 14 May 1752, Robert Payworth (t17520514-22).

sample decades whose individual health or mental circumstances was taken into consideration.⁶²

A total of 76 children aged 8 to 15 were indicted for theft at the Old Bailey during the sample decades. Including the 7 defendants reprieved for transportation with the 35 sentenced likewise in court, these were the outcomes of their trials:

Whipped or branded	11	15%
Transported (32 male and 10 female)	42	55%
Died (Dunn)	1	1%
Hanged (Gadd)	1	1%
Acquitted	21	28%

Referring back to the bottom line of Table 5.1, a very rough comparison of these figures can be made with those available for all sentencing for theft. The transportation rate of children aged 8 to 15 (47 per cent rising to 55 per cent with the addition of those reprieved for transportation) was similar to the overall percentage for all defendants for the sample decades (51 per cent). At a time when both society and the criminal justice system were determined to punish those guilty of property crimes, the courts used the newly established transportation to punish more than half the children convicted of theft. While this appears harsh, the death sentence was even more severe and there is no absolute proof that any child aged 8 to 15, apart from Henry Gadd, was hanged, whereas the overall rate of death sentences for theft for all defendants was 4 per cent. The more lenient sentences of whipping and branding were used for 15 per cent of offences committed by children aged 8 to 15, whereas the overall rate for these lesser punishments was 10 per cent for defendants as a whole. More than a quarter of the children aged 8 to 15 were

⁶² OBP, 10 May 1758, John Cambridge (t17580510) See also OBP, 25 Oct 1758, James Perciful (t17581025-3), 'a weak boy as to his understanding'; OBP, 23 Feb 1743, Elizabeth Camell (t17430223-8), 'sometimes troubled with falling sickness'.

acquitted, but of far greater significance is the fact that these acquittals were given to defendants who had, by their own admission, all committed the crime for which they were indicted, and that this was also the case with a number of defendants labelled 'boy' and 'girl'.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the court showed a degree of leniency to children. Innocence, gullibility and vulnerability were not completely ignored, nor was the social conscience of the time averse to mercy or the needs of the individual. While we know what the law stated regarding offences committed by children, a remarkable degree of flexibility was applied in a considerable number of the cases described in this chapter. As far as children aged 8 to 15 were concerned sentencing was very much in the hands of the judges and at the discretion of the court, and they made substantial use of this discretion. The hopes, fears and expectations of children, their parents and friends are unrecorded, but it is not difficult to imagine the relief and gratitude experienced by those fortunate enough to be treated with leniency of this kind.

LONDON'S CHILD THIEVES.

The outstanding merit of www.oldbaileyonline lies in its potential, not as a generator of narrow statistics, but as a qualitative source dealing in broad patterns and demonstrating lived experiences. Real children were being processed through the criminal justice system and *The Proceedings* gives insight into the lives and experiences of defendants, witnesses and victims. In the vast quantity of general, specialized and popular literature on eighteenth-century crime, children rarely take centre stage and no extensive study has been made of their involvement at the Old

Bailey during this period. In this chapter, as in the other four, the experiences of children will be placed at the forefront of the enquiry.

When a child appeared in court at the Old Bailey, it was the end of a process. There was no organized police force, so if the crime occurred in the street, ordinary citizens were expected to join in the 'hue and cry' to ensure the suspect was detained. The most usual treatment of young offenders caught in the act, according to the *Public Advertiser*, was simply to beat them up and many incidents involving children were dealt with informally.⁶³ When Simon Onely had a handkerchief stolen from his pocket in 1743, a crowd gathered around the suspect, George Wenscot. At the subsequent trial at the Old Bailey, Onely told the court,

The people would have me leave him to them; said I, If I leave him to your mercy you will whip him to Death, or drown him; said I, Lad, if you have got any Friends, I will send you to them, and they shall correct you. Thomas Wood came by at the same Time; said I. this little snotty Boy has picked my Pocket, if you will go along with me I will pay you for going, and take him to his Friends; but I found it was not for my Safety to go so far, so I secured him.⁶⁴

Children could be arrested on premises where the crime was committed or taken straight to a magistrate's home or to 'rotation' offices by a member of the public, a parish constable or one of the night watchmen. If a case was serious enough to be passed on to the Old Bailey, magistrates were required to commit the accused to prison to await trial. As the century progressed, magistrates tended to dismiss weak

⁶³ *Public Advertiser* 10 Jan 1764, quoted in Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1989), p.7.

⁶⁴ OBP, 7 Sept 1743, George Wenscot (t17430907-51).

cases, only committing the accused to prison if there was sufficient evidence to merit a trial. Sessions at the Old Bailey took place eight times a year so children whose cases were passed on often remained in Newgate for several weeks awaiting their trial in dread and uncertainty

Although crime in eighteenth-century London was not the preserve of any single social class, the majority of adults and children who appeared at the Old Bailey were the poor of the capital. As we have seen in previous chapters, anxiety about crime and fear of disorder was widespread among the propertied classes, particularly at the beginning of the century. Idle, disreputable children were a specific concern and the London Workhouse, which opened in 1699, was based on the notion that the discipline of regular work was essential to save children from habits of idleness and vice.⁶⁵ Throughout the 1720s and 1730s, the overriding concern of the elite was the prevalence of organized gangs and street crime.⁶⁶ Fear of pickpockets, burglary and violence was rife and, following the exploits of Jonathan Wild and Jack Shepherd, the general public felt a sense of panic, exacerbated by reports in the popular press. On 30 July 1730, an account in the sensational *Grub Street Journal*, recorded the arrest and punishment of a group of children, who had reduced pick pocketing to a fine art.

Information having been given to Sir John Gonson of a gang of pickpocket boys, to the number of 30, who nightly infest the Piazzas in Covent Garden, the Strand, Temple-bar and other streets thereabouts, he issued out his

⁶⁵ Stephen Macfarlane, 'Social Policy and the Poor in the Later Seventeenth Century', in A.L.Beier and R. Finlay (eds), *London 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (London, 1986), p.263.

⁶⁶ John Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London 1660 – 1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror* (Oxford, 2001), pp.372-6.

warrant for the searching of several night-houses and night-cellars, which harbour and entertain them; and several of the gang being apprehended by the Constables, eight of the most notorious were on Tuesday committed to Tothill Fields Bridewell, to hard labour. The oldest of these boys is not above 13, and most of them curs'd and swore in a dreadful manner as they were carrying them to Bridewell.⁶⁷

Elite public opinion during these years was influenced by newspaper publicity such as this and by the illustrations of Hogarth, but was shaped by the writings of Defoe, Hanway and the Fieldings. As Heather Shore observed, 'Clearly, however erroneous, the citizens of early eighteenth-century London had a strong sense of who their criminals were, what their nature was, how they were defined and recognized. They were not merely the poor, but a group with their own codes of behaviour, closely connected, and ensconced in a criminal lifestyle'.⁶⁸ In the wake of elite rhetoric, pamphlet literature and press releases, it would not be unreasonable to think that all the children who appeared at the Old Bailey were part of this network, sucked into a criminal underworld, villainous, vicious and vice-ridden. The truth could not have been more different.

Peter Linebaugh in *The London Hanged*, with its political interpretation of an undifferentiated, threatening lower class, emphasized the difficulty of distinguishing between the 'criminal' population of London and the poor population

⁶⁷ Rictor Norton, *Early Eighteenth-Century Newspaper Reports: A Sourcebook*. 'Lewd and Disorderly', <http://www.infont.demon.co.uk/grub/rape1.htm> Consulted 22 Mar 2007. A further group of very young pickpockets was reported in 1764 – *Public Advertiser*, 30 Jan 1765.

⁶⁸ Heather Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks and the surviving strategies of the poor in early eighteenth-century London', in Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds.), *The Poor in England 1700-1850* (Manchester, 2003), p.148.

as a whole. He argued that the crowd and the hanged were one and the same. ‘That is why’, he concluded, ‘we can say of the hanged that they belonged to the *poor*’.⁶⁹ More recently, Paul Griffiths argued that in early modern London, ‘A neat split dividing the worlds of criminals and citizens did not exist’, and that the relationship between criminal communities and other forms of support and sociability was much more one of ‘overlapping circles’.⁷⁰ The capital, as this thesis has already suggested, was not a heaving mass of criminality, drunkenness and prostitution, but a busy, crowded metropolis, where the majority of the poor had to work hard to bring up their children in a wide range of economic and personal circumstances. Parishes were places of settlement and, as those demanding welfare provision demonstrated, the parish afforded them a structure, an identity and a sense of belonging. The poor and those with criminal connections lived alongside one another in these communities and their lives overlapped, but it does not necessarily mean that they were synonymous.

This section of the chapter will examine the backgrounds and characteristics of child defendants at the Old Bailey, trying to tease out who they were and why their circumstances led them to commit crime. Firstly, source material from the 1730s will be used to explore the experiences and backgrounds of children who were members of criminal gangs, a type of child defendant not found to the same extent during the sample decades. Secondly, using the sample decades and a few cases from elsewhere in the period, the backgrounds of other child defendants who

⁶⁹ Linebaugh, Peter, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003 2nd edn.), p.xxi.

⁷⁰ ‘Overlapping circles: imagining criminal communities in London, 1545-1645’, in A. Shepard and P. Withington (eds), *Communities in Early Modern England* (2000), pp.125, quoted in Heather Shore, ‘Crime, criminal networks’, pp.141-2.

were drawn into crime will be explored. In the process, this section will consider what children stole and how they disposed of it.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, there was great concern in London about 'the Black Guard'. In 1704 the Governors of the London Workhouse gave specific orders that 'vagrant children commonly called the Black Guard' should be taken in.⁷¹ They were regarded by the elite as 'the Pest and Shame of the City, pilfering and begging about the streets by Day, and lying therein almost naked in all Seasons of the Year by Night' and had acquired an unenviable reputation in the capital.⁷² But their notoriety was the creation of elite paranoia, embellished over the years with literary myth. In 1722, Daniel Defoe used the Black Guard as the subject of his novel, *Colonel Jack*, written for the entertainment of the upper classes.⁷³ Two years later, in an amusing pamphlet, he condemned as vermin 'above Ten Thousand Wicked Idle, Pilfering Vagrants ... the Black Guard,' a gross numerical exaggeration.⁷⁴ Suggestions of this kind, even if delivered in jest, must have duped the gullible and further fuelled suspicion and fear among the elite. The children who pilfered from the docks and begged in the streets were real enough and some may have rejoiced in their notoriety. At night, they slept at the glasshouse in the Minories, but they were drawn into crime from troubled backgrounds and poverty, their everyday lives grim and their prospects bleak. While the majority of children from the poor communities were in casual

⁷¹ LMA, CLA/075/01/007, 11 & 18 Oct 1704.

⁷² Sir William Maitland, *The History of London, from the Foundation by the Romans to the Present Time* (London, 1739).

⁷³ Daniel Defoe, *Colonel Jack*, Samuel Holt Monk, (ed.), (London 1722, Oxford, 1965).

⁷⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Everybody's Business: Private Abuse, Publick Grievances* (London, 1725) p.24.

employment or receiving education, the so-called Black Guard was a small but troublesome and discordant minority, at odds with society.

A number of trials in the 1730s involved children such as these and offer vivid glimpses of their lives and experiences. In 1734, Richard Casely, alias Cock-my-Chin, gave evidence against defendants, Jack Jones, a shoe-black boy, and his mother. 'The Prisoners and I,' he told the court, 'had been a-stealing Oil that Night, at the Old-Swan. We got two Kettles full, and sold it to John Gill, a Hempdresser, in Bridewell-Alley'. As they crossed London Bridge, Jack Jones stole a wig from a shop and was arrested. Cock-my-Chin ran away with the wig, passing it on to Jack's mother in Plum Pudding Square. He then took up his lodging for the night on the pipes that belonged to the water-house at London Bridge. 'The Watch found me there', he testified, 'and carry'd me to the Constable. He threaten'd to send me to Bridewell for a Black-guard; but I promis'd never to lie there any more, and so he let me go'. 'Later', he continued, 'I met Jack Baldwin and another Black-Shoe-Boy eating a Marrow-bone. I ask'd them to give me a bit, for I was very hungry; but they said, there was 2 Guineas bid for taking me up, and so they got a Constable and took me'. Turning to the defendants, Cock-my-Chin added, 'It was you that draw'd me away when I liv'd at Mrs. Bradley's in Pudding-Lane, where I had a Shilling a Week for cleaning Shoes - I know all the Butchers in East-cheap, and they can give me a Character'. Jack Jones was transported.⁷⁵ Cock-my Chin was a member of a gang but, as his evidence shows, there were few loyalties among thieves. Boys betrayed both one another and adults who made use of them. Andrew Scott, indicted for stealing 112 lb. of sugar, used small boys to get through holes in the

⁷⁵ OBP, 30 June 1734, John Jones (t17340630-1).

protective fencing. Following his arrest he escaped but Robert Oliver, one of his boys, directed the constables to the glasshouse in Rosemary Lane where he was hiding. To exonerate himself, Robert gave evidence against Scott, who 'had nothing to say in his Defence, nor any body to his Reputation'.⁷⁶

Young boys adrift, who had run away from home or apprentice masters, were easy prey for adult criminals, but not all lived on the streets or at the glasshouses. Sarah Hewlet, 'a common receiver and person of ill Fame, did entice and encourage Boys to go a thieving, lodg'd them at her House, and us'd to give them what she pleas'd for the Things they stole, and then made them spend the Money at her House'. Perkins, one of her boys, received four shillings and sixpence for a cheese and a firkin of soap he had stolen. When Sarah Hewlet was arrested for theft and receiving, some of her boys, 'who claimed to be twelve but looked more like eight or nine year-olds', gave evidence against her. Perkins told the court that they 'spent the Money on Gin and Hot-Pots', and George Dawson 'that she gave three shillings for the Hock of Bacon' he had stolen.⁷⁷ That the same day, Perkins and Dawson also gave evidence against Richard Wooll and John Dancer, boys of eleven and twelve, who had stolen a hat and were, consequently, transported.⁷⁸ Two years later, the tables were turned on Dawson, now working for another receiver. Petty pilfering had developed into organized shoplifting and he had stolen 22 pairs of children's stockings and, with Joseph Hitch, sixty yards of printed lawn, a very fine linen. A third partner in crime, Richard Pancost, gave evidence against both of them.

⁷⁶ OBP, 16 Jan 1730, Andrew Scott (t17300116-4).

⁷⁷ OBP, 28 April 1731, Sarah Hewlet (t17310428-64).

⁷⁸ OBP, 28 April 1731, Richard Wool and John Dancer (t17310428-36).

I and the Prisoner went out a-thieving together. We used to meet at one Howard's House in Baldwin's Gardens, where we used to sell the Goods we stole; and Howard and his Wife are now in Hold for buying stolen Goods. We met at Howard's between 4 and 5 in the Evening, and went from thence to Mr Hodges's Shop. Dawson went in and got the Goods, while we stood to watch. We ran down St. Martin's, where we lost Dawson, but we met him again at Howard's. We sold 'em all to Howard's Wife for 22 shillings. She gave us 12 shillings that Night, and 10 shillings next Morning. We shared the Money, and had 7 shilling and 4 pence a-piece.

One of Dawson's school friends gave evidence on his behalf. His attendance at school suggests that his earlier life had once had some stability but now he had been sucked into crime and his prospects were grim. *The Proceedings* records, 'Dawson says he is but 14 Years old, but by the Parish Books of St. Martin's, it appears he's above 17.' He was sentenced to death, but was transported with Joseph Hitch in 1734.⁷⁹ These boys were typical of those feared by the elite.

By the end of the 1730s, elite preoccupation with the Black Guard had declined from its earlier fever pitch, and, as an identified 'gang' or group, it seems to have disappeared. Nevertheless, throughout the eighteenth century boys were more troublesome than girls and there were more indictments against them. Groups were always seen as more dangerous than individuals, their chances of succeeding in crime were greater, and they posed a potential threat for the future.⁸⁰ John Price, otherwise known as Cobler, a member of a thieves' den in Shoe Lane near Holborn

⁷⁹ OBP, 21 Feb 1733, George Dawson (t17330221-15).

⁸⁰ Hufton, Olwen, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750 – 1789* (Oxford, 1974), p.253.

presided over by Harry White who specialized in recruiting waifs and strays, gave evidence against his companions in crime:

I am about ten years of age. I and Henry Dumbleton, Jack Harris, Jack Simmonds, and another butcher's boy, who I don't know, took some decanters from the Fountain tavern, that stood on a board in the yard - I believe it is about a fortnight ago - and carried them to one Harry White, in George Alley, and sold them. Harris's father sent him on board o'ship, as soon as he heard we were taken.⁸¹

A year later, he was himself betrayed by Sarah Bibby, a regular witness at the Old Bailey. Bibby, whose mother sold oranges and oysters at the Ram Inn at Smithfield, was no more than thirteen when she gave evidence against John Price, a boy of eleven, and succeeded in having him transported for stealing penknives and razors. The very same day, she appeared in court a second time to give evidence against Harry White and Sarah Soames, accused of theft and receiving. Bibby, 'trained up to evil-doing from her cradle', told the court that Harry White was in the business of thieving, 'and,' she added, 'he harbours thieves; and takes children away from their friends; he took me away from my mother'. White and Soames were both transported. A month later, Bibby returned to give evidence at the trial of Elizabeth Stavenaugh, a shoplifter who lived with Harry White. Bibby boasted to her criminal associates that 'she had hanged five or six last session, and she would hang a great

⁸¹ OBP, 4 April 1744, Henry Dumbleton (t17440404-30).

many more'. But the following December, her apparent glee in convicting others was cut short when she was arrested herself and transported for theft.⁸²

As we saw in Chapter 3, at mid-century Marine Society propaganda played on public perceptions of child crime, claiming that the charity was helping to solve a social problem. While this publicity continued to exaggerate the extent of child crime, the courts, nervous and uneasy, took action against a few individuals. In 1770, ten year-old James Harris and Daniel Trigg, just two of 'a dozen little pilfering boys' who picked pockets 'from the Paternoster-row to Newgate-street, and back again', were found guilty and transported.⁸³ Disquiet persisted among the elite and in 1783, ten year-old James Cherrick, one of a gang of five, was arrested for taking a card of lace from a shop window about nine o'clock at night. The judge concluded, 'I think in order to break these gangs of boys, it is necessary to transport this boy, young as he is, to America for seven years'.⁸⁴ Perceptions of the criminality of young boys continued and 'by the mid-nineteenth century juvenile delinquency was established as a major focus of anxiety among the propertied, and separate penal policies and trial procedures for young offenders were being introduced for the first time'.⁸⁵

⁸² OBP, 24 Apr 1745, John Price (t17450424-39); 24 Apr 1745, Henry White, Sarah Soames (t17450424-13); 30 May 1745, Elizabeth Stavenaugh (t17450530-8); 4 Dec 1745, Sarah Bibby (t17451204-15).

⁸³ OBP, 17 Jan 1770, James Harris, Daniel Trigg (t17700117-25).

⁸⁴ OBP, 10 Dec 1783, James Cherrick (t17831210-57).

⁸⁵ John Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford, 1987), 246-7; Phyllida Parsloe, *Juvenile Justice in Britain and the United States: The Balance of Needs and Rights* (London, 1978); Wiley B. Sanders, *Juvenile Offenders for a Thousand Years: Selective Readings from Anglo-Saxon Times to 1900* (Chapel Hill, 1970), 7-175, as quoted in Peter King, 'The rise of juvenile delinquency in England 1780 – 1840: changing patterns of perception and prosecution', *Past and Present*, August 1998.

The boys discussed so far appear to have been adrift from society and, like the Black Guard, a troublesome and discordant minority. But the majority of children who appeared at the Old Bailey during our period do not fit into this category. There were 76 child defendants aged 8 to 15 in the sample decades and the trials of 43 offer specific background details about the defendants' employment (57%).

9 criminal connections	21%
5 receiving charity and casual employment	11.5%
7 running errands	16%
6 in specific employment/working for relative	14%
5 described as 'a servant'	11.5%
11 apprentices (including 5 parish apprentices)	26%

16 more cases give other background information about child defendant who lived in the capital (21%).

All the children who appeared at the Old Bailey, apart from those who had criminal connections, lived in the poor settled communities of the capital. The sample decades shows that they came from a wide range of circumstances. Mary Johnson, aged ten, lived with her mother in the cellar of the prosecutor's house; fourteen year-old Mary Thrusel lived with a couple who sold milk in the city and lodged in a garret occupied by their family, sleeping at night at the foot of their bed; and Ann White stole from the house where she went to fetch water.⁸⁶ Before her trial, Jane Wood used to go to the prosecutor's house to play with his child.⁸⁷ A few defendants appeared in court without support from family or friends, notably John Peirson and Joseph Fitzwalter, who offered no defence except to say, 'We have no

⁸⁶ OBP, 4 Dec 1730, Mary Johnson (t17301204-54); OBP, 17 Oct 1750, Mary Thrusel (t17501017-7); OBP, 11 Sept 1754, Ann White (t17540911-15).

⁸⁷ OBP, 8 Sept 1742, Jane Wood (t17420909-38),

witnesses, we have none but our own dear selves'.⁸⁸ This response was echoed in 1778 by Thomas Nelson, who told the court, 'My father is dead, and I have nobody here: I am but fifteen years old'. Thomas was whipped.⁸⁹ We saw in previous chapters that single-parent families were common and here too the absence or demise of fathers of child defendants is a recurrent theme. In 1766, a witness at the trial of George Atkins and his brother, aged ten, told the court, 'Their father is dead, and their mother is a very poor woman, that goes about buying kitchen-stuff'.⁹⁰

Five children from the sample decades were receiving charity from neighbours at the time they committed crime. Alice Murray, a widow who lived in Greek Street, told the court that Ruth Child, aged thirteen, 'stood at my door for charity. She had neither shoes nor hardly anything else that could be call'd apparel; I used to take pity on her, and gave her some cold victuals, and an old petticoat, and an old curtain to make her a gown, and other things, and sometimes money, and in return she wash'd my door down'. In her defence Ruth told the court. 'My mother is dead and my father is a journeyman Baker. He lives at Hampton-court and I was in great necessity'.⁹¹ Twelve year-old Evan Evans had been supported and clothed by Mrs Willis. His father told the judge, 'I was not able to maintain him so he was brought up next door to Madam Willis, who has been very kind to him and has often given him Money to keep him out of Temptation.'⁹²

⁸⁸ OBP, 12 Sept 1744, John Peirson, Joseph Fitzwalter (t17440912-51).

⁸⁹ OBP, 18 Feb 1778, Thomas Nelson (t17780218-1).

⁹⁰ OBP, 17 Dec 1766, George Atkins, Thomas Atkins (t17661217-25).

⁹¹ OBP, 28 Feb 1759, Ruth Child (t17590228-14).

⁹² OBP, 29 Jun 1743, Evy otherwise Evan Evans (t17430629-37).

The majority of the 57% of child defendants with background information were employed in apprenticeships, as servants, in specific casual work or in running errands. Among the apprentices was fifteen year-old Edward Hutchins, apprenticed to a rug-maker.⁹³ Among the five parish apprentices were thirteen year-old Hannah Wisby, apprenticed to a washerwoman by the parish of Cheshunt in Hertfordshire, and fourteen year-old Ann Carr, who was illegitimate, brought up in the workhouse and apprenticed by the parish of St George, Hanover Square.⁹⁴ The uncle of eleven year-old Sarah Stoner told the court, ‘We had the prisoner at a month old. We had her bound apprentice to us by Lambeth parish in August last.’⁹⁵ James Perciful was admitted to Chelsea workhouse in 1744 as an orphan and remained there until his brother took him out when he was ten.⁹⁶ At the time of his trial, he was apprenticed to Mr. Ives, at the Cooper's-arms alehouse.⁹⁷ As we noted in Chapter 4, the vast majority of apprentices were not parish apprentices but the presence of at least five parish apprentices in the sample decades suggests that the poorer and more deprived the background of the child, the greater the temptation to steal. Chapters 3 and 4 showed that a significant number of boys in London worked for a close relative and there are two examples in the sample decades. John Gillam, aged twelve worked for his uncle, a watchman, and Thomas Lane worked for his father bottoming

⁹³ OBP, 16 Jan 1752, Edward Hutchins (t17520116-21).

⁹⁴ OBP, 12 Oct 1748, Hannah Wisby (t17481012-14); OBP, 30 May 1754, Ann Carr (t 17540530-28).

⁹⁵ OBP, 17 July 1754, Sarah Stoner (t17540717-12).

⁹⁶ London Metropolitan Archive (hereafter LMA), X/15/37, ‘St Luke’s Chelsea, Workhouse Register 1743-1799’ a transcription of the original records made by Tim Hitchcock in 2003, available on [www.http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Chelsea/Chelsea1734.html), James M Perciful, admitted 2 Oct 1744, discharged 30 July 1754.

⁹⁷ OBP, 25 Oct 1758, James Perciful (t17581025-3).

chairs.⁹⁸ Seven children, five boys and two girls, were employed to run errands. Thirteen year-old Ann Hilliard delivered milk to ‘noblemen’s houses’.⁹⁹

A number of child defendants came from settled families who had lived in London for many years and whose neighbours rallied to give them support at their trial. Five neighbours gave evidence on behalf of fourteen year-old Mary Thrusel and Christian Pronor was supported by a witness who had known her since infancy.¹⁰⁰ Trials from other decades show defendants experiencing similar support from their communities. In 1761, the court heard that after the death of her mother, fourteen year-old Sarah Simpson lived with a neighbour until her father found work for her. Another witness added, ‘I have known the defendant five years. I teach children to read, she was a scholar of mine. Her friends were very honest people’.¹⁰¹ Apprentice masters of poor children have often been criticized for abusing their charges, but Christian Pronor’s mistress told the court, ‘I have known the Prisoner four Years; her Character is that of a very honest and just Person; she is a Servant-Maid; she lived with me three Quarters of a Year, and behaved well’.¹⁰² In 1768 Joseph Constable, the master of fifteen year-old William Booth, was a fine example of care and concern. ‘The prisoner has been apprentice to me three years and a half, he always behaved himself well to me,’ he told the court. ‘I gave him a little liberty to go out a-holiday making. There was [a baker’s boy] came to him, but I gave him

⁹⁸ OBP, 13 April 1743, John Gillam (t17430413-40); OBP, 25 Feb 1747, Thomas M Lane (t17470225-8).

⁹⁹ OBP, 14 Jan 1757, Ann Hilliard (t17570114-13).

¹⁰⁰ OBP, 17 Oct 1750, Mary Thrusel (t17501017-7). OBP, 29 June 1743, Christian Pronor (t17430629-34). See also OBP, 28 April 1742, Richard Cooley (t17420428-26).

¹⁰¹ OBP, 1 April 1761, Sarah Simpson (t17610401-8). See also OBP, 7 Dec 1768, Samuel Clark (t17681207-14).

¹⁰² OBP, 29 June 1743, Christian Pronor (t17430629-34).

advice not to go with him. I would do all in my power to make a man of him, if I can have him in my care again'. William was whipped.¹⁰³

Charity lodgings, workplaces, shops, warehouses and streets were all places where children could steal. A servant or apprentice had access to keys or unlocked drawers and knew where valuable goods were kept. Some, left in the house alone, took the opportunity to steal and others used their position to admit partners in crime. Child defendants in the sample decades stole a wide range of goods. These included clothing, footwear, hats, wigs and linen, brass candlesticks, copper cooking utensils and pewter plates. Some stole silver spoons, singly or as a set, quills of gold and silver wire, silver buttons and buckles, in fact any silver object that could be broken up and sold. Others took items of obvious value, gold, silver and metal watches; commodities such as bobbins of silk, lead, oil, soap and tobacco; and food items such as sugar, cheese, lemons, ham, bacon and legs of mutton. Child defendants experienced in the art of thieving, got away with a glass decanter and wine glasses, a gold watch chain, twenty two pairs of children's stockings and sixty yards of printed lawn. But by far the most common item stolen by children was money, often in quite substantial amounts, the largest sum being a couple of £200 banknotes.¹⁰⁴

The case of fourteen year-old apprentice John Hetherington, indicted for stealing £30, gives a rare insight into the way a poor boy spent the money he had stolen. John took it into Moorfields and joined other boys who were gambling there. A group of them went with him to an alehouse, where they had some 'Beef-stakes

¹⁰³ OBP, 13 April 1768, William Booth (t17680413-18).

¹⁰⁴ OBP, 4 Dec 1730, Mary Johnson (t17301204-54).

drest and a young Woman with them'. An older boy, pretending to give change, cheated John out of some of the money, but with the remainder he bought handkerchiefs for several of the boys, and a handkerchief and a pair of shoes for himself.¹⁰⁵

One of four 'servants' from the sample decades, fourteen year-old Elizabeth Bridgeford, was employed by a shopkeeper, who took her from the London Workhouse. She stole £4 in money from an unlocked drawer and her master's evidence at her trial tells how she spent it.

I found her in bed at the Griffin Inn in the Borough; I charged her with taking my money out of my drawer; she acknowledged she had, and gave me sixteen shillings and ninepence. I asked her what she had done with the rest; she said she had bought some new clothes with it, and gave them to me in a bundle. I took her before Sir John Fielding, who examined her. She told him everything and what she had bought and the price of each article. The Justice made a bill of it, and it came to upwards of £4. I asked her for the green purse it was in. She gave it me.¹⁰⁶

Perhaps the most telling account of the behaviour and attitude of another 'servant' comes from a case heard in 1766. Fifteen year-old John Bevan was not in apprenticeship, but was working as a yearly-hired servant to Joseph Lewis, who kept a public-house in Clare Market. John had been with his master only eight days, employed at £4.10 shillings a year, when he burgled his house and stole three stone buttons set in silver, a gold ring, a silver breast-buckle and £5 in money. Hearing

¹⁰⁵ OBP, 16 April 1740, John Hetherington (t17400416-14).

¹⁰⁶ OBP, 13 April 1768, Elizabeth Bridgeford (t17680413-36).

that Bristol Fair took place the following week, he set out for Bath, where he stayed for almost three weeks. When he had spent all the money, he returned to London. Joseph Lewis told the court, 'I asked him how he could rob me, who had been kind to him. He said never master behaved better, he never lived so well in his life'. John was condemned to death but was reprieved for transportation.¹⁰⁷ His words, 'I have never lived so well in my life', would have had resonances for many child defendants, who found themselves with employers better off than their parents. Most of these children, in their apprenticeship placements or employment were tempted to steal money or goods they could exchange for cash, an item that had never been available to them in any significant quantity. The way they used the money, not for luxuries, but for a bed for the night, a good meal with friends, shoes and basic clothing indicates both their background and their need.

The most obvious place to exchange goods for money was the pawnbroker's shop, an establishment that provided many poor families with a means of survival. By 1750 there were about 250 large pawnbrokers in London and countless smaller ones.¹⁰⁸ 'Pawnbroker' was a label attached to anyone who lent money on material security and the most disreputable were said to be those who took pawns as a sideline to their normal business, including those who sold gin and kept brothels. Henry Fielding, in common with others, saw pawnbrokers as receivers of stolen goods and numerous writers alleged that they encouraged thieves. Little is known about the workings of the trade in London before 1800, but a repeated accusation

¹⁰⁷ OBP, 9 April 1766, John Bevan (t17660409-64).

¹⁰⁸ Linebaugh, p.227-8.

was that brokers accepted pawns from children without their parents' knowledge.¹⁰⁹ Many of the children who stole clothing or household items tried to exchange the goods for money. Their experiences and dealings with pawnbrokers varied considerably.

Children using pawnbrokers often had to lie about the origin of the goods they hoped to exchange for money. They invariably took a huge risk for the pawnbroker could stop the goods and summon a constable. Those who pawned stolen goods on a regular basis knew pawnbrokers who would accept them, but they could easily be outwitted by an experienced receiver or be duped by a greedy one. Three cases have been chosen from the sample decades to illustrate three different kinds of response children could receive. Richard Henson and Edward Wood, both aged ten, stole a linen sheet from a washing line in the country district of Hampstead and took it wet into London to pawn. The pawnbroker refused to accept it, so they took it to a baker and 'got a Couple of Rolls for it' and, subsequently, a whipping from the court.¹¹⁰ Thomas Bradlen, a chimney-sweeper's boy, on the instruction of his master, Richard Purney, stole a silver salver from the butler's pantry at the house of Thomas Holles, Duke of Newcastle. Purney broke the salver into pieces and sent Thomas to several selected pawnbrokers to turn them into cash. Thomas simply told the pawnbrokers that he found the silver whereupon they weighed the pieces and gave him money for them.¹¹¹ Thirteen year-old Ann White pawned thirteen pewter plates she had stolen at a pawnbroker's shop in Skinner Street. In court the plates were valued at a shilling each. On discovering the theft,

¹⁰⁹ Tomkins p.205-8.

¹¹⁰ OBP, 14 Oct 1747, Richard Henson (t17471014-21).

¹¹¹ OBP, 27 Feb 1754, Richard Purney, Thomas Bradlen (t17540227-4).

John Phillips, the owner, took Ann to the shop to claim his goods but the pawnbroker refused to hand them over, even for payment, saying she would 'deliver them to the Old Bailey'. Ann was charged, but Phillips got a search warrant and the plates were found in the cellar. The pawnbroker had taken advantage of Ann's naiveté and exchanged the plates for the smallest sum possible. If the goods were not redeemed, she stood to make a sizable profit. She was notably absent from the court on the day of Ann's trial.¹¹²

As this survey has shown, 21 per cent of child defendants had criminal connections, but the majority came from a range of poor homes. Some were apprenticed by the parish while others may have been indentured by their parents. Others were hired as servants or ran errands and a few worked with relatives. Most, including those receiving charity, appeared to have been employed in some way and to have had some form of support from adults, parents or friends. A very small number appeared to be completely adrift and without 'friends' or adult support.

In her study of eighteenth-century France, Olwen Hufton described crime as an essential part of the 'economy of makeshift'. As French rural workers entered the unfamiliar world of an urban environment they were likely to fall into temptation. Pickpocketing was largely an 'urban monopoly, characteristic of crowded streets or the gatherings in fairs and markets'. The youngest children picked pockets and the mother, amongst her other activities, sold the proceeds of their crime. Clothing and linen, common items of theft, could always be sold to

¹¹² OBP, 11 Sept 1754, Ann White (t17540911-15).

clothes dealers. These women knew how to alter and unpick and soon passed goods on, even those that were stolen.¹¹³

The poor families that have been discussed in this thesis experienced a range of income levels and dealt with their circumstances in a variety of ways. In the course of their life-cycle, most were compelled at some stage to 'make do', to adopt strategies of 'makeshift', including pawnshops and reliance on parish relief. Heather Shore, reflecting on the petty and mundane nature of most crimes, argued, 'What might have been seen as criminal behaviour by the authorities, might by the offender be viewed as solutions to poverty, dearth, crisis, under and over employment'.¹¹⁴ When chimney-sweep, Thomas Bradlen, took a lump of silver to a pawnbroker and received three shillings for it, 'he said he would go and buy himself a flannel waistcoat, he being then in his shirt.'¹¹⁵ Mary White, indicted for assaulting a four-year old child, stealing her clothes and selling them to an old-clothes woman, said in her defence, 'I lived at Mrs Peirce's in Grub-Street, three Nights. My Mother is at present in Sepulchre's Workhouse, but my Father is dead'.¹¹⁶ She stole to turn the clothing into much needed cash. In 1737, defendant Charlotte Gregg told the court that her mother owed rent to Ann Howell, their landlady. She stole a leather bag containing 'a thirty-six Shilling piece of Gold, 17 Guineas, 3 half Guineas, and 5 Shillings in Silver' from the landlady's desk. Ann Howell told the court that Charlotte and her mother 'had not a Penny to buy them a Role or Cheese before I lost my Bag. After they had got my Money, the Mother

¹¹³ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France 1750 – 1789* (Oxford, 1974) pp.255-59.

¹¹⁴ Heather Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks', p.139.

¹¹⁵ OBP 27 Feb 1754, Richard Purney, Thomas Bradlen (t17540227-4).

¹¹⁶ OBP, 30 June 1725, Elizabeth Hogg (t17250630-16).

bought her Girl a new Pair of Stockings and Shoes, and they had a good Loin of Pork for Dinner besides - and that Way went one of my half Guineas.’¹¹⁷ All these children stole to provide basic necessities.

Olwen Hufton cites French mothers encouraging their children to steal and they had counterparts in London throughout our period. Elizabeth Hogg, aged ten, was a silk winder and frequently stole two or three bobbins of silk. She took them home to her mother, who sold them for sixteen pence a pound to a receiver in Wapping. Over a period Elizabeth got away with forty bobbins and sixteen pounds of silk.¹¹⁸ Ann Redmayne, who stole spangles from her workplace, ‘confess’s her Mother had put her upon taking the Goods, being us’d to beat her if she did not bring home something’.¹¹⁹ When thirteen year-old James Hines brought his mother a silver tablespoon he had stolen, she sent him to the pawnshop, saying, ‘I will go and get you a pair of shoes and you shall go to your master in the morning’.¹²⁰ By returning her son to his master, she passed a financial burden onto someone else.

What about the gangs of boys in the 1730s and those in the sample decades with criminal connections? Could their activities be termed ‘an economy of makeshift’? Some children gained lodgings in return for the goods they stole and if they had no family this was one way of ‘getting by’, but much went into the pockets of the receivers and boys like Cock-my-chin slept rough and went hungry, living hand-to-mouth on the proceeds of minor theft and crime.

¹¹⁷ OBP, 12 Oct 1737, Charlotte Gregg (t17371012-4).

¹¹⁸ OBP, 30 June 1725, Elizabeth Hogg (t17250630-16).

¹¹⁹ OBP, 2 June 1731, Ann Redmayne (t17310602-6).

¹²⁰ OBP, 7 Dec 1768, James Hines, (t17681207-48).

CHILDREN AS WITNESSES

Child witnesses appeared at the Old Bailey more frequently than child defendants and gave evidence in a wide range of trials. Some children had witnessed horrendous and terrifying events and others had themselves been victims of crime or abuse. An understanding of the oath was a pre-requisite of giving evidence but no systematic method was found for accessing trials that offered illustrations of the interrogation of children about this. This random sample of ten trials, involving thirteen child witnesses, found by chance while researching other material, shows how they were questioned and how their credibility was judged. This sample will also be used to explore the witnesses' backgrounds and characteristics.

There was some inconsistency in interpreting the law in relation to children's evidence, and although the age of discretion for witnesses was twelve, younger children were sometimes sworn if they were shown to have understood the oath.¹²¹ At the Old Bailey all children under twelve, and some who were older, were questioned about their understanding but *The Proceedings* was intended to be read by the general public, so standard, repetitive swearing-in of adult witnesses was usually omitted, and in the case of children full details of interrogations were not always included.¹²² A brief summary was sometimes given; for example, when four schoolboys gave evidence about a burglary at their school, the text read:

¹²¹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p.128, footnote 121.

¹²² For a good example of a detailed interrogation of an adult's understanding of the oath see OBP, 25 Oct 1786, William White (t17861025-9).

The four witnesses for the prosecution being children, the eldest not twelve years old, they were severally asked, previous to being sworn, whether they understood the nature of an oath, to which they gave satisfactory answers.¹²³

In cases where a full transcript appeared in the text, the interrogation had unusual features. John Morris, a thirteen-year old boy, gave evidence at the trial of Christopher Moreton, a thief who was subsequently transported. John was questioned at length before being sworn.

Court. Can you read?

Court. Did your mother ever send you to school?

Morris. No; she keeps a green stall and cannot afford it.

Court. Do you know good from evil?

Morris. No

Court. Do you know what will be done to you if you tell a lie?

Morris. No

Court. Do you know anything about heaven or hell?

Morris. I have heard people talk about heaven; but I know nothing about it at all.

Court. Consider now, when upon your oath, which is the most solemn engagement between God and your soul, if this young man should be hanged for what you shall say, and you shall tell a lie what will become of you?

Morris. I believe I should go to hell.

¹²³ OBP, 3 July 1771, Stephen Clements (t17710703-45).

Court. Who told you so?

Morris. Nobody; I thought of it myself.

Court. A very proper answer, tho' I think I never saw so much ignorance in a boy of thirteen years old: but I shall take an opportunity to speak to him. Swear him.¹²⁴

Despite John's ignorance, his reference to hell and the ensuing consequences if he told a lie seemed to have satisfied the court and he was allowed to take the stand. His interrogation, longer than most, illustrates the kind of questions put to children.¹²⁵ Some were asked if they could say the catechism and others had to identify the book used for the oath or repeat the Lord's Prayer. George Foster, a child of ten who gave evidence against a thief who stole his money, had a clearer idea what the oath involved:

Q. If you should tell a lye, what do you think will become of you?

G. Foster. I shall go to the naughty man if I don't tell the truth.¹²⁶

John Moss, a thirteen year-old apprentice, made more mature responses:

Who made you? - God.

Can you say your catechism? - Yes.

Can you say the Lord's prayer? - Yes.

¹²⁴ OBP, 20 Feb 1771, Christopher Moreton (t17710220-16).

¹²⁵ The printing of full versions of interrogations of children seems to have been more common in the 1780s. At this time children were asked if they could read and if they attended church. See OBP, 11 Sept 1782, William Jones (t17820911-54); OBP, 10 Dec 1783, James Macauley (t17831210-90); OBP, 20 Oct 1784, Elizabeth Axford (t17841020-53); OBP, 6 Apr 1785, George Wilkinson (t17850406-48); OBP, 11 Jan 1786, Elizabeth Brown (t17860111-40); OBP, 18 Apr 1787, Hannah Pleasant (t17870418-19).

¹²⁶ OBP, 10 July 1765, John Rees (t17650710-3). See also: Surrey Assizes Proceedings, Lent 1759, p.15, quoted in John Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp.128-29, footnote 121.

Judge: What do you mean by going to the naughty man?

Child: Going to the devil.

Repeat it. - [Repeats the Lord's prayer.]

If you don't tell the truth, where will you go when you die? - To the devil.

What book is that, look at it? - A testament.¹²⁷

Ann Reynolds appeared to have a fluent answer ready, 'I am fifteen Years of Age and if I speak any Thing but the Truth, my Soul will be damned to all Eternity'.¹²⁸

The questions that John Travilian, a thirteen year-old workhouse inmate, were asked show that the court was anxious to ensure that children were not pressured or inveigled into giving evidence or given instructions on how to respond.

Q. Do you know what will become of you if you tell a lie upon your oath?

Travilian. If I tell a lie upon oath, the devil will have me.

Q. Did anybody bid you say so?

Travilian. No, nobody.

Q. Has anybody set you on to tell a story?

Travilian. No.¹²⁹

At a trial in 1782, the defendant interrupted the proceedings, claiming that the child witness 'was taught this story at the justices, they have a story learned by heart.' Indeed, some children probably were taught the responses and given instructions on what to say, so how was their credibility judged? Much rested in the hands of judges and jury and at each individual trial, as with sentencing, they could use their discretion. Prior to the trial, some child witnesses appeared before a justice at the sessions court, which could served as a filter, attempting to ensure that only the

¹²⁷ OBP, 21 Feb 1776, Stephen Self (t17760221-38); 22 May 1776 Stephen Self (t17760522-4).

¹²⁸ OBP, 25 Feb 1741, Hannah Robinson, Dorothy Middleton (t17410225-36).

¹²⁹ OBP, 10 Sept 1755, Mabell Hughes (t17550910-41).

most serious cases with adequate prosecution evidence were sent on to the Old Bailey.

Nine year-old Charles Herbert, a prosecution witness against James Matthews, had already been interrogated by John Fielding at the sessions court. At the Old Bailey, his mother recounted these events:

Mr. Fielding sent for my child to come there. I went with him. He called the child from me, from the door. There were several men came in, and the prisoner amongst them. A man said, Little boy, do you know the man? He said, Yes, sir, that is the man, and pointed to the prisoner. Then Mr. Fielding had the child up stairs and he asked him [again] and he told him the same. The child was twice at Mr Fielding's. Mr. Fielding came downstairs and there was the prisoner, the child, and the pawnbroker. The justice asked my child again if that was the man: he said, yes.

The evidence of this nine year-old boy was, therefore, acceptable to the court and he gave a lucid and convincing account of the theft of the stockings he was carrying along the street. His evidence carried significant weight in the case for the prosecution and the defendant was subsequently transported.¹³⁰

There was always a danger that a child might weave stories or treat imagination as truth. Butler Buckley, also aged nine, was a witness for the prosecution in which the defendants were his father and his uncle. Richard Buckley, his father, told the court,

¹³⁰ OBP, 16 Jan 1761, James Matthews (t17610116-7).

I have taken what care I could in giving my Boy good Instructions, but my care had but little effect on him. He was always very perverse, and a notorious Liar, for which I have often corrected him, though not with severity, for fear of hardening him. The Boy told Mr Justice De Veil, that I had been in Newgate several times.

De Veil could not recall him and the Keeper of Newgate told the court he had never seen either of the defendants before. Butler, 'being detected in several Falsehoods and Contradictions, and a sufficient Number of Creditable Witnesses appearing on behalf of the Prisoners, the Jury acquitted them'.¹³¹ As these two examples of nine year-old witnesses show, the court was prepared to listen but children's testimony was not always accepted as reliable evidence.

Once sworn, children were treated like other witnesses. There was no privacy, no form of protection and giving evidence could prove an ordeal. Thomas Faris, aged thirteen, and William Butterworth, aged fourteen, who had witnessed the theft of a silk handkerchief, had to face the defendant across the court and answer questions he put to them. As a direct result of their evidence, the prisoner was transported.¹³² Four boys, aged eleven and twelve, awakened in the night at their boarding school by a gang of violent burglars, who threatened to blow their brains out if they made a sound, gave evidence for the prosecution against one of them. The boys had to re-live their terrifying experience in court, in the public gaze and in the presence of a violent criminal. On the basis of their evidence, he was

¹³¹ OBP, 16 Apr 1735, Richard Buckley, John Buckley (t17350416-30).

¹³² OBP, 7 Sept 1743, Henry Harris (t17430907-45).

condemned to death.¹³³ The experiences of children in court varied but many child witnesses must have suffered fear, anxiety or nightmares, and some had to live with the knowledge that a prisoner was punished as a result of their evidence and could, at a future date return, even from transportation, to seek revenge at a time when the law offered little protection. In all ten cases, which involved thirteen child witnesses, the evidence given by them was a crucial element of the trial and in all cases but one their credibility was judged acceptable to the court.

These cases will now be explored for information about the backgrounds and characteristics of the children who took the witness stand. It is clear from the evidence of John Morris, uneducated and grossly ignorant about the oath, that he and the defendant Christopher Moreton, nicknamed Cut Knuckle, knew each other. In his defence, Moreton suggested John had been bribed to betray him with the promise of an apprenticeship and called him ‘a common thief’. Whatever the truth of the affair, John Morris was a boy who had links with experienced criminals.¹³⁴ As we saw earlier, children associated with criminal gangs had no qualms about betraying others to save themselves from prosecution. Fifteen year-old Ann Reynolds, who answered so readily to the oath, was herself involved in the crime. She told the court that the two female defendants, ‘carry'd me with them, because I cou'd get through a smaller Place than they: Middleton forced [the window] open with a Fork and put me in, and I opened the Door to her.’ Ann’s testimony and that of the victim in the case were sufficient evidence to condemn both women to

¹³³ OBP, 3 July 1771, Stephen Clements (t17710703-45). NA, ‘Petition and free pardon’, SP 44/90 ff.312, 316-17.

¹³⁴ OBP, 20 Feb 1771, Christopher Moreton (t17710220-16).

death¹³⁵

Most child witnesses in this random sample did not have criminal associations. John Travilian was an inmate of Aldgate workhouse because he was orphaned and he gave evidence in a murder trial.¹³⁶ John Moss was apprenticed to a hairdresser and gave evidence about the suffering of himself and his fellow apprentice, who died as a result of his master's ill-treatment. Thomas Faris and William Butterworth, who witnessed the theft of a silk handkerchief, were both errand boys, one for a stationer and the other for a shoemaker.¹³⁷ Nine year-old Charles Herbert, intelligent and articulate, was trusted to carry goods for his master and had a supportive and responsible mother.¹³⁸ George Foster, aged ten, who gave evidence against a thief who stole his money, also appears to have been trusted. 'I went to get change for a quarter guinea,' he told the court, a substantial sum for a child of his age to carry.¹³⁹ Butler Buckley was shown to be an impudent, lying, mischievous boy, 'a great Grief' to his father, who 'was afraid he had got into ill Company'. Richard Buckley, the defendant, was a respected and reliable servant of Henry Vipont, who told the court, 'I keep the Long Room at Hampstead. The Prisoner was a very faithful and just Servant. I agreed with him to serve me at Scarborough during the Season.'¹⁴⁰ The presence of Vipont, in support of a servant

¹³⁵ OBP, 25 Feb 1714, Hannah Robinson, Dorothy Middleton (t17410225-36).

¹³⁶ OBP, 10 Sept 1755, Mabell Hughes (t17550910-41).

¹³⁷ OBP, 7 Sept 1743, Henry Harris (t17430907-45).

¹³⁸ OBP, 16 Jan 1761, James Matthews (t17610116-7).

¹³⁹ OBP, 16 Apr 1735, Richard Buckley, John Buckley (t17350416-30).

¹³⁹ OBP, 7 Sept 1743, Henry Harris (t1743090745).

¹⁴⁰ The Long Room at Hampstead, comprising a pump room where the chalybeate water could be drunk and an assembly room for dancing and concerts, was rebuilt in the 1730s and balls, concerts and other events attracted a discerning clientele. www.lagaffe.co.uk/hampstead.php. Consulted 9 Nov 2007. The Long Room in Scarborough, 'a spacious building with a view for leagues over the sea', was kept by Henry Vipont, Master of the Long Room at Hampstead. Here were Balls every

he had known only a few months, suggests that Richard Buckley came from a respectable background. The evidence for the prosecution seems to have been an extraordinary and malicious fabrication by his son. The four school boys, who gave evidence about a burglary, attended a small boarding school run in the home of their schoolmaster. His house had been targeted by the burglars and the goods stolen included money and a collection of silver, suggesting he was considerably more affluent than most in his profession. The articulate and observant boys were likely to have come from homes of the middling-sort, with parents who could afford to pay boarding fees. This random sample is small but the 13 child witnesses, nevertheless, come from a range of backgrounds:

Criminal connections	2
Workhouse child	1
Apprenticed	1
Errand boys	4
Son of respected servant	1
Boarding school pupils	4

As we might expect, witnesses at the Old Bailey included both members of criminal gangs and those on the fringes of criminality. Among the very poor were a workhouse child and an abused apprentice. Four errand boys, two trusted with substantial amounts of goods or money, the son of a respected servant and middling-sort pupils of a boarding school also took the witness stand.

evening and chairs from London plied the streets. *The Borough of Scarborough, British History Online*, www.british-history.ac.uk. Consulted 9 Nov 2007.

CHILDREN AS VICTIMS

Poor children were vulnerable to many forms of exploitation, to physical brutality and to sexual assault. Crimes committed within family homes or in workplaces were often invisible so some children undoubtedly suffered and justice was never done. Trials involving child victims were occasionally heard at the Old Bailey but these were usually the more extreme cases. Three types of crime will be considered here; clothes theft, child murder and child rape.

a. Clothes Theft

As we saw in Chapters 1 and 3, clothing was an essential but expensive item and provision made by parishes and by the Marine Society was an important element of the economy of makeshift for those who used these services. The purchase of new and ready-made garments remained beyond many, if not most, poor families well into the nineteenth century.¹⁴¹ Markets selling second-hand clothes were common and both new and second-hand clothing were among items frequently stolen from shops, houses and workplaces. Child victims of clothes theft were usually taken to a quiet street or country area outside the city where they were stripped of their outer garments and left until they were found or made their own way home. Searches of www.oldbaileyonline under keywords 'child stripped', 'stripping' and 'strip child/boy/girl' produced twenty-one cases during the period 1700 to 1780, an average of about three per decade. Girls, whose layered garments were valuable,

¹⁴¹ Peter Jones, 'Clothing the Poor in Early-Nineteenth-Century England', *Textile History*, 37 (1). May 2006, pp.17-37,

were the main target of this kind of theft; only a few victims were boys. The vast majority of perpetrators of this crime were women, who could approach children more easily than men and would have been less conspicuous as they walked their victims to secluded streets or into the countryside. Some clothing was stolen from well-dressed children but many of the garments were second-hand and raised only a few pence from a dealer or pawnbroker. Clothes stolen from Thomas Hughes were described by the pawnbroker as ‘very poor things’ and she was reluctant to buy them.¹⁴²

Clothes theft from children reflects the needs of the defendants but also tells us something about the circumstances of child victims. In the busy metropolis, children whose clothes were stolen were usually alone when they were accosted. Sarah Campbell’s father, a publican, told the court that the school his daughter attended was a quarter of a mile from his home. ‘Do you send her without a servant with her?’ the judge asked. ‘I do’, he replied. Sarah, a well-dressed child, was brought home at eight o’clock at night with her cotton skirt, stays, a capuchin cloak and gold earrings missing.¹⁴³ Three more cases heard in the 1720s concerned children stripped of their clothing on their way home from school.¹⁴⁴ In 1741, Elizabeth Minton, aged five and in the care of a servant, was allowed to play in the street around five o’clock, but was brought home three hours later ‘by a boy who found her sitting on a Dung-hill without her Coat and Stays and the Skirt of her Frock was cut from her Body and pinn’d about her.’ She had been carried away by

¹⁴² OBP, 26 May 1748, Jane Sims (t17480526-20).

¹⁴³ OBP, 25 Feb 1756, Sarah Lee (t17560225-26).

¹⁴⁴ OBP, 16 Oct 1723, Mary Smith (t17231016-4); 14 Oct 1724, Frances Jakes (t17241014-19); 28 Aug 1728, Ann Weichard (t17280828-7).

two young women who promised her plum cake.¹⁴⁵ Thomas Hughes was stripped of his frock, stays and camblet skirt in the park. His mother told the court, 'I don't know what time of day it was. The day the King went to Parliament, he went by himself into the Park to see the King go to the House'. Asked for Thomas's age, she replied, 'He is three and a half years old.'¹⁴⁶ It is impossible to know if the apparent freedom of movement of young children reflected in these few cases was experienced by children in general in eighteenth-century London. Some of these parents may have been remarkably casual and imprudent but child care and supervision must have been an enormous problem for poor mothers when they were working.

Clothes theft was a felony and the adult defendants who stole from Sarah Campbell, Elizabeth Minton and Thomas Hughes were all transported. Two cases of clothes theft during our period were committed by children and in both instances sentencing was more lenient. Six year-old Jane Carpenter, playing in Spittle Square, was carried into a side street by twelve year-old Elizabeth Metcalf and fourteen year-old Elizabeth Brown, who stole her gown and took it to a local pawn shop. The pawnbroker was criticized by the court for dealing with children and the defendants were whipped.¹⁴⁷ Richard Wett and William Dear, two young boys, were caught in Stepney Fields stripping five year-old John James of his frock and stealing his silver buckles, each worth two shillings. They 'gave ill Language, flinging a brick bat' at

¹⁴⁵ OBP, 1 July 1741, Mary Smith alias Rouse and Mary Smith (t17410791-13).

¹⁴⁶ OBP, 26 May 1748, Jane Sims (t17480526-20).

¹⁴⁷ OBP, 30 May 1745, Elizabeth Metcalf, Elizabeth Brown (t17450530-10).

the member of the public who apprehended them. They were found guilty and branded.¹⁴⁸

Most victims of clothes theft came to no permanent harm, although their experiences must have been very frightening, but theft of children's clothes was taken extremely seriously if the child was threatened by the assailant.¹⁴⁹ One of the most tragic cases involved victim John Pace, a child of four, who left school on a January afternoon in 1713, moments before his aunt arrived to collect him. Eventually, he wandered to the glass house in the Minories to warm himself and Susan Perry, pretending she knew his parents, told him she would take him home. She took John out of the city, where she murdered him and left his body in a ditch. The next day she sold his bodice-coat, frock and petticoat for ninepence. Susan Perry was hanged.¹⁵⁰

b. Murder

Murder is extreme behaviour and very few child murder cases were brought before the court at the Old Bailey. There is no method of searching www.oldbaileyonline for murder victims of specified age so a manual search for all murder victims was undertaken for the whole period 1700 to 1780. This search produced 980 murder prosecutions.¹⁵¹ Child victims between the ages of 3 and 15 with age information

¹⁴⁸ OBP, 4 Dec 1717, Richard Wett and William Dear (t17171204-2). For another male clothes thief see OBP, 25 June 1761, Thomas Matthews (t17610625-7).

¹⁴⁹ OBP, 30 May 1750, Elizabeth Banks (t17500530-12) The defendant threatened to fling the child in the pond at Marylebone. She was sentenced to death and the sentence was carried out.

¹⁵⁰

¹⁵¹ Murders were often perpetrated by more than one person so there were fewer victims than this figure suggests.

were extracted. Cases involving the deaths of children in traffic accidents, which were often prosecuted as murder, were not included in the following table.¹⁵²

Table 5.2 Murder cases involving child victims aged 3 to 15.

Source: Old Bailey, 1700 – 1780.

Decade	Number of cases	Acquitted	Manslaughter	Guilty
1700s	1	1	0	0
1710s	2	1	0	1
1720s	2	0	1	1
1730s	4	3	1	0
1740s	2	1	1	1
1750s	2	1	0	1
1760s	3	1	0	2
1770s	1	1	1	0
	19	9	4	6
		47%	21%	32%

Of the nineteen murder trials involving child victims between the ages of 3 and 15 with age information, six cases resulted in murder convictions:

John Pace, aged 4, was murdered by Susan Perry for his clothes in 1713.¹⁵³

James Barret, aged 11, was murdered by his father in 1728.¹⁵⁴

Thomas Salter, aged 15, a parish apprentice was murdered by Edmund Gilbert, his apprentice master, in 1745.¹⁵⁵

Alexander Knipe, aged 11, an inmate of Aldgate workhouse, was murdered by Mabell Hughes in 1755 (This case was described in Chapter 1).¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² *The Proceedings* for 1700-1780 include 20 cases of traffic accidents involving children. Most drivers of carts or carriages were charged with murder but most were acquitted. Carter, John Wolley, who killed three year-old Catherine Thorn, was found to have been drunk, OBP, 11 July 1770, John Wolley (t17700711-39). John Berryman, the driver of a two-horse dray, was accused of killing six year-old Sarah Martin. He failed to stop and claimed he was hard of hearing, OBP, 6 June 1717, John Berryman (t17170606-32). Both these drivers were found guilty of manslaughter and branded.

¹⁵³ OBP, 25 Feb 1713, Susan Perry (t17130225-27).

¹⁵⁴ OBP, 17 Jan 1728, Joseph Barret (t17280117-38).

¹⁵⁵ OBP, 24 April 1745, Edmund Gilbert (t17450424-33).

Ann Nailor, aged 13, a parish apprentice, was starved, beaten and murdered by Sarah Metyard and her daughter and tried in 1762.¹⁵⁷

Mary Clifford, aged 14, a parish apprentice, was treated with savage cruelty and murdered by Elizabeth Brownrigg in 1767.¹⁵⁸

Four more cases resulted in charges of manslaughter:

Thomas Baker, aged 6, died in St Bartholomew's Hospital after being struck on the head by a brick thrown by Frances Coats in 1720.¹⁵⁹

George Main, an apprentice aged about 11, suffered hunger and cold and was savagely beaten by fisherman, John Bennet, in 1733.¹⁶⁰

George Carter, aged 13, died after accidentally being shot and wounded with a gun in 1746.¹⁶¹

William Ringrose, a young apprentice died of ill-treatment he received in Bridewell and subsequently from his master, Stephen Self in 1776.¹⁶²

The Proceedings give few details about James Barret, a victim of violence in his own home. James received a mortal blow from which he died instantly and his father was hanged in 1728. Thomas Salter's parents died within a fortnight of one another and he was taken into Newington workhouse, from where he was apprenticed to Edmund Gilbert, a draught weaver, who starved and cruelly beat him. After Thomas's death, Gilbert called searchers to examine the boy's body and

¹⁵⁶ OBP, 10 Sept 1755, Mabell Hughes (t17550910-41).

¹⁵⁷ OBP, 14 July 1762, Sarah Metyard, Sarah Morgan Metyard (t17620714-30).

¹⁵⁸ OBP, 9 Sept 1767, James Brownrigg, Elizabeth his wife, John their son (t17670909-1); Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, 1981), p.135.

¹⁵⁹ OBP, 12 July 1720, Frances Coats (t17200712-1).

¹⁶⁰ OBP, 12 Jan 1733, John Bennet (t17330112-3).

¹⁶¹ OBP, 17 Jan 1746, Abraham Dixon (t17460117-42).

¹⁶² OBP, 21 Feb 1776, Stephen Self (t17760221-38).

seek permission for burial but it was bruised from head to foot and they refused his request. Gilbert was found guilty and sentenced to death but his sentence was later commuted to branding and nine months' imprisonment.¹⁶³ Ten years later, Mabell Hughes, the first of three women to be found guilty at the Old Bailey for murdering a child, was hanged. The appalling crime of murder was perceived as more despicable when committed by a woman and, as we saw in Chapter 1, members of a workhouse community gave evidence against her.¹⁶⁴ Two even more horrendous cases followed in the 1760s. Ann Nailor, a parish apprentice aged thirteen and too ill to work, and her sister were tortured, murdered and dismembered in 1758, although the crime was not discovered until four years later, when Sarah Metyard informed on her mother following an argument and, in doing so, unwittingly incriminated herself.¹⁶⁵ Five years later, the high-profile and well-documented case of Elizabeth Brownrigg caused public outrage. An apparently respectable midwife, Brownrigg took in orphan apprentice girls and using them as drudges, whipped and starved them with savage barbarity. Mary Jones, a child from the Foundling Hospital who was beaten severely, escaped and complained to the Hospital Governors. They instructed a solicitor to write threatening prosecution, but, reluctant to take matters further, simply arranged for Mary Jones to be discharged from her apprenticeship. Meanwhile, Mary Clifford, a parish apprentice, was bound to Brownrigg by the overseers of White Friars. Tortured and starved, she was

¹⁶³ OBP, 24 April 1745, Edmund Gilbert (t17450424-33).

¹⁶⁴ OBP, 10 Sept 1755, Mabell Hughes (t17550910-41).

¹⁶⁵ OBP, 14 July 1762, Sarah Metyard, Sarah Morgan Metyard (t17620714-30).

eventually rescued by neighbours but died in hospital.¹⁶⁶ The Metyard and Brownrigg case, coming within a few years of each other, aroused public concern that such atrocities were allowed to continue unchecked. Peter Linebaugh suggests that Brownrigg's hanging 'helped to limit the exploitation of children by London employers'.¹⁶⁷

Dorothy George highlighted the Metyard and Brownrigg cases in her discussion of the exploitation and abuse of parish apprentices and also drew attention to the cases involving two child victims from the 1730s who suffered immense cruelty and neglect. George Main, mentioned above, was savagely abused but John Bennet, who was found guilty 'only of manslaughter'; and John Williams was badly abused by James Durant, who was acquitted because the jury judged the boy had died from consumption.¹⁶⁸ Dorothy George continued,

These are not isolated cases and there can be no doubt that those which came to the court represent an infinitesimal proportion of the little apprentices who were beaten, starved and neglected, still less of those who ran away to become beggars and vagrants.¹⁶⁹

We saw in Chapter 4 that parish apprenticeship accounted for a very small number of poor children and while it would be callous to understate tragedy and unrealistic to underestimate hardship and suffering, some of which must never have

¹⁶⁶ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003, 2nd edn.), p.322; Lucy Moore, *The Thieves' Opera* (London, 1997); Kristina Straub, 'The Tortured Apprentices: Sexual Monstrosity and the Suffering of Poor Children in the Browning Murder Case', in Laura Rosenthal and Mita Choudhary (eds), *Monstrous Dreams of Reason* (London 2002) pp.66 - 81.

¹⁶⁷ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003, 2nd edn.), p.322.

¹⁶⁸ OBP, 12 Jan 1733, John Bennet (t17330112-3); OBP, 10 Jun1736, James Durant (t17360610-32).

¹⁶⁹ George, p. 228-29.

come to light, there is still a need to restore a balance to distorted perceptions. Parish apprentices like Thomas Salter, Ann Nailor and Mary Clifford were among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children, but the suffering described by Dorothy George was not typical of the experiences of all poor children in employment in London. Apart from the acquittal of James Durant for indisputable brutality, the remaining eight acquittals all involved the death of children in circumstances that might occur in any society. The death of any child is tragic, but while little credit can be assigned to the adults involved in these cases, none appears to have been deliberately vicious or malevolent. Thomas Shaw, a child living with a parish nurse, for instance, died at a result of her gross negligence.¹⁷⁰ Peter Bluck confessed to murdering his daughter but had twice tried to hang himself following the death of his wife and the family's apothecary told the court that the child died of convulsions.¹⁷¹ Thirteen year-old Joseph Davise, in a tragic accident, sustained a head injury from a tile thrown by another boy and Francis Mallum died as the result of an abscess, not from a blow received in a fight with a friend.¹⁷² Twelve year-old schoolboy William Poole, slapped by his schoolmaster, hit his head on a corner of the chimney breast. Several of his school friends were in court to testify that the schoolmaster had not struck him in anger and a colleague and parents confirmed the schoolmaster's good character.¹⁷³

Numbers of child victims in murder trials at the Old Bailey were small, but the details of their deaths reflect many of the same circumstances that have been

¹⁷⁰ OBP, 10 Sept 1718, Eleanor Callimore (t17180910-76).

¹⁷¹ OBP, 4 July 1730, Peter Bluck (t17300704-41).

¹⁷² OBP, 26 Oct 1752, Joseph Davise (t17521026-46); OBP, 15 Jan 1700, Francis Mallum (t17000115-16).

¹⁷³ OBP, 24 Oct 1770, John Barney (t17701024-55).

pointed up in other chapters; and again suggest that the world inhabited by eighteenth-century London children was generally more orderly and caring than has frequently been allowed by a historiography that emphasizes the brutality and disorder of the period and place.

c. Rape

Perhaps the most gruelling test of the brutality of the period can be found in the extreme crime of child rape. The crime of child rape is an aspect of legal history that has interested a number of historians. Rape first became a felony in 1275 in the Statute of Westminster, which set the age of consent at twelve. The 1576 Act drew a clearer distinction between adult and child victims, and lowered the age to ten. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, as a result of ambiguity in the law, two separate ages of consent existed, ten and twelve, a confusion that lawyers argued about and which juries largely failed to appreciate. Between the ages of ten and twelve, sexual intercourse was considered a misdemeanour and a rape charge could only stand if a child could prove non-consent. Consequently, many of the accused were charged with the misdemeanor, ‘assault with intent to commit rape’, normally tried at the petty or quarter sessions, although there can be little doubt that the crime they had committed was often rape.¹⁷⁴

In 1987, Anna Clark approached the issue of rape from a feminist perspective, showing rape in the eighteenth century as ‘just one way in which

¹⁷⁴ Antony Simpson ‘Vulnerability and the Age of Female Consent: Legal Innovation and its Effect on Prosecutions for Rape in Eighteenth-Century London’ in George Rousseau and Roy Porter (eds), *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Manchester, 1987), pp.185-87. See also Julie Gammon, ‘A Denial of Innocence: Female Juvenile Victims of Rape and the English Legal System in the Eighteenth Century’ in Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey (eds), *Children in Question: Children, Parents and the State* (Manchester, 1999).

women were oppressed'.¹⁷⁵ Using material from a diverse range of sources she traced the development of women's roles as rape victims through into the nineteenth century. She calculated that 20 per cent of rape trials at the Old Bailey involved masters and servants and observed that rapes of children 'excited almost universal revulsion'.¹⁷⁶ Antony Simpson, also writing in 1987, showed that during the period 1730 to 1830, about one-fifth of all cases of capital rape involved children below the age of ten and that between 1730 and 1789 the proportion of child victims of this age rose to 25 per cent. He described child rape as primarily 'a Metropolitan phenomenon', stemming from the widespread belief that sexual intercourse with a virgin could affect a cure for venereal disease.¹⁷⁷ 'Its prevalence was used to explain the actions of James Booty, aged fifteen, who raped five or six children, all under seven, before his eventual conviction and execution at Tyburn 1722'.¹⁷⁸ Evidence from the Lock Hospital's *Annual Account* that this misconception resulted in 'the most horrid acts of barbarity' being committed on small children who were admitted to the hospital with venereal disease adds further support to this argument.¹⁷⁹ Antony Simpson concluded:

Sexual abuse of children flourished in eighteenth-century London because of an unfortunate coincidence of female vulnerability and perceived male need. The failure of the courts of this time to preserve the ancient common-

¹⁷⁵ Anna Clark, *Women's Silence Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England 1770-1845* (London, 1987), p.3.

¹⁷⁶ Clark, pp.40 and 48.

¹⁷⁷ Simpson, 'Vulnerability', p.192. See also Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Vol. 1, Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago, 1998), pp.210-18.

¹⁷⁸ Simpson, 'Vulnerability', p.193. OBP, 10 May 1722, James Booty (t17220501-34). This case is described earlier in the chapter.

¹⁷⁹ Kevin Siena, *Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor: London's "Foul Wards" 1600-1800* (New York, 2004), pp.193-94.

law rights of female children does not indicate much concern for childhood or its protection. This fact stands strongly against opinion which views this period as one in which childhood became defined as a status demanding care and protection.¹⁸⁰

More recently, in a thesis dealing with adult rape, Julie Gammon approached the subject, again from a legal perspective, examining how adult female complainants were treated by the courts.¹⁸¹ In a separate article, Gammon has also discussed child rape, examining sixteen cases heard at the Old Bailey between 1734 and 1797 involving girls under the age of fourteen. She concluded that the justice system expected children to be ‘innocent’ of sexual matters, while at the same time treating them as adults in the court. Paradoxically, children who had been raped had lost that innocence but the court offered them no protection in the way it dealt with them.¹⁸²

The issue of child rape will be explored here from a different perspective. The text of *The Proceedings* will be used to tease out who the victims of child rape were and why they were vulnerable. A search of [www.oldbaileyonline](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org) under ‘Crime, Verdict and Punishment Search’ for the whole period 1700 to 1780 produced a total of 203 rape prosecutions. Trials involving child victims aged 3 to 15 were extracted and 89 were found, 44 per cent of all indictments for rape.

¹⁸⁰ Simpson, ‘Vulnerability’, p.200.

¹⁸¹ Julie Gammon, ‘Rape victims and the law: a study of the treatment of female complainants by the courts and legal attitudes towards sexual crime in London and Bristol, c.1650-1850’ University of Essex, PhD (2000).

¹⁸² J.Gammon, “‘A denial of innocence’: female juvenile victims of rape and the English legal system in the eighteenth century’, in *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State*, Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey, (1999).

Table 5.3: Prosecutions for Child Rape at the Old Bailey, 1730 - 1779

Source: www.oldbaileyonline

Columns 1-4 present the numbers of capital prosecutions for rape in the periods designated, numbers of guilty verdicts and conviction rates. Column 5 presents the numbers executed in each period. Columns 6-10 present numbers of prosecutions in those cases where victims were between the ages of 3 and 15, the percentage these represent of all rape prosecutions, the conviction rates for rape and the percentage in this category and the rate of detention for trial for assault and intent to rape.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Years	Rape prosecutions	Guilty (No.)	Guilty (%)	No. executed	Child victims aged 3-15	% of total	Guilty no.	Guilty (%)	Detained for trial for assault & intent to rape
1700-1709	9	2	22	2	7	77	2	29	0
1710-1719	17	1	6	1	8	47	1	12	0
1720-1729	32	3	9	2	14	44	4	29	1
1730-1739	27	7	26	7	10	37	2	20	1
1740-1749	25	4	16	4	11	44	2	18	1
1750-1759	27	2	7	2	14	52	1	7	6
1760-1769	24	6	25	6	11	46	2	18	6
1770-1779	42	4	6	2	14	33	1	7	2
	203	29	14	26	89	44	15	17	16

Accusations of rape were dealt with initially at the sessions courts but the majority failed to reach a jury trial.¹⁸³ The only existing petty sessions records of one of the City of London magistrates' courts for the eighteenth century indicate that less than 15 per cent of all rape cases were sent on to the grand jury.¹⁸⁴ Most cases involving children came to court because the child was infected with venereal disease and further enquiries indicated rape. Other cases tended to be dismissed at a preliminary

¹⁸³ Simpson, 'Popular Perceptions of Rape as a Capital Crime in Eighteenth-Century England: The Press and the Trial of Francis Charteris in the Old Bailey, February 1730', *Law and History Review* 22, 1 (Spring 2004), www.historycooperative.org/journals/lhr/22.1/simpson.html para 62. Consulted 22 March 2007.

S Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* (London, 1975), p.434, quoted in Gammon, p.75.

¹⁸⁴ Simpson, 'Popular Perceptions', paras 59 and 60 and "The Blackmail Myth" and the Prosecution of Rape and Its Attempt in Eighteenth-Century London: The Creation of a Legal Tradition', *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 77, 1 (Spring, 1986), 122-23.

stage and many more went unreported.¹⁸⁵ Sexual assaults on children reported in the press aroused disgust and outrage but, as this table shows, only a minority of prosecutions produced a guilty verdict, although a small number were detained for trial for intent to rape. Victims had little incentive to bring their cases to court and the publicity attendant on many of these trials was likely to tarnish the reputation of a child and her family permanently. It is impossible to know the real scale of a crime that was essentially secretive and where the experience was often deliberately hidden.

In previous chapters we have seen that children of the poor in the capital came from a wide range of communities and experienced a variety of economic and personal circumstances. At the Old Bailey child defendants and child witnesses also came from a range of backgrounds and child victims of rape were no different. Class was not an issue where this kind of assault was concerned but child rape victims from the poorest homes rarely appeared in court and many cases must never have been brought to justice. John Fielding blamed mothers for this, stating that ‘offenders often go unpunished, for the maternal Tenderness of their Mothers either starved by their Necessities, or drowned in Gin; and, for a trifle, conceal and forgive an Offence, which our Laws have made capital.’¹⁸⁶ As in many instances of theft or assault, matters of sexual indecency were often dealt with informally by shaming assailants or forcing apology or payments. For the desperately poor this was the only viable alternative to an expensive legal system. The true rate of unreported sexual abuse of children from very poor families is extremely difficult to determine.

¹⁸⁵ McLynn, *Crime and Punishment*, p.107.

¹⁸⁶ BL Collection 11602gg28 quoted in Clark p.49.

The typical cost of bringing a prosecution for an assault or felony has been estimated at between 10 shillings and £1, and the minimum expenditure for a rape case seems to have been about £2.¹⁸⁷ This represented several months' wages for a poor family. No form of financial assistance was normally given and cases that were brought were 'presumably paid for by employers, friends, or relatives of the victim, or even by public-spirited doctors or magistrates'.¹⁸⁸ Additional expenses might accrue from examination by a midwife or doctor and the subpoena of a surgeon to give evidence in court. A mother, whose daughter had been in hospital following a sexual assault, told the court at the Old Bailey, 'Mr Gloster, the surgeon, examined her, but he would not come to give evidence without I subpoena'd him, and it was not in my power to subpoena him. I am a very poor woman'.¹⁸⁹ Another mother told the court, 'Mr. Kennedy refused to come here without I would give him some money. I am a poor woman, and could not afford it. I subpoena'd him and Mr. Kennedy has been with me and two other gentlemen, and offered me money to make it up, which I could not.'¹⁹⁰

Children involved in rape cases between 1700 and 1780 came from a range of backgrounds. Mary Martin, a child of thirteen whose father made nets for fishermen, was apprenticed by the parish of Barking. Jeremiah Amenet, her master, ill-treated her and sent her out during the day to sell periwinkles and crabs and at night to sell radishes. She told the court,

¹⁸⁷ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp. 41-48; Simpson, 'Perceptions', footnote 61.

¹⁸⁸ Simpson, 'Popular perceptions', para 70; 'Masculinity and Control: The Prosecution of Sex Offences in Eighteenth-Century London', (PhD thesis, New York University, 1984), p.293.

¹⁸⁹ OBP, 5 Dec 1770, Charles Earle (t17701205-39). Earle was acquitted but detained for trial for assault and attempted rape.

¹⁹⁰ OBP, 16 Sept 1778, James Larwill (t17780916-12).

I lived with the prisoner, who is a weaver. The first night I went there, he asked me to go to bed with him. I told him I would not. The next morning he was at his loom, weaving by the window and I was winding of quills. He asked me if he should lie with me. I said I would not; with that he chucked me upon the bed with all his force and did it.

Mary ran away to her cousin in Barking, who immediately went to the parish officer. The parish midwife found Mary had been sexually abused and the expenses of the subsequent trial at the Old Bailey were probably borne by the parish. Two fish women who knew Mary were there to give evidence of her good character.¹⁹¹ Ten year-old Mary Sherwin, a workhouse child, was raped by her father after a visit to Bartholomew Fair. The vestry clerk of St Sepulchre's appeared on her behalf and the doctor, who had been summoned to the workhouse, detailed the injuries she had received and the treatment he had administered for venereal disease. Mary's evidence in court offered a heartrending explanation for her lack of resistance: 'I said I would tell my mistress: he said if I did he would never come and see me any more'.¹⁹² Both these children were in parish care and parish officials appear to have provided them with support.

Ten year-old Catherine Black was raped in Newgate prison, where her mother was imprisoned for debt. On the day of the assault, she went to fetch a halfpenny candle but was stopped on a dark staircase and raped by Gerard Bourn. Aided and abetted by Jonas Penn, he raped her three more times before her mother discovered what had happened. At their trial, the surgeon told the court that he

¹⁹¹ OBP, 18 May 1774, Jeremiah Amenet (t17740518-43). Amenet was acquitted.

¹⁹² OBP, 13 Jan 1779, Philip Sherwin, (t17790113-36). Sherwin was found not guilty; *London Evening Post*, Dec 12-15, 1778.

found Catherine ‘abus’d to the utmost degree, the Parts being violently lacerated, contus’d, and inflam’d, and she pox’d in a miserable manner.’ Catherine was not considered capable of taking the oath, ‘but the Matter appearing so clear, in the Opinion of the Court, the Prisoners were, by Order of Court, to stand committed, and remain in Prison for this Fact till they do find Security for their good Behaviour for Seven Years’.¹⁹³ Again, a woman unable to pay for a court case must have relied on the authorities of Newgate to provide financial support.

Family lifestyle for the poor in the capital was one in which children were inevitably at risk. Many were sent out to nurse and became other people’s children. Jane East’s mother told the court, ‘I put my child to nurse with the prisoner’s wife as I am in service.’¹⁹⁴ Many more were apprenticed to masters in neighbouring parishes.¹⁹⁵ In the working environments of the poor, a master’s rights over his apprentices and domestic servants produced confusing situations and parents were often unable to protect their children. In a culture where beds were shared in both family homes and institutions, where apprentices slept in the same room as their masters, children were at risk. Thirteen year-old apprentice Ann Lockwood was assaulted by her master when his wife was away.¹⁹⁶ The text of *The Proceedings* summarized the ordeal of ten year-old Mary Mackneal, who was raped ‘in a Room up two pair of Stairs.’

¹⁹³ OBP, 16 Oct 1723, Gerard Bourn and Jonas Penn (t17231016-52). Bourn and Penn were found guilty.

¹⁹⁴ OBP, 16 Sept 1778, James Larwill (t17780916-12). Larwill was found not guilty.

¹⁹⁵ OBP, 13 July 1715, William Cash (t17150713-54); OBP, 13 July 1715, Daniel Bonnely (t17150713-35). Cash and Bonnely were acquitted.

¹⁹⁶ OBP, 6 Dec 1721, John Weston (t17211206-46). Weston was acquitted.

Sir John Murry threw her down on the Floor and whipt her, and them took her up in his Lap, and put her Hands behind him, and laid her Leg over his Thigh, and enter'd her Body as he sat in a Chair, her Face being towards him; and said she must not tell his Lady nor her Mother, threatening to put her in Gaol if she did; that she cry'd out but no body came.'¹⁹⁷

Urban living accommodation offered many places where rape could take place; cellars, garrets and houses that were empty while inhabitants were working. A woman, who shared a bed with ten year-old Catherine Masters in lodgings, held her down while a man raped her.¹⁹⁸ Nine year-old Elizabeth Salter claimed to have been assaulted by John Grimes who lived in the same tenement.¹⁹⁹ Children could be picked up playing in streets while their parents were working or while they were running errands. Children worked in adult spheres such as inns and alehouses or entered the bedrooms of lodgers so it is not surprising that most sexual assaults took place within a familiar household, often committed by someone known to the child, such as a family friend, fellow apprentice or schoolmaster. Mary O'Neal left her three young children with a regular visitor at her house, a Chelsea Pensioner, who assaulted one of them.²⁰⁰ Ten year-old Ann Mayne was raped by Rev Benjamin Russen, the headmaster of the charity school she attended.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ OBP, 25 Feb 1719, John Murry (t17190225-43). Murry was acquitted.

¹⁹⁸ OBP, 23 April 1707, Alice Gray (t17070423-26). Alice Gray was found guilty and sentenced to death.

¹⁹⁹ OBP, 30 May 1754, John Grimes (t1754 0530-1). Grimes was acquitted but detained for trial for assault and intent to rape.

²⁰⁰ OBP, 3 June 1767, Charles Brown, (t17670603-52). Brown was acquitted but detained for trial for assault and intent to rape.

²⁰¹ OBP 15 Oct 1777, Benjamin Russen (t17771015-1). Russen was found guilty and sentenced to death; for further comment see Gammon, 'Denial', pp.79-80.

Victims of child rape were not always poor apprentices or servants: some were children of employers and landlords. Apprentice master, Thomas Walgrave, whose three year-old daughter, Catherine, had been raped, told the court, 'I suspected the Prisoner, who was my Apprentice. I taxed him with abusing the Child, and he fell down upon his Knees, and owned he had abused her three Times for Satisfaction in his own lustful Way, in the Garret.'²⁰² Mary Holmes, aged five, was raped by her father's work colleague. Her mother told the court, 'My husband is a tailor, and so is the prisoner, he worked with us. On going out myself I have left the child for a day together in the prisoner's care. Our house being in a very by place, very few people come there.'²⁰³ Eight year-old Mary Brand, whose father was a barber, crossed the road from the public house where they lived to the dwelling directly opposite, which her father was hoping to rent out. Joe Payne, his apprentice, raped Mary there in the attic.²⁰⁴ Daughters of publicans were particularly vulnerable to men of lower class served by their parents.²⁰⁵ Seven year-old Jane Field's father kept a public house in Billingsgate, which William Stringer had used as a lodging house. He knew his way around and sexually assaulted Jane in the cellar.²⁰⁶ Edward Brophy was head waiter at *The New Goose and Gridiron* in St Paul's, a respectable tavern where a free masons' club met regularly. He sexually

²⁰² OBP, 17 Jan 1739, John Adamson (t17390117-11). Adamson was found guilty and sentenced to death. See also OBP, 16 Oct 1765, Samuel Tibbel (t17651016-2) a sixteen year-old apprentice who raped his master's daughter.

²⁰³ OBP, 24 April 1754, Hugh M'kave (t17540424-29). M'kave was found guilty.

²⁰⁴ OBP, 9 Sept 1767, Joseph Payne (t17670909-69). Payne was sentenced to death but was reprieved.

²⁰⁵ Anna Clark, p.42.

²⁰⁶ OBP, 13 April 1768, William Stringer, (t17680413-47). Stringer was acquitted but detained for trial for assault and intent to rape.

assaulted the publican's niece, Phillis Holmes, in one of the empty rooms.²⁰⁷

Elizabeth Sharpe, daughter of a publican, confided in a neighbour a week after being sexually assaulted. The neighbour told the court:

She colour'd, and burst out a-crying, and said I will tell you who it was if you won't tell my dada. I said I would not, but would tell her mama. She said it was Mr. Craige. I asked her who he was; she said, the man that work'd for her father. I asked her how he met with her; she said she was playing with some peas, tossing them up upon the bed, as she sat in the room playing with her doll. As she went to get some of the peas, he throw'd her upon the bed, and did something that hurt her, and pressed her so hard upon her belly that she could eat no victuals all next day.

Elizabeth's father gave evidence, saying, 'When I had taken the prisoner up, as I was going to the justice, he turned his head about and look'd at me. I said, How can you look me in the face after you have used me so ill, though I have been a father to you?'²⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

The quantitative survey of defendants and sentencing that opened this chapter suggested that the total number of child defendants aged 8 to 15 numbered about 150, of which 135 have been identified in the course of this research. The quantitative data for this period is inevitably not absolute, but by combining it with

²⁰⁷ OBP, 3 Sept 1766, Edward Brophy (t17660903-38). Brophy was found guilty and sentenced to death.

²⁰⁸ OBP, 3 July 1771, James Craige (t17710703-33). Craige was acquitted but detained for trial for assault and intent to rape.

an assessment of the qualitative information provided by the trials held at the Old Bailey, this chapter has attempted to gain an insight into the treatment of children during this period. Despite the occasional death sentence passed by the court, and recorded in the text of *The Proceedings*, no firm evidence has been found that any child between the ages of 8 and 15, apart from Henry Gadd, was hanged for theft. Whipping and branding, less severe punishments, were used more frequently, for young offenders. In the sample decades, all 21 defendants with age information and nearly a quarter of 'boys' and 'girls' who were acquitted had actually committed the crime for which they were indicted. These facts give clear indications that the court made substantial use of its discretion and showed some leniency and compassion towards children.

The survey of children's involvement with the criminal justice system brings us nearer to the lived experiences of defendants, witnesses and victims and enables us to set them in a broader context. As in the other chapters, our subjects were, for the most part, children from a wider range of backgrounds than might be assumed on the basis of the current historiography. This research has also demonstrated that questions can be asked and answered about the characteristics and circumstances of the children involved, using a predominantly qualitative methodology. Apart from a small number involved with criminal networks, most defendants were among the thousands of children of the poor in relatively stable households, in receipt of charity or in employment or apprenticeship. The most common item stolen by children was money, but their dealings with pawnbrokers and receivers show how poor children and their families used unlawful makeshift

strategies in an effort to remain solvent. Witnesses, as one might expect, came from a slightly wider range of backgrounds than defendants. They included children with criminal connections who betrayed one another to save themselves and children who were trustworthy apprentices going about their everyday business. Child victims of clothes theft tended to be unattended children, not necessarily the poorest, although many of the clothes stolen were not worth a great deal. The number of child victims of murder was very small, and these victims were, for the most part, the poorest and most vulnerable. Nevertheless, we need to be realistic in our assessment of these rare events. Looked at in a wider context, most deaths of children that resulted in murder trials were the result of misadventures or misfortunes that one would find in any society. Child rape victims again came from a range of social backgrounds, but many worked in adult situations where they were extremely vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

This thesis was concerned with the experiences of the children of the poor in London and viewed them against the backdrop of institutions where they were found in significant numbers. Essentially open-ended and source-led, this research placed these experiences in the forefront of the enquiry and drew on a variety of sources, some well-recognized and others largely unexplored, that had not previously been used in this way. Very little secondary material has been written about poor children in eighteenth-century London and this thesis was an exploratory survey in five specific areas, rather than a study with a narrowly-defined perspective in a well-documented area of historiography. The arguments emerged gradually and this research had some unexpected outcomes.

As the research progressed, it became clear that the characteristics and backgrounds of the children under investigation were quite different from those described in the mission statements and the rhetoric concerning the institutions that served them. Of much greater concern, was the realization that this rhetoric of social reform has been assimilated into the historiography of the capital, so giving us an unbalanced and inaccurate account of the characteristics and lives of these children. It also became clear that the current historiography provides a very limited assessment of the employment and apprenticeship of poor children in London, and of their role and treatment in the courts of the Old Bailey. In sum, the ‘children of the poor’ and their role in eighteenth-century London needed to be re-assessed.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this research was that concerning the occupations and trades of the parents of hundreds of Marine Society boys referred

to in the Introduction. The lists of employment clearly demonstrate that boys taking advantage of charity offered by the Marine Society came from a wide range of backgrounds and from a diverse assortment of districts across the capital. Their parents included skilled artisans and the literate as well as those in manual and labouring occupations. Their addresses ranged from those of rate-paying tenants or householders of modest tenements to those living in rents in the poorer districts of the capital. These lists provide a unique sample of hundreds of families from a larger and wider group of the labouring poor than is usually considered, a group whose levels of income varied and whose needs were complex and ever-changing. It is reasonable to conclude that there were many more families like them, and that children from these families were ‘the children of the poor in London’.

Chapter 1 examined the experiences of children in three workhouses that differed in size, location and the wealth of the parish. While the sources do not allow any one to be described as typical, the experience of poverty, adversity and privation for families with children or children on their own was shown to be similar wherever they were housed. Inmates included families from all levels of the labouring poor. Children whose parents had previously been employed and self-sufficient but now were sick or unable to cope with family commitments were admitted alongside children of those suffering long-term hardship. *Chelsea Admissions and Discharges Register* showed that members of the workhouse ‘family’ were predominantly women and children. In Chelsea workhouse a very small minority of children suffered permanent abandonment and most parents tried to retrieve their children at the earliest opportunity. Parish apprenticeships were

offered only to orphaned or long-term inmates there or to those admitted in order to become eligible for indentures financed by the parish of their parents' settlement. Over the course of fifty years, these three workhouses, like many others, gradually expanded their facilities to meet increasing demand. The benefit of temporary respite in a workhouse or acceptance of outdoor relief was part of an economy of makeshift for very poor families, while they re-established themselves after sickness or found employment following economic problems or personal disaster.

This thesis was primarily concerned with the children of the poor, their identities, their lives and their experiences rather than with the institutions that served them, but the general nature of these institutions, their original stated purpose and their everyday functioning and management did emerge from the research. The overall impression gained was that the workhouses studied were not deliberately unpleasant or coercive institutions but were largely administered by parish officers with humanity and concern. While standards of hygiene and cleanliness sometimes fell below the level hoped for by the authorities and expected by inmates, the services offered were much needed and sought by a fluid population of the labouring poor and their children. Supplies of clothing in all three workhouses were distributed generously, while specific facilities for work and education for children were determined by the size of the institution. The births, admissions and discharges recorded in the *Chelsea Admissions and Discharges Register* do not concur with Jonas Hanway's grim assessment of the mortality-rates of young children in London's workhouses and his selected figures raise issues that may never be resolved. By the 1770s, the mortality-rate of young children in

workhouses was well below those recorded for the Bills of Mortality and in some workhouses was below that rate years earlier. Given Hanway's proclivity for exaggeration in order to goad authorities into action or to raise money, the mortality-rate may not have been quite as horrific as he claimed and his assessment should perhaps be regarded with skepticism. Children undoubtedly died in workhouses but the lack of knowledge about medicine and hygiene must have been the principal cause of many deaths of young children both inside and outside eighteenth-century institutions.

For poor families and children in their own right seeking outdoor relief, services in a range of London parishes seem to have been both comprehensive and generous. Careful inquiries made before relief was given and instances of relief refused or withdrawn seem typical of the kind of strategy one would expect to find in any welfare system. As far as children were concerned, no evidence was found that parish officials were deliberately coercive, corrupt or excessively parsimonious.

Workhouses were originally conceived as 'nurseries' for the poor, who were seen as idle, irreligious and corrupt: religion was to be the means of reforming and disciplining them. In the three workhouses studied, there was no evidence that families or children conformed to this stereotype. Inmates included both the destitute and members of a fluid population of those needing temporary support for themselves or their children, who were admitted once and, as far as we know, never returned. Most parents admitted were sick and were discharged as soon as they were capable of finding work. Workhouse inmates attended church on Sundays, children recited the catechism, and daily prayers were part of the workhouse regime

but it is impossible to say how much influence religion had on those admitted to the institutions. It is likely that the general tone and atmosphere of each workhouse depended on the goodwill and co-operation between officials and inmates, and that most paupers and their children were more concerned with their immediate situation on earth than their future prospects in heaven. For parish officials providing welfare, the original philosophy of the SPCK may well have been subsumed by the everyday concerns of dealing with workhouse inmates experiencing a multitude of problems. The characteristics of those admitted must have rendered the initial desire to see both adults and children in workhouses reformed, disciplined and 'bred to labour & industry, virtue & religion' largely irrelevant.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that the background and characteristics of children who attended London's charity schools were at odds with the mission statements of the institutions. It argued that while parish worthies setting up schools may have imagined they would be taking disruptive children off the streets, in practice they provided education for children of the settled industrious poor, whose parents were able to maintain them in full-time education and who competed for a limited number of places. Very poor children were not encouraged and the majority of charity school pupils were selected 'objects of charity', deemed worthy of admission on the basis of their parents' honesty and industriousness. Children in a number of schools were already literate when they were admitted. As the schools became established, trustees took pride in them and in the pupils they had recommended. The balance in the curriculum between literacy and labour changed according to the mood-swings of the day, until literacy gradually took precedence.

This chapter suggested that poor parents saw literacy as an important asset in an increasingly industrialized and commercial society and that this was one of the main reasons for their seeking education for their children. Charity school pupils who stayed on until they were about fourteen often went into apprenticeships or service financed or approved by the schools. These children were more highly regarded than parish apprentices and many became the valued apprentices and domestic servants of the middling sort and even of the elite. Contrary to *The Charity School Movement*, the standard work on charity schools by M.G. Jones, the pupils of the twenty London charity schools explored in this thesis were clearly not ‘the scum of the parish’.

Chapter 3 examined the experiences of Marine Society recruits and the *Registers of Boys sent as Servants on the King’s Ships* were found to be the most useful and significant documents from the Marine Society archive for this purpose. These registers offered a wealth of information about the boys and their backgrounds, including information that linked them to the workhouses, schools and parishes from which they came. Just as Chapter 2 argued that the characteristics and backgrounds of charity school children were at odds with the schools’ mission statements, so Chapter 3 argued that the backgrounds of the boys using the Marine Society were at odds with the Society’s advertising rhetoric written by Jonas Hanway. In this case the disparity arose for different reasons. The sudden rise in philanthropic activity in the 1740s based on Christian principles found its first practical expression in the Foundling Hospital, and the following two decades saw the blossoming of other charities aimed specifically at children. The establishment

of the Marine Society in 1756 was, in Hanway's words, 'important and timely', providing useful service to the nation during the Seven Years' War.¹ Effective fund-raising was vital if new charities were to succeed and during the 1750s and 60s, donations were raised by personal contact and networking, sermons, charity dinners, theatrical and musical events. Every charity had to prove its worth and there was significant competition, as 'squabbling' and 'ridiculous feuds' testified.² Hanway recognized the importance of persuading prospective donors of the merits of the Marine Society and, using a two-fold argument, he claimed the Society would not only provide recruitment for the navy but would also 'purge the streets of London' of dissolute youths with criminal tendencies. The combination of these two arguments guaranteed support. Even though the Society in private soon acknowledged that recruits came from a range of backgrounds, Hanway continued to play on elite concerns about law and order, using the same rhetoric and advertising propaganda in subsequent decades to ensure that the Marine Society continued to function. Charities today, competing for sponsorship and donations, also present poignant photographs and carefully selected information to attract contributions. The existence of a competitive market for charitable donations in eighteenth-century London resulted in the exaggerated rhetoric concerning, not only the destitution and criminal tendencies of recruits of the Marine Society, but also the overstated and embellished characteristics of the girls of the Lambeth Orphan Asylum and the Magdalene Hospital.

¹ Jonas Hanway, *A Letter from a Member of the Marine Society Shewing the Generosity and Utility of Their Design* (London, 1757), p.26.

² Donna Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1989), p.127.

London boasted a unique range of charities created for the benefit of children, and poor families took advantage of the new services on offer. Those who were destitute or needed temporary support accepted parish relief, those who were eligible took advantage of places for their children at London's charity schools, and a wide range of families from the industrious poor sent their sons to sea with the Marine Society. The parents making strategic use of parish welfare and the new charities had a range of incomes and dealt with their economic or personal circumstances in different ways. Individuals and groups of children were found with links to more than one institution, illustrating how relationships were forged between parishes and charities, and between one charity and another. A number of workhouse children and war orphans, identified by name in two sets of records, were transferred from workhouses to the Foundling Hospital. Limited numbers of children from workhouses were accepted by certain charity schools. Large groups of boys and individuals from 34 named workhouses, 10 named charity schools and the Foundling Hospital went to sea as recruits of the Marine Society. Transfers from one institution to another meant that services were increasingly integrated and charities began to develop strong relationships with one another. Services that had ostensibly been set up to handle the destitute, in fact, served children from a wider range of backgrounds. By the end of the century, thousands of poor children had taken advantage of the variety of welfare, educational and training opportunities available in London. Children of both the settled poor and of those who were destitute were able to access a relatively high level of support.

Apprenticeship has often been seen as a life-changing experience. Dorothy George placed great emphasis on the hardships and cruelty suffered by poor apprentices and her descriptions, taken largely from sessions papers, reflected a system clearly open to abuse. Some poor children suffered hardship and even death at the hands of cruel masters, but by highlighting the worst cases of abuse among parish apprentices, the most vulnerable children, George inadvertently created the impression that they constituted a much larger proportion of poor children than the 2 per cent eligible for indentures paid for by the parish. While acknowledging the harsh conditions and misery endured by these most vulnerable children, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate the far wider range of work opportunities and apprenticeships available for poor children in London, and to restore a balance to George's account.

The wide range of casual work undertaken by Marine Society boys prior to enrolment was the starting point of Chapter 4. This offered a new perspective on child employment and provided strong indications that many more boys of similar backgrounds were likely to have been employed in London. The range of employment and involvement in trade, quite often with a parent or relative, showed the contribution young boys made in a society gradually becoming industrialized but still retaining many small workshops. Children who undertook some form of casual employment gained knowledge of the working world and the kind of conditions they might expect in the workplace or apprenticeship.

It is difficult to generalise about the casual work and apprenticeships undertaken by children: conditions of work and adult employers varied enormously.

Both parishes and charity schools apprenticed children with low indenture fees, but while parish children received little training and were at risk of exploitation and abuse, charity school children were placed with more care and, as far as we know, experienced fewer serious problems. Foundling Hospital children were apprenticed with selected and vetted masters and most seem to have settled without complaint, although as numbers increased and the Hospital's system of monitoring came under strain, serious mistakes were made. Children taught specific trades at the Bridewell apprentice school seem to have valued their training, encouraged by the prospect of monetary gifts available at the end of their time. Over an eighty-year period, only a handful of Bridewell boys left the school to take up apprenticeships elsewhere.

The apprenticeship system was problematic in all its forms, in many ways unsatisfactory for both apprentice and master. Although large numbers of poor children continued to take formal indentures throughout the eighteenth century, the system was generally in decline and not all children readily accepted their role. Within the brief window of time available to them, parish children sent on trial had the opportunity to transgress rules created by adults. By a variety of means some tried to negotiate with parish authorities by misbehaving, running away or protesting about their master's treatment or reputation. Although it is not always possible to tell at whose request a trial period was terminated, this research found enough evidence to suggest that poor children were not always pawns in a game of chance and that a minority had agency and authority, in measure and in combination with their parents. These children were not backward in expressing

this agency and some negotiated with the authorities, particularly in relationship to apprenticeship, trying to exercise some control over their lives.

Research for Chapter 4 also suggested that a substantial number of poor children were never apprenticed, but continued in casual work, hired by the year or paid a weekly wage. This underlines the extent to which apprenticeship was less common among the communities of the poor than the legalities and the historiography make it appear. Childhood experiences of work described in the settlement examinations of Chelsea parish showed that work experiences varied and that those who completed their apprenticeship had no guarantee of future employment in their trade. For some poor children apprenticeship was a period in their lives that bore little relationship to what followed. In the Chelsea examinations, those receiving support from the parish in childhood were rarely the same members of society applying for relief in later life. This complements the argument made in Chapter 1 that any member of the poor community could fall into abject poverty and that those receiving parish relief were members of a fluid poor population with complex needs. The Chelsea settlement examinations provide one set of figures on childhood experiences of work and apprenticeship and more research is needed before generalizations can be made. Finally, Chapter 4 used the 'Registers of Girl Apprentices under Hicks's Trust' belonging to the Marine Society to show that while poor parents from a range of backgrounds used the charity to send their sons to sea, they preferred to employ their daughters at home, rather than accept apprenticeships in trades, even with indenture fees of £10.

Chapter 5 examined the experiences of children in relation to the criminal justice system, a topic that has received very little attention from historians for the period of this thesis. *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey* was used to explore the experiences of those who fell foul of the law or were victims or witnesses of crime. Despite the fact that age information was not given routinely prior to the 1790s, *The Proceedings* does record a substantial number of ages of children and this research managed to trace roughly 90 per cent of the estimated 150 child defendants with age information for the period from 1700 to 1780. Two sample decades of defendants were used to create statistics but, inevitably, these could not be absolute and were recorded simply as a way of understanding the evidence that is available.

Death sentences served on children has long been a subject of debate among historians and in this thesis a comparison was made between the names of children whose death sentences were recorded in *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey* and the names on transportation lists. 18 child defendants with age information between the ages of 8 and 15 were found, who were sentenced to death between 1700 and 1780, but who were in fact transported. This research found no firm evidence that any child between the ages of aged 8 and 15, apart from one member of a criminal gang, was hanged for theft during this period. Sentencing using the less severe punishments of whipping and branding was used more frequently for young offenders than for adults, and during the two sample decades all 21 defendants with age information and nearly a quarter of the 'boys' and 'girls' who were acquitted had actually committed the crime for which they were indicted. This evidence

offers clear indications that the court made substantial use of its discretion and showed some leniency and compassion towards children.

This research found that for the period of this thesis *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey* could be used to draw only very broad quantitative conclusions about the lives of children involved with the criminal justice system but was an excellent qualitative source. As such, it produced a wealth of background information about the children who appeared in court as defendants, victims and witnesses of crime. It showed that apart from a small number involved with criminal networks, defendants were a very small minority of the thousands of children of the poor who lived in London. They came from a variety of poor and very poor backgrounds; some had grown up in relatively stable households, others were in receipt of charity or were in casual employment or apprenticeship. These children were not, for the most part, delinquent street children or members of criminal gangs of the type described in Marine Society propaganda. Many were poor children who had been tempted to steal from their employers or workplaces. Money was the most common item stolen and *The Proceedings* shows how some poor children and their families used unlawful makeshift strategies in an effort to remain solvent. Witnesses came from a wider range of backgrounds and included trusted, articulate apprentices as well as a few children with criminal connections who betrayed one another to save themselves. Child victims of clothes theft varied in social background but some of the garments stolen were worth very little. The majority of those who stole clothing from children were women. The number of children murdered during the period of this thesis was very small and victims tended to be the poorest and most vulnerable

children. Indictments for child rape were relatively common during the eighteenth century, although the number of defendants found guilty was very small. Victims came from a range of social backgrounds and, like most poor children at the time, had to work or live in situations where they were extremely vulnerable.

For the children of the poor who lived in London, life had no common pattern. Children varied both in the extent of their education and in the age at which they entered casual or regular employment or apprenticeship. Taking this investigation as a whole, it is reasonable to conclude that the experiences of eighteenth-century children of the poor in London were varied and uneven, but that their treatment in institutions, in most apprenticeships and even in the court of the criminal justice system was not characterized by unthinking brutality, but by the range of emotional responses and engagements that one would expect to find in any population. In cases of excessive abuse and scandalous cases of sexual crime, high-profile reporting in the press may have reflected a growing intolerance of such behaviour.

The picture of London and its poor inhabitants that emerged from this research is strikingly different from that generally portrayed in the historiography of the capital. Long-standing notions of a squalid, vice-ridden city, viewed from the perspective of subsequent progress and enlightenment, have gained a currency that has coloured our every perception. Dorothy George's *London Life* is the much quoted foundation of this literature and together with William Hogarth's prints, peppering the pages of most histories of the capital, continues to provide the

dominant interpretation and image of the lives of poor Londoners. These negative images reflect much contemporary eighteenth-century elite commentary. London generated both excitement and anxiety among the elite and while many praised the capital's new world of luxury, others, voicing fears and concerns about the growth of the 'monster' city, denigrated it as overflowing with idle inhabitants, destabilized by crime and disorder, and in danger of running headlong into chaos. Both artists and journalists offered their own perspectives on life in the capital. From about 1720 until 1751, the 'gin epidemic' was increasingly associated with a wide range of social ills and at the height of the perceived crisis, Hogarth created three sets of prints that included children from 'the lower orders' gambling and sipping gin.³ These prints had a 'hard-hitting, propagandist agenda' and complemented the writings of Hogarth's friend, Henry Fielding, London's chief magistrate from the 1740s.⁴ Fielding's *Inquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase in Robbery* of 1751 highlighted drunkenness and depicted the majority of the poor migrating to the capital as idle and profligate, eschewing hard work in favour of more lucrative criminal activities, while his *Covent Garden Journal* provided a comic counterpoint to his judicial warnings. All these prints and pamphlets are, on the one hand, propagandist and confrontational, dealing deliberately in extremes and, on the other, satirical and entertaining; the works, in one instance, of 'a writer of comedy with a pencil' and in the other, perhaps the eighteenth century's greatest picaresque

³ William Hogarth, *Industry and Idleness*, *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street*, and *The Four Stages of Cruelty*.

⁴ Christine Riding, 'Crime and Punishment', in Mark Hallett and Christine Riding, *Hogarth* (London, 2007) p.181.

novelist.⁵ Hogarth's prints and Fielding's journalism were born out of upper class paranoia and together with the rhetoric of Jonas Hanway have created a vision of a dystopian London. This has echoed down the years and has been absorbed into the historiography of the capital from Dorothy George onwards.

Dorothy George herself, writing at a time when abstinence from alcohol and the signing of the pledge were commonplace, was clearly appalled by the 'gin epidemic' in the first half of the eighteenth century. From her meticulous research, she carefully selected sources relating to the consumption of gin, particularly those showing its effect on women and children, and used them to create a lurid narrative of the 'orgies of spirit-drinking', a phrase she used three times.⁶ In her view, the great gin-drinking years were 'a tragic episode', and the Act of 1751, which increased prices and so resulted in a reduction of spirit-drinking, was 'a turning-point in the social history of London'.⁷ Clearly, there was a serious drink problem in the capital but it is a problem unlikely to have been depicted quite so graphically by historians today.⁸ In his study of the 'Mother Gin' controversy, Peter Clark noted that the famous story of a dram-shop with the sign, 'Drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two pence' was 'discredited as apocryphal soon after it appeared', and he argued that 'the spirits trade was more limited in its scale and conventional in its

⁵ Walpole, Horace, *Anecdotes on Painting in England* (London, 1780), quoted in Riding, 'Introducing Hogarth: Past and Present', in *Hogarth*, p.33.

⁶ D.George, pp.41, 42, 51.

⁷ D.George, pp.49, 54.

⁸ This research found only one reference to a female workhouse inmate in St Margaret's Westminster being punished for being drunk and disorderly - WCA, E2633, 7 Mar 1727. **See page** Drunkenness was not cited in connection with any admissions to the workhouse and did not feature anywhere else in this study.

organization than alarmist propagandists asserted'.⁹ While Dorothy George maintained that the high levels of infant mortality between 1720 and 1751 were attributable to the consumption of gin,¹⁰ Clark suggests that they were 'mainly associated with endemic levels of smallpox and typhus', while adult mortality rates at the time 'remained relatively stable.' The 1751 Act had some impact and consumption fell sharply, but by mid-century it was the brewing industry, now marketing a new high-quality beer, that changed fashions in drinking habits and 'finally brought "Mother Gin" to her knees.'¹¹

Dorothy George also painted a vivid and shocking picture of eighteenth-century London with its ruinous houses and tenements, multitudes of deserted children, vagrants living and sleeping in brickfields and women starving to death in empty rooms.¹² Disease, destitution and death were everyday experiences among the very poor of eighteenth-century London, and, indeed, among the wider communities of the poor, who were also vulnerable, as applications for parish relief at workhouse doors and at settlement examinations testify. Research for this thesis found countless examples of families and children from all levels in misery and distress and explored some of the reasons for this. The fatherless and children of single, widowed or deserted women can be found in every chapter of this thesis. But the horrific images portrayed in Hogarth's satire and Fielding's rhetoric and the evidence put forward by Dorothy George present a view of London's poor that is

⁹ Peter Clark, 'The "Mother Gin" Controversy in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Ser., Vol.38 (1988), pp.71. See also Jonathan White,

¹⁰ D.George, p.41, quoting Maitland, *History of London* (1756), p.115.

¹¹ P.Clark, p.72, 84. See also Jonathan White, "The 'Slow but Sure Poyson': The Representation of Gin and its Drinkers, 1737-1751," *Journal of British Studies* 42/1 (2003), pp.35-64.

¹² D.George, pp. 83, 55, 105, 173.

biased, partial and misleading. Such a view takes no account of the hardworking lives of the settled poor and portrays their children in a far worse light than the reality of their experiences demonstrates.

In 1994, as noted in the Introduction, Peter Earle appealed to historians to recognize the reality of the lives of poor Londoners, who ‘were not entirely devoted to booze, sex and vice’, and did not spend all their time ‘in taverns or being jostled in the streets’, but ‘lived or tried to live hard-working, respectable lives’. His plea has been largely ignored. On the basis of research into the experiences of thousands of poor children and their families, this thesis re-iterates that plea, attempting to offer a more balanced appraisal and appreciation of the lives and experiences of poor children and their families, a balance that is missing from the historiography of London.

This thesis aimed to show normality, ordinariness and typicality and the sources demonstrated that the lives of the majority of London families were, as indeed they are for the majority of people today, work-orientated and mundane. For eighteenth-century men and women struggling to raise a family, daily life was dominated by the hard labour necessary to earn a meagre wage and by makeshift measures used to retain their independence. Moving to cheaper lodgings, using pawn broking facilities, thrift in the purchase of food and clothing, and application for private charity were all options available to poor families not destitute enough to be eligible for parish relief. Sending a son to sea with the Marine Society or seeking yearly-hired or weekly-paid employment for their children or an informal apprenticeship with a local tradesman without an indenture fee were all strategies

used by the settled and industrious poor. Most relied on occasional support of relatives, friends and neighbours. For some, trying to maintain independence from the parish was a priority, while for others parish relief provided an essential life-line.

This thesis has shown that many more children in London contributed to the family budget by casual work in a wide range of urban trades, a fact that has not previously been fully recognized. Some worked for parents or relatives in the small workshops and businesses that were still common in the capital, while others laboured in the rope grounds and brick yards of the East End, acted as draw boys for weavers, drew beer or ran errands. Girls, who were more difficult to employ in casual work, often helped at home with household tasks or child-minding before entering service. All these activities reflect the everyday routines of life in eighteenth-century London.

This more balanced view of the metropolis complements the growth of an increasingly industrialized, commercial and thriving city, where thousands of hardworking men, women and children provided the labour and services to make this growth and development possible. If London's poor had been as disorderly, drunk and debauched as the rhetoric of reform and the historiography suggests, the capital would have been engulfed in anarchy and chaos. Portraying vice is easier than portraying virtue and people behaving badly will always find an audience. Television companies, and indeed historians today, revel in portraying the ignominy and vice of eighteenth-century London, but these were simply elements of a much

broader canvas, perhaps less exciting, but nearer to the everyday experiences of the labouring poor.

This thesis argued that the deep-seated prejudices of the elite, clearly evident in the rhetoric of eighteenth-century social reform, misrepresented and denigrated the children of the poor. Prejudices of this kind were long-standing and can be traced back over centuries, but the articulation and dissemination of these prejudices was distinctive in the eighteenth century. From the writings of John Bellers to the propaganda of Jonas Hanway on behalf of the Marine Society, the rhetoric of social reform referred to London's poor children in derogatory terms.¹³ The stated purpose of workhouses and the mission statements of charity schools demonstrate how denigration of the poor became common parlance, not only among the elite, but also among the middling-sort. The widespread use of this kind of terminology was attributable, in large measure, to the growth of printed material available in the public domain. This writing and publishing embraced a public obsessed with all things new, and opinion was manipulated and moulded in a new way. The new daily newspapers, fast becoming the dominant form of print culture, stressed the sensational, with debate and comment that was devoured avidly by the literate and read aloud in the coffee houses and taverns of the capital. Pamphlets, periodicals, published letters and sermons provided a glut of material easily accessible to the public. The discourses of Hale and Defoe, the religious pamphlets

¹³ John Bellers, Quaker and social reformer, in putting forward his ideas for a College of Industry, described London's poor children as those 'brought up to trades of begging and stealing ... from babyhood, they contracted the evil habits which prepared them for the "hangman's harvest"', *Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry* (London, 1695), p.11.

of the SPCK, the mocking tones of Mandeville and the cynicism of Ned Ward all influenced and contributed to elite attitudes and the mood swings of the day. At mid-century, emotive sermons, delivered with passion and verve on behalf of new charities, were circulated in pamphlet form and played significant roles in their publicity campaigns. Print culture provided Hanway and the Fieldings, foremost among social reforming propagandists, with a public arena from which to propagate information and misinformation. Visual communication in popular prints offered complementary images, highlighting but exaggerating problems, fuelling elite doubts and fears and persuaded them of the need for control and social reform among the poor. Society's elite and the middling-sort shared similar concerns as, caught up in the moral and social arguments of the day, they pondered and discussed the perceived problems of the children of the poor, 'the Warts and Wens of the Body Politic', those who were 'worthless, incorrigible and abandoned'. This misrepresentation and denigration of the poor, inherent to the eighteenth-century literature of social reform, has been absorbed into the historiography of the capital. This thesis has attempted to separate the reality of the lives and experiences of the children of the poor from that rhetoric.

This thesis claimed that recent historiography has given us an inaccurate account of the functioning of charitable institutions aimed at children. By focusing on their experiences, it shed new light on the way in which these institutions operated and how they were used by poor children and their families. This thesis suggested that for the period 1700 to 1780 the historiography of London has provided a limited assessment both of the employment and apprenticeship of poor

children, and of the nature of their experiences within the criminal justice system. Using sources primarily concerned with children, it accessed new information about their casual employment in London, and examined the nature of apprenticeships available to poor children in the capital. By using trials involving child defendants, witnesses and victims from *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, this thesis found new material both on the backgrounds of children who appeared before the court, and on their sentencing and treatment at the Old Bailey. In sum, this thesis explored the lives and experiences of the children of the poor in London, showing that they have a compelling and significant story to tell and that their contribution to eighteenth-century society has been wildly under-estimated.

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