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**NAVY COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES IN THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF THE GREAT CENTRAL  
RAILWAY LONDON EXTENSION, 1894-1900**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The Great Central Railway holds particular meaning for me for two reasons. Firstly, I am old enough to remember the line in its final years of operation. Secondly, and more importantly, family connections with the line go back several generations. As such, I owe a debt of gratitude to my late father and grandfather for awakening a lifelong interest in, and affection for, the line.

In undertaking the research for this thesis, I am grateful for the assistance given to me by the staff of the National Archives, Lambeth Palace Library, the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, Oxford History Centre, Northamptonshire Record Office, Nottinghamshire Archives, and Warwickshire County Record Office. Thanks are also due to the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland for permission to reproduce images from the Newton collection, all rights in respect of which are held by Leicestershire County Council.

I would like to express especial thanks to my supervisor Professor Carolyn Steedman for her patient, insightful and expert help over the last five years. Finally, I am appreciative of the interest shown in this project, and assistance provided, by members of my family.

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines navvy communities and families at the very end of the nineteenth century against the backdrop of the construction of a specific railway line running through the centre of England: the Great Central Railway London Extension. Although navvies have been subjected to a number of previous studies, this thesis seeks to situate their experiences within the context of late nineteenth century working-class society. It analyses the concept of community in relation to the mainly itinerant workers and their dependents, and explores the role of difference in terms of lifestyle and culture, together with shared experiences, and how these may have helped to define identity.

Navvies were still considered by many contemporaries to be somewhat disreputable, isolated and neglected, and thus, at the margins of society. This notion is assessed by reference to their encounters with the various agencies of the Victorian state and voluntary and religious sectors including the police and judiciary, the poor law, the education system, health services and Christian home missionary endeavour. A central theme of the thesis is the importance attached to perceptions of the navvy community. Attention is devoted to the manner in which such perceptions were created, and in particular on the role of literary representations of the navvy. These perceptions often shaped the initial response of local residents to the influx of the workforce, but they were challenged and frequently amended as a result of direct contact. An argument is also advanced that a crucial pointer to the way in which the incomers were regarded and treated was the degree to which they conformed to accepted social norms, not least being that related to respectability.



## **Abbreviations**

BPP – British Parliamentary Papers

TNA - The National Archives.

LPL - Lambeth Palace Library.

RecOLR - Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

MRC – Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

NRO - Northamptonshire Record Office.

OHC – Oxford History Centre

NottA - Nottinghamshire Archives.

WRO – Warwickshire County Record Office.

## INTRODUCTION

‘His class is one of the most neglected in the commonwealth: he is a Bedouin on English soil, creating great works ... One hundred thousand specimens of “humanity in the rough” wander up and down the United Kingdom from one public work to another’, is how one commentator, described the collective body of the country’s navvies in 1905.<sup>1</sup> An apt description it would seem noting as it does the navvy’s itinerant lifestyle, a degree of marginalisation, and in stressing ‘humanity in the rough’, making reference to the men’s apparent rough edges, but also, and perhaps more subtly, indicating the hard physical nature of their labours. The quotation postdates by only a few years the completion of the railway line that forms the background to this thesis, the Great Central Railway London Extension, and provides a link with perceptions of the navvy stretching back to the peak of railway construction in the mid years of the nineteenth century and forward into the twentieth century. Given that the navvy was intrinsically linked with major civil engineering projects, itinerancy was a fact of life for many, reflecting as it did the nature of such work. It was of limited duration which for many meant a short period of residency in a given area before the demands of securing future employment compelled migration. Above all, navvies earned a reputation for disreputable behaviour which engendered suspicion and perhaps even fear in some quarters, and provides a ready explanation as to why collectively they might have been considered as outcasts. These characteristics, together with a more recent assumption that implies overwhelming Irish ethnicity, have ensured an enduring and increasingly stereotypical image of the hard drinking, lawless and godless navvy. This in itself is something of a

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<sup>1</sup> Felix Baker, ‘England’s Bedouins’, *Good Words*, 46 (1905), p. 351.

contradiction given that the Irish, with their widespread adherence to the Catholic faith, are rarely considered to be godless.

With the construction of a specific railway line as a background, this thesis looks afresh at railway construction workers. Unlike previous studies, however, which have tended to concentrate exclusively on the men, I extend the coverage to include aspects of community and family life which shifts the focus where possible upon women and children in their families. Using these themes I challenge the emphasis of earlier scholarship which has all too often viewed this social grouping in isolation; I seek to situate it within the wider experience of the late nineteenth century working-class. Given that my research is delineated by the course of the railway it is essentially regional in character and concentrates on the areas through which the main part of the line passed, namely, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire.

## **I Antecedents of the London Extension and its Subsequent History**

Although the railway line is of interest in its own right, and aspects of its construction and specific locations on or in close proximity to the route will be a recurring feature throughout the thesis, I am not writing a railway history. In consequence, I deliberately provide only a brief summary of the line's antecedents and subsequent history. This is solely to give a degree of context.

The line was known initially as the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire (MS&L) Railway London Extension, however, the company adopted the name Great Central in 1897 deeming this to be more befitting a route with the aspiration of running trains through the centre of England to the capital. The route, some ninety-five miles in length, was the last main line to be built in England with construction

being undertaken between 1894 and 1899. It ran from Annesley just north of Nottingham, through Nottingham, Loughborough, Leicester and Rugby, and thence through a predominantly rural environment until connecting to the existing Metropolitan Railway at Quainton Road in Buckinghamshire (see Figure 0.1). Within the metropolis a short line was constructed from the Metropolitan to reach a new terminus at Marylebone. For construction purposes seven contracts were awarded within three divisional areas: the Northern Division comprising contracts one to three (Annesley to Rugby) with Edward Parry as engineer in charge; the Southern Division comprising contracts four to six (Rugby to Quainton Road); and the Metropolitan Division comprising contract seven (Cranfield Gardens to Marylebone). The last two divisions were under the superintendence of noted civil engineers Sir Douglas Fox and Francis Fox.<sup>2</sup> My interest also extends to a short eight mile link that connected the Great Central at Woodford Halse with the Great Western Railway at Banbury constructed between 1897 and 1900.

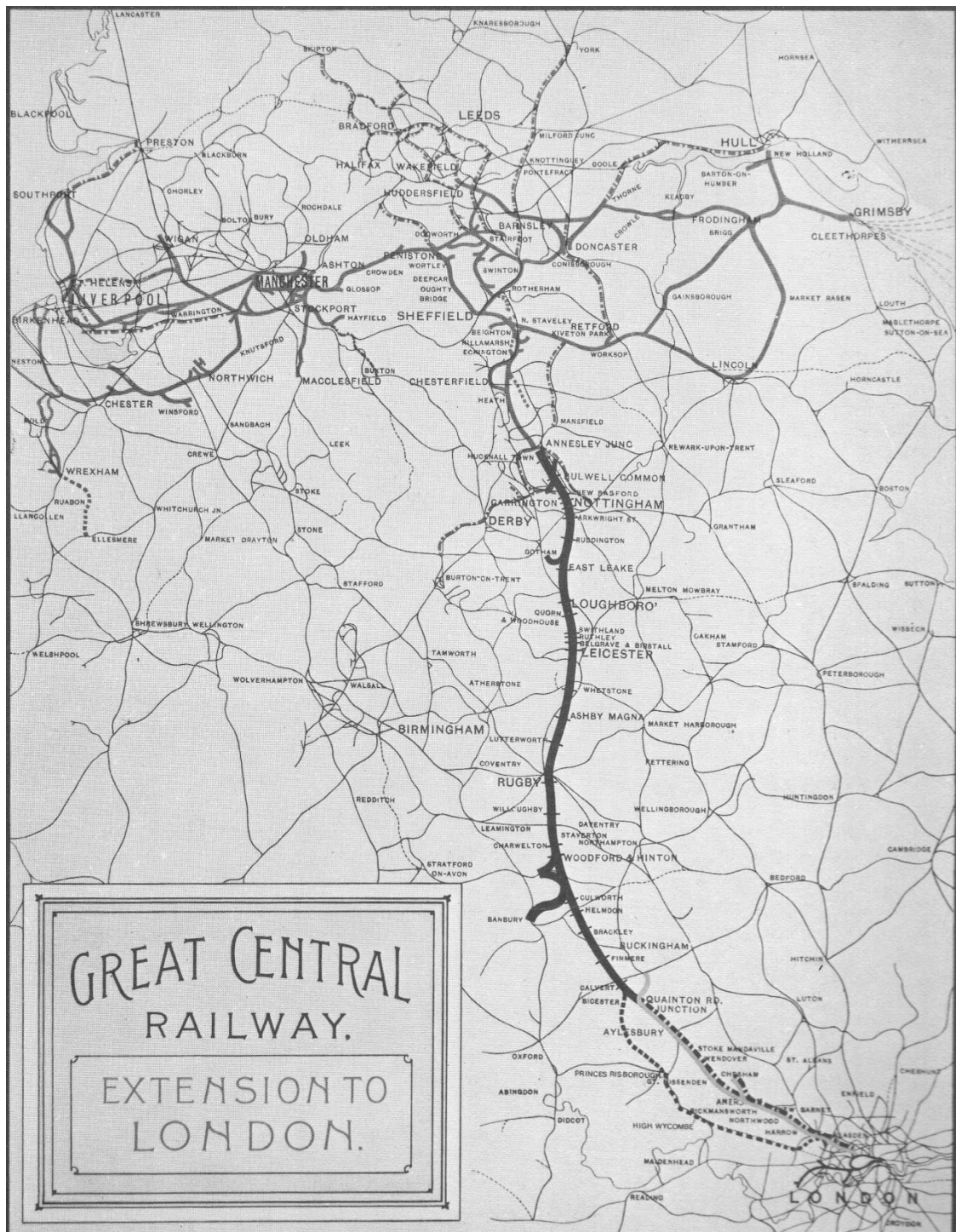
Given that the line was a very late addition to the railway network, combined with the fact that the major centres of Nottingham, Loughborough, Leicester and Rugby were already served by competing railway companies, the London Extension was disadvantaged in its efforts to establish a foothold in terms of traffic and thus, failed to maintain a consistent revenue stream. For this reason it has been labelled a foolhardy, even a ‘reckless’<sup>3</sup>, scheme, driven in large part by the ambitions of one man, Sir Edward Watkin, chairman of the MS&L until 1894. The final cost of the railway amounted to £11.5M against earlier capital and borrowing powers of £8.2M.

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<sup>2</sup> Ralph Freeman, ‘Fox, Sir (Charles) Douglas (1840-1921)’, *Revd Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> (11 December 2014).

<sup>3</sup> David Turnock, *An Historical Geography of Railways in Great Britain and Ireland* (Aldershot, 1998), p. 20.

Figure 0.1: Map of Great Central Railway London Extension



Source: L. T. C. Rolt, *The Making of a Railway* (reprint, London, 1979).

A significant proportion of this cost overrun was caused by compensation payments for land and property acquired, and the fact that the company was obliged to construct houses for workpeople to replace those demolished in the vicinity of the London terminus as well as in both Leicester and Nottingham.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless in engineering terms, the line was planned and constructed to a very high standard, ‘a late masterpiece, showing ... the lessons of the past had been profitably learnt’.<sup>5</sup> It is a matter of some debate as to whether or not Watkin envisaged the London Extension as the main element in a grand enterprise to run trains from the north of England, through London and on to Paris via a Channel Tunnel.<sup>6</sup> What is clear is his determination to transform what was previously a provincial railway serving parts of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire into a major trunk route. The Great Central lost its independent status when absorbed into the London and North Eastern Railway at the grouping of 1923, and in 1948 became part of the nationalised network under the auspices of British Railways. By the 1950s the perception that the line represented a duplicate main line that was inferior to the ex-Midland Railway routes linking Sheffield, Nottingham and Leicester with St Pancras was firmly established. As a result, the 1963 report *The Reshaping of British Railways*, colloquially known as the Beeching Report after the then chairman of the British Railways Board, Dr Richard Beeching, earmarked the line for closure as a through route.<sup>7</sup> This came on the 3rd of September 1966, less than seventy years after its opening.

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<sup>4</sup> George Dow, *Great Central, Volume Two: Dominion of Watkin, 1864-1899* (3rd edn, Shepperton, 1985), pp. 279, 287.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Simmons, *The Railway in England and Wales 1830-1914* (Leicester, 1978), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Both Robin Leleux and Harold Pollins support the view that the ultimate aim of Watkin was to establish a route to the continent. More recently, Grahame Boyes has argued that whilst Watkin did champion a Channel Tunnel, he never explicitly stated the desire to run through trains. See Robin Leleux, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Volume IX: The East Midlands* (Newton Abbot, 1984), p. 32; Harold Pollins, ‘The Last Main Railway Line to London’, *Journal of Transport History*, 4:2 (1959), p. 87; Grahame Boyes, ‘The Origins of a Modern Myth: The Loading Gauge of the GCR London Extension’, *Journal of the Railway & Canal Historical Society*, 35:10 (2007), p. 781.

<sup>7</sup> British Railways Board, *The Reshaping of British Railways*, (London, 1963).

## II Historiography

The railway navvy has received very limited attention from historians. Much of the general literature provides an overview of the navvy from his origins in the eighteenth century through to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond; however, the greatest attention in terms of railway labourers is directed to the years up to and just after the middle of the nineteenth century. This is unsurprising given that this was the era when the majority of the railway network was constructed. A number of themes dominate debate: character and reputation, ethnic origins, the composition of the navvy community, and living and working conditions. All of these topics are given prominence in Terry Coleman's *The Railway Navvies*, which although first appearing well over forty years ago, is still perhaps the best known general survey of the navvy. Coleman makes reference to the origins of the term 'navvy', describing its derivation from the eighteenth century 'navigator' and claiming the first navvies came from Lincolnshire having experience building sea walls and canals. He also highlights variations in spelling with 'navey' being much in evidence prior to the 1870s. In many ways Coleman's work has done much to perpetuate the negative image of the navvy by concentrating on his reputation for drunkenness and violent behaviour, highlighting in detail the religious and ethnical tensions that could spark severe disorder with Irish workers in conflict with English and Scots. However, if he stresses the concept of the navvy as villain, he also sees aspects of the hero and victim. Heroic status arises from the navvy's labour without which the railways would not have been built. The victim is seen in the exploited worker constantly exposed to the threat of death and injury, forced to live in sub-standard huddled accommodation, and irregularly paid, thus, having to rely heavily on credit. This last point meant the navvy all too often found himself on the wrong end of the truck system whereby payment was in

the form of goods or tickets exchangeable for goods only from employers.<sup>8</sup> Whilst all of these issues have legitimacy, much of Coleman's work lacks critical analysis, and like other writers on the subject, makes little attempt to contextualise the experiences of the navvy within the contemporary social and cultural environment. Not least in this respect is the absence of any clear attempt to determine the ethnical make-up of the overall navvy cadre.

A more nuanced approach has been evident in subsequent research. James Handley for instance has documented the history of the navvy in Scotland. With a coverage that encompasses many of the topics addressed by Coleman, and despite the obvious national bias, he has produced a far more restrained and reasoned account. Devoting attention to the living conditions of the workers he too has stressed the often overcrowded and poorly constructed temporary huts that formed the mainstay of accommodation, particularly in more remote areas. However, he emphasises that many workers preferred to seek housing in local towns whenever available. By reference to a number of specific construction projects, Handley has attempted to quantify the ethnic breakdown of the workforce. Although the Irish were well represented, native born Scots were much to the fore, with Englishmen in a minority.<sup>9</sup>

David Brooke, perhaps more than any other scholar has succeeded in rehabilitating the reputation of the navvy by challenging many pre-existing assumptions. Whilst not denying the incidence of sometimes serious disorder that could involve ethnic tensions, he has cast doubt on the suggestion that the migration of workers into areas where railway construction was taking place invariably led to an

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<sup>8</sup> Terry Coleman, *The Railway Navvies* (reprint, Harmondsworth, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> James E. Handley, *The Navvy in Scotland* (Cork, 1970).



increase in criminal activity.<sup>10</sup> Similarly he accepts that hutted encampments were often constructed, but argues in similar vein to Handley, that this was by no means the only type of accommodation occupied by the workers; many sought out permanent accommodation in local towns and villages.<sup>11</sup> Brooke too has devoted some attention to the work of church missions as directed towards railway workers, but as with Coleman there is some lack of contextualisation in so far as there is little attempt to connect this activity with the contemporary religious and philanthropic backdrop. Above all Brooke has engaged far more critically with the issue of ethnicity, arguing that although Irish workers made a major contribution to railway construction they were present in greatest numbers in Scotland. In England they were most prominent in the north; however, even within that region they tended to be very much in the minority.<sup>12</sup> Scottish and Welsh workers meanwhile were mostly confined within their own national boundaries.<sup>13</sup> This position is supported by Dick Sullivan in *Navvyman* suggesting that by the 1880s English born workers made up about eighty per-cent of the navvy cadre with Irish born only perhaps ten per-cent.<sup>14</sup> In his study of the Irish navvy Ultan Cowley reiterates the tradition of Irish subsistence farmers and so called ‘tattie hokers’ coming to Britain often on a seasonal basis to work on the harvest, many of whom subsequently drifted into navvying. He does, however, accept Brooke’s contention that most navvies working in England and Wales originated from

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<sup>10</sup> David Brooke, ‘The Criminal Navvy in the West Riding of Yorkshire’, *Journal of the Railway & Canal Historical Society*, 30:7 (1992), pp. 365-372; ‘The “Lawless” Navvy: A Study of the Crime Associated with Railway Building’, *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd Series, 10 (1989), pp. 145-165.

<sup>11</sup> David Brooke, *The Railway Navvy* (Newton Abbot and London, 1983), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> David Brooke, ‘Railway Navvies on the Pennines, 1841-71’, *Journal of Transport History*, New Series, 3 (1975), pp. 45-46.

<sup>13</sup> Brooke, *The Railway Navvy*, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Sullivan’s figures must be treated with caution as they are based on lists of dead and injured navvies. See Dick Sullivan, *Navvyman* (London, 1983), p. 48.

the north of England, and sees the Irish as predominating in Scotland and also the USA.<sup>15</sup>

If there has been discussion as to the merits of huddled accommodation for the railway worker, there can be no doubt that it was extensively used. Purpose built accommodation and related services for navvies could on occasion be both extensive and fairly sophisticated. The concept of model villages developed later in the nineteenth century, and these were often associated with the construction of reservoirs and dams to provide clean water for large urban conurbations. In part this was born out of necessity given that alternative sources of accommodation and ancillary services were often absent when civil engineering projects were undertaken in remote areas. One such large scale encampment, the village of Birchinlee, otherwise known as 'Tin Town' has been detailed by Bill Bevan. Built by the Derwent Valley Water Board between 1901 and 1916 for workers constructing the Derwent and Howden dams, it included housing and a range of other facilities such as a hospital, school, recreation centre and public baths. Bevan has remarked on the fact that there appears to have been significant interaction between the navy community and the local populace. Young women in particular were attracted to events held in the recreation centre and he speculates that marriage to navvies who subsequently settled in the area may account for the fact that many Irish and Welsh surnames survive in the district.<sup>16</sup>

As well as forming the basis of David Brooke's work on ethnicity, the methodological model focusing on the analysis of census returns has proved a fruitful approach in other studies concerned with establishing navy settlement patterns, origins, and family groupings. Margaret Gerrish has shown that of the four hundred

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<sup>15</sup> Ultan Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain: A History of the Irish Navy*, (Dublin, 2001), p. 56

<sup>16</sup> Bill Bevan, 'Village of the Dammed: Upper Derwent's Tin Town and Planned Navy Settlement', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 126 (2006), pp. 103-126.

navvies she has been able to identify who were engaged in the construction of Grimsby docks during 1851, the majority were itinerant, the evidence indicating 'origins that are patternless'. However, she does claim that the neighbouring county of Yorkshire was the birth place of the largest number of labourers, and significantly she states that a quarter of the labourers were Irish by birth.<sup>17</sup> More recently, Clive Leivers has undertaken a similar study focusing on the construction of the Dore & Chinley railway in Derbyshire between 1888 and 1894. Leivers postulates that nearly a third of the workers originated in the areas through which the line passed. However, he too highlights that across the work force as a whole, recorded place of birth show a very wide geographical spread.<sup>18</sup> These studies imply the presence within the navy community of a large number of both indigenous born and locally recruited labourers.

My research does echo that of Brooke, Gerrish and Leivers in so far as I address the birth origins and ethnicity of a sample of family groups that I have identified as being connected to the construction of the London Extension. But from this start point I proceed to examine a series of key issues with the intention of seeking to re-assess their significance by altering the focus of attention. Unlike much of the earlier work I look in detail at the experiences of the navvies and their dependents, and relate these to the life experiences of working people generally. I consider the question of accommodation and living conditions, with particular reference to hutted encampments, but contrary to previous work, I am less concerned with the relative quality of its construction than with what living arrangements have to say both about the reality or otherwise of community, and the late Victorian concepts of home and domestic ideals. Similarly, I look again at the workers' contact with local

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret M. Gerrish, 'The Dock Builders: Dock Navvies at Grimsby in 1851', *Journal of Transport History*, 15 (1994), pp. 45-58.

<sup>18</sup> Clive Leivers, 'The Modern Ishmaels? Navy Communities in the High Peak', *Family & Community History*, 9:2 (2006), pp. 141-155.

agencies in order to establish attitudes to migrants, gender and welfare, as well as what can be gleaned of familial relationships. My reappraisal of missionary work with railway workers attempts to demonstrate a link to a much wider socio-religious movement aimed at the working class in general. In addition, by turning my attention to the education of the workers' children I extend the scope of scholarship into a hitherto neglected, but nonetheless important area, not least due to the pivotal role that education came to fill in the late nineteenth century experience of childhood.

### **III The London Extension and the Late Nineteenth Century Construction Worker**

Civil engineering projects at the end of nineteenth century saw greater reliance placed upon mechanical plant; however, the building of the London Extension was still labour intensive. Naturally enough the number of men employed fluctuated, reflecting the peaks and troughs of activity, but it is possible to gain an impression of the relative size of the workforce employed by the various contractors. Strictly speaking it is incorrect to infer that the workforce was comprised exclusively of adult males. Engineers' reports often refer to the number of 'men and boys'.<sup>19</sup> This is a clear indication that youngsters, colloquially known as 'nippers' aged thirteen and upwards were regularly employed on the works, many, as I will show, seemingly having followed their fathers into the industry. As far as the Southern Division is concerned, records suggest that the workforce reached its maximum level in September 1896 with 3,778 workers employed. Similarly, the Metropolitan Division peaked with a total of 2,887 in May 1897, whilst the highest number recorded for the Banbury

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<sup>19</sup> For one such reference see TNA, RAIL 463/28, Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway Director's Minutes, 6 September 1895.

branch was 751 in June 1899.<sup>20</sup> By comparison figures for the Northern Division are less easily obtainable, but I have located one reference to 3,217 workers being employed in July 1897.<sup>21</sup> The above figures do of course reflect obvious timing differences, and no allowance is made for any double counting arising from the movement of men across contracts or divisions. They do however, tend to support a previous assessment that as many as ten thousand men were involved with the project at one time or another.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout this thesis I will use ‘construction workers’, ‘railway workers’, and ‘navvies’ as terms to describe the totality of the men. This is a deliberate choice of vocabulary to reflect the fact that whilst a substantial number of the men were referred to as navvies or railway labourers, the workforce was not made up exclusively of unskilled labourers. Excavation of cuttings and the formation of embankments was a key part of establishing the permanent way, but much else was involved. This ranged from the brickwork needed for bridges and viaducts (some bridges were also constructed from steel girders), and the portals and lining of tunnels; carpentry for the wooden centring of bridges and other general woodwork; even horse handlers were employed as horses were used in not insignificant numbers for hauling wagons and general transportation. This latter point serves to highlight the continuing importance of horses and, in particular heavy horses, across the economy. For much of the eighteenth century the horse was ‘a measure of labour itself’,<sup>23</sup> but throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the horse remained a crucial

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<sup>20</sup> TNA, RAIL 463/29 and 463/30, Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway Director’s Minutes, 4 September 1896, 7 May 1897; TNA, RAIL 226/2, Great Central Railway Director’s Minutes, 2 June 1899.

<sup>21</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 31 July 1897.

<sup>22</sup> Dow, *Great Central*, Volume Two, pp. 315-318.

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 167.

source of power for transportation and agriculture with the Shire gradually becoming the dominant breed of heavy horse.<sup>24</sup>

It has been possible to identify several categories of workers. A variety of trades is represented including carpenters, bricklayers, stonemasons and blacksmiths. Horse drivers as indicated above were employed to take charge of the teams of horses. A significant number of engine drivers indicate the use of contractor's locomotives to bring in equipment and materials to the work sites from the main depots and remove wagons of spoil. Tunnel miners figure by virtue of the construction of several tunnels along the course of the route, the longest such structure being the three-thousand yards long Catesby tunnel in Northamptonshire . In addition, the presence of steam navvy drivers reflects the fact that together with steam cranes, this particular piece of equipment was the primary form of mechanical plant in use on the line. Mechanical excavation was probably first employed as early as 1843, but the steam navvy, essentially a steam driven excavator, was not used in a meaningful way on railway construction until 1880.<sup>25</sup> Some forty-three such machines were deployed along the length of the line. I have also noted the presence of non-manual workers such as pay clerks and timekeepers forming part of contractors' administrative staffs. Since these men cannot be classed as construction workers they have been excluded from my study. This does not however, necessarily indicate that they were segregated from the rest of the workforce in terms of living arrangements. There is evidence to show that in some circumstances they too occupied railway huts.

It also has to be borne in mind that it would be wrong to assume that the workforce comprised men who were exclusively railway workers. By this I mean that

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Moore-Colyer, 'Aspects of Horse Breeding and the Supply of Horses in Victorian Britain', *Agricultural History Review*, 43:1 (1995), p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Simmons, *The Railway in England and Wales*, pp. 154-5.

many, at one time or another, employed their various skills across a range of civil engineering projects which in addition to railway construction included docks, canals, dams and reservoirs. Clearly the need to secure employment often dictated the type of work that was undertaken and some men maintained a continuing association with particular contractors. This movement between categories of construction has been recognised by commentators like Coleman and Brooke but it is nonetheless worth reiterating. To take a case in point, the major engineering project that pre-dated the London Extension was the Manchester Ship Canal built between 1887 and 1893. There is evidence to show that a number of men who had previously worked on the canal subsequently found their way, accompanied by their families, to sections of the London Extension. Equally it should not be thought that all of the workers employed on the railway were migrant workers. Local men formed a proportion of the workforce as is evident from references in newspaper reports and judicial records. Such references do allow a distinction to be drawn between many of the incomers who had an established connection with major construction projects and local men who despite often being labelled as ‘navvies’ were more likely to have seized the opportunity provided by the railway to secure new, albeit temporary, employment.

Both the late nineteenth century time scale and the London Extension itself carry considerable significance. With some exceptions conditions in general for both men and their families were on the whole greatly improved by the 1890s when compared to those prevalent earlier in the century. The main contractors and in some cases sub-contractors were solely responsible for the recruitment and management of the men. The railway company itself had no involvement with the employment of construction workers. For the board of directors, a priority was ensuring that satisfactory progress was maintained and that the planned completion date should not

slip.<sup>26</sup> We have already seen that mechanisation was more widely developed however; it would be wrong to assume that the work was any less demanding. Hours of work could be long and arduous, with shift working around the clock implemented at times to catch up on delays to the schedule. For instance, on the site of Victoria Station in Nottingham, the contractors, Logan & Hemingway installed special electric lighting so that ‘the men could be kept working night and day’.<sup>27</sup> Equally the work could be hazardous; death and injury was still commonplace. In an attempt to quantify the dangers, one contemporary contractor observed that for every five young men aged about twenty who contemplated a career on public works, one was bound to be killed.<sup>28</sup> Earlier in the century, workers had, at least in theory, some protection in the form of legal remedy via the common law against an employer for injury sustained through negligence during the course of employment. But the reality meant that the courts ‘had interpreted employment as a contract implying an acceptance by the workman of liability for most industrial accidents’.<sup>29</sup> The Employers Liability Act 1880 opened a further avenue to redress although the provisions of the act contained a number of restrictions, and under certain circumstances employers were still able to claim a defence of common employment if the injury resulted from the negligence of a fellow employee. Legal redress was in any case dependent upon the individual being in a position to take proceedings against their employer. The situation moved in favour of the worker in 1897 with the passage of the Workmen (Compensation for Accidents) Act. Although not universal in its coverage it did extend to employment

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<sup>26</sup> There was for instance an exchange of views between the board and contractor Thomas Oliver & Son over delays to the completion of contract No 4 at the beginning of 1898. See TNA, RAIL 226/1, Great Central Railway Directors Minutes, 26 January 1898.

<sup>27</sup> NottRO, DD505/4, Recollections of Edward Dale (typescript), p. 6. Dale was an engineer employed by Logan & Hemingway between 1890 and 1935.

<sup>28</sup> Navy Mission Society, *Light After Darkness* (London, 1908), p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Martin J. Weiner, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge and New York, 1990), p. 204.



‘in, or about a railway ... or engineering work’.<sup>30</sup> Subject to certain provisions an employer was liable to pay compensation to an employee for injuries suffered, or to his dependents in the event of death.

Loss of earnings as a result of illness was ever present. Sick clubs were not uncommon. The men would pay a small sum each week and receive a benefit for a limited number of weeks when needed. The men were also very much subject to the vagaries of the weather in so far as adverse conditions often meant a cessation of work and a consequent loss of income. The early months of 1895 for instance witnessed a prolonged cold spell with severe frosts which brought work on the railway to a halt for many weeks. This caused genuine hardship to both men and dependents.<sup>31</sup> Issues surrounding remuneration had largely been addressed by the last decade of the nineteenth century. Payment of wages on a weekly basis was common practice, thus, obviating the need for men to seek credit, and the Truck Amendment Act of 1887 extended legislation prohibiting the use of this practice to all manual labourers. Ironically legislation aimed at combating the practice had been passed as early as 1831, but railway construction was specifically excluded.<sup>32</sup>

Accommodation of course remained a major factor. For some of the men and their dependents who moved into the midland counties to work on the new railway this was secured in local towns. This was particularly so in terms of the larger urban centres such as Leicester and Nottingham where the line was cut through the heart of built up areas, but even in the more rural districts, records indicate that some families lived in villages adjacent to the line. It was in the rural areas, however, that accommodation in the form of huts was also provided.

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<sup>30</sup> Workmen (Compensation for Accidents) Act, 1897, 60 & 61 Vict., c. 37.

<sup>31</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 7 February 1895; *Nottingham Weekly Express*, 15 February 1895.

<sup>32</sup> George W. Hilton, *The Truck System* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 133.

Hutted accommodation had a long association with railway construction workers, and earlier in the century it caused much concern, not least to the Select Committee on Railway Labourers of 1846, due to its poor quality. The Select Committee had been established at a time when the railway system was expanding at a rapid pace, and its remit was to consider the impact of large numbers of construction workers employed across much of the country. The committee pinpointed many of the problems inherent at the time that impacted on the men's physical and material wellbeing: lack of regular payment, poor accommodation, exposure to risk, the potential for disorder, and the lack of spiritual and educational provision.<sup>33</sup> The huts, often built by the workers themselves, developed in some cases into unplanned and uncontrolled shanty settlements. Some of the most notorious settlements were those that grew up at the site of the Woodhead tunnel between Manchester and Sheffield in the 1840s and along the route of the Settle and Carlisle line during the 1870s, which in the case of the latter earned such exotic names as Sevastopol, Salt Lake City, and Batty Green.<sup>34</sup> By the end of the century the worst examples had been replaced by far superior, albeit temporary housing. Nothing on such a grand scale as the planned villages referred to earlier were built to serve the London Extension, ostensibly because the line ran through populated areas and most facilities that might be required could be accessed close at hand. Nonetheless, to obviate the shortage of available accommodation, the various contractors did erect several small encampments consisting of wooden huts at a number of locations. The largest such encampment was built in the vicinity of Catesby tunnel.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> BPP, 1846 [530] XIII, *Report From the Select Committee on Railway Labourers*.

<sup>34</sup> Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*, see esp. pp. 104-6; 194.

<sup>35</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society 1895-6*, (London: 1896), p. 45.

An invaluable asset associated with the London extension is the existence of a comprehensive photographic record of its construction. This is thanks to a Leicester photographer, Sydney Newton who travelled the length of the line during the 1890s photographing the work as it progressed. His interest extended beyond that concerned with civil engineering, and a number of his photographs record the railway workers, members of their families, and the exteriors and in rare cases, the interiors of wooden huts serving as living accommodation.<sup>36</sup> The images of the huts, and the areas just outside the huts which were used as common spaces, provide a crucial insight into the domestic circumstances prevailing during the term of the railway's construction. Newton's photographs present visual evidence of the physical structures that combined to form a number of small but discrete settlements. The question arises as to whether these settlements, given their limited lifespan, together with the people who resided within them, constituted what might be termed true communities. A number of historians have engaged with the issue of community, and Keith Snell has been prominent in stressing the importance of community and a sense of belonging for the majority of people.<sup>37</sup> Snell's work is predicated above all on a linkage between community and location, and the application of this approach to itinerant construction workers appears at first glance to have limited validity. However, as important as location is in this respect, community as a concept encompasses a variety of themes including personal relationships, familiarity, and even a sense of difference. Of course only a proportion of the workers and their dependents lived in huts, and one cannot neglect to consider those who resided within the local economy. Nonetheless, taking

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<sup>36</sup> Newton's complete collection is held at the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. A selection of the images have been published. For example see L. T. C. Rolt, *The Making of a Railway* (reprint, London, 1979); Gary Boyd-Hope and Andrew Sargent, *Railways and Rural Life: S. W. A. Newton and the Great Central Railway*, (Swindon, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006).

into account the photographic evidence and what can be determined of family and household composition, and migration patterns, together with general domestic arrangements, I believe it is possible to make some useful points about the notion of community in respect of the navvies.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century the image of domesticity as an almost utopian ideal was prevalent, so much so, that by the second quarter of the century it had become, it is claimed, ‘a central part of the new morality propagated by the Evangelical movements’.<sup>38</sup> At its heart was a concept of highly idealised separation between the home and the world of work, and between the public and private spheres inhabited by the male breadwinner and the loving wife and mother respectively, and it permeated much of middle-class thinking relating to the home. The desire to disseminate the ethos of domesticity found much of its impetus in the so called ‘civilising mission’, the missionary philanthropic movement of the nineteenth century aimed at improving the moral condition of the poor at home as well as promoting civilisation abroad.<sup>39</sup> If we accept a desire to promote domesticity within the working class, it is pertinent to ask to whether or not this model permeated the ranks of itinerant railway workers. Once again, I advocate that an analysis of their living conditions, particularly the internal arrangement of huts, helps to provide an answer by indicating the extent to which they shared common working-class values.

If the civilising mission played a key role in the dissemination of domesticity, its influence can also be seen in relation to another activity closely associated with the

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<sup>38</sup> Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Among those who have focused attention on the civilising mission are Alison Twells, Moira Martin and Simon Gunn. See Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Classes* (Basingstoke, 2009); Moira Martin, ‘Single Women and Philanthropy: A Case Study of Women’s Associational Life in Bristol, 1880-1914’, *Women’s History Review*, 17:3 (2008), pp. 395-417; Simon Gunn, ‘The Ministry, The Middle Class and the “Civilising Mission” in Manchester, 1850-80’, *Social History*, 21:1 (1996), pp. 22-36.

construction worker: church mission. A tradition of ministering to the navy community by means of specific missions was evident for much of the nineteenth century. However, what had previously been organised on a somewhat ad hoc basis, gained a more formalised status with the creation of the Navy Mission Society (NMS) in 1877. Operating under the auspices of the Anglican Church it was founded as its name implies, to cater for the spiritual needs of the navy by means of a specialist ministry, however, its remit extended to the provision of more practical assistance in the form of day schools where deemed necessary, Sunday schools, night schools, reading rooms and sick clubs. As was the case with most large scale construction projects employing navvies, a number of lay missionaries were embedded within the workforce engaged on the London Extension, supported by a network of local clergy and local volunteers. A picture emerges suggesting that in some areas local elites became actively involved or at least gave tacit encouragement. At least one mission day school, at Catesby tunnel, was established in conjunction with the building of the railway. Whether welcome or not, the NMS was one organisation that virtually every worker and most family members would probably have had some contact with at one point or another, not merely during the building of the line, but throughout their association with major projects of that nature. Like much that relates to navvies, the work of navy missions in general and the NMS in particular, has often been treated in isolation. I contend that it provides another link with the wider movement to bring about spiritual and moral reformation amongst the working class. As such, its role should be viewed as part of the promotion of mission both at home and overseas, and church extension within Victorian Britain which had its roots in the evangelical revival and which encompassed the concept of the civilising mission. It is also important to bear in mind that its reception and impact

amongst the construction workers cannot be divorced from the attitudes towards organised religion that prevailed within the working class.

#### **IV Perceptions and Wider Society**

As is often the case when newcomers move into an area in significant numbers, or when people are confronted by individuals who appear to lead unconventional lives, uncertainty and apprehension become apparent. Reality can be distorted, rumours begin to circulate and fears become magnified. There is evidence that this was the case in a number of locations along the course of the London Extension and offers an interesting insight into the psychology of how people come to terms with new and novel events. Under such circumstances there may also be a conscious effort to marginalise the outsiders or at least make little or no attempt to bridge any pre-existing social exclusion, although it is perhaps easy to overplay this aspect especially at the very end of the nineteenth century. The experiences of other migrant and immigrant groups can provide important parallels. The present day provides examples such as the families of travelling showmen who are often misunderstood and suffer prejudice simply because of the ignorance of their lifestyle and achievements on the part of the wider population.<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding, the incomers of the late nineteenth-century Midlands did not exist in a vacuum and a degree of interaction and integration was inevitable. I began this thesis with a quotation which reflected one man's perceptions of the navy community and I believe that perceptions are a crucial element in understanding the relationship between the workers and their families and the wider population. The perceptions of construction workers that were evident amongst elements of the local population as work began on the new railway no doubt

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<sup>40</sup> 'The Road Less Travelled', *Independent*, 6 August 2013.

sprang from a variety of sources. As I alluded to above, rumour may have played a part, as did word of mouth more generally, public opinion, and for a minority, previous experience might have proved a relevant factor. But I think the influence of popular literature cannot be ignored given the assertion that ‘Nineteenth-century Britain was uniquely the age of the periodical ... [they] came to constitute a literature in their own right’.<sup>41</sup> Titles that exhibited a distinctly religious outlook and aimed at a middle-class readership, did from time to time feature articles that focused upon the lifestyle and characteristics of the navy community. It should be stressed that these articles projected a range of views, and were by no means exclusively negative in tone, but I think that collectively they did contribute significantly to prevailing public impressions of the navy. To a great extent my thesis relates the outcomes arising from a series of individual and collective encounters between the incomers and representatives of official and semi-official bodies whether schools, judiciary, poor law or religious organisations. It is unsurprising that this direct contact helped to create perceptions within the minds of those in authority. But perhaps more to the point is the degree to which any existing pre-conceptions were modified as a result of the encounters.

Concerns did surface prior to the commencement of construction that the new railway would bring navvies from all parts of the country and that this would disturb normal patterns of life.<sup>42</sup> There were for example, genuine fears of importing smallpox into areas otherwise free of the disease, and much discussion centred upon the adequacy of existing hospital accommodation. The treatment of injured navvies was also a topical issue in terms of both the logistical impact, and the funding

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<sup>41</sup> J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel. (eds), *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society* (Aldershot and Toronto, 1994), p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> The matter was for example discussed by Rugby Board of Guardians. See *Rugby Advertiser*, 16 October 1894.

implications upon what was essentially a charitable based health service. Inevitably some of the migrants did fall foul of the law, but for the most part offences were minor which suggests a pattern that mirrors working-class crime in general.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps predictably, given the navy's reputation, drunkenness and associated disorderly conduct were perceived as a perennial problem, and seem to have demanded the attention of the police and judiciary to a very great extent. More serious crime was committed but its incidence was rare. In many respects the disputes and offences that came before the courts and which highlighted family relationships and attitudes to gender issues, carry the greatest interest. Domestic violence, sexual and physical assaults upon women and child neglect were again very rare but all can be linked in at least one instance to railway workers, and these cases give further insights into both domesticity and concepts of masculinity as they shaped the consciousness of the working-class male. The cases that I highlight also provide the opportunity to test outcomes against the body of scholarship that has focused on marital relationships, gender, and violence. In particular, I consider the reactions of women to violent partners, and the options available to them via the legal process, and the response of the judiciary in terms of the relative treatment of complainant and perpetrator. Is there for example, evidence to support the claim that women were increasingly seen by the courts as victims with a tendency for less tolerance to be shown towards men who inflicted ill-treatment on them?<sup>44</sup> Also pertinent is the question of greater concern for child welfare whereby changing attitudes towards the treatment of children gradually gained ground leading to the belief that children had certain 'rights'.<sup>45</sup> This

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<sup>43</sup> Clive Emsley, *Crime, Police, and Penal Policy: European Experiences 1750-1940* (Oxford and New York, 2007), p. 152.

<sup>44</sup> Martin J. Weiner, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge and New York, 2004), p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 45.



manifested itself in philanthropy, the growth of voluntary associations with the aim of protecting children, and also greater involvement in children's affairs by the state.

Those construction workers who became known to the courts were not exclusively perpetrators of crime; some were victims. One particular case which I examine in detail involved a serious assault on a navvy by two police officers which caused considerable soul searching on the part of local officials within the Northamptonshire town of Brackley. Occurrences such as this bring the focus back yet again to the recurring theme of perceptions, however, as in relation to this particular incident, these were not exclusively negative in tone. This is also illustrated by the differing attitudes that emerged in respect of a seeming nationwide increase in the problem of vagrancy during the mid-1890s which impacted upon both the judiciary and poor law authorities. Contemporary discussion of this increase highlighted a variety of possible causes with the building of the railway being one such in several of the districts alongside the route. This gave rise to a sharp distinction being drawn between the 'genuine' navvy and the much derided 'tramping navvy'. But if a division was evident here, it was merely one aspect in the perceived gulf between the respectable and non-respectable elements within society. Where we see the construction workers in contact with authority, and this was particularly the case with regard to the law, they appear to have been assessed as to how far they conformed to accepted standards of respectability. To my mind this gives added support to the argument that it is necessary to examine how their experiences stood in relation to those of the working class as a whole.

There is no doubt that for much of the nineteenth century Britain was a youthful society, thus, it has been claimed that the proportion of the population aged

fourteen and under never fell below thirty per-cent.<sup>46</sup> Despite this statistic, both Ginger Frost and Sally Shuttleworth have pointed out that the definition of childhood during this period remains somewhat contentious. Even at late century most working-class youngsters still entered the world of work at a comparatively early age, therefore, it is difficult to specify an exact age range that can be said to encompass childhood.<sup>47</sup> What we can be sure of is that by the final decade of the century, the increased role of the state was plainly evident and the reality of compulsory elementary education was firmly established. Indeed, the 1893 Education Act saw the minimum age for exemption from school attendance rise to eleven.<sup>48</sup> From late 1894 navy children were being admitted to local elementary schools along the course of the route, ranging from the urban Carrington school forming part of the Nottingham School Board to a cluster of small village voluntary schools.<sup>49</sup> I have identified 209 children who attended these schools during the period that the line was under construction, but this is unlikely to represent the total intake across all of the schools in the catchment areas. In fact it is extremely difficult to quantify the precise number of children who formed part of the navy community in this instance. The 209 children were associated with only a small sample of one hundred and ten families, therefore, given the existence of other family groups, the presence of children under school age, and the youngsters who were employed by the various contractors, the total number of children probably far exceeded this figure. The education of the navy children provides an interesting perspective on local perceptions. Inevitably this

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<sup>46</sup> James Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood 1800-1914* (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> Ginger Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Westport, Ct., 2009), p. 4; Sally Shuttleworth, 'Victorian Childhood', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9:1 (2004), p. 108.

<sup>48</sup> Elementary Education (School Attendance) Act, 1893, 56 & 57 Vict., c. 51.

<sup>49</sup> The earliest admission I have identified is that of the daughter of a foreman navy to Hellidon school in Northamptonshire on 26 November 1894. See NRO, ZB 122/69, Hellidon School Admission Register, 1875-1932.

intake had a logistical impact, particularly on the smaller schools, in terms of accommodation and teaching resources. More importantly, however, are the responses and perceptions of the various teachers as they confront issues surrounding the newcomers. Some of the reactions were perhaps predictable in their negativity. There is no doubt some of the children were disadvantaged by their frequent moves, and the views expressed by a number of the teachers regarding the children's educational progress does resonate with contemporary discourse surrounding the question of learning disabilities. Indeed the measures put in place at that time by the Leicester School Board to address the problem can be seen to have had direct relevance to the navvy community. However, on a more optimistic note the more broadly based experiences afforded by migration could act as a catalyst for challenging the somewhat insular outlook that often pervaded rural schools in particular. Issues such as behaviour and attendance were not exclusively related to the incomers but permeated much of the day to day school experience. This raises questions about the ideology underpinning elementary education and provides the opportunity to engage with what is an extensive historical debate. In particular I consider arguments put forward in support of explicit social control linking education with the aim of maintaining social stability and order, and also scholarship that postulates the belief that schooling was part of a process of socialisation. There is also a link here with the degree of agency which working-class parents in general were able to bring to bear in the matter of education. Resistance to the demands of education could, and did, manifest itself in the failure of some parents to ensure the regular attendance of their children at school. Many however, it has been argued, did show a genuine interest in

the efficiency of schools, and were prepared to make judgements about the ability of individual schools to meet their own measures of educational achievement.<sup>50</sup>

Reference to educational matters, and specifically to the existence of school boards does draw attention to the whole question of local finance. Throughout the nineteenth century, local government in its broadest sense took on many guises ranging in magnitude from county councils and large borough authorities, to rural sanitary authorities and boards of guardians, with responsibilities encompassing areas such as the police, highways, sanitation, education and poor relief. These organisations were collectively, the overarching agency of authority for the majority of people. Funding in support of these organisations derived ostensibly from local taxation in the form of rates, and by default the burden fell to individual ratepayers. Rates were levied on property in the form of land and buildings and assessed on the rental values, but it has been pointed out that although rates were paid by the occupiers of property this 'did not mean that they fell with equal weight on all in relation to their income'.<sup>51</sup> The influx of the construction workers placing added demands on local infrastructure could have implications for ratepayers if the result was an increase in the rates. Even if the status quo was maintained and there was no direct impact on the level of rates, the presence of the workers may have given rise to some resentment. Local residents were in effect subsidising the incomers given that the vast majority are unlikely to have made any contribution themselves through the rating system. This thesis will make a number of references to the issue of funding whether in relation to policing, hospital provision, the poor law or education. It is clear that those in authority were conscious that the decisions they were called upon to

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<sup>50</sup> Harold Silver, *Good Schools, Effective Schools, Judgements and Their Histories* (London, 1994), pp. 35-36.

<sup>51</sup> E. P. Hennock, 'Finance and Politics in Urban Local Government in England, 1835-1900', *The Historical Journal*, 6:2 (1963), p. 216.

make often had consequences for the ratepayers within the various administrative districts, and thus, they had to exercise careful judgement. No doubt their deliberations were conditioned to some extent by self-interest as ratepayers themselves, but also by an awareness of the political implications where the wider public was concerned.

## **V Methodology and Sources**

Identification of individual workers and their families has represented a major challenge. Direct reference to census returns for 1891 and 1901 has not been possible given the fact that construction of the main London Extension and its Woodford Halse to Banbury link covered the period from late 1894 to 1900. As such, few if any of the migratory railway workers were resident in the areas of interest at either of the census dates. In addressing this challenge, my methodology has relied primarily upon sources highlighting the workers' children and in particular their education. Local elementary school admission registers, where extant, supplemented in some cases by log books, have afforded an initial entry point. Many admission registers contain a wealth of information: the child's name, date of birth, and the name of parent or guardian. In a number of instances details of siblings attending the same schools, previous schools attended, local residence, and the father's occupation is additionally recorded. Identification of residence has been particularly useful in a number of instances where references to children living with parents in railway huts provides clear evidence of the presence of construction workers. Data extracted in this way has allowed a search of census returns for both 1891 and 1901 with the aim of establishing family and household composition. This approach is not without problems. Common surnames can give rise to a myriad of results which do not allow

for accurate analysis, and in other cases names are apparently absent from the records. This latter point is perhaps unsurprising given the itinerant nature of the workers' lifestyles. I have also noted inconsistencies in relation to names, places of birth, and occupations which do highlight some of the limitations associated with resources of this type. Children in particular were treated as an adjunct to their parents, and in many respects it has not always been possible to determine their precise status. However, I have been able to positively identify the households of one hundred and twenty-one construction workers who moved into the Midlands as a result of the new railway. Within this overarching total, I have determined that one hundred and ten of the families had children who attended local schools, and one hundred and one have been traced to either the 1891 or 1900 census or both. Clearly, in light of the methodology adopted, it is only households containing school age children that have in the main been detected.

School records have served a second purpose in that they have informed much of my work on the children's experiences of elementary education. All elementary schools subject to inspection and in receipt of government grants were required by the Education Department to maintain a log book. Head teachers were instructed to record such incidences as visits to the school by managers, notable periods of absence or illness and lesson plans, and 'any special circumstances affecting the school'.<sup>52</sup> The intake of navy children clearly fell within the terms of the latter and resultant entries do give an indication as to the impact on school populations and available space. However, it is those log books in which head teachers have ignored the instruction not to enter 'reflections or opinions of a general character' that have proved to be the most

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<sup>52</sup> BPP, 1895 [C.7652] LXXVI, Education Department, Code of Regulations for Day Schools with Schedules and Appendices, p. 2.

rewarding.<sup>53</sup> Notwithstanding the possibility of prejudice, the insights offered relate not solely to the individual teachers and the incoming children but also to parental attitudes and those of the wider community.

Local newspapers have proved a particularly valuable source of information from several angles. Reports of deaths and accidents associated with the new railway together with the reporting of petty, county and borough sessions, and boards of guardians meetings have aided the further identification of individual workers and in some cases families. These have been included in the total figure noted above. As indicated earlier, it has also been possible on occasions to distinguish between migrant workers and local men who had joined the ranks of those working on the construction project. Both the content of reports and the style of reporting have contributed much to the assessment of local perceptions of, and attitudes towards the workers. Reference to court and poor law records themselves has in many instances supplemented newspaper reports as well as offering new avenues of research. My work on the Navy Mission Society has been based in large part on the central records of the society held at Lambeth Palace Library. Surprisingly, I have failed to locate records relating to any of the local groups that were formed in support of the Mission. Had the groups kept records of any kind, it is unlikely that some would not have survived, therefore, their absence may reflect the fact that voluntary or charitable associations of this type were not required to maintain official records.

The authentic voice of the workers themselves is almost entirely absent not only in relation to the London Extension but more generally. In terms of semi-autobiographical material Patrick MacGill's *Children of the Dead End* is perhaps most widely known. Born in Ireland, MacGill worked for a period as a navy in

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

Scotland at the turn of the twentieth century, and his experiences are interwoven into a narrative that features his friendship with an established navvy ‘Moleskin Joe’, his subsequent career as a journalist and writer, and an on-going quest to be reunited with a young woman from his home village in Ireland.<sup>54</sup> A few autobiographical sketches and reminiscences from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century also exist but in most cases contain only details of brief interludes in the writers’ lives either working as navvies or more often, reflections on encounters with navvies. Nonetheless, these do reinforce the impression that men drifted into the industry for comparatively short spells. Tony Murray has recently reflected on the lack of both fictional and autobiographical accounts of the Irish navvy but has noted several recent novels by former Irish construction workers who have used the medium to portray their experiences.<sup>55</sup> Apart from official and semi-official records reliance must be placed upon a number of contemporary accounts from the latter part of the century which in the main are informed by involvement with missionary activity amongst the workers.<sup>56</sup> Such sources are not without insight into the living conditions and culture of the navvy community, but clearly they are witness to what are essentially middle-class values and in the case of missionary work, religious conviction. Even on the rare occasion when the voice of the navvy is heard it is inevitably used both selectively and subjectively.

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<sup>54</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End: The Autobiography of a Navvy*, (reprint, Ascot, 1980, of orig. edn, London, 1914).

<sup>55</sup> Tony Murray, ‘Navvy Narratives: Interactions Between Autobiographical and Fictional Accounts of Irish Construction Workers in Britain’, in Liam Harte, Yvonne Whelan, and Patrick Crotty (eds), *Ireland: Space, Text, Time* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 209-217.

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the best known are works by the Revd D. W. Barrett and Elizabeth Garnett. See D. W. Barrett, *Life and Work Among the Navvies* (facsimile edn, Kettering, 2003, of orig. edn, London, 1880); Elizabeth Garnett, *Our Navvies: A Dozen Years Ago and Today* (facsimile edn, Charleston, 2010, of orig. edn, London, 1885).



## **VI Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter One is in part a quantitative analysis of the origins and family and household composition in respect of those families identified from census records, and provides a foundation from which to explore theories of community and assess their applicability to the railway workers. In doing so the focus of attention is directed on a number of defining issues: accommodation, paying particular attention to hutted encampments; migration patterns; male and female social relationships; and the extent of shared cultural characteristics. Parallels are also drawn with other social groupings defined by both ethnicity and occupation.

Chapter Two examines the impact of rumour, and looks in some detail at the way perceptions of navvies may have formed prior to the commencement of the railway with particular reference to popular literature in the form of autobiography and periodical articles. The relevance of any pre-conceptions is then tested against the impact of direct contact between the incomers and local health services. The chapter also assesses the impact of the new railway in terms of both the perceived incidence and reality of late century vagrancy which had implications for the police, poor law and judiciary.

Chapter Three is concerned in its broadest sense with crime. It deals with petty criminality, most obviously in the guise of drunkenness, which helped to set the agenda for many contemporaries. It also considers other categories of crime such as domestic violence which had consequences for the home and family environment, and in which drinking often had a discernible influence. Finally, the chapter highlights the incidence of navvies as the victims of crime and the bearing this had on the relationship between the workers and the local population.

Chapter Four continues the evaluation of the impact arising from contact between the railway workers and their families and local agencies, and reinforces the significance of perceptions. In this case it is the role of education within the lives of migrant navvy children during their time in local elementary schools. This includes an overview of elementary education within the country in terms of both voluntary and board provision with emphasis on developments following the 1870 Education Act. Against the background of the Education Codes and the curriculum as it was taught during the final decade of the nineteenth century, the logistical impact of the influx of children in terms of accommodation and teaching resources is explored. More importantly, an assessment is made of the perceptions and responses of individual teachers as they came to terms with the newcomers, and where discernible, their resultant attitude to children and parents.

Finally, Chapter Five looks at the ethos and development of the Navy Mission Society and the role it played during the construction of the London Extension. With regard to the latter aspect, attention is turned to the work of the society with the navvy community which encompassed both religious and secular aspects: education in the form of Sunday and day schools, provision of reading rooms and other recreational facilities. Links to the more general theme of home mission and specifically that of the civilising mission are pursued, and by means of a case study, I consider the role of social action on the part of one woman of rank. Attitudes across the working-class to organised religion are also explored in order to bring some perspective to the experience of the railway workers. In drawing together the various themes the conclusion, whilst acknowledging that the lifestyles of the workers and their families did give rise to certain distinct characteristics, nonetheless lays stress on the fact that the fundamental life experiences of this grouping show less divergence

from those of their working-class peers than has often been suggested. Moreover, the presence of these men, women and children within, or close by, local communities gave rise to the opportunity for reflection and some reassessment of commonly held preconceptions and values.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **A True Community?**

The men who were engaged on the construction of the Great Central London Extension at the end of the nineteenth century, together with the family members accompanying them, formed a grouping or to be more precise, a number of connected groupings for the duration of the work, in so far as they worked and in many cases lived together. However, the title of this chapter poses a question: did they constitute a community in their own right? Moreover, given the itinerant nature of the lifestyle, it is equally pertinent to consider the question in terms of whether or not they also formed part of a much wider navy community. In assessing the relevance of community in the context of the construction workers, this chapter will consider many of the issues which impinge upon concepts of community and identity, and will begin to bring into focus one of the central themes of the thesis: the experiences that shaped the lives of the construction workers. The chapter begins with an overview of existing scholarship on the subject of community and also considers its association with class. It will then examine the ethnic origins of a sample of the men who moved into the Midlands with their families, and highlight some of the common features evident from their longer term migration and work patterns. This is followed by consideration of the housing arrangements of the workforce. Firstly, focus will be directed towards the hutted encampments both from the point of view of their physical characteristics, and the evidence they offer about the impact of domesticity and respectability. Secondly, attention will be move to those workers who resided in accommodation within local communities. To widen the scope of the analysis, discussion will turn to socialisation and the way that relationships and bonds were established within the

work, leisure, and home environments. The chapter ends by considering local recruitment of labour, and the possible attractions of the construction industry for new entrants.

## **I The Concept of Community and the Issue of Class**

Modern use of the word community is commonplace. This can range across a variety of situations: in terms of a geographically constrained area or region and thus, in perhaps its most widely utilised context relating to local community linked to a specific place, a village or town perhaps, or to distinguish rural and urban environments; in relation to ethnic groupings, where the designation community can have both cultural and religious connotations as well as possibly a local dimension; even when matters of world-wide importance are discussed this often gives rise to a favoured media phrase (and in my opinion, misnomer) the ‘international community’ which implies consensus and co-operation . Despite its ubiquity, I suggest that in the majority of cases there is little clarity as to what is actually meant by community.

I have referred to some of the modern uses of the word community, but it is as well perhaps to consider the earlier evolution of the term. Raymond Williams has recorded the development of the word from the fourteenth century and highlights a number of meanings: the common or common people; an organised society; a distinct district, the quality of holding something in common; common identity and characteristics. From the nineteenth century, however, he sees community as defining something which was ‘more immediate’ than society in its wider sense.<sup>1</sup> In essence then, we perceive a term which in general implies immediacy, intimacy,

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford, 1985), p. 75.

and commonality. Community has been the subject of scholarly research from sociological, anthropological and historical perspectives, much of which has been concerned with attempts at definition and identification and analysis of its characteristics. Perhaps the most obvious linkage in many people's minds is that between community and locality. Keith Snell for instance, articulates this point arguing that most historians, himself included, 'think of community as formed mainly within a bounded area in which virtually everybody knew each other, to which people felt that they belonged'.<sup>2</sup> Edward Royle follows a similar train of thought by maintaining that a community should be 'small and limited enough for the members to know one another'.<sup>3</sup> For both Snell and Royle, the particular 'place' that equates with community is the parish, and for the former, '*Community* for most people *was the parish* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.<sup>4</sup> Whilst the position taken by Snell and Royle is perfectly valid, the suggestion that community is intrinsically allied to place, raises an immediate problem when discussing its relevance to late nineteenth century railway construction workers. Long term residence in one location was usually incompatible with the nature of work connected with major civil engineering projects, and the transient nature of settlement patterns suggests a fundamental detachment from place. However, the situation was not as straightforward as it might at first appear. Yes; the workers did migrate at frequent intervals; but when engaged on a particular project a number, together with their dependents, were housed in purpose built huts that in the case of the Great Central route, formed small but discrete settlements. Even those workers

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<sup>2</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, see esp. pp. 1, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Royle, 'The Parish Community Through the Vicarage Window: Nineteenth-Century Clergy Visitation Returns', *Family & Community History*, 12:1 (2009), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp. 499-500.

who resided in local towns and villages often lived in close proximity to their fellow workers.

An affinity with place may be important for many, but it is not the only determinant of community. Although writing in the context of nations, Benedict Anderson has argued that ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined’.<sup>5</sup> This allows us to consider the concept from a more abstract perspective. A sense of belonging is surely a key issue in this respect and has become a recurrent theme throughout much of the literature concerned with community. Clearly, belonging can be strongly associated with place, but this need not necessarily be the case, indeed, ‘community is clearly not synonymous with locality’.<sup>6</sup> The desire to belong to a group exhibiting a common lifestyle or occupation, or to a network of kin, friends and acquaintances can be just as powerful. Anthony P. Cohen suggests that the word community indicates both the membership of a small group having something in common, but which also distinguishes them from other groups. For him the boundaries between communities are important in defining the differences that may exist between them; however, such boundaries are not necessarily physical.<sup>7</sup> It has been argued that it is possible to inhabit more than one community at any given time, whether this be place of residence, kin, place of work, church or school.<sup>8</sup> The railway workers were clearly not completely divorced from society at large and a degree of interaction was inevitable, and this was by no means limited solely to those living within the local population. In her seminal anthropological study of the Cambridgeshire

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (reprint, London and New York, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Deacon and Moira Donald, ‘In Search of Community History’, *Family and Community History*, 7, (2004), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester and London, 1985), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Deacon and Donald, ‘In Search of Community History’, p. 14.

village of Elmdon during the 1960s, Marilyn Strathern examines the resident's identification with the village itself and particularly what constitutes a 'real Elmdoner' whether judged by long term residence or extensive and multi-generational kinship ties. The study may have been concerned first and foremost with place, but interestingly, she determined that it was not the 'geographical entity' of the village that figures predominantly in concepts of belonging. Issues such as 'common occupation or life-style ... friendships and feuds', matter where relationships are concerned.<sup>9</sup> In approaching the issue of difference, Cohen presents an interesting insight into cultures and communities that are peripheral or marginal in nature, neither of which in his opinion, should be viewed solely from a geographical perspective. What is most marked in such circumstances he maintains, is the commitment, and sense of belonging shown by the members towards their communities. He also brings another aspect into play; self-awareness and consciousness of difference, with the suggestion that community is above all a mental construct.<sup>10</sup> Consideration of marginality must figure prominently in any consideration of the railway workers as they were often portrayed as being at the margins of society, although the degree to which this was relevant at the end of the nineteenth century is open to question. Nonetheless, aspects of their lifestyle did set them apart.

Reference above to the importance of social relationships in any notion of community is surely key. C. J. Calhoun postulates that community is concerned with 'the relationships among social actors', and that the closeness of relationships implies 'face to face contact, commonality of purpose, familiarity and

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<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Strathern, *Kinship at the Core* (Cambridge and New York, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, p. 114.



dependability'.<sup>11</sup> Once again this provides a base against which to analyse the railway construction workers. Of particular relevance is the fact that groups of families moved between common locations as one job ended and another began. This implies knowledge of each other, contact and commonality of purpose and familiarity, thus, bonds established in this way were not necessarily broken by the act of migration. Social relationships, however, are not always harmonious, and Bill Bramwell is surely correct when he postulates that communities 'are made up of conflicts and disunity as well as of what people had in common'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Gerard Delanty stresses that ties of belonging do not exclude conflict.<sup>13</sup>

Relationships and the question of identity do I think have much to do with experiences. In such circumstances it is impossible, and moreover inappropriate to ignore the issue of class. Within the Marxist tradition, and as pre-eminently argued by E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*, shared experiences and common interests have been advanced as the drivers which underpinned the emergence of working-class consciousness.<sup>14</sup> Thompson's work of course set the agenda in many respects, but subsequently the very notion of class has been keenly debated by historians. Thompson's work has been criticised for example, for its failure to engage in any meaningful way with the experiences of women in the shaping of class, thus, for Joan Scott, his concept of class was 'constructed as a masculine identity'.<sup>15</sup> Lynette Finch has argued that the concept of the working class was a middle-class construct as a means of distinguishing its own

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<sup>11</sup> C. J. Calhoun, 'Community: Toward a Variable Conceptualization for Comparative Research', *Social History* 5:1 (1980), pp. 110-111.

<sup>12</sup> Bill Bramwell, 'Public Space and Local Communities: The Example of Birmingham, 1840-1880', in Gerry Kearns and Charles W. J. Withers (eds), *Urbanising Britain: Essays on Class and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York, 1991), p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Gerard Delanty, *Community* (2nd edn, London and New York, 2010), p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (reprint, Harmondsworth, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), p. 72.

identity, and that the category of the working class only gained meaning because that group ultimately gave it meaning.<sup>16</sup> More recently the very basis of class as a useful form of differentiation has been called into question given the internal divisions inherent within the working class: 'what possible meanings remain for class as an operative political category'.<sup>17</sup> Yet as Mike Savage has pointed out the critics of class have failed to produce an alternative way 'of understanding or explaining social inequality'.<sup>18</sup> There seems little doubt that the working class exhibited clear divisions, many of which were recognised by those from within; they patently did not form an amorphous mass. If the working class as a whole was divided in a variety of ways, then this was equally applicable to late nineteenth century construction workers. Although they may have been perceived in some quarters as forming a generic class, obvious demarcations were apparent within their own ranks.<sup>19</sup> As I pointed out in the Introduction, the workers engaged on the Great Central consisted of unskilled navvies and a range of semi-skilled workers and skilled tradesmen. Needless to say, some occupational groupings viewed themselves as superior to others with whom they worked, thus, the skilled might denigrate the unskilled:

The men who did the tunnelling ... being skilled and well-paid workmen, were even more independent than the joiners, masons, and bricklayers.

There was little love lost between these latter and the ordinary navvies. The

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<sup>16</sup> Lynette Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance* (St Leonards, 1993), p. 144.

<sup>17</sup> Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbor, 2007), p. 173.

<sup>18</sup> Mike Savage, 'Class and Labour History' in Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Class and Other Identities: Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History* (Oxford and New York, 2002), p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> For instance the head teacher at Ruddington Boy's Elementary School designated all of the fathers of the migrant children as navvies even though several trade groupings were evident. See NottA, SA143/1/3, Ruddington Endowed C of E Boys School Admission Register, 1892-1910.

workers in stone and brick looked upon the drillers and wagon-fillers as an inferior race.<sup>20</sup>

We may possibly see traces here of the occupational consciousness that in the case of some coal miners has been shown to have surmounted class consciousness, thus, they saw ‘themselves first and foremost as miners rather than members of a wider working class’.<sup>21</sup>

Selina Todd has very recently reflected upon the continuing relevance of *The Making of the English Working Class*. Whilst acknowledging the omissions of the book (rural life, women’s experiences, and servants are among the topics she sees as being neglected), she retains a certainty that its central premise that class is not a static order but rather ‘an active, dynamic relationship, lived out in different ways according to the context in which people find themselves’ still holds good, and the substance of Thompson’s thesis has in fact provided the insight underpinning much of her own work.<sup>22</sup> As such it is important to gauge the extent to which the common experiences of the construction workers and their families had the ability to unite people and contribute to a sense of identity. Equally, even if they were in some respects different, were there aspects of their lives that created an affinity with other members of the working class? This is perhaps particularly pertinent in relation to notions of respectability which played such a significant part in nineteenth century society, and which has been seen as central to the development of class categorizations.<sup>23</sup> Respectability is of course often associated

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Smith, ‘Railway Making and Railway Makers in England Twenty-Five Years Ago’, *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, July 1886, p. 546.

<sup>21</sup> Hester Barron, *The 1926 Miners’ Lockout: Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield* (Oxford, 2010), p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> Selina Todd, ‘People Matter’, *History Workshop Journal*. Advance Access Published August 16, 2013, doi: 10.1093/hwj/dbt010, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (reprint, London, 1998), see esp. p. 3.

with living arrangements, and given that hutted encampments are intrinsically linked to navvies, it is to these that my attention is initially directed.

## **II Itinerant Workers and the Hutted Encampments**

The ability to link one-hundred and one families with census returns has enabled me to establish that the vast majority were itinerant in that they had moved into the Midlands because of the new railway, and many subsequently migrated to other parts of the country when work on the London Extension was completed. What becomes immediately apparent is that where households contained a male head, they were overwhelmingly English by birth with other ethnic origins being very much in the minority. One was of Scottish birth and six Welsh, and one Irish although there is an element of doubt with regard to the latter as inconsistencies evident in the 1891 and 1901 censuses suggest the possibility of either Irish or English birth. This suggests a pattern that conforms with the findings of the more recent scholarship undertaken by such as Brooke, Cowley and Leivers that indicates that civil engineering projects in much of England during the nineteenth century were undertaken by a predominantly English born workforce. Indeed, this should not come as too much of a surprise since contemporary opinion seems to have been well aware of this fact: ‘They [navvies] may be said to come from nearly every shire in England and Wales, but principally from the agricultural districts of England’.<sup>24</sup> This comment certainly rings true as far as these men are concerned as their places of birth show a very wide geographical spread. Northern counties such as Lancashire and Yorkshire feature as do areas of eastern England, the south east and the south west. If one region does predominate it is the Midlands. Given that

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<sup>24</sup> W. H. O., ‘A Few Words About Navvies’, *Leisure Hour*, 804 (1867), p. 326.

the Great Central ran through the heart of the midland counties of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, this fact might offer support to the proposition that railway contractors ‘recruited their construction labour predominantly from the regions in which building was taking place’.<sup>25</sup> However, in referring to the Midlands I conceive the region in its widest sense, and consequently include men born in areas some distance from the course of the route, notably Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, and Gloucestershire. Of course place of birth and place of residence at the time of either the 1891 or 1901 census cannot indicate very long term migration patterns or indeed, the most recent place of residence, but reference to the birth places of offspring points to a high degree of mobility. Place of birth can of course have meaning for many. Joanne McEwan and Pamela Sharpe have touched upon the historical meaning of ‘home’, explaining that while it could relate to one’s dwelling place, it was frequently used to describe a specific village or town. When used in the latter sense there ‘does seem to be a strong emotional tie of belonging in many migrant writings’.<sup>26</sup>

The majority of the men were what might be termed career construction workers, or at the very least, had gained previous experience in various parts of the country. Where families can be traced to the 1891 census, male heads were for the most part working on a variety of civil engineering projects throughout the country prior to moving to the new railway. The same locations or geographical areas reappear throughout the records, but two in particular figure prominently: the area extending eastwards from Ellesmere Port in Cheshire through Runcorn to Cadishead and Irlam in Lancashire, and that encompassing Chapel-en-le-Frith,

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<sup>25</sup> Brooke, *The Railway Navvy*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Joanne McEwan and Pamela Sharpe, ‘Introduction’, in Joanne McEwan and Pamela Sharpe (eds), *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1600-1850* (Basingstoke and New York, 2011), p. 11.

Chinley and Edale in Derbyshire. The first area delineates the route of the Manchester Ship Canal built between 1887 and 1893 where twenty-four of the families were resident, and the second a section of the Dore & Chinley railway line built between 1888 and 1894 by the Midland Railway to link Sheffield and Manchester, and encompassing Totley and Cowburn tunnels.<sup>27</sup> Here a further seventeen families were recorded as resident. Similar patterns are discernible following completion of the Great Central route. The 1901 census indicates that families were widely scattered throughout England, but a number of common locations are again apparent, notably, Old Sodbury in Gloucestershire, and Idle near Bradford in Yorkshire.

The itinerant lifestyle of the workers is immediately apparent, as is the common migration patterns followed by a number of the families. Information as to where future work might be obtained was widely available. An informal network grew up whereby information concerning new opportunities often circulated by word of mouth to the extent that a writer earlier in the century described the process in these terms: ‘there is no need to advertise for hands. The news passing from mouth to mouth, permeates somehow in an inconceivably short time through the scattered ranks of navvydom’.<sup>28</sup> The need to ensure continued employment was a prime concern for the men, and the demand for specific skills and trades in many cases determined the precise course of migration. This is perhaps best illustrated by reference to one group of workers, tunnel miners. Of those miners identified as engaged on the construction of Catesby tunnel, six had previously worked at either Totley or Cowburn tunnels. A number of the Catesby miners were subsequently recorded as resident at Old Sodbury and Idle where tunnel construction was in

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<sup>27</sup> Leivers, ‘The Modern Ishmaels?’, pp. 141-155.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Dickens, (ed.), ‘Navvies’, *All The Year Round*, 27 December 1873, p. 200.

progress at the turn of the century. Some civil engineering contractors employed a small core workforce on a permanent basis which consisted of their most trusted and long serving men. These men, who often entered the company's employment at an early age as manual workers, illustrate how it was possible to work one's way up to a senior position. The firm of Logan & Hemingway formed in 1865 had a previous association with the MS&L before it won the contract to build the section of the London Extension running from Annesley to East Leake. A partner in the firm who recalled the importance attached to a small number of highly experienced and dependable employees noted how the firm 'always had these about us'. He also claimed that the firm could always retain the best men across the board because of its ability to obtain lucrative contracts, and the fact that its sub-contractors always paid good money.<sup>29</sup> True or not, there is little doubt that many construction workers did seek to establish and maintain an association with individual contractors such as Logan & Hemingway if there was a good prospect of regular employment.

In terms of their living accommodation, a significant proportion of the men and their dependents probably moved into permanent housing either as tenants or boarders in towns and villages close to the line. To the north of Leicester it was said that the navvies reside 'principally in the town of Loughborough'.<sup>30</sup> The Buckinghamshire village of Quainton may exemplify the situation that pertained in a number of smaller communities: here some of the men and their families found accommodation within the village, while others resided in huts close to the railway at the edge of the village.<sup>31</sup> As mentioned earlier it was in the more rural areas that small hutted encampments were provided by the contractors. There was nothing to compare in scale with the large settlements that had been in evidence on the Settle

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<sup>29</sup> Nott A, DD505/1, Recollections of Charles Robert Hemingway (typescript), see esp., p. 45, 53.

<sup>30</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1895-96*, p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> *Bucks Herald*, 8 June 1895.

and Carlisle route for instance, but they did represent a continuation of the tradition dating back to the early days of railway construction. There had been a gradual improvement in the standard of such accommodation although one clergyman working with a railway mission between 1876 and 1878 felt that ‘its [the shanty’s] debasing, demoralising influences in times past, and even now, are too apparent’.<sup>32</sup> However, whilst some of the accommodation he witnessed was still very basic he was also able to describe huts that were vastly superior in quality, and which exhibited a degree of both comfort and respectability. Thus, he felt able to posit that: ‘All this serves to show that there is not that utter and universal want of taste and civilisation among our railway makers which is generally supposed’.<sup>33</sup> The huts tended to be of a uniform design divided into three parts: a central section used on a communal basis for day to day living, cooking and eating by both the main occupant and his family and also any lodgers, and to either side were bedrooms, one for the family and the other for the lodgers.

By the end of the century temporary hutted accommodation, where it was utilised, was generally of a reasonable standard as the planned village of Birchinlee in Derbyshire demonstrates. Aside from the experience of navvies, there were occasions when there was a need to accommodate other temporary workers. For instance, during World War I this need took on a new urgency and saw the active involvement of the state not least with regard to the opening of a munitions factory at Greta in Scotland in 1916. As Chris Brader has detailed, the very existence of the factory and the requirement to recruit and house an essentially migrant workforce of some 15,000 led to the building of two new townships at Gretna and nearby Eastriggs. The townships contained a mixture of permanent dwellings for skilled

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<sup>32</sup> Barrett, *Life and Work*, p. 63

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.



married workers and temporary brick and timber hostels and timber bungalow style huts for the predominantly single female workers, and illustrates the extent of central planning on the part of the Ministry of Munitions not only in respect of the design and construction of the townships, but also the control exerted over the day to day life of the women in what were of course exceptional circumstances.<sup>34</sup> It is pertinent to ask the question of whether or not control or surveillance was an issue of relevance to navy encampments. In his study of philanthropic housing provision through an analysis of material culture, Gordon Marino has broached this very subject. He too has referred to Birchinlee and the fact that there was an element of segregation between the huts of workmen and those of foremen and managers, with the workmen's situated close to the police station and missionary. They were thus, under 'constant supervision'. He also notes the existence of rules governing the behaviour of the huts' residents.<sup>35</sup> As I have already stressed, encampments such as Birchinlee were of a scale that went far beyond anything that was found in connection with the London Extension, where there were only small clusters of exclusively living accommodation. As such, any surveillance would certainly have been less overt. It was not uncommon for the local NMS missionary to reside in a hut alongside the men to whom he ministered, but since each missionary was responsible for a stretch of the new line close scrutiny of more than a fraction of the workforce would have been impossible. There was no permanent police presence within the camps, although additional constables, often funded by contractors or the railway company, were recruited to monitor the navy population more generally.

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<sup>34</sup> Chris Brader, 'Timbertown Girls: Gretna Female Munitions Workers in World War I', (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Gordon Marino, ' "You Shall be Taught What You Need to Know, Both For Your Soul and Bodies" (Annual Report of the Manchester Juvenile Reformatory, 1857). The Archaeology of Philanthropic Housing and the Development of the Modern Citizen, (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2012). p 102.

Despite not having come across any specific evidence, it is not inconceivable that there were rules in place to govern the occupation of the huts. Equally pertinent is the interest that may have been generated on the part of local sanitary authorities about temporary buildings lying within their areas of responsibility. David Brooke has referred to a contemporary observer at the turn of the twentieth century who commented on the fact that construction sites were outside the authority of any government agency to intervene.<sup>36</sup> However, it seems incongruous that encampments adjacent to areas of permanent residential occupation were not subject to some form of inspection and control if they were ever deemed to constitute a nuisance, were subject to a nuisance complaint, or were considered the source of infectious disease. This is especially so if many sanitary inspectors were concerned with the domestic arena and the ‘systematic inspection of housing’.<sup>37</sup> The 1872 Public Health Act certainly provided local authorities with considerable powers in respect of the control of overcrowding, removal of nuisances, and powers of entry to dwellings.<sup>38</sup>

I have been able to trace twenty-two families who resided at Catesby camp and a further five at a camp near the village of Thorpe Mandeville in Northamptonshire. The settlements have left no trace and there are no written records to indicate how large they were, although a few contemporary references do give a very rough idea as to their extent. For example, one estimate put the number of people living at a camp near the line at Cosby in Leicestershire at ninety-five.<sup>39</sup> Reference to the location of some families at the time of the 1891 census reveals camps at several sites along the course of the Manchester Ship Canal ranging in

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<sup>36</sup> Brooke, *The Railway Navy*, p. 47.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Hamlin, ‘Nuisances and Community in Mid-Victorian England: The Attractions of Inspection’, *Social History*, 38:3 (2013), p. 366.

<sup>38</sup> Public Health and Local Government Act, 1872, 35 & 36 Vict., c. 79.

<sup>39</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1895-6*, p. 44.

size from twenty to sixty-nine huts, and Leivers has identified a camp consisting of fifty-five huts near the entrance to Totley and Cowburn tunnels in Derbyshire.<sup>40</sup> Projecting forward to 1901 two camps at Old Sodbury tunnel can be identified of eleven and twenty-four huts respectively. On the basis of this evidence it is reasonable to assume that the camps attached to the Great Central were relatively small. Newton's photographs whilst not conclusive, do tend to confirm this view. A photograph of Catesby camp is reproduced at Figure 1.1. If this was indeed the largest camp then it is difficult to appreciate its true scale from the photograph. The image is frustrating in so far as one cannot gauge how much lies beyond the range of Newton's lens. In general terms it does appear that camps situated along the course of railway lines or waterways which ran for many miles, were close to centres of population, and where the workforce was scattered, were generally small in scale. Only where the workforce was concentrated at a single site as in the case of reservoir construction or where the location was remote, did large scale camps predominate.

Inevitably conditions in the settlements varied from household to household, with one observer of the new railway works commenting that 'some of the huts were wonderfully tidy and comfortable, others quite the reverse'.<sup>41</sup> Photographs of the exteriors and interiors of some of the huts along the course of the line, although of course selective, do give the impression of accommodation that despite its temporary nature is well appointed and relatively comfortable. As the image at Figure 1.2 shows, some of the huts resemble a single storey terrace, in so far as they are constructed in the form of a large structure divided into several separate dwellings. All are built of timber with pitched and felted roofs and the chimneys

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<sup>40</sup> Leivers, 'The Modern Ishmaels?', p. 148.

<sup>41</sup> *Politics and Society: The Journals of Lady Knightley of Fawsley, 1885 to 1913*, ed. Peter Gordon (Northampton, 1999), p. 260.

seem to be brick built. The porches or outhouses are clearly evident. Figure 1.3 suggests that some of the camps were extremely small. This one is nonetheless of interest as we can note what may be a wooden privy standing just outside the huts, and to the right are what seem to be makeshift gardens. Images of hut interiors are extremely rare and I am aware of only three. The image at Figure 1.4 is of the kitchen or main living area of a hut complete with a range. The images at Figures 1.5 and 1.6 although taken at the same location are probably not from the same hut. The last two are rooms from the homes of what were admittedly either a foreman or supervisor and his family, and show a bedroom and what amounts to a parlour. The bedroom has an iron bedstead, rugs covering part of the floor, the walls adorned with pictures, and vases and other ornaments standing on a textile covered chest or cupboard. To one side stands a pram. The parlour is even more extravagantly furnished with a chaise longue and chest of drawers. This chimes with Barrett's account from nearly two decades earlier. Indeed, he was not the only observer to note this characteristic. When spending a day with the workers building Tilbury Docks in 1883, the Revd A. R. Buckland commented that upon entering the residence of one family he encountered 'a very pleasant interior'.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, the evocation of domesticity points to the fact that at the very least, some of the occupants of the huts took a pride in the appearance of their temporary homes.

The concept of domesticity may have been predicated on a strictly gendered division between the private and public spheres, but in reality such a clear distinction was less readily discernible. The separate spheres thesis has been

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<sup>42</sup> Revd A. R. Buckland, 'A Day with the Navvies at Tilbury', *Quiver*, January 1883, p. 691.

*Figure 1.1: Catesby Navvy Camp, Northamptonshire.*



*Source: The Newton Collection. Reproduced by permission of Leicestershire County Council.*

*Figure 1.2: Helmdon Road Navy Camp, Northamptonshire.*



*Source: The Newton Collection. Reproduced by permission of Leicestershire County Council.*

*Figure 1.3: Barley Fields Navvy Camp, Finmere, Buckinghamshire.*



*Source: The Newton Collection. Reproduced by permission of Leicestershire County Council.*

*Figure 1.4: Interior of Navy Hut, Newton, Warwickshire.*



*Source: The Newton Collection. Reproduced by permission of Leicestershire County Council.*



*Figure 1.5: Interior of Navy Hut, Calvert, Buckinghamshire.*



*Source: The Newton Collection. Reproduced by permission of Leicestershire County Council.*

*Figure 1.6: Interior of Navvy Hut, Calvert, Buckinghamshire.*



*Source: The Newton Collection. Reproduced by permission of Leicestershire County Council.*

acknowledged as an important step in our understanding of class and gender, but ‘it is far from being the whole story’.<sup>43</sup> John Tosh has questioned the degree to which men and women inhabited the private and public spheres, pointing to the fact that the home was at the centre of a man’s authority over his dependents and thus, ‘integral to masculinity’. He also argues that if domesticity was a product of the ‘bourgeoisie’ it ultimately became the aim ‘of all but the bohemian and the very poor’.<sup>44</sup> Others have also cast doubt on the strict compartmentalisation between the private and public with the convincing argument put forward that middle-class women were ‘constantly testing, negotiating and remaking boundaries’.<sup>45</sup> Equally, it has been posited that for working-class women who lacked financial and material resources, the distinction between public and private spheres held little relevance.<sup>46</sup> I will explore the ‘civilising mission’ further in Chapter Five, but it was this movement with its links to philanthropy and social action more generally, that did much to instil the ethos of domesticity within the working class by inculcating solid values that made the middle classes, ‘independent and upright, sober and provident, educated, sexually restrained, family orientated, church going’.<sup>47</sup> Despite obvious differences in layout, I am nonetheless struck by both the practical and symbolic similarities evident between the interiors of the huts described above, and the various spaces of a typical ‘by-law’ working-class house, with its gradations of

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<sup>43</sup> Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London, 1999), see esp., pp. 2-4.

<sup>45</sup> Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman’s Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York, 2007), p. 4. See also Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2001), esp., p. 79.

<sup>46</sup> Karl Ittmann, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England* (Basingstoke and London, 1995), p. 155.

<sup>47</sup> Gunn, ‘The Ministry, the Middle Class and the “Civilising Mission”’, p. 34.

cleanliness skilfully interpreted by Victoria Kelley.<sup>48</sup> As Kelley explains these dwellings, often constructed in the form of terraces, were known as ‘by-law’ houses due to the ability of local authorities under the Public Health Act 1875 to make by-laws governing the design of working-class housing. This was part of a move to address the poor state of much working-class housing.<sup>49</sup> She highlights the front room or parlour, only used on Sundays or holidays or for receiving special visitors, and containing the best furniture and objects and thus, kept very clean and tidy. This room projected what was best about the house and the manner in which it was furnished and decorated made a statement of status. We can see an obvious parallel with the parlour in the hut at Figure 1.6, but also with the bedroom at Figure 1.5. In both instances we see a space apart from the main living area where some of the better possessions are kept, and which appear clean and tidy. The pram visible in the bedroom merits comment. It is of the familiar design dating from the 1880s whereby baby and pusher faced each other.<sup>50</sup> It clearly indicates the presence of a young child within the family or possibly the imminent arrival of a new infant, but what to modern eyes might seem a fairly unremarkable item may have had much greater significance to the parents concerned. Lesley Whitworth in her study of consumerism in 1930s Coventry relates that one respondent to whom she spoke about the prospect of owner-occupation ‘ marvelled at the thought of having “a new baby, a new pram and a new house” ’.<sup>51</sup> The context is of course different, but in

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<sup>48</sup> Victoria Kelley, ‘ “The Virtues of a Drop of Cleansing Water”: Domestic Work and Cleanliness in the British Working Classes, 1880-1914’, *Women's History Review* 18:5 (2009), p. 722.

<sup>49</sup> Kelley, ‘ “The Virtues of a Drop of Cleansing Water” ’, p. 722. See also John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970* (London, 1980), p. 155-6.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny* (London and Sydney, 1972), p. 177.

<sup>51</sup> Lesley Karen Whitworth, ‘Men, Women, Shops and “Little, Shiny Homes”: The Consuming of Coventry 1930-1939’ (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 1997), p. 212.

the latter case, material possessions acquired against the background of rising fortunes and expanding horizons could generate a feeling of pride and satisfaction.

The living room or kitchen in both house and hut are more closely aligned. A space of ‘intimate domesticity’, this is where the household lived for much of the time, where the hearth or range was situated, and where eating, cooking and interaction took place. As such, the level of cleanliness fluctuated somewhat.<sup>52</sup> Finally, Kelley describes the scullery and backyard, the ‘backstage’ area where the main water supply was located and where the heaviest and dirtiest work was carried out; thus, this is reflected in the relative lack of cleanliness.<sup>53</sup> It is unlikely that any huts contained a separate scullery or back kitchen although the porches or outhouses may have served a similar purpose. The image at Figure 1.3 shows what looks like a makeshift copper just outside the huts, while outside the huts at Figure 1.2 it is possible to discern a tin bath, basins and a bucket. This suggests that domestic tasks such as washing took place in communal areas surrounding the huts. One of Newton’s photographs depicts what is assumed to be the main water supply for a camp, a large wooden or wooden clad tank raised on stilts. As to the precise mechanism used to supply water to the huts, events at Brackley in Northamptonshire shed some light on the matter. Following a request from Messrs Walter Scott & Co the contractor for that section of line, Brackley Borough Council authorised the supply of water from the local water works for domestic purposes for a number of huts at the edge of the town. A charge of 1s 6d per one thousand gallons as measured by meter was levied, on condition that all installation and maintenance costs were covered by the company.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kelley, ‘ “The Virtues of a Drop of Cleansing Water” ’, p. 728.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., see esp. pp. 724, 728.

<sup>54</sup> NRO, LG3/2, Brackley Borough Council and Urban Sanitary Authority minutes, 12 February 1895.

Kelley has also noted attempts by the late nineteenth century to ‘civilise’ the working classes and promote domesticity. Whilst accepting that middle-class values of domesticity may have been communicated to the working classes, she stresses that the working class evolved its own values of domesticity that were based on concepts of motherly love and service to the family ‘that included the work of cleanliness, and that were used as a badge of respectability in a network of community values’.<sup>55</sup> Such a process in practice has been identified by Valerie Gordon Hall. Women within the coal mining communities of Northumberland she argues, had a part in defining their own domesticity setting standards of housekeeping that were ‘exceedingly high given the coal dust-laden environment and their frequent pregnancies’.<sup>56</sup> In other words it was the need to conform to the norms of one’s own community that mattered as much as any outside influence. It is quite possible that the interiors of the huts which Newton photographed were arranged specially for the camera. Images of some of the residents of other huts standing outside their homes are naturally posed, and we see them well dressed, perhaps in their Sunday best, again for the benefit of the camera. This does not detract from the fact that the overall image projected is one of respectability with the home being a haven and a place apart from the dirt and noise of the workplace. I would suggest that by the end of the nineteenth century, railway construction workers, transient though they might be, were by no means divorced from many of the core values, not least that of domesticity, that dominated Victorian society. Huttled encampments formed the backdrop to a shared experience for the inhabitants every bit as powerful as that for people within a permanent settlement. The tendency for group migration from job to job meant that although there was a

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<sup>55</sup> Kelley, ‘“The Virtues of a Drop of Cleansing Water”’, p. 728.

<sup>56</sup> Valerie Gordon Hall, ‘Contrasting Female Identities: Women in Coal Mining Communities in Northumberland, England, 1900-1939’, *Journal of Women's History*, 13:2 (2001), p. 113.

regular change of location the opportunity existed for a continued association between individuals and family members. Social relationships that are such a key element in the formation of communities could grow in such surroundings, given the scope for regular contact between the inhabitants. Permanence of 'place' then was not necessarily a critical element for these people.

### **III Navvies Within the Wider Community**

The huddled encampments housed only a portion of the workforce; the local economy had always been the source of much accommodation.<sup>57</sup> The evidence gleaned from census returns indicates that to a great extent families had to be pragmatic when it came to accommodation. Any personal preferences aside, a family might reside in a hut at one location and in a permanent dwelling at the next or vice versa. Affordability and suitability may have played a part, but it has been suggested that many working families occupied accommodation that was not necessarily appropriate from a size or income point of view, but because it was available within the area in which they wished to live.<sup>58</sup> For the construction workers the significant fact is that there was a regular cross over between the types of accommodation. The camps afforded the opportunity for families to live together in small groups, but those who resided in local towns and villages often lived nearby in the same streets and formed what were effectively small enclaves. Within Nottingham the NMS noted the homes of a least fifty men clustered around the New Basford mission room, and one hundred close to the Briar Street room.<sup>59</sup> At Ruddington south of Nottingham, I have been able to identify seventeen families who settled in the town during the construction phase of the new railway. Two

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<sup>57</sup> Brooke, *The Railway Navvy*, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 152.

<sup>59</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1897-98*, p. 51.

families headed by navvies William Price and Thomas Mills lived in the High Street with a further four families headed by engine drivers Thomas Knox and James Broderick and navvies Joseph Owens and Samuel Bemrose, resident in the Leys just to the south of the High Street. Four more families including those of gangers Samuel Clay and James Dicks were housed in Marl Road.<sup>60</sup> Given that a station on the new line was built in the town it is natural that men should seek available accommodation in the town and unsurprising that they formed small groups in the process. What is apparent is the fact that whether living in camps or as part of the local economy, the railway families were faced with the problem of having to set up a new home on a frequent basis. This no doubt caused considerable upheaval for all of the family members.

The construction workers and their dependents did not exist in a vacuum. There is nothing to suggest that those associated with the building of the Great Central experienced any overt or prolonged hostility in the areas in which they settled, however, suspicion and distrust on the part of local people was probably to be expected. Snell has detected a general dislike of 'foreigners' which operated at a very parochial level and which he terms 'the culture of local xenophobia'. For many rural dwellers across much of the country this applied just as much to the inhabitants of neighbouring villages and parishes as those from a considerable distance away.<sup>61</sup> Unfamiliarity and lingering but irrational fears of the lawless and godless navvy no doubt came into play. Other groups were seen in a similar light. Irish immigrants who came into Britain in large numbers particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century are a case in point. In the North West of England

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<sup>60</sup> The location of these families is based upon information contained in the Ruddington School Admission Register. See SA143/1/3, Ruddington Endowed C of E Boys School Admission Register, 1892-1910.

<sup>61</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, see esp. pp. 28, 42.



in particular, they were not ‘warmly embraced by their English neighbours’, but neither were they regarded as outcasts from the rest of the working class.<sup>62</sup>

However, unlike incoming railway workers who were engaged in an occupation which was by and large outside of the normal experience of most people, the Irish, were often seen as an economic threat in that they competed for the same work as the local population.<sup>63</sup> Common ethnicity and religious adherence to Catholicism which exerted a powerful influence, did of course go some way to distinguish the Irish and for this reason they were seen in some quarters as racially inferior.<sup>64</sup>

Where a direct comparison between the two groups can perhaps be drawn, is in relation to the existence of occupational networks. We have seen that the railway workers lived as well as worked in close proximity; Carl Chinn has likewise drawn attention to the concentration of Irish men and women following the same occupation in certain areas of Birmingham in the early Victorian period, specifically several households of hat makers living in two adjoining streets.<sup>65</sup>

An increase in population, albeit temporary, may have placed additional burdens on local infrastructure, but it also represented an opportunity. Contact with the newcomers could be actively sought as at the Tin Town of Birchinlee where events at the recreation centre often attracted people from the surrounding district.<sup>66</sup> Shopkeepers and publicans no doubt welcomed the prospect of extra trade and those with property to rent could profit from the demand for housing. The advent of

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<sup>62</sup> Steven Fielding, ‘A Separate Culture?: Irish Catholics in Working-Class Manchester and Salford, c. 1890-1939’ in Andrew Davies and Steven Fielding (eds), *Worker's Worlds, Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939* (Manchester and New York, 1992), p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> W. J. Lowe, *The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: The Shaping of a Working-Class Community* (New York and Bern, 1989), p. 161.

<sup>64</sup> Charles W. J. Withers, ‘Class, Culture and Migrant Identity: Gaelic Highlanders in Urban Scotland’, in Gerry Kearns and Charles W. J. Withers (eds), *Urbanising Britain: Essays on Class and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York, 1991), p. 55-79.

<sup>65</sup> Carl Chinn, ‘“Sturdy Catholic Emigrants”: The Irish in Early Victorian Birmingham’, in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension* (Dublin and Portland, 1999), p. 65-66.

<sup>66</sup> Bevan, ‘Village of the Dammed’, p. 124.

the London Extension was greeted with some satisfaction at East Leake in Nottinghamshire since 'A short time ago, through bad trade, there were many unoccupied houses, but now every house is taken up.'<sup>67</sup> Single men seeking lodgings could also bring benefits to the local economy. Whatever apprehension there might be about unknown workers could prove insufficient to prevent local householders from attempting to exploit the situation to their advantage and at the same time give rise to a degree of integration. Fred Kitchen has recalled that his mother took in two joiners who were employed on the construction of a railway line near to his home in Yorkshire in about 1906. In fact the demand for accommodation was a boon to the whole neighbourhood with many households with a spare bedroom looking to cash in, 'It was the gold rush for Little Norwood'.<sup>68</sup>

Interaction between residents and incoming railway workers was clearly inevitable. The duration of stay on the part of the incomers may have dictated the reaction of the local population to some extent. If they settled for a reasonable length of time and became familiar with local patterns of behaviour they were more likely to be accepted.<sup>69</sup> Based upon the length of time their children remained within the local school, the majority of the families who were housed in Ruddington probably stayed in the area for relatively short periods. In many cases it was for only a matter of months, therefore, they had little time to adjust to the new surroundings or establish any kind of rapport with long settled residents. In contrast, it is likely that William Price remained for just over two and half years, whilst a further two families headed by navvies John Dunham and Fred Price may have remained for just under two years and eighteen months respectively. Although regular migration was a key feature of the life pattern of these families, frequent

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<sup>67</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 17 January 1895.

<sup>68</sup> Fred Kitchen, *Brother to the Ox* (reprint, London, 1945), see esp., p. 89, 112.

<sup>69</sup> Standish Meacham, *A Life Apart: The English Working Class 1890-1914* (London, 1977), p. 50.

house moves were by no means unusual across the working class as a whole. There was much localised movement within very limited areas. This may have been due to changes in family circumstances, or as has been noted, because frequent moves were not costly, and many people were often only aware of vacancies in their immediate locality.<sup>70</sup> More geographically significant migration was often determined by the demands of a specific trade or industry in much the same way as for construction workers. Standish Meacham has cited Alfred Williams who in *Life in a Railway Factory* recounted his experiences working in the Great Western Railway's Swindon Works from 1892 to 1914. Williams records that due to an over-supply of manpower within their ranks, boilermakers were constantly forced to move throughout the country in search of work.<sup>71</sup> Very recently, Alison Light has highlighted a high degree of mobility in respect of previous generations of her own family.<sup>72</sup> What these examples suggest is that the construction workers taken as a whole were perhaps less at the margins of working-class society at the end of the century than is often portrayed, and that migration was a fact of life for many working families. Many neighbourhoods especially in urban areas were not immune from a steady turnover among the residents and coming to terms with new neighbours or settling into new surroundings was not necessarily a rare occurrence.

#### **IV Socialisation: Work and Leisure**

Opportunities to forge relationships, and engender feelings of belonging existed in many facets of everyday life. The construction sites obviously figured prominently in the lives of the men, and could give the impression of a living community. This

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Dennis and Stephen Daniels, '“Community” and the Social Geography of Victorian Cities', in Michael Drake (ed.), *Time, Family and Community* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 205-6.

<sup>71</sup> Meacham, *A Life Apart*, p. 40.

<sup>72</sup> Alison Light, *Common People: The History of An English Family* (London, 2014).

is perhaps best articulated by the analogy penned by a visitor to the site of Tilbury docks: 'the site ... forms by itself a parish; the navvies and other men employed are its population'.<sup>73</sup> The comparison drawn in this case no doubt had much to do with the fact that the visitor was himself a clergyman. Nonetheless, the workplace offered the chance to establish friendships and perhaps renew acquaintances made on previous jobs, but could also reinforce male bonds between father and son. Multi-generational affiliation to the construction industry appears to have been widespread. Forty two percent of the households that could be traced to one or both of the census returns, included resident male offspring who had either followed their fathers occupation or were working in some capacity within the railway construction industry. A study of the coal and steel industries in South Yorkshire has demonstrated that close occupational ties between fathers and sons indicated strong economic and social links. Fathers encouraged sons who remained co-resident to work along-side them as a means of exerting some control over income flow into the household and prolonging parental authority.<sup>74</sup> Jane Sheppard has also noted the high incidence of sons following their fathers into employment at the Brighton works of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>75</sup> In the case of the construction workers two additional issues appear relevant. Firstly, the employment of youngsters from the age of about thirteen or fourteen on railway works was commonplace. They were most often engaged to grease wagons used for tipping spoil, or to operate points on the temporary rails laid to give train access to the various work sites. The sons of

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<sup>73</sup> Buckland, 'A Day with the Navvies at Tilbury', p. 691.

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Walker, 'Father's Pride?: Fatherhood in Industrializing Communities', in Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers (eds), *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke and New York, 2007), pp. 121-2.

<sup>75</sup> Jane A. Sheppard, 'The Provenance of Brighton's Railway Workers, 1841-1861', *Local Population Studies*, 72 (2004), pp. 28-29.

existing workers were obvious in a prime position to obtain employment in this way. Secondly, the migratory lifestyle must have influenced the choice of occupation in so far as association with the industry was a constant amongst continued upheaval.

The issue of language may have had the potential both to set the railway workers apart from the resident population and to give their working and domestic settings a distinctive edge. It has already been noted that the railway workers originated from many parts of the country thus, a wide range of dialects and forms of pronunciation would have been apparent within their ranks. It is probable that other linguistic mannerisms were also present. Navvies tended to bestow nicknames on each other to such an extent that they were ubiquitous, indeed, it was remarked that an individual 'rarely, if ever, uses his patronymic'.<sup>76</sup> Many nicknames were derived from a man's place of birth such as 'Bristol Jack' or 'Brummagem Bob', while others as the Revd Barrett observed, arose from 'reasons connected in some way with incidents of their life, their character, manners, conversation, appearance'.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, Barrett also noted that nicknames were not necessarily of a permanent nature; 'a man may get a new name on almost every "job" to which he goes'.<sup>78</sup> Without background knowledge of the men, the names might appear in the words of another contemporary as 'more or less ludicrous' when he referred to such as, 'Happy Jack', 'Dusty Tom', 'Billy-goat', and 'Frying-pan'.<sup>79</sup> Aside from nicknames, a slang vocabulary also developed amongst construction workers. For example, the soil that the navvies shovelled was always known as 'muck'. Edward Smith who had contact with the industry from an early age recorded some of the

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<sup>76</sup> W. H. O. 'A Few Words About Navvies', p. 326.

<sup>77</sup> Barrett, *Life and Work*, pp. 47-50.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Dickens (ed.), 'Navvies As They Used To Be', *Household Words*, 21 June 1856, p. 545.

commonly used words which included: ‘Blow-up’ that signalled the start of the working day, ‘Yo-ho’ the signal to cease work, a ‘getter’ a man using a pick or bar to loosen the soil, a ‘chucker’ someone who shovelled spoil into wagons, and ‘rabbit-holing’ a ruse whereby men would deliberately create cavities in the spoil shovelled into wagons to make it appear that they were fuller than they actually were.<sup>80</sup>

Aspects of the language used by these workers could then, be identified with their own occupations and wider industry, and had meaning and relevance to both themselves and their families. That said, this phenomenon did not of itself make them in any sense unique. This may appear contradictory, but can I think be explained by the fact that other trades and occupations, and indeed elements of the local population with whom they had contact no doubt exhibited similar patterns. For example, Hester Barron has highlighted the linguistic peculiarities that distinguished coal miners. She refers to one ex-miner who was born before the First World War and upon entering the pit had to learn a new vocabulary: ‘a mixture of the broadest dialect of Durham and a number of words ... used exclusively by pitmen when below ground’.<sup>81</sup> A contemporary who spent time as a climbing boy for a chimney sweep has described the language used by sweeps to describe such things as the brush, sooty cloth or the soot itself. He also recounts that if one sweep met another who he did not know he would ask ‘can you patter cant’ (speak slang) to determine if he was a novice or veteran at the trade.<sup>82</sup> Even today, regional variation manifested in either slang or extended vocabulary can on occasions be unintelligible to the uninitiated. What it does give support to however, is the idea of

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<sup>80</sup> Smith, ‘Railway Making and Railway Makers’, see esp. pp. 547, 550, 678.

<sup>81</sup> Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout*, p. 27.

<sup>82</sup> George Elson, *The Last of the Climbing Boys: An Autobiography* (London, 1900), see esp., p. 134, 137.

difference; language can constitute a demarcation and a boundary. It is significant in relation to the Great Central route that by 1894 school attendance was compulsory to at least age eleven, and the widespread attendance of the railway children at local elementary schools is attested by extant school records. In all probability therefore, it was within schools, at least initially, that contact between incomers and locals was most apparent and may have set a pattern for the future relations between children and adults alike. Children from a variety of backgrounds invariably mixed together in the schools and this could have provided the catalyst for the exploration of difference. Incoming children may have been derided and teased about their dialects or way with words by local children. In such circumstances, peer pressure can manifest itself in attempts to conform to local forms of speech, at least during school hours, in order to promote acceptance.<sup>83</sup> Even outside of school differences might be apparent. The experiences of Irish children who settled in mid-century Derby as a result of their parent's migration are perhaps analogous to those of navvy children in some respects. These children formed a distinct group because of 'bilingualism, cultural patterns of learning ... the experience of travel, family dislocation'.<sup>84</sup> It is ironic that for all children, irrespective of their backgrounds, schooling was at least in part predicated on the standardisation of English which was 'institutionalised in the compulsory state education system'.<sup>85</sup> The teaching of English sought to diminish the variations found throughout the country to the extent that 'the doctrine of correctness was

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<sup>83</sup> Scott K. Phillips, 'Natives and Incomers: The Symbolism of Belonging in Muker Parish North Yorkshire', in Michael Drake (ed.), *Time, Family and Community* (Oxford, 1994), p. 233.

<sup>84</sup> Hilary Minns, ' "Rough-Headed Urchins and Bonnetless Girls": A Study of Irish Childhood in Derby in the Mid Nineteenth-Century', (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1995), p. 273.

<sup>85</sup> Dick Leith, *A Social History of English* (2nd edn, reprint, London and New York, 1997), p. 57.

preached with mechanical inflexibility: attention to linguistic form overrode all considerations of linguistic function'.<sup>86</sup>

Other than school, to which I give greater prominence in a later chapter, one of the most likely points of contact, for the men at least, was the public house. For working men in general drinking was an important leisure activity. There is little doubt that the vast majority enjoyed both the drink itself, most commonly in the form of beer, and the conviviality associated with its consumption. For the construction workers it represented another shared experience, and offered an escape from work that was physically demanding and potentially dangerous. Alcohol might be welcomed for 'the depressant comfort it brought as a drug, and for the associated social comforts of the drinking place'.<sup>87</sup> Irrespective of the appeal of alcohol for its own sake, drinking was probably a form of leisure that was most readily accessible, particularly for those residing in huts or in the more rural areas. Recounting his experiences from earlier in the century, Barrett has indicated that for many hut dwellers evenings might be spent playing cards or shove halfpenny, reading or reminiscing in the hut while in the summer, 'quoits and cricket are among the favourite pastimes'; however, he accepted that the temptation of alcohol was ever present.<sup>88</sup>

Whilst drinking was, and still is, a major element within British culture, opportunities for enjoying leisure were far more extensive for the working population at the end of the nineteenth century. This was partly due to greater leisure time; for example the Bank Holidays Bill 1871 had provided for additional statutory holidays, and the concept of the "week-end" was more firmly

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>87</sup> Rob Donovan, 'Drink in Victorian Norwich, Part I', *Brewery History*, 130 (2009), p. 28.

<sup>88</sup> Barrett, *Life and Work*, p. 58, also 61-62.



established.<sup>89</sup> The role of leisure is central to the theses of working-class formation, and the full flowering of a working-class culture by the end of the century developed by both Eric Hobsbawm and Gareth Stedman Jones. They see the culture being identifiable in part with leisure activities such as the pub, sport, the seaside holiday, and the music hall.<sup>90</sup> Relating his argument to E. P. Thompson's position that the working class was made by the 1830s, Stedman Jones has claimed that 'something akin to a remaking took place in the years between 1870 and 1900'.<sup>91</sup> Earlier in the century aspects of working-class leisure were seen by some within the middle classes as a 'threat to social and political order',<sup>92</sup> and like many other areas of working-class life, in need of a 'civilising' influence.<sup>93</sup> This gave rise to the notion of 'rational recreation' which sought to achieve the twin aims of recreation combined with education and instruction.<sup>94</sup> Notwithstanding, there is little doubt that leisure and popular entertainments had established a firm grip by late century, cutting across class boundaries in many cases. It is illuminating to consider a sample of the activities available to the residents of Nottingham and district at Whitsun 1898:

The various railway companies had catered for excursionists with characteristic liberality ... The multifarious cheap trips from and to Nottingham on Monday morning were extremely well patronised ...

Another popular outdoor event was the annual Band of Hope demonstration

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<sup>89</sup> Peter Bailey, 'Entertainmentality!: Liberalizing Modern Pleasure in the Victorian Leisure Industry', in Simon Gunn and James Vernon (eds), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley, 2011), p. 121.

<sup>90</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1984), see esp., pp.185-6; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (reprint, Cambridge, 1993), see esp., p. 207.

<sup>91</sup> Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 236.

<sup>92</sup> Bailey, 'Entertainmentality!', p. 120.

<sup>93</sup> Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester and New York, 2005), p. 18.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

at the Arboretum ... river traffic ... was exceedingly brisk ... With regard to the indoor amusements, the theatres and music hall had provided capital holiday programmes.<sup>95</sup>

Those resident outside of the urban environments perhaps had fewer options, but the tradition of travelling shows and circuses brought entertainments to the rural areas, and provided many, 'particularly children ... with their first glimpse of the strange and the wonderful'.<sup>96</sup> The NMS does seem to have made efforts to organise leisure activities for workers residing in huts, although predictably on its own terms. What was described as 'a novel athletic meeting' was held near Cosby camp on Whit Monday 1896 which included races for adults and children, a cricket match, and tug of war. Alcohol was not in evidence as only tea and refreshments were served. If the claim that 'fully 2,000 persons from the surrounding district attended' is to be believed, it appears that the event attracted many non-navvies, and gives further weight to the view that there was considerable interaction and socialisation between the workers and local residents.<sup>97</sup> For urban dwellers the music hall had widespread appeal, given that by the 1880s it was 'rapidly consolidating as the dominant entertainment business'.<sup>98</sup> Its somewhat disreputable reputation had given way to a greater conformity with concepts of respectability due to the increased control exercised in terms of fixed seating, timing of performances and control of audience behaviour.<sup>99</sup> Both Leicester and Nottingham boasted music halls, with the two in Leicester situated 'in the densely

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<sup>95</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 4 June 1898.

<sup>96</sup> Brenda Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville and London, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 30 May 1896.

<sup>98</sup> Bailey, 'Entertainmentality!', p. 124.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124-5.

populated district of working-class housing half a mile north of the town centre'.<sup>100</sup>

It is claimed that music hall audiences in general comprised working people, both men and women, from 'every economic and industrial sphere' with many going in groups formed of family, neighbours or workmates.<sup>101</sup> This is once more redolent of camaraderie and group identity.

I cannot be certain whether the men working on the London Extension or any of their family members engaged in any of the specific leisure activities referred to above. But it is difficult to believe that some did not take advantage of the opportunities, especially considering the itinerant lifestyle which meant exposure to a variety of geographical locations. What I can be sure of is that for many, time off work was an important part of their overall life experience, and they were seemingly exercising agency as to their attendance at the works. We can gain some impression of this process from the periodic reports laid before the MS&L railway company by the resident engineers for the various sections of the line under construction. There are a number of occasions when holidays, including official bank holidays, those that were possibly discretionary on the part of contractors, and even some that were quite clearly unofficial, were cited as a reason for delays to the schedule. The Whitsun holiday of 1896 was said to have extended to four days, and as a result 'interfered with progress' on the Southern Division of the route.<sup>102</sup> In similar vein, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in the summer of 1897 meant that the works were closed for three days. This contrasts with a day's holiday with pay granted to the MS&L's own men employed at the Gorton locomotive and

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<sup>100</sup> Jeremy Crump, 'Provincial Music Hall: Promoters and Public in Leicester, 1863-1929', in Peter Bailey (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes, 1986), p. 57.

<sup>101</sup> Dagnar Höher, 'The Composition of Music Hall Audiences 1850-1900', in Peter Bailey (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes, 1986), pp. 80-81.

<sup>102</sup> 463/29, Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire Railway Directors Minutes, 5 June 1896.

carriage works in Manchester.<sup>103</sup> Later the same year the August bank holiday caused further disruption in the Metropolitan Division with ‘workmen staying away for more than one day’.<sup>104</sup> This may merely have represented a case of recovering from the excesses of the day, or perhaps more accurately, the night before, but was deemed worthy of a day without pay.

## **V Socialisation: The Domestic Environment**

In working-class areas within larger urban centres the street in particular was a place of considerable social activity or ‘street socialisation’.<sup>105</sup> Encounters in the street, chatting or gossiping at the door ‘encouraged familiarity and conviviality among neighbours’,<sup>106</sup> with the womenfolk central in establishing family and neighbourhood networks.<sup>107</sup> The pseudo terraced huts described earlier in many ways resemble a street frontage and the adjacent front doors would have given women the chance to socialise with their neighbours. Domestic chores such as washing were often performed on a communal basis given the need in many situations to share facilities. The area surrounding the copper and tubs outside the huts at Figure 1.3, and the shared backyards attached to much working-class housing were spaces where mundane activity took place, but they also presented the opportunity for social intercourse to help pass what was a long and physically demanding process and help forge and cement relationships; no doubt they were also the scene of neighbourly disputes from time to time. Patricia Malcolmson paints a vivid picture of the time consuming and often unpleasant task of the wash: the fire underneath the copper to boil the water with its by-product of steam and

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<sup>103</sup> TNA, 463/31, Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire Railway Directors Minutes, 2 July 1897.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 27 August 1897.

<sup>105</sup> Fielding, ‘A Separate Culture?’, p. 36.

<sup>106</sup> Bramwell, ‘Public Space and Local Communities’, p. 39.

<sup>107</sup> Meacham, *A Life Apart*, p. 60.

high temperatures, the noise of the dolly pounding heavily soiled linen in the wash water, puddles of water and dripping clothing, the mangle squeezing out the excess water and flattening the larger items, hanging out on the clothes line and finally ironing and airing. Other family members were often involved with the children tasked with fetching water and stoking the fire beneath the copper.<sup>108</sup> The whole process could take several days and 'permeated everyday family life'.<sup>109</sup> Such was the effort and upheaval involved that the frequency of the wash might be extended to monthly or even six weekly intervals.<sup>110</sup> From a personal point of view the scene has resonance for me and I can attest to the enduring nature of many of the elements described above. Growing up in the 1950s and early 1960s wash day was almost a ritual: always on a Monday and taking most of the day to complete, boiling the washing and use of the mangle was still widespread. It was very much a shared experience as all of the housewives in the neighbourhood followed the same routine.

Washing was not a task that was always done exclusively for the immediate family. For the wives of soldiers who had received permission or leave to marry and were allowed to live in the barracks, there was an expectation that they would carry out tasks such as washing for the unaccompanied men sharing their barrack block.<sup>111</sup> In these circumstances a woman often had to undertake domestic tasks for between six and ten men and might expect to receive sixpence a week in payment from each man.<sup>112</sup> It was also common practice for working-class women who took in lodgers to do their washing as well and in these circumstances their workload

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<sup>108</sup> Patricia E. Malcolmsen, *English Laundresses: A Social History, 1850-1930* (Urbana and Chicago, 1986), see esp. pp. 20-25.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>111</sup> Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge and New York, 1984), see esp. pp. 30-31; 109.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

could be significantly increased. The taking in of lodgers was widespread amongst the working class, and the railway workers were no exception to this.<sup>113</sup> At one time or another forty-four percent of the households identified to the census returns contained at least one, but in many instances, multiple boarders. In hutt accommodation the main occupant and his wife or partner acted as landlord and landlady, but of course much of the additional work involved fell to the women. Children were also likely to have been expected to take a share in domestic tasks such as cleaning and child-care as well as laundry. This would have extended to the boys as much as the girls, if the experiences of working-class London boys during this period can be taken as a guide.<sup>114</sup> According to Elizabeth Garnett, long associated with the Navy Mission Society and who herself lived amongst the navvies during the 1870s, Sunday was an especially busy day for a typical household:

When ten men (the usual number of lodgers) each have a separate piece of beef, or even when two or three of them club together, and there then are but half-a-dozen joints, a great net of greens, a large bowl (one stone) of potatoes, and three or four puddings at least to prepare and cook; besides making a dozen beds, washing up the breakfast things, and ... washing and dressing the children ... a woman has as much as she can possibly manage on Sunday morning.<sup>115</sup>

The lodgers often supplied their own food which the landlady cooked for them.

Garnett indicates that for bed and washing a man might pay two shillings and sixpence a week, for 'half lodge' where presumably one meal a day was included

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<sup>113</sup> For a contemporaneous account of boarding among the iron workers of Middlesbrough see Lady Bell, *At The Works* (2nd edn, London, 1911), see esp., p. 82.

<sup>114</sup> Ellen Ross, *Love & Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford and New York, 1993), p. 69.

<sup>115</sup> Garnett, *Our Navvies*, p. 179.

the cost increased to six shillings a week.<sup>116</sup> Barrett recollects that the bedrooms typically occupied by the lodgers were furnished in a basic manner: ‘bedsteads, all very close together, with room for two in a bed, made often of a mattress stuffed with straw, covered with brown or light-blue coverlets, a few boxes standing in one corner, a “kit” or two hanging from the beams’.<sup>117</sup> Clearly, lodgers were totally integrated into the household sharing the common living space with the host family, only the family bedroom being off limits.

It is to be expected that single or unaccompanied men should have gravitated towards their fellow workers when seeking accommodation in the vicinity of construction sites. As a result of migration patterns detailed above, some of the boarders may well have known both each other and their prospective landlords and landladies by virtue of contacts gained from previous jobs. However, it was not necessarily limited to lone men; family groups were also accommodated in this manner. Taking in lodgers allowed a helping hand to be extended to work colleagues who were able to secure accommodation with fellow workers, and in some cases friends and acquaintances. It reaffirms the perception of a close knit group and extended community based on mutual benefit and occupational solidarity. It must not be forgotten, however, that lodging was also a commercial arrangement, providing the host family with an important source of extra income. It is significant that in almost every case, census returns indicate that the wives or partners of the railway workers were not recorded as being engaged in any occupation in their own right. Taken at face value, this no doubt reflected in part a lack of opportunity. The industry to which they were most closely bound was male dominated and had no openings for female employment and given that these

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>117</sup> Barrett, *Life and Work*, p. 58.

women were in the main itinerant, and thus, outsiders and unknown, at least initially, to the local population, scope for work in the local economy in competition with resident women was negligible. Taking in lodgers in situations such as this was often the only course open to the women if they wished to earn additional income. These women then, made an enormous contribution to the household economy yet remained largely hidden within the domestic arena. Deborah Vallenze has traced the loss of status suffered by working women generally during the nineteenth century. Whilst they were regarded as 'industrious and productive' in a pre-industrial economy, the gradual loss of employment opportunities associated with agriculture and cottage industries, led to a concurrent loss of this positive image.<sup>118</sup>

The lack of employment opportunities for women may have manifested itself in another way. Aside from households that were enhanced by the presence of lodgers, the families of the railway workers were on the whole large. The average number of children per family within the sample equated to 5.3. This figure is once again derived from analysis of both the 1891 and 1901 censuses where applicable. This data can only reveal the number of offspring recorded at the two dates in question and doesn't necessarily equate with the total number of children born to any one set of parents, nor can it identify levels of infant mortality, or any children absent from the family home for whatever reason. Nonetheless, fertility levels within this group of families appear high. Indeed, only six households are recorded with a single child, whereas twenty produced between eight and ten offspring, and one contained eleven. Thirty-nine percent of the households also produced between five and seven. There is fairly widespread agreement that fertility across all social

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<sup>118</sup> Deborah Vallenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (Oxford and New York, 1995), see esp., pp. 10-11.



classes was in decline during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Despite much research in this area the process is still by no means fully understood.<sup>119</sup> However, a linkage has been advocated between fertility levels and occupational groupings and more pertinently the employment prospects of women. It is perhaps possible to draw parallels between railway construction and industries such as mining where research indicates that a combination of relatively high male wages and low employment prospects for women tended to result in high levels of fertility. In addition, such an environment reinforced the concept of the male bread winner and female home maker.<sup>120</sup> Conversely marital fertility was 'likely to be depressed as a result of greater employment opportunities for women and the possibility of remaining at or returning to work when married with young children'.<sup>121</sup>

Up to this point I think it has been possible to gain some appreciation of how a sense of belonging can be attached to both the workers and their families and their wider social milieu, the latter, most clearly exemplified by reference to lodging. The experiences of three widows associated with the construction of the Great Central can provide greater clarity. Widowhood for the working-class woman in particular, could mean a precarious future if she was left with no obvious source of income. This situation could be greatly exacerbated if she had dependent children to consider. The spouse of an itinerant railway worker was especially vulnerable since, as we have seen there was little realistic prospect of securing employment in her own right even if in a position to do so. The apparent strategy of

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<sup>119</sup> A number of scholars have embraced this topic. For example see Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (London and New York, 1999); Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914* (London, 1980); Simon Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain 1860-1940* (paperback edn, Cambridge, 2002); Robert Woods, *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>120</sup> Barry Reay, *Rural England: Labouring Lives in the Nineteenth Century*, (Basingstoke and New York, 2004), p. 100.

<sup>121</sup> Woods, *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales*, p. 157.

three widows whose families were linked with the new railway is revealing and tells us much about the communal spirit that existed amongst the workers. Harriet Wade and Emily Russell were both living with their respective spouses Joseph and James at Catesby huts in 1896 and both had children attending Hellidon school.<sup>122</sup> At some point after this date both were widowed. Mary Ward was already a widow when she arrived in Carrington late in 1894 where her son David attended Carrington elementary school. What these women had in common, apart from widowhood, was a continued association with the railway construction industry after the completion of the Great Central. In 1901 they had all relocated to areas where new railway building was in progress.

Wade was living in huttled accommodation at Chigwell in Essex with her nine children aged between two and eighteen, a niece aged eleven, and one boarder. Russell likewise, was accommodated in a hut at Alfreton in Derbyshire together with her eight children whose age range also ran from two to eighteen. Although described as a lodging house keeper, only two boarders were resident at the time of the census. Ward meanwhile was living at Chipping Sodbury in Gloucestershire with her two sons aged twenty two and sixteen, son-in-law, grandson and two boarders. In each household the elder of the male offspring had seemingly followed in their late father's footsteps and were employed on the railway projects in the vicinity. No doubt the employment of their sons had a bearing on the women's migration patterns and clearly each household was heavily dependent for survival upon the earnings of the children together with income generated by the presence of lodgers. For the widows, the benefits accruing from remaining close to people to whom they were known, or with whom they felt a certain affinity cannot

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<sup>122</sup> ZB 122/69, Hellidon School Admission Register, 1875-1932.

be underestimated, and lays much emphasis on a sense of belonging. This is perhaps most evident with regard to the two women who were living within hutted settlements surrounded by other railway families. Although Mary Ward was living in a house in Chipping Sodbury, her closest neighbours in the same street were two households headed by railway construction workers. That working-class women developed strong links of friendship and self-help networks is well documented, and the fact that these women were living in close proximity to others who shared similar backgrounds probably made the establishment of such networks easier.<sup>123</sup> Thus, neighbours, perhaps those living in the same house in the case of shared occupancy, living next door, or directly opposite, might be relied upon for assistance.<sup>124</sup> Ellen Ross in particular, has stressed the importance of these networks especially during periods of illness or bereavement, when child minding was required, or even when material aid might be welcome. To a great extent this assistance was based upon 'reciprocity' in that if a women proffered help it was on the understanding that she would receive what was her due when she found herself in need. Such was the strength of this unofficial network that for most families 'the safety net was the neighbourhood itself'.<sup>125</sup>

Neighbourliness could even extend to either permanent or temporary adoption of children. The lack of any legal foundation for adoption prior to the 1920s saw an informal system develop whereby in the absence of, or inability on the part of kin, neighbours might take on parental responsibility.<sup>126</sup> There is evidence to indicate that this may not have been unknown amongst the railway workers. When Annie Whalley then aged six, was admitted to Charwelton school in

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<sup>123</sup> Meacham, *A Life Apart*, p. 52.

<sup>124</sup> Ross, *Love & Toil*, p. 135.

<sup>125</sup> Ellen Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War I', *History Workshop Journal*, 15:1 (1983), see esp. pp. 6; 8; 11.

<sup>126</sup> Ross, *Love & Toil*, p. 133.

Northamptonshire in March 1896 she was under the guardianship of Samuel Winstanley, an engine fitter working on the Great Central. It is highly probable that Annie was the daughter of engine driver Charles Whalley who in 1891 had lodged with Winstanley and his family when they were resident at Chapel-en-le-Frith in Derbyshire. Whatever circumstances gave rise to the situation, Annie was subsequently placed in the care of Winstanley and his wife, perhaps because they had become trusted friends of her father or there may have been some kinship connection. Winstanley or his wife may have taken the initiative as it was often the case that friends and neighbours undertook to adopt a child because of genuine compassion or affection rather than as a result of any sense of obligation or even one might speculate, a mercenary motive.<sup>127</sup> If as it has been claimed, neighbourliness was not determined by a physical location such as a street or series of streets, but had more to do with a willingness or desire to form relationships, we can move closer to the concept that community was not necessarily bound to place but was also related to a conscious awareness of belonging or common values. Mutual assistance was not restricted to women folk for men often exhibited similar behaviour. However, it has been noted that non-kin aid rarely crossed gender boundaries reflecting the different socialisation patterns of men and women.<sup>128</sup> Navvies gained something of a reputation for looking after their own. If illness or even death should befall a colleague, workmates rallied round: 'they maintain their own sick and bury their own dead'.<sup>129</sup> Sick clubs whereby each man paid a few pence a week were common, thus if injury or illness prevented a man from working it paid out a weekly sum or contributed towards the cost of a doctor. In some cases the aid was more spontaneous; Patrick MacGill, recounts how on one occasion he

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>128</sup> Ross, 'Survival Networks', p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> W. H. O., *A Few Words About Navvies*, p. 327.

and other members of his gang contributed a shilling a head so that a terminally ill workmate could travel home to die.<sup>130</sup> Solidarity was also evident in the existence of an unwritten code of conduct which one did not breach with impunity. For instance, it was unacceptable to invoke the forces of law and order against one's own kind. To do so might result in being 'execrated by the whole community', or worse still to suffer an unfortunate 'accident' in the course of work, as in the case of a navvy who in seeking revenge for having been ejected from a hut for causing a disturbance, caused summonses to be issued against a fellow worker and his wife for selling drink without a licence and for setting a dog upon the complainant. The navvy was last seen at the top of a shaft excavated to divert water from the workings in a tunnel. No-one was sure of his fate but it was rumoured that if anyone cared to search they might find him at the bottom of the said shaft.<sup>131</sup> This anecdote may of course be apocryphal but it does nonetheless illustrate the importance that was placed upon unity and the avoidance of involving external agencies in internal disputes.

## **VI Local Recruitment**

So far the emphasis has been upon the incoming families, but is there any evidence that local men were recruited to the ranks of those constructing the new railway? It is difficult to be precise on this point due to the scarcity of records so the evidence where it exists, is implicit rather than explicit in nature. Although migrant labour was obviously a mainstay of the workforce, I suspect that for the contractors responsible for a project of this size it would not have been practical to rely exclusively upon this source. Recruitment within the various areas was probably a

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<sup>130</sup> MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 239-41.

<sup>131</sup> 'A "Navy" Ball', *Chambers Journal*, 8 March 1873, p. 160.

necessity, whilst the employment opportunities presented were no doubt of interest to many local men. Indeed, there were occasions when labour was in short supply, and as late as 1897, Douglas Fox engineer for the Metropolitan Division had to report that: ‘Some trouble is experienced in obtaining sufficient men for the tunnel works’.<sup>132</sup> It is possible to surmise that a number of ‘navvies’ named in court cases were in fact local men rather than established workers. I suspect they were described as such simply because that was the occupation they were following at that point in time. In a few instances, I have noted men who may have worked as navvies temporarily only to revert to agricultural work in the vicinity once the railway was completed. Details of boarders living with a number of the families at locations to which they had moved following completion of the Great Central are in some cases informative. For instance, navy George Sparrow who was living with his family in Farm Hill huts near to the Northamptonshire village of Thorpe Mandeville and working on the link from the new line in 1899, had relocated to Thurscoe in Yorkshire by 1901. Recorded as part of his household at Thurscoe were six single men aged between eighteen and twenty two, all classified as navvies, and all of whom had been born in villages close to the Great Central line in Northamptonshire.<sup>133</sup> Parallels are evident in relation to the household of another railway labourer Reuben Thwaite. He too, had resided in Farm Hill huts during the period 1898-1900, and had subsequently moved to Yorkshire by 1901 but to Bolton upon Dearne where he provided accommodation to three railway labourers who also originated from two Northamptonshire villages a short distance from the route

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<sup>132</sup> 463/30, Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire Railway Directors Minutes, 9 April 1897.

<sup>133</sup> Census of England and Wales, 1901, RG 13/4407.

of the Great Central.<sup>134</sup> What is significant here is that two of the boarders were married men; one aged forty the other sixty seven.

One cannot be certain if any of these lodgers actually worked on the Great Central, but it appears that none had previous experience as railway workers prior to the commencement of that project. What the experience of all these men implies is that some individuals did not necessarily take up work on the railway as a temporary expedient whilst it was available in their own neighbourhoods, but were content to move away from their home area to pursue a new career whether or not this proved to be on a long term basis. David Brooke has asserted that the age profile amongst navvies increased as the century progressed.<sup>135</sup> But perhaps the presence of the six young men in the household of George Sparrow points to the fact that railway construction work was not unattractive to members of a younger generation at late century? Seen in isolation the situation described above cannot be judged representative, but an analysis of the age profile of the male heads of those families I have identified, together with that of their spouses, reveals that even the ranks of the established worker were populated by a large number of relatively young individuals. By using data from the censuses to estimate the ages of both male heads of household (heads were female in a small number of cases) and spouses in 1895 (a date by which time most of the former were working on the Great Central) it has been possible to establish a simple age profile (Table 1.1). The vast majority of the males were in the age group thirty one to forty, with only a handful of these aged forty. The results for the women reveal a profile which is very similar albeit there were nearly twice as many women in the twenty-one to thirty age range. It bears reiteration that of course all of these men were living with

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., RG 13/4409.

<sup>135</sup> Brooke, *The Railway Navvy*, p. 37.

dependents and all had children of school age and thus, may not have been typical of construction workers in general. However, there appears to be no marked correlation here between age and any given occupational category. However, whilst some were entering the industry others were invariably leaving it. The continual upheaval associated with the constant need to relocate, the possibility of better conditions or prospects in another occupation, or simply a liking for a particular location, all of these issues probably played a part in a decision to forsake the life of a railway construction worker. George Farr who had worked as a labourer on the Manchester Ship Canal clearly found a move to Carrington to work on the new line amenable as he ultimately stayed there after the opening of the route and found employment as a maltster.<sup>136</sup>

*Table 1.1: Age Profile of Male Railway Construction Workers and Spouses (adjusted to year 1895).*

	Age range		21-30		31-40		41-50		Over 50		Total
	Under 20	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Males	-	-	17	17%	51	53%	22	23%	7	7%	97
Females	4	4%	31	31%	45	46%	17	17%	2	2%	99

*Source: Censuses of England and Wales 1891 and 1901.*

The question arises as to why local men were willing to migrate many miles from home. In the example of the men from rural Northamptonshire referred to above, it seems highly likely that they became acquainted with the likes of Sparrow and Thwaite whilst the new railway was in the course of construction in the neighbourhood. That they were influenced to move by ‘new found friends’ cannot

<sup>136</sup> Census of England and Wales 1901, RG 13/3187.



be discounted.<sup>137</sup> The younger men may have seen the chance to move as an opportunity, and without dependents were able to migrate north without hardship. The married men are of greater interest in many ways, particularly the elder of the two, William Yates. A general labourer, he was clearly prepared to leave the village of his birth, and be separated from his wife and children to follow a new occupation. Social issues such as the ‘influence of the family and its supporting or debilitating role’ have been advocated as a possible motivating force behind migration, thus, dissatisfaction with his domestic situation might encourage a man to seek a change of scene.<sup>138</sup> Economic considerations, however, probably played some part in the decision by all to migrate with the prospects of higher wages a prime driver. Railway workers were traditionally thought to be better paid than many of their working-class peers although the work was physically demanding. It has been claimed that a typical navvy could earn perhaps fourpence-halfpenny an hour at the end of the century which for a sixty hour week equated to about twenty shillings, but if fictional accounts of navvy life are to be believed weekly amounts might have been of the order of between twenty-five and thirty shillings.<sup>139</sup> By the start of the twentieth century navvies might earn sixpence an hour which allied to plentiful overtime could net a man up to two pounds two shillings a week.<sup>140</sup> Skilled men could command higher basic wages with tunnel miners earning perhaps two pounds a week whilst bricklayers from two pounds ten shillings to as much as four pounds a week.<sup>141</sup> An agricultural labourer in late nineteenth-century

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<sup>137</sup> David Tidswell, ‘Gender, Family, Work and Migration in Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, in Pamela Sharpe (ed.), *Women, Gender and Labour Migration* (London and New York, 2001), p. 138.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 141-2.

<sup>139</sup> Sullivan, *Navvyman*, p. 176. L. Walker, ‘Our Lass Letty’, *All the Year Round*, 15 November 1888, p. 45.

<sup>140</sup> As detailed by Patrick MacGill himself a one-time navvy. See MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 182

<sup>141</sup> Barrett, *Life and Work*, p. 19.

Warwickshire by contrast might have to subsist on ten or eleven shillings a week.<sup>142</sup>

The surveys of poverty undertaken by Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree within London and York respectively although some years apart, offer an indication of what each considered a minimum living income for a moderate family of two adults and two to three children. In the case of the former this equated to between eighteen shillings and twenty-one shillings a week and for the latter, approximately twenty-one shillings and eight pence.<sup>143</sup> On the basis of these figures a skilled railway worker in such circumstances could be said to live well above the subsistence level, an unskilled navvy might fall close to, or somewhat above, whilst an agricultural labourer was well below subsistence. However, this is of course a very simplistic approach and takes no account of regional variations or differentials within the same occupational groupings. Also, wage rates of male workers can be misleading when attempting to assess total household income, given seasonal opportunities and the possibility of additional earnings by women folk and living-in offspring.<sup>144</sup> For example, an unmarried navvy earning twenty shillings a week might be regarded as being reasonably well-off. An investigation of Warwickshire villages during the 1890s has revealed differences of up to five shillings a week in the wages paid to agricultural labourers in villages only twenty-five miles apart.<sup>145</sup>

It is of course easy to fall into the trap of equating rural employment exclusively with agriculture. Barry Reay highlights the error of making this assumption, pointing out that many rural people were engaged in a variety of crafts

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<sup>142</sup> Roland Quinault, 'Landlords and Labourers in Warwickshire c. 1870-1920', *Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, Number 44 (Stratford, 2004), p. 2..

<sup>143</sup> Albert Fried and Richard M. Elman (eds), *Charles Booth's London: A Portrait of the Poor at the Turn of the Century, Drawn From His "Life and Labour of the People in London"* (London, 1969), p. 10; B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty, A Study of Town Life* (reprint, Bristol, 2000, of orig. edn, London, 1901), p. 296,

<sup>144</sup> Reay, *Rural England*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>145</sup> Cited in: Reay, *Rural England*, p. 42.

and trades such as blacksmithing, carpentry, masonry, coppicing, shop keeping and shoemaking, not to mention regionally based industries like charcoal burning and woodworking and even mining.<sup>146</sup> Employment opportunities were thus, not necessarily as limited as is often thought. It is unclear as to whether or not William Yates was engaged in agriculture, but in all probability he was relatively unskilled, and this would have determined in large part the options available to him if he sought a change of employment. Railway labouring was of course generally considered an unskilled occupation with only physical fitness seen as a prerequisite. Notwithstanding, the majority of rural male workers were involved with agriculture, but as Reay also makes clear, it is important to appreciate the specific employment conditions of agricultural workers that invariably affected earning potential; some employed on regular contracts and many working on a casual basis.<sup>147</sup> Both agricultural workers and railway workers could also fall prey to the vagaries of the weather and thus, incur loss of income. For instance, an exceptionally prolonged cold spell during the early months of 1895 brought construction of the Great Central to a halt.<sup>148</sup>

This chapter has engaged with the theme of community and identity, and has demonstrated that for the workers and their families itinerancy could act as a catalyst for establishing lasting bonds. Living in close proximity often in extended households due to the presence of boarders, whether in hutted camps or within the local economy, had the potential to reinforce these bonds. The construction workers as a grouping may have exhibited differences that were apparent both from within, and by comparison with other sections of the working class. However, this mirrored many of the characteristics of the working class more generally. We have seen

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., see esp. pp. 26, 30.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>148</sup> *Nottinghamshire Weekly Express*, 8 and 15 February 1895.

evidence to support a central argument of this thesis that in respect of some of the norms of working society, and in terms of their wider experiences they shared much in common with their working peers. This contributed to a greater sense of class cohesion. Experiences then, were important, but so too were perceptions about the workers particularly within middle-class minds. The next chapter will develop this theme by exploring the topic of rumour and the manner in which perceptions were formed and subsequently amended in the light of direct contact between the workers and a number of local agencies.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Rumours and Reputations: Navy Communities in Contact with Health and Poor Law Agencies.**

On Friday 5th October 1894 the *Nottingham Weekly News* was able to reassure any concerned readers that temporary huts for navvies were not, despite claims to the contrary, being provided off St Ann's Well Road. All necessary accommodation it was believed would be readily available within the town.<sup>1</sup> On a more personal note, another newspaper, this time based in Oxfordshire, could allay fears in May of the following year that a reported assault by navvies on Mr William Fathers a butcher from Woodford Halse in Northamptonshire and the subsequent theft of a shoulder of mutton had, following a police investigation, proved to be 'an entire invention'.<sup>2</sup> These are two random examples of rumours or falsehoods that either preceded the full-scale commencement, or were contemporaneous with the early months, of the construction of the new railway. This chapter is concerned with perceptions of the railway workers and navvies in general. I consider the impact of rumour and examine contemporary autobiographical works and periodical articles to gauge the way in which the wider navy community was portrayed. I also look at newspaper reports to evaluate attitudes towards the workers engaged on the London Extension. Preconceived ideas about the incoming workers may have determined initial reactions, but to what degree were these early perceptions affected by actual contact with local agencies such as the poor law and health services? I will attempt to show that many perceptions of navvies were misguided, but also that attitudes among mainly middle-class observers were far from universally negative and reflected a

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<sup>1</sup> *Nottingham Weekly News*, 5 October 1894.

<sup>2</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 2 May 1895.

belief that to a great extent navvies could be categorised into respectable, hard working men, and disreputable idle loafers.

## **I Rumour**

Rumours often abound in situations that fall outside what might previously have been considered normal experience. The London Extension was clearly a case in point. Railway construction during the nineteenth century was not novel, but neither was it an everyday occurrence, particularly at this late century date. That the new railway was to be built was no doubt evident to virtually everyone living close to the proposed route, but this fact would not necessarily have prevented a degree of uncertainty as to the precise impact that it would have on day to day life. In all probability the influx of itinerant construction workers into the affected areas presented a particular challenge in so far as they represented an unknown quantity to many of those with whom they might conceivably come into contact. This then, was a fertile ground for speculation, exaggeration, and distortion.

Ralph L. Rosnow has highlighted that anxiety and uncertainty are key determinants in the generation of rumours: ‘embellished by allegations or attributions based on circumstantial evidence, they are attempts to make sense of uncertain situations’.<sup>3</sup> It has also been argued that rumour reflects an attempt to come to terms with new events, so that, in trying to establish what these events may mean for them, individuals seek to adopt a suitable coping mechanism.<sup>4</sup> There is also the issue of topicality in so far as rumours tend to ‘concern current or topical

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph L. Rosnow, ‘Rumor as Communication: A Contextualist Approach’, *Journal of Communication*, 38:1 (1988), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> P. A. Lienhardt, ‘The Interpretation of Rumour’, in J. H. M. Beattie and R. G. Lienhardt (eds), *Studies In Social Anthropology: Essays In Memory of E. E. Evans-Pritchard by his former Oxford Colleagues* (Oxford, 1975), p. 120.

issues of interest to people'.<sup>5</sup> It is surely not difficult to envisage that all of the aforementioned aspects were of relevance to those who were affected by the construction of the new railway. With any large scale civil engineering project there is usually a considerable time lag between approval being granted and material evidence of work on the ground. The London Extension was no different in this respect; the parliamentary Bill authorising construction of the route received Royal Assent in March 1893, but given the need for tendering and letting of contracts, it was not until the end of 1894 that construction work of any significance began. No doubt during much of this period people living within the communities adjacent to the route lacked real knowledge as to what was happening, but perhaps more importantly, knowledge of what would happen in the future. Even when work commenced there was potential for a transitional period during which the realities of the material, social, and cultural impact gradually became apparent. Perhaps inevitably rumour partly filled the void, helping to compensate for 'an unsatisfied demand for information.'<sup>6</sup> However, rumours usually cannot be 'devoid of all plausibility' if they are to spread.<sup>7</sup> In a study of rumour in the Bihar region of northeast India during the late nineteenth century Anand A. Yang has stressed the importance of context in this respect. Taken out of context rumours might readily appear 'bizarre', but when viewed from the perspective of prevailing circumstances or previous experience they may seem far more credible. Yang relates that rumours frequently sprang up in response to a perceived relationship between census operations and new government taxation. Speculating that due to the fact that the 1872 census came in the wake of the imposition of income tax, Yang suggests this

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<sup>5</sup> Prashant Bordia and Nicholas DiFonzo, 'Problem Solving In Social Interactions on the Internet: Rumor as Social Cognition', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 67:1 (2004), pp. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Lienhardt, 'The Interpretation of Rumour', p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

may explain the resulting situation whereby the ongoing connection between censuses and taxes ‘was not an unreasonable belief.’<sup>8</sup> In the case of the first example relating to the new railway quoted above, there are two main reasons why it was not implausible that huts might be built in a specific district of Nottingham. Firstly, the road in question was in a central location very close to the site of Victoria Station which would be built to serve the new line and thus, an area where a large body of men would soon be engaged in building work. Secondly, hutted accommodation was traditionally associated with navvies, and, as is made clear elsewhere in this thesis temporary hutted encampments were provided in a number of locations on the new railway. However, these were located not in urban areas, but almost exclusively in rural districts where other types of accommodation was less readily available. Clearly this rumour had much to do with concerns about where workers would be housed and any possible impact upon the resident population, but there also appears to have been a lack of accurate information. Navvies did of course have a poor, if often undeserved reputation, and in the second example there is once more the mark of plausibility, but we can also perhaps see evidence of fear and ignorance, and also the correlation that has been drawn between rumours and prejudice.<sup>9</sup> If navvies were outcasts renowned for criminality then an incident involving physical violence and theft was no more than might reasonably be expected. This merely reinforced negative perceptions and stoked fears of a social grouping knowledge of whom, for the most part was not evidence based but relied upon hearsay. In fact this constituted a self-fulfilling prophesy in so far as hearsay is the very essence of rumour.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Anand A. Yang, ‘A Conversation of Rumours: The Language of Popular “Mentalities” In Late Nineteenth-Century Colonial India’, *Journal of Social History*, 20:3 (1987), see esp., p. 491.

<sup>9</sup> Hans-Joachim Neubauer, *The Rumour: A Cultural History* (London, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.



Prejudice was not, or indeed is not, of course limited to a single grouping. Gypsies exhibiting, or at least perceived to exhibit, similar characteristics to navvies with itinerancy and social ostracism being the most obvious, were often victimised in this way. Using newspaper reports, Sarah L. Holloway has analysed the racialisation of gypsies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and has highlighted aspects that illustrate remarkable parallels with navvies. Generalisations were often applied to gypsies; they were seen as a 'degenerate, ungodly, and criminal minority', and they were subjected to harassment by the law particularly in relation to the 1824 Vagrancy Act, a piece of legislation to which I will refer again later in this chapter. Holloway has also shown that the inter-war period saw the construction of a concept which separated 'true' gypsies from 'half-bloods or indigenous itinerants'.<sup>11</sup> This also mirrors a perceived division between the 'genuine' navvy and the less authentic 'quasi-navvy'. As I mentioned above, conclusions about groups or individuals are frequently based upon ungrounded fear or ignorance. Gypsy children were not immune from the consequences of such prejudice, as Paul Bowen has demonstrated. Parents of local children were often unwilling to see gypsies attend the same schools deeming them to be 'a class of children with a lower standard of cleanliness, manners and morals'. Among the more extreme instances of prejudice that he cites is an episode dating from the early twentieth century where parents with children at a school in Surrey formed a deputation threatening to withdraw their offspring from the school if gypsy children were allowed to attend.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah L. Holloway, 'Outsiders In Rural Society?: Constructions of Rurality and Nature: Society Relations In the Racialisation of English Gypsy-Travellers, 1869 -1934', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21 (2003), see esp., pp. 703, 711.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Bowen, 'The Schooling of Gypsy Children in Surrey 1906-1933', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 36:1 (2004), pp. 58-9.

Assumptions about railway workers were certainly being made, but often based on ignorance. There was clearly a belief in some quarters that the workers were lacking in educational attainment at least as far as either their reading abilities or the range of their intellectual interests was concerned. A correspondent to one local newspaper thanked those who had donated literature for distribution amongst those working on the new line, but felt it necessary to add that: ‘I would also take the present opportunity of saying that many of the navvies are educated up to date, and, therefore, do not stand in need of juvenile literature, some of the parcels which have reached me containing a superabundance of such matter.’<sup>13</sup>

## **II General Perceptions of the Navy**

In order to gain an insight into how impressions of navvies were generated, it is I think highly illuminating to examine a selection of autobiographical works, recollections, and other contemporary books and periodicals. Allowing for inevitable subjectivity and selectivity there is some support for the premise that direct contact with the navy community, or experience of the lifestyle led to a more considered assessment and a far more favourable image. This appears to be the case amongst those who might be expected to know them better than anyone else: the contractors who employed them. Charles Hemingway who began work for the family firm of Logan & Hemingway in 1874 felt that ‘for all their rough and blunt ways’, the majority of navvies were ‘good sterling chaps, some of them with high ideals of character, who to use their own words would “scorn to do a mean or dirty action” ’.<sup>14</sup> Edward Dale an engineer with the firm expressed similar sentiments: ‘They were a good-hearted lot on the whole, in spite of their beer-

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<sup>13</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 24 October 1896.

<sup>14</sup> DD505/1, Recollections of Charles Robert Hemingway, p. 55.

drinking propensities and bad language'.<sup>15</sup> Many of the autobiographical sources reflect only fleeting encounters with navvies or direct experience of the work for very short periods of time. In addition, they do not reflect class encounters in the sense that the writers, with few exceptions, were themselves exclusively male and working class; this may influence the image portrayed. However, logic dictates that a cross section of character traits must be evident amongst any given social group, and this fact did not go unrecognised, thus, 'There were good men and out-and-out scamps to be found among them'.<sup>16</sup> Even accepting this premise, much of the literature does emphasise the laudable qualities of navy society with one writer in particular perceiving a generosity of spirit and unselfish attitude towards their fellow workers.<sup>17</sup> Albert Pugh, who worked on the Manchester Ship Canal and a number of railway contracts during the latter part of the century adopts a similar position in praising the kindness and hospitality shown by fellow hut dwellers to whom one might be a total stranger, and remarks that it was common practice to 'take a pal, when on tramp looking for work, to his home or lodgings, feed and sleep him'.<sup>18</sup> Pugh also expresses great admiration for navy wives who like many working women had to undertake heavy domestic work, but in particularly trying circumstances: 'the water outside, one tap to half a dozen families, no sink, or other town conveniences, such as gas, electric light, and have in addition to her family, about a dozen or more lodgers'.<sup>19</sup> There is a tendency for these writers to rely too heavily on generalisations, and that is certainly the case with Joseph Keating who encountered navvies working near Mountain Ash in South Wales. Nonetheless, he

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<sup>15</sup> DD505/4, Recollections of Edward Dale, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Kitchen, *Brother to the Ox*, p. 116.

<sup>17</sup> Elson, *The Last of the Climbing Boys*, p. 157.

<sup>18</sup> Albert Pugh, 'I Helped to Build Railroads', *Pilot Papers: Social Essays and Documents*, 1:4 (1946), p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

saw a surprising side of the men, an unexpected depth: ‘their intelligence was astonishing’, and ‘They were artists in human conversation and geniality’.<sup>20</sup> He was a young boy at the time and this may have coloured his reflections, illustrating what David Vincent has described as ‘a particular freedom of selection and interpretation’ in autobiography.<sup>21</sup> Another childhood recollection is that of Arthur Waugh, a doctor’s son from Somerset, and the encounters he describes in the company of his nanny suggest a very obvious class division. The excitement he felt at initial meetings on their daily walks was displaced by the belief that the men were ‘not nice’, but it seems questionable whether this sprang from his own thought processes, or was inculcated by his nanny who he claims fled from the navvies ‘with red cheeks’ after ‘rude words’ were levelled in her direction.<sup>22</sup> The skill mix, and obvious social distinctions within the overall body of railway construction workers was evident to some observers, and provided a focus for their comments. In an 1886 article, the Revd Edward Smith, a Methodist minister, who had spent some time as a boy time-keeper on railway works a quarter of a century earlier, reflected on what was effectively an hierarchical structure within the workforce with many having ‘a due sense of their own importance’.<sup>23</sup> For Smith it was the navvies that were the ‘most interesting study’ being ‘a strange compound of evil with good’.<sup>24</sup> Whilst more needed to be done, the passage of years, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the efforts of Christian men and women had heralded an

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Keating, *My Struggle for Life* (Facsimile edn, Dublin, 2005, of orig. edn, London, 1916), p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London, 1981), p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Waugh, ‘A Somerset Village, 1866-1875’, *Fortnightly Review*, September 1931, p. 354.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, ‘Railway Making and Railway Makers’, p. 546.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 547, 548.

improvement in the lifestyle of all railway workers: ‘Things are better now, thank God! ... Many are teetotallers, and some are consistently pious’.<sup>25</sup>

The most prominent work depicting navvy life remains Patrick MacGill’s *Children of the Dead End*. It is important to bear in mind that the work is semi-autobiographical, relating in the main to MacGill’s experiences as a navvy engaged on the construction of the water works at Kinlochleven in Scotland during 1906. Following his migration from Ireland, he led a peripatetic lifestyle spending time as a potato picker, tramp and railway platelayer as well as working as a navvy. The blurring of fact and fiction can be distracting, and one contemporary review opined: ‘it is this pen of the novelist that stultifies the book. Had Mr MacGill written a life, not a novel, he would have done better’.<sup>26</sup> MacGill certainly provides a bleak picture of what for him was the almost soul destroying nature of navvying, and conveys a deep sense of social isolation, albeit tempered by the companionship of colleagues. Above all else he emphasises the male exclusivity of the navvy’s life. From the point of view of the work environment this is undoubtedly true, but he goes further by maintaining that the navvy is shorn of female contact in general: ‘women play little or no part in their existence’, ‘they seldom marry’, ‘the navvy is seldom the son of a navvy’.<sup>27</sup> In fact he never refers to the presence of women at the encampment at Kinlochleven. Granted, he is describing his experiences at a very isolated site in Scotland however, he is strangely at odds with the commentary provided by other contemporaries such as D. W. Barrett, Elizabeth Garnett and Albert Pugh, quoted above. Needless to say, single and unaccompanied men did form a significant proportion of the workforce engaged on most construction

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 679.

<sup>26</sup> ‘The Navvy’s Pen’, *Saturday Review*, 21 March 1914, p. vi.

<sup>27</sup> MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 211-12.

projects, but these writers do make plain that in the case of the works with which they were associated, women and indeed children were a significant presence both within encampments and the wider navy community and were integral to the domestic setting. As far as the London Extension is concerned, both my own research and Sydney Newton's photographic collection adds further support to this position.

I have relied upon material from Elizabeth Garnett's *Our Navvies* and D. W. Barrett's *Life and Work Among the Navvies*, throughout this thesis, and they do provide very detailed accounts of navy life, albeit from a middle-class perspective. Both are written in terms of Christian mission, and whilst they give much valuable information about living conditions and navy culture, they are concerned fundamentally with both the necessity, and practical aspects, of ministering to the navy community. Garnett in particular denounces the evils she sees as associated with navy culture namely, alcohol, immorality, in so far as many navvies lived with partners outside of wedlock, and failure to observe the Sabbath. It is apparent from their writing that both developed a close affinity with the navvies and their families arising from long term contact by virtue of their missionary work with the community. Despite perceived failings on the part of the navvies, they were eager to acknowledge many redeeming qualities: 'there are some of them whose hearts are as true, and whose lives are as upright ... as those of some of their more highly favoured, and far more cultured brethren in better positions of life'.<sup>28</sup>

Most of the periodicals in which I have located articles about navvies were targeted at a middle-class readership, and include *Quiver*, *Good Words*, and *Leisure Hour*. Simon Cooke has categorised *Quiver* and *Good Works* as being among a

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<sup>28</sup> Barrett, *Life and Work*, p. 33.

number of small, portable journals designed to entertain, as for instance while undertaking a journey, and aimed mostly at male readers. *Leisure Hour* meanwhile, was larger in scale and this he defines as reflecting ‘Evangelical magazines that could only be enjoyed in a domestic setting’.<sup>29</sup> It was one of several periodicals which according to Frank Murray were introduced in the 1850s by the Religious Tract Society and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and which aimed to ‘entice the working-class reader away from their preferred “corrupting” reading matter’, but ultimately reached a mainly middle-class audience.<sup>30</sup> This appears to leave little doubt that such magazines were underpinned by pronounced religious sentiments. A number of articles penned by Elizabeth Garnett were carried by *Quiver* in the 1880s, which essentially reiterate the themes running through her own book.<sup>31</sup> Garnett had previously collaborated in missionary activity with Revd Lewis Moule Evans, the founder of the Navy Mission Society, and the latter had also contributed an article in three parts to the magazine in 1877 with the same title, ‘Navvies and Their Needs’ as his appeal that year for funding in aid of the fledgling NMS. The article deals in large part with his experiences working with navvies at the Lindley Wood reservoir in Yorkshire, but the first part is of particular interest for two reasons. Firstly, in terms of lifestyle he refers to navvies as having much in common with gypsies. However, he sees each as forming a ‘distinct species but the gypsy forms a foreign, the navy a native species’.<sup>32</sup> This reinforces the prejudice and ethnic bias evident with regard to gypsies that was noted earlier, and which for

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<sup>29</sup> Simon Cooke, ‘Periodicals of the Mid-Victorian Period: The Physical Properties of Illustrated Magazines’, <<http://www.Victorianweb.org/periodicals/cooke.html>> (1 May 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Frank Murray, ‘Often Taken Where a Tract is Refused: T. B. Smithies, the *British Workman*, and the Popularisation of the Religious and Temperance Message’, in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds), *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth-Century* (Basingstoke and New York, 2009), p. 161.

<sup>31</sup> For example see Elizabeth Garnett, ‘Navvydom In the North’, *Quiver*, 21:1021, (January 1886), pp. 404-407; ‘Sunday on the Yorkshire Moors’, *Quiver*, 21:1021, (January 1886), pp. 497-499.

<sup>32</sup> Lewis Moule Evans, ‘Navvies and Their Needs, Part I’, *Quiver*, 12:577 (1877), p. 53.

Evans seemingly accounted for the contrasting attributes attaching to the two groupings: ‘The gypsy is ... notable for his preference for a dishonest to an honest mode of life, the navvy for the sterling worth, reality and honesty of his work’.<sup>33</sup> The navvy then, may have been different to many of his working-class peers, but nonetheless possessed admirable qualities, and was certainly superior in character to the non-native itinerant. Secondly, in introducing the navvy to his reader, Evans relies upon what I feel sure is fictional material. He uses the literary device of claiming on one occasion to have entered a railway carriage in which the only other occupant was a navvy. Engaging in conversation, the navvy proceeded to describe his way of life, explaining at length that his like were treated as outcasts and that although he now attempted to live a respectable life, he had a few years earlier been a heavy drinking tramping navvy. The navvy’s narrative evokes symbolism in so far as he claims that tramping between jobs one Christmas, he wandered through a dark wood and was drawn to a bright light which chanced to be a church where a service was in progress. Entering the church he listened to the clergymen preach a sermon on the theme of redemption and underwent something of a Damascene conversion: ‘I walked that night out of darkness into light’.<sup>34</sup> In view of the fact that Evans was deeply involved in ministering to the navvy community and working to establish the NMS, I think there is little doubt he was attempting to invoke sympathy towards navvies as a collective body and thus, gain support for his cause. There may be elements here that were based loosely on his work with the men at Lindley Wood, but he was using the ‘experiences’ of a previously unreformed navvy to press the case for a regular mission. He was championing both the ability of the church to engage with degenerate individuals, and its power to reform and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-4.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 56.



redeem. Equally, the navvy, in the guise of his travelling companion, was clearly receptive to such overtures, and was not unworthy of society's forbearance; neither was he beyond redemption.

Aside from this brief departure by Evans, the fictional representation of the navvy or navvy lifestyle does make an appearance in late Victorian literature from time to time. For example, I have discovered two short stories that appeared in *All the Year Round* during the second half of the 1880s. Although one is unattributed, the similarities in style suggest they may conceivably have been penned by the same author. Both are written in the first person of a navvy reminiscing about events which occurred during the course of a railway construction project some years earlier. 'Free Among the Dead' revolves around the incongruous friendship between 'Shrimpy' a navvy, and Galbraith, a man of gentlemanly birth who unbeknown to his friend has sought employment as a navvy incognito to avoid apprehension by the police on a spurious charge of murder. As the police close in, Galbraith meets an untimely death as the result of a tragic accident excavating a cutting although he professes his innocence up until the last.<sup>35</sup> 'Our Lass Letty' meanwhile concerns the courtship of the heroine Letty Trot, daughter of a navvy, by both the project's resident engineer, Francis Lyne and a navvy, Jim Talbot, lodging with her family, although events prove the engineer to be less than honourable. The theme of deception also runs through this story as unbeknown to the navvy, Lyne had previously seduced Talbot's wife and persuaded her to desert him, only to abandon her shortly afterwards. The denouement takes place one winter's evening at the Trot's hut when Talbot's missing wife in a state of exhaustion arrives in search of Lyne, only for the engineer to cruelly deny all

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<sup>35</sup> ' "Free Among the Dead": A Navvy's Reminiscence, In Two Parts', *All the Year Round*, 19 December 1885, pp. 372-376, 26 December 1885, pp. 397-402.

knowledge of her. The distraught woman rushes out into the cold and is found dead in the snow the following morning. This of course leaves Lyne discredited and Talbot free to marry Letty.<sup>36</sup> In each case the setting of the railway works is used as a backdrop to the unfolding storyline, and as might be expected there are elements that suggest familiarity with the navvy's world, so, we have an impression, albeit heavily sanitised, of life in a navvy hut, and of the nature of the work. Galbraith's attempt to avoid detection masquerading as a navvy is not without a degree of credibility given that as Revd Edward Smith makes clear: 'The railway was a convenient hiding-place for criminals'.<sup>37</sup> However, in common with much Victorian fiction of this type there is an undercurrent of both melodrama and sentimentality. As Regina Garnier has suggested, a tendency to introduce sentimentality into the representation of the working class merely conspires to idealise or distort reality.<sup>38</sup> In consequence, these specific stories provide a highly romanticised impression of railway workers and their families, although in terms of perceptions this does avoid anything that might tend towards negativity.

In some of the non-fiction articles surveyed, there is something of a voyeuristic quality to the writing, a feeling that the author is observing a strange and exotic way of life. The physical characteristics of the navvies and their families received much attention. In referring to navvy women one author wrote: 'Great, gaunt creatures are these women, with a quite distinct appearance to that of most women whom we have seen or known'. Meanwhile, when describing the children he noted; 'Open-eyed babies ... of quite a navvy type', and older girls as: 'bold and

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<sup>36</sup> Walker, 'Our Lass Letty', pp. 44-51.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, 'Railway Making and Railway Makers', p. 550.

<sup>38</sup> Regina Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford and New York, 1991), p. 145.

unrestrained'.<sup>39</sup> Another writer described navvies themselves as: 'in most cases tall, massive beings, of the Saxon type'.<sup>40</sup> Descriptions of the navy's personalities were also articulated in a manner that to modern minds might appear condescending, thus, he is: 'shy and sensitive, warm in temper, and a lover of independence'.<sup>41</sup> Yet for all his idiosyncrasies, there was acceptance in some quarters that the navy did not deserve his bad reputation. In respect of a supposed predilection for heavy drinking and drunkenness he was, in the eyes one commentator at least, less of an offender than other working men: 'The navy is not a drunkard. He could not get through the violent and sustained labour he does, if he were an habitual sot ... He never has beer brought to him when at work as is the custom of puddlers and foundry-men'.<sup>42</sup> In terms of some of the descriptions offered we might also see parallels with the concept of the heathen at home and overseas, in fact one observer of the navy encampments on the Settle and Carlisle route in the 1870s wrote that they exemplified 'that curious half-savage navy life'.<sup>43</sup> For some observers then, these people were different both physically and emotionally. Lewis Evans had referred to this trait in the 1870s, but as late as 1905 the NMS was still stressing the point in that missionaries were advised: 'Remember that the Navvies require peculiar treatment, and need much sympathy and tenderness'.<sup>44</sup>

The existence of this body of literature indicates that the image of the navy, and indeed that of the navy community in general, was being projected into the public consciousness, and there was obviously a belief that this was of potential

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<sup>39</sup> M. A. Curtois, 'The Navy Woman', *Leisure Hour*, June 1891, p. 571.

<sup>40</sup> Buckland, 'A Day With the Navvies at Tilbury', p. 691.

<sup>41</sup> W. H. O. 'A Few Words About Navvies', p. 327.

<sup>42</sup> Dickens (ed.), 'Navvies', p. 201.

<sup>43</sup> 'A "Navy" Ball', p. 157.

<sup>44</sup> Navy Mission Society, *Rules and Instructions for Missionaries & Candidates* (London and Manchester, 1905), p. 1.

interest to readers. The mid to late Victorian era has been characterised by Caroline Sumpter as experiencing a ‘publishing boom’ with increasing mass production allowing newspapers and magazines to come ‘within the reach of unprecedented audiences’ by the 1890s.<sup>45</sup> As a result, periodicals such as those referred to above, were achieving a much wider circulation, and while the articles or books relating to navvies may not necessarily have influenced the views of all readers, it is not difficult to understand how perceptions may have gained a foothold. Admittedly, much of the literature I have featured was written either by clergymen or those with avowedly religious beliefs, and this reflects the fact that individuals involved in Christian mission were amongst those who had the greatest level of contact with railway workers. Equally, a number of the periodicals in which these articles appeared were the products of religious societies or Christian evangelical publishers. Clearly, they had an agenda, and this undoubtedly comes through in the perceptions they advance. Taken as a whole, I think we see here examples of the fascination evident amongst elements of the Victorian middle classes with aspects of society outside of normal experience, in the case of navvies, almost a race apart. It recalls the visits paid to the city slums, the so called ‘slumming’ articulated by Seth Koven. He does postulate a tension between philanthropy and repressed sexuality, what he terms ‘eros and altruism’, but nonetheless he makes clear that the experience ‘did shape how elite men and women represented their experiences among the poor’.<sup>46</sup> In discussing increasing levels of literacy, David Vincent has advanced the theory that it ‘promoted motionless mobility’ by allowing the

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<sup>45</sup> Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (Basingstoke and New York, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton and Oxford, 2004). see esp. p. 14, 18.

absorption of knowledge about areas outside of one's normal social sphere.<sup>47</sup> He may have envisaged this from the point of view of those lower down the social hierarchy looking upwards, but the proposition can surely work equally well in reverse. The written word allowed those within the middle classes with an interest to become 'acquainted' with a version of the navy without physical contact.

Aside from general literature which provides us with an overview, what can be gleaned about the specific response to railway workers engaged on the London Extension? The local press forms a useful repository of opinion, and in general across the areas affected by the railway it was fairly muted in terms of editorial comment, although there were limited occasions when it was deemed politic to publish items pertaining to the navvies. Reactions were mixed, but not overly negative in tone. The *Leicester Chronicle* reflected the commonly held maxim that: 'Railway navvies are often a rough class, and cannot be regarded as amongst the most law-abiding citizens', however, even this statement was hedged by a more conciliatory tone: 'We do not wish to speak disparagingly of them, for they work hard ... and theirs is a rough roving life, with many temptations to hard drinking, and a too great frequenting of public houses, because of their lack of home life and home comforts'.<sup>48</sup> A tendency for excessive drinking was of course perhaps the biggest evil assumed to apply to the navy, and whilst there was condemnation it was by no means universal. Rowdiness did break out from time to time and the *Loughborough Monitor and News* felt it necessary to lay down a marker in relation to events in a notorious area of the town, 'The Rushes', which contained a high proportion of public houses and lodging houses, and indeed, this may have been as much a case of taking aim at the proprietors of the various establishments, or

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<sup>47</sup> David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 27 July 1895.

perhaps the local authorities for a lack of adequate regulation, as at the incomers themselves: ‘there has been a tendency on the part of the navvy colony to indulge in excesses ... in “The Rushes”, where many of these navvies are lodging, there was on Saturday and Monday nights, some rather lively proceedings which kept the police on the alert’.<sup>49</sup> Two months later following the appointment of an additional constable to patrol the area there was a hint of sarcasm evident in the comment that this ‘was a step in the right direction’, in relation to ‘that delightful locality known as “The Rushes” ’.<sup>50</sup> For the *Banbury Guardian*, commenting on the statistics for drunkenness throughout the district reported at the licensing sessions of 1897, there was a positive message to be distilled:

there has been no increase in this class of crime in this district this year and considering the fact it includes the Jubilee festivities ... and that there is at present a large influx of workmen in connection with the new railway, this is eminently satisfactory ... It is worthy to note too, that with one exception, the districts showing the largest increase are not those affected by the new railway works.<sup>51</sup>

This positivity had been evident much earlier in Nottingham, as the *Nottingham Weekly News* was effusive in its praise concerning the behaviour of the men within the town:

A fact in connection with the making of the railway on which the workmen may be congratulated is that although the extension scheme has involved the introduction of a large amount of navvy labour into the town, the navvies and the police hardly ever come into contact ... very few indeed of the workmen have got into trouble of any kind. It speaks volumes for the

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<sup>49</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 14 March 1895.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 May 1895.

<sup>51</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 2 September 1897.

character of the navy, nearly all of whom, it must be borne in mind, are comparative strangers to Nottingham, and have to spend their leisure as best they can.<sup>52</sup>

### **III Health Issues**

It is clear then, that whether by means of oral transmission or the written word, a range of opinions about the navy community were in fairly wide circulation at late century. But the question remains as to how far direct contact between the workers and their families and agencies of both the local state and voluntary and charitable sectors, challenged or re-affirmed existing pre-conceptions and prejudices. That large numbers of workers were moving into the Midland counties to work on the railway did arouse a level of concern among some local authorities. Much of this centred on health issues and the potential for the importation and spread of infectious disease despite the fact that ‘life and death encounters with infectious disease were fairly general across England and Wales in the Victorian period’.<sup>53</sup> Smallpox appears to have been regarded as the greatest threat presented by the inward migration of navvies. The disease in particular was still perceived as a problem generally, and indeed, epidemics did break out from time to time. In Leicester and Nottingham, the two largest urban centres other than the metropolis through which the line passed, the early 1890s had seen an elevation in the number of cases notified (see Table 2.1). The year 1893 was notable for a decade high in the incidence of smallpox although it must be said that this was of fairly modest proportions. The increase can be seen both in respect of Leicester and Nottingham (figures for Loughborough were made available from 1896), but perhaps more

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<sup>52</sup> *Nottingham Weekly News*. 12 April 1895.

<sup>53</sup> Graham Mooney, ‘Infectious Diseases and Epidemiologic Transition in Victorian Britain? Definitely’, *Social History of Medicine*, 20:3 (2007), p. 601.

significantly in the aggregate number of cases (11,135 with 909 deaths recorded) across all major towns and cities submitting figures to the Local Government Board (LGB). Localised outbreaks of the disease were in some instances associated with the congregation of navvies at work sites. For example, in January 1893 smallpox was reported among navvies working on the Manchester Ship Canal in Wirral rural district, an outbreak amongst men living in the same hut at Hathersage in Derbyshire that same month ‘occasioned some alarm in the Peak district’, and the following year it was claimed that navvies accounted for the majority of the 222 cases identified at Ecclesall, Sheffield, with only twenty-three cases occurring among the native population.<sup>54</sup> Of course navvies were on occasion convenient scapegoats, whose presence in an area could be used to distract attention from wider public health failings as at East Haddon in Northamptonshire, where a group of Irish navvies repairing a railway line were blamed for an epidemic of diphtheria in 1889.<sup>55</sup>

*Table 2.1: Cases of Smallpox Reported in Nottingham, Leicester and Loughborough, 1892-1899*

Year	Nottingham	Leicester	Loughborough
1892	5	39	
1893	68	281	
1894	59	9	
1895	3	4	
1896	0	0	0
1897	0	0	0
1898	0	0	0
1899	0	0	0

*Source: Annual Reports of the Local Government Board, 1892-93 to 1899-1900*

<sup>54</sup> ‘Public Health and Poor-Law Medical Services’, *British Medical Journal*, 1:1739 (1894), p. 948.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth T. Hurren, ‘Poor Law Versus Public Health: Diphtheria, Sanitary Reform, and the “Crusade” Against Outdoor Relief, 1870–1900’, *Social History of Medicine*, 18:3 (2005), p. 412.



These factors were no doubt still fresh in the minds of many people when the new railway began construction late in 1894 and perhaps had inevitable consequences for the way in which the issue was perceived. Medical professionals were alert to the apparent risks with the *British Medical Journal* noting that Leicester's Medical Officer of Health was pressing for additional hospital accommodation for the isolation of smallpox in light of 'the near approach of important railway works, which will bring in their train large numbers of navvies'.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, a direct comparison was made between this impending movement of men and the consequences arising from previous migration: 'A like influx, it will be remembered, in the case of some parts of Derbyshire, led to widespread epidemicity of the infection of small-pox in 1893'.<sup>57</sup> There was clearly an implied linkage between itinerancy and the spread of the disease. If the navy was seen as a vehicle for transmission of smallpox then the vagrant was equally if not more culpable. During the 1893 outbreak much was blamed upon common lodging houses and workhouses for the transmission and 'the story has been one of tramp-spread infection'.<sup>58</sup> In the town of Rugby, both the board of guardians and the local board of health were similarly concerned about the threat of disease posed by the arrival of large numbers of workers, and for the need to make some kind of provision in the shape of a new infectious hospital. Interestingly, the chairman of the local board, Revd Charles Elsee was able to call upon previous experience to bring some sense of proportion to the debate. Whilst acknowledging the need for precautions, he made reference to railway works in and around the town some years earlier and the fact that 'there was no difficulty then'.<sup>59</sup> However, when discussion

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<sup>56</sup> 'Public Health and Poor-Law Medical Services', *British Medical Journal*, 1:1795 (1895), p. 1183.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1183.

<sup>58</sup> 'Small-Pox in Great Britain', *British Medical Journal*, 1:1680, (1893), p. 554.

<sup>59</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 23 October 1894.

turned to the prospect of a joint hospital for town residents and railway workers, Elsee reflected the implied prejudice that is often denoted by reliance on generalisations; there should, he argued, be a separate facility for a ‘different class of people—for people belonging to the town’.<sup>60</sup> Once more the concept of difference is apparent; contamination of the town’s inhabitants might ensue and not merely from the point of view of disease, but from social and moral deficiencies. There was also the question of funding for a new hospital given the overlapping responsibilities of the board of guardians, town authority, rural sanitary authorities and county council, and indeed in this case, the railway contractors. Sally Sheard has thrown light on the nature of this thorny subject. She points out that the 1875 Public Health Act required compulsory isolation of infectious disease and also gave powers to sanitary authorities to erect isolation hospitals. But by 1882 only 296 out of 1,593 sanitary authorities in England and Wales had made any such provision. The 1889 Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act sought to address this situation and the Isolation Hospital Act of 1893, which was of course newly enacted when the London Extension was in progress, allowed county councils to cut across sanitary districts and made provision for their area.<sup>61</sup> Despite the legislation, and leaving aside the matter of railway construction, hospital coverage across the country was still far from satisfactory. As late as 1896 Nottinghamshire County Council Health and Sanitary Committee was informed that: ‘The Medical Officers anticipate much difficulty in isolating smallpox, should it arise, with the present amount of Isolation Hospital accommodation.’<sup>62</sup> The problem then, was a general one and by no means

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 20 November 1894.

<sup>61</sup> Sally Sheard, ‘Reluctant Providers?: The Politics and Ideology of Municipal Hospital Finance 1870-1914’, in Martin Gorsky and Sally Sheard (eds), *Financing Medicine: The British Experience Since 1750* (Abingdon and New York, 2006), see esp., pp. 115, 118.

<sup>62</sup> NottA, CC1/1/4, Nottinghamshire County Council, Annual Report of the Health and Sanitary Committee, 27 July 1897.

related solely to the migration of workers despite the fact that it had seemingly concentrated minds in several areas affected by the new line. The outcome at Rugby saw the railway company requested to erect an infection hospital for their own use but with maintenance funded on a shared basis between the town and rural sanitary authority.<sup>63</sup> A somewhat different solution to the same problem was applied at Lutterworth in Leicestershire. Here the railway contractors, Topham, Jones & Railton, were willing to identify a site and have temporary huts available for erection as a makeshift hospital at a few hours' notice if smallpox was to break out among the workers. The local board of guardians agreed to bear half of the associated costs.<sup>64</sup> It was not unknown for the infections wards of local workhouses to be used as a means of isolating infectious disease, thus, a navvy was admitted to Brackley workhouse suffering from diphtheria, although the thorny issue of payment was as ever at the forefront of the guardians' concerns.<sup>65</sup> In some areas this approach reflected the fact that rather than build separate isolation hospitals in order to discharge their responsibilities under the 1875 Public Health Act, local authorities 'made arrangements with existing voluntary or poor law institutions'.<sup>66</sup>

Isolation hospitals were one strand in the fight against smallpox but infant vaccination had technically been compulsory since 1853 with boards of guardians given responsibility for overseeing the task. Peter Hennock has drawn attention to the fact that guardians initially had no effective powers of enforcement, but as a result of legislation in the 1870s, between 1872 and 1883 in excess of ninety-three

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<sup>63</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 27 November 1894.

<sup>64</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 9 May 1896.

<sup>65</sup> NRO, PL1/16, Brackley Guardians Minute Book, 18 December 1897.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Lomax, 'The Control of Contagious Disease In Nineteenth-Century British Paediatric Hospitals', *Social History of Medicine*, 7:3 (1994), p. 392.

per-cent of surviving infants were vaccinated within one year of birth.<sup>67</sup> Levels of vaccination did fall off quite dramatically during the latter years of the century. Contemporary comment did lay some emphasis on the lack of widespread serious epidemics engendering complacency,<sup>68</sup> but there was also in some quarters an anti-vaccination sentiment arising both from an objection to the concept of compulsion, and from fears about the safety of the procedure in terms of the arm to arm transfer of lymph being the cause of the transmission of other diseases.<sup>69</sup> Nadja Durbach has argued that anti-vaccinationism ‘found its most fervent support in predominantly working-class regions and neighbourhoods’.<sup>70</sup> Durbach sees this as reflecting working-class resistance to state interference both with the physical body, and the responsibilities of parents for making decisions as to the care of their children. Such parents also sought to contrast themselves with ‘uniformed, negligent, or lazy parents’.<sup>71</sup> The authorities in Leicester had followed what might be described as a deliberate policy of laying less stress on vaccination and substituting notification of cases of smallpox and applying compulsory quarantine for up to fourteen days.<sup>72</sup> This approach the Medical Officer of Health claimed, had shown significant benefits during the 1893 outbreak:

The value of quarantining has been well shown during the Leicester epidemic, and I have been able, with comparative ease, by means of my

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<sup>67</sup> E. P. Hennock, ‘Vaccination Policy Against Smallpox, 1835-1914: A Comparison of England with Prussia and Imperial Germany’, *Social History of Medicine*, 11:1 (1998), pp. 55-6.

<sup>68</sup> Ernest Hart, ‘Report on Vaccination as a Branch of Preventive Medicine, Part I’, *British Medical Journal*, 1:1783 (1895), p. 485.

<sup>69</sup> Hennock, ‘Vaccination Policy’, p. 61.

<sup>70</sup> Nadja Durbach, ‘“They Might as Well Brand Us”: Working-Class Resistance to Compulsory Vaccination In Victorian England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 13:1 (2000), p. 48.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, see esp., p. 46, 50.

<sup>72</sup> Hennock, ‘Vaccination Policy’, p. 64.

inspectors, to quarantine hundreds of persons at their own homes and with a success that has been gratifying both financially and otherwise.<sup>73</sup>

Hennock has postulated that the protracted Royal Commission of 1889-96, appointed to review the issue of compulsory vaccination, contributed to the decline in vaccination due to the fact that local authorities were reluctant to initiate prosecutions for non-vaccination whilst uncertainty as to the Commission's findings prevailed.<sup>74</sup> Although the subsequent Vaccination Act of 1898 did confirm the compulsory administration of vaccine, albeit within six months of birth, it also included a clause whereby it was possible for a parent to avoid a penalty for non-compliance if: 'he conscientiously believes vaccination would be prejudicial to the health of the said child'.<sup>75</sup>

In the event fears of epidemic related to the new railway were unfounded. As the figures indicate, Nottingham, Leicester and Loughborough suffered only a handful of cases during the years of the line's construction and there is no obvious causal link between these and the influx of workers and their families. There was an outbreak of typhoid affecting seven individuals in Leicester in 1896, the origin of which was identified as being an untreated case 'in the person of a youth who worked on the new railway', but even here there is nothing to indicate that the individual was not a native of the town.<sup>76</sup> Other than this I have found no reference to any outbreaks of either smallpox or other infectious disease in any other area affected by the route that can be linked to the impact of the railway works. This suggests that it was the prevalence of smallpox in particular within the population as a whole in any given year that conditioned the spread of the disease rather than

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Ernest Hart, 'Report on Vaccination as a Branch of Preventive Medicine, Part II', *British Medical Journal*, 1:1785 (1895), p. 595.

<sup>74</sup> Hennock, 'Vaccination Policy', p. 62.

<sup>75</sup> Vaccination Act, 1898, 61 & 62 Vict., c. 49.

<sup>76</sup> RecOLR, Borough of Leicester, 48th Annual Report Upon the Health of Leicester, 1896.

the specific movement of workers per se, although a strict policy of isolation as at Leicester was no doubt crucial. Taking precautions may have been sensible, but the heightened fears were not based upon likely outcomes. Allowing for the fact that vaccination was normally administered during infancy, albeit ideally repeated at puberty,<sup>77</sup> it might be assumed that navvies lacking in many instances an attachment to any given location, and thus, possibly less exposed to official pressure, might be amongst those social groupings exhibiting the lowest rates of vaccination. This was not necessarily the case. For example, of 222 cases of smallpox recorded amongst navvies at Totley in Derbyshire in 1893, 130 at least were said to have been vaccinated.<sup>78</sup> It is not possible to determine if these numbers were the result of infant vaccination or at a later age possibly as a response to that, or a previous outbreak.

The railway workers had a wider impact on health services than that merely associated with infectious disease. Workhouse infirmaries were once more a possible place of refuge as at Narborough in Leicestershire when a seemingly destitute navvy was admitted for medical relief in February 1895. This incident gave rise to some disquiet in view of the fact that the medical officer had consented to the man's wish to enter the workhouse. This was seen as setting a dangerous precedent by 'opening a very wide door' during the course of construction.<sup>79</sup> The new railway also caused an increase in patients admitted to the Leicester workhouse infirmary late in 1895 with twenty railway men swelling the numbers.<sup>80</sup> Illness or injury could have serious consequences for the men as the inability to work meant a loss of income, and many would have had little option other than to hope for some

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<sup>77</sup> Hart, 'Report on Vaccination as a Branch of Preventive Medicine, Part I', p. 486.

<sup>78</sup> Hart, 'Report on Vaccination as a Branch of Preventive Medicine, Part II', p. 598.

<sup>79</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 9 February 1895; 9 March 1895.

<sup>80</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 9 November 1895.

assistance from the poor law authorities. Guardians did have the power to recover costs from those considered able to contribute, and retrospective attempts were made to do so if the patient recovered and was able to resume work.<sup>81</sup> Examples of self-help were evident in so far as sick clubs were operative in several areas often due to NMS initiatives. The contractors also made some provision; Thomas Oliver & Sons, responsible for the stretch of line between Rugby and Woodford Halse for example made a deduction of a penny-halfpenny per man per week to cover medical attendance.<sup>82</sup> This was fairly basic, but James Handley has detailed a much more sophisticated sick and accident scheme established at the Forth Bridge works in 1883. Here membership was compulsory and a weekly contribution covered medical advice and medicines for navvies and their wives and children as well as benefits payable in the advent of sickness or injury.<sup>83</sup> Injury and indeed death resulting from accidents were occupational hazards that faced all construction workers due to the inherent dangers associated with the nature of their work. Some quite horrendous injuries were sustained such as those suffered by Thomas Springthorpe who was admitted to Nottingham general hospital in February 1896. Whilst engaged on excavating a cutting at Bulwell, Springthorne was placing a blasting charge when the cap exploded prematurely causing severe facial disfigurement together with the possibility that he might lose the sight in one eye.<sup>84</sup> Whilst the Board of Trade did produce annual statistics relating to industrial injuries sustained across a range of industries throughout the United Kingdom, the task of extracting quantitative data in respect of men engaged on civil engineering

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<sup>81</sup> Keir Waddington, 'Paying for the Sick Poor: Financing Medicine Under the Victorian Poor Law - The Case of the Whitechapel Union, 1850-1900', in Martin Gorsky and Sally Sheard (eds), *Financing Medicine: The British Experience Since 1750* (Abingdon and New York, 2006), p. 100.

<sup>82</sup> NRO, PL3/20, Daventry Poor Law Guardians Minute Book, 1894-1897, 11 March 1896.

<sup>83</sup> Handley, *The Navvy in Scotland*, pp. 329-330.

<sup>84</sup> *Nottingham Weekly News*, 21 February 1896.

projects is complicated by the difficulty of identifying relevant figures from amongst those presented. For a period during the 1890s the annual statistics did include a category encompassing men engaged on the ‘Construction or repair of Bridges, Docks, Railways, and other works’, and this provides the closest approximation, although there is no indication of the total number of men so employed. Table 2.2 shows the figures reported for this category across the years 1894-98. For comparison purposes it is worth noting that these rates fall well below those pertaining to the two most hazardous occupations which were perhaps unsurprisingly, shipping (merchant seamen and fishermen), followed by mining. Fishing was particularly hazardous: over the six year period 1877-82 an average of 244 fishermen were lost per annum.<sup>85</sup> The figures for these occupations are also shown at Table 2.2. For the sake of brevity I have combined the figures for merchant seamen and fishermen, and coal and metal miners into single categories.

*Table 2.2: Industrial Accidents by Occupation 1894-1898*

Occupation	Year									
	1894 Killed	1894 Injured	1895 Killed	1895 Injured	1896 Killed	1896 Injured	1897 Killed	1897 Injured	1898 Killed	1898 Injured
Construction of Bridges, Docks, Railways, and other works	45	933	57	1281	48	973	54	985	45	1165
Merchant seamen and fishermen *	2465	-	2236	-	2233	-	1874	2594	1410	2486
Mining (Coal and metal)	1173	4105	1096	5470	1072	6073	979	4764	941	4408

\* Number of injured not recorded until 1897.

*Source: Annual Report of the Labour Department of the Board of Trade, 1894-95 – 1898-99*

<sup>85</sup> Susan Capes and Robb Robinson, ‘Health and Safety in the British Deep-Sea Trawl Fisheries During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, *The Mariner's Mirror*, 94:3 (2008), p. 299.



As previously observed employees did under certain circumstances have recourse to the law to seek compensation for injuries suffered in the course of their work. One such was navvy, Michael Duffy, who brought a successful action under the Employer's Liability Act against contractor Henry Lovatt at Leicester County Court following an accident which resulted in the amputation of his leg. Duffy was struck by a passing train while filling a wagon with waste, and claimed that the driver of the train failed to give a warning by blowing his whistle. The presiding judge found there had been negligence on the part of the driver and awarded Duffy £120.<sup>86</sup> Although the case was heard in early 1897, the Workmen's Compensation Act of that year which extended the protection given to employees had not yet reached the statute book. The Employer's Liability Act was less favourable, and contained many exclusions. However, it seems Duffy had a reasonable chance of success because the act had removed the defence of common employment under a number of circumstances one of which specifically covered negligence on the part of a fellow employee in charge of a locomotive or train on a railway.<sup>87</sup> What is significant of course is the fact that a navvy was in a position to go to law, not from a purely legal standpoint, but more from a personal perspective. He was legally represented in court so the question of finance becomes pertinent. Did he have sufficient funds to meet any fees before the case was heard or was payment dependent upon the outcome? It has been maintained that such cases were taken on a commission basis despite the disapproval of the Law Society, but possibly more relevant is reference to the fact that by the 1890s 'Poor Man's Lawyers' who

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<sup>86</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 30 February 1897.

<sup>87</sup> David G. Hanes, *The First British Workman's Compensation Act 1897* (New Haven and London, 1968), pp. 20-21.

offered a charitable legal service were becoming increasingly available.<sup>88</sup> But once more a navvy was being placed no less favourably than any other working man.

Aside from workhouse infirmaries there is evidence that other local hospitals at Leicester, Nottingham and Rugby and the cottage hospital at Brackley accepted navvies who had suffered accidents in the course of their work. As Joan Lane has pointed out, hospitals in general, many of which dated from the eighteenth century, were predominately voluntary or charitable institutions which relied upon local generosity for income and were run by boards of governors and trustees.<sup>89</sup> Such was the importance of locally generated income that according to Steven Cherry subscriptions and donations accounted for perhaps half of the ordinary income of provincial hospitals in the period up to 1914, although other sources of funding such as Hospital Saturday and Hospital Sunday were becoming more significant.<sup>90</sup> Cherry has researched the origins of both Hospital Sunday and Hospital Saturday. The former developed from appeals or collections in aid of local hospitals following church sermons, and was first established as an annual Sunday event in Birmingham in 1859, whilst the latter began as house to house, street or workplace collections, and by the 1880s 'featured in more than forty English provincial centres and ... workplace collections were prominent, many now systematized around a halfpenny or penny per week contribution'.<sup>91</sup> Workplace collections were certainly becoming a vital source of funding at Leicester by the end of the century as in 1896 monies raised amounted to £3,187-2s-9d, which at

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<sup>88</sup> P. W. J. Bartrip and S. B. Burnam, *The Wounded Soldiers of Industry: Industrial Compensation Policy 1833-1897* (Oxford, 1983), p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> Joan Lane, *A Social History of Medicine: Health, Healing and Diseases in England, 1750-1950* (London and New York, 2001), p. 82.

<sup>90</sup> Steven Cherry, 'Regional Comparators in the Funding and Organisation of the Voluntary Hospital System, c.1860-1939', in Martin Gorsky and Sally Sheard (eds), *Financing Medicine: The British Experience Since 1750* (Abingdon and New York, 2006), p. 62.

<sup>91</sup> Steven Cherry, 'Hospital Saturday, Workplace Collections and Issues in Late Nineteenth-Century Funding', *Medical History*, 44:4 (2000), pp. 470-71.

that point in time ‘was the largest sum ever yet received in one year from this source’.<sup>92</sup> Leicester Infirmary as well as Nottingham General, and Rugby St Cross hospital all conformed in many respects to the classic voluntary pattern. The charitable and philanthropic ethos underpinning the hospitals was given substance not only by virtue of the funding regime, but by the fact that each hospital operated a system of recommendation whereby subscribers could recommend a given number of patients per annum according to a predetermined scale.<sup>93</sup> For example, at St Cross an annual payment of one guinea gave the subscriber the right to allocate up to six outpatient visits or one inpatient admission per year.<sup>94</sup> In effect the subscriber made a pre-payment which afforded the privilege of making charitable gestures to those for whom the cost of hospital treatment was prohibitive, and this ensured that only the deserving poor would receive free treatment. In fact anyone in a position to pay was effectively barred, as was implicit in the rules of Leicester Infirmary: ‘No person can be admitted who is able to pay for Medical Treatment’.<sup>95</sup> The construction of the London Extension did raise concerns among these local hospitals as to the likely increase in both patient numbers and associated costs, with the chairman of the board of the Leicester infirmary noting that the work in the area would inevitably impact on the workload and expressed the hope that the public would respond appropriately.<sup>96</sup> I would however, argue that the presence of the railway works also brought significant benefits to the medical institutions and their staff in a number of areas.

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<sup>92</sup> RecOLR, 11D65/C/1 Leicester Infirmary Annual Report, 1896, p. 9.

<sup>93</sup> RecOLR, 11D65/C/2, Leicester Infirmary Annual Report, 1897, p. 7; Nick Hayes, ‘“Our Hospitals”? Voluntary Provision, Community and Civic Consciousness in Nottingham Before the NHS’, *Midland History*, 37: 1 (2012), p. 97; WRO, CR2745/4, Hospital of St Cross, Rugby, Annual Reports of the Board of Management, 1894-1903, 31 December 1897.

<sup>94</sup> CR2745/4, Hospital of St Cross, Rugby, Annual Reports of the Board of Management, 1894-1903, 31 December 1897.

<sup>95</sup> 11D65/C/1 Leicester Infirmary Annual Report, 1894, p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 16 March 1895.

Given the location of Rugby's St Cross hospital, the institution saw navvies using its facilities and the management board was particularly concerned that a number of accident cases had been attended without the appropriate subscriber's recommendation which in this case required the presentation of a ticket. In common with many voluntary hospitals, St Cross did not refuse to admit accident cases but the question of recouping the costs was seen as a pressing matter in these circumstances. The management board thus, took steps to seek recompense from the railway contractors who were duly asked to provide a subscription. The point at issue here was not so much that the men might receive free treatment whilst being in a position to pay, but that they clearly fell outside the normal rules of admission. The subscription from the contractors effectively placed their employees in a situation anomalous to people admitted under recommendation. The railway workers as a whole did make a further contribution on their own volition by way of workplace collections in aid of the hospital which realised the sum of £19-10s-3d in 1897.<sup>97</sup> Topham, Jones & Railton the contractors responsible for the section of line between Leicester and Rugby adopted something of a pro-active approach when early in 1895 they requested that three beds be set aside at Leicester Infirmary for 'accidents that might occur' in return for an appropriate charge. This request was subsequently refused by the management board on the basis that beds could not be reserved exclusively for the contractor's men and that as the hospital relied upon voluntary contributions, the board did not make specific charges.<sup>98</sup> However, the board did confirm that all 'accidents will be received and treated', although as at St Cross the contractors were asked to make an annual donation for the duration of the

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<sup>97</sup> Hospital of St Cross, Rugby, Annual Reports of the Board of Management, 1894-1903, 31 December 1897.

<sup>98</sup> RecOLR, 11D65/A/11, Leicester Infirmary Committee Minute Book, 1893-1901, 15 January 1895.

works which was agreed at twenty-five pounds.<sup>99</sup> The experience at Brackley cottage hospital was similar in many respects. At the annual meeting in October 1895 it was stated that the past year had witnessed ‘new features in their experiences of managing the institution in consequence of the influx of navvies into the district ... and the increase in the number and gravity of the cases treated in the hospital’ with thirteen navvies having been admitted, all with broken limbs or other serious injuries.<sup>100</sup> One such was Spencer Baseley who suffered an accident on the line in June 1896 and whose injuries were so severe that one of his legs had to be amputated. It is claimed that cottage hospitals were characterised by ‘the desire to achieve low cost care’, and were run predominantly in the interests of medical practitioners who, working outside of the larger centres, rarely had the chance to practise in voluntary general hospitals, and who sought to broaden their range of skills for future career enhancement.<sup>101</sup> Across hospital facilities more generally, it has been postulated that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, surgeons were eager to gain greater experience which they saw as ‘vital to surgical advancement’ and in consequence the period was ‘characterised by a distinctively experimental ... outlook’ to which end riskier procedures were often attempted.<sup>102</sup> It is ironic therefore, that the diversity and severity of cases that the new railway brought to a small hospital such as that at Brackley might be highly beneficial in professional terms to the medical staff who administered the various treatments. Financial prospects were also improved by the railway as in line with the approach taken at Rugby and Leicester, the contractors were again asked to assist with an

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 22 January 1895.

<sup>100</sup> OHC, OHA BRA 1 A1/2, Brackley Cottage Hospital Management Committee Minutes and Annual Reports, 1883-1899, 30 October 1895.

<sup>101</sup> Steven Cherry, ‘Change and Continuity In the Cottage Hospitals c.1859-1948: The Experience of East Anglia’, *Medical History*, 36 (1992), p. 273.

<sup>102</sup> Claire Brock, ‘Risk, Responsibility and Surgery in the 1890s and Early 1900s’, *Medical History*, 57:3 (2013), pp. 325-6.

initial sum of fifteen pounds forthcoming, and workplace collections among the railway workers added to the hospital's receipts. Such was the contribution made by these extra funds that following completion of the works it was 'a matter of regret to the committee that the sources of income have somewhat diminished'.<sup>103</sup>

There was then, a degree of commonality in terms of the response of all these hospitals to the extra demands that the presence of the railway workers created. Even though many of the men were outsiders there was apparently no question of refusing admission to accident cases irrespective of whether these presented as out or inpatients. Not unreasonably, the men's employers were expected to provide a contribution to hospital funds as some recompense. The attempt by Topham, Jones & Railton to make an arrangement with Leicester Infirmary raises an interesting question. Did this reflect an employer taking their responsibilities for their men seriously and thus, illustrate genuine altruism? In retrospect it is impossible to be sure on this point. It seems likely that there was a combination of motives: to secure medical provision, yes; but perhaps by this means they also 'safeguarded and restored ... human capital'.<sup>104</sup> The actions of the men in making workplace collections on behalf of the various hospitals also give cause for speculation. This may well reflect gratitude for treatment received but the case for an element of self-interest seems compelling. I mention the possibility of self-interest in light of the suggestion made by both Keir Waddington and Steven Cherry that working-class collection schemes such as Hospital Saturday, albeit a more systematic and regular form of contribution, often created certain expectations on the part of the giver. For Waddington this was the expectation that contribution

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<sup>103</sup> Brackley Cottage Hospital Management Committee Minutes and Annual Reports, 1883-1899, 2 November 1899.

<sup>104</sup> Martin Gorsky and Sally Sheard, 'Introduction', in Martin Gorsky and Sally Sheard (eds), *Financing Medicine: The British Experience Since 1750* (Abingdon and New York, 2006), p. 3.

‘gave an entitlement to treatment’.<sup>105</sup> Cherry has also expressed the view that contributions of this nature were a manifestation of self-help and denoted ‘a contribution to the health care of others, and an expression of loyalty to a particular community’.<sup>106</sup> The majority of navvies may not necessarily have felt a sense of loyalty to the resident community but the act is redolent of class solidarity. At the very least, their reputation for looking after their own implies that they saw this as loyalty to their fellow workers.

#### **IV Vagrancy and Common Lodging Houses**

I made reference earlier to the connection that was drawn between vagrancy and the transmission of disease, but vagrancy also played a much more prominent role in underscoring the perceptions surrounding the building of the London Extension. The statistics collated by the LGB show a considerable increase in the number of vagrants relieved across poor law unions from the mid-1890s. Over the forty-one year period stretching from 1858 to 1898, the LGB figures show a peak of 11,554 in the mean number of vagrants recorded as at Lady-Day 1897.<sup>107</sup> However, as the LGB were obliged to admit the veracity of these figures were called into question by the fact that the numbers submitted by the various unions were not prepared on a uniform basis and the problem of double counting was clearly evident. For example, vagrants relieved in more than one workhouse on the same day might be counted twice. In addition, some unions commonly included only those relieved on the night of the day to which the return related whilst others included all vagrants

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<sup>105</sup> Keir Waddington, ‘Unsuitable Cases: The Debate Over Outpatient Admissions, the Medical Profession and the Late-Victorian Hospitals’, *Medical History*, 42 (1998), p. 30. Cherry, ‘Hospital Saturday’, p. 482.

<sup>106</sup> Cherry, ‘Hospital Saturday’, p. 481.

<sup>107</sup> BPP, 1898 [C.8978] XXXIX, *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1897-98*, p. 337.

relieved at any time during the twenty-four hours.<sup>108</sup> Vagrancy may have warranted much attention during the mid-1890s but it exercised the LGB over many years. The Pauper Inmates Discharge and Regulation Act 1871 had mandated that itinerants applying to a workhouse for casual relief should be detained, and given a task of work to complete. Where provision existed vagrants were on admission segregated from other inmates in a separate casual ward ideally arranged into cells. They were usually bathed and their clothes fumigated.<sup>109</sup> These measures tie in with the fears alluded to earlier that vagrants were a source of, and a prime cause of the spread of, infectious diseases. The regulations were further tightened by the Casual Poor Act 1882 which required the detention of vagrants for two nights.<sup>110</sup> Measures of this sort were obviously aimed at maintaining a level of control, and used as a deterrent: ‘the less eligibility principle writ large’.<sup>111</sup> Notwithstanding, they could, as has been postulated, be counterproductive in so far as they might encourage casuals to shun workhouses and stay on the streets.<sup>112</sup> For the LGB, the problems inherent with the treatment of vagrants stemmed in large part from a belief that there was a lack of vigour on the part of local guardians in enforcing the existing regulations, and little uniformity of approach from union to union. Lionel Rose suggests that this may indeed have been the case, indicating as he does, that by 1896 only about half of workhouses had a cell system and less than half detained casuals for more than one night.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> BPP, 1897 [C.8583] XXXVI, *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1896-97*, p. lx.

<sup>109</sup> Robert Humphreys, *No Fixed Abode: A History of Response to the Roofless and the Rootless In Britain* (Basingstoke and New York, 1999), p. 100.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>111</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), p. 102.

<sup>112</sup> Rachel Vorse, ‘Vagrancy and the New Poor Law in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England’, *The English Historical Review*, 92:362 (1977), p. 64.

<sup>113</sup> Lionel Rose, ‘“Rogues and Vagabonds”: Vagrant Underworld In Britain 1815-1985’ (London and New York, 1988), p. 84.



Rachael Vorspan, Robert Humphreys, and Roger Hopkins Burke have all given some credence to the idea of a relationship between the levels of vagrancy and prevailing economic conditions.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, this aspect did come to the fore in the extensive contemporary debate about the causes of vagrancy. Comment in some cases drew attention to a direct linkage with the economic cycle in so far as the mid-1890s were believed to have witnessed a downturn in trade which was followed by a recovery: ‘In my report for 1894, I ventured to write that whenever trade in England has been bad, vagrancy has increased, and whenever trade has recovered itself, vagrancy has diminished. In 1896 trade has recovered itself’.<sup>115</sup> That the country was bedevilled by a body of permanent or semi-permanent vagrants numbering perhaps five to seven thousand that during ‘a period of bad trade, depression, or lean years ... was added to by the weakest and poorest of the working class population’, was the belief expressed by J. J. Henly, a former poor law inspector, at a poor law conference held at Oxford in December 1895.<sup>116</sup> The existence of a correlation between vagrancy and the economic cycle was also supported by local poor law officials to some extent, but blame for increasing numbers of vagrants at mid-century was also laid upon the discharge of men following the completion of short term service in the army. In fact this connection does appear to have some validity given the contention that: ‘One-quarter of the soldiers who left the Edwardian army became unemployed or unemployable

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<sup>114</sup> Vorspan, ‘Vagrancy and the New Poor Law’, p. 63; Humphreys, *No Fixed Abode*, p. 108; Roger Hopkins Burke, ‘Policing Bad Behaviour: Interrogating the Dilemmas’, in Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson, (eds), *Behaving Badly: Social Panic and Moral Outrage - Victorian and Modern Parallels* (Aldershot and Burlington VT, 2003), p. 67.

<sup>115</sup> As reported by T. Lloyd Murray Browne, inspector for the South Midlands district in his submission to the Local Government Board. See *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1896-97*, p. 81-2.

<sup>116</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 12 December 1895.

vagrants'.<sup>117</sup> Despite the strength of feeling amongst guardians generally about the issue of vagrancy, the response of the LGB was limited to the issue of a circular to poor law unions in 1896 once more stressing the need to enforce the regulations.<sup>118</sup> This of course came at a time when work on the London Extension was well advanced. Despite this intervention, vagrancy remained a politically sensitive issue.

For some of the poor law unions lying close to the route, the presence of the new railway was seen as contributing to the rising levels of vagrancy at late-century, but even here there was a realisation that this was by no means the only factor. The scale of the London Extension and the associated demand for labour meant that the works obviously acted as a magnet for men seeking employment. Those who by virtue of previous employment had managed to establish a relationship with specific companies undertaking contracts on the line were no doubt reasonably assured of securing work. As alluded to in Chapter One, local men swelled the ranks of the labour force, but many more would have travelled considerable distances in the hope of being taken on. There was a tradition for single and unaccompanied navvies to tramp from job to job and thus, men falling into this category would have joined the influx. Henry Stevens, LGB inspector for the district encompassing parts of the east Midlands and eastern England reporting on pauperism in Leicestershire, drew attention to the fact that: 'local works, railway and reservoir making, were certainly attracting casual labour to those parts'.<sup>119</sup> Casual labour does not of course necessarily equate to vagrancy and many of these individuals may have been actively seeking work. Reporting on levels of vagrancy in early 1895 the Chief Constable of Leicestershire, Edward Holmes, was of the

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<sup>117</sup> Edward Spiers, 'The Late Victorian Army 1868-1914', in David Chandler and Ian Beckett (eds), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army* (Oxford and New York, 1994), pp. 192-3.

<sup>118</sup> Rose, '“Rogues and Vagabonds”', p. 84.

<sup>119</sup> BPP, 1896 [C.8212] XXXVI, *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Local Government Board, 1895-6*, p. 204.

opinion that work on the Midland Railway in the vicinity of Melton the previous year, and the work currently in progress on the London Extension and at Swithland reservoir 'has very materially affected the numbers', however, he qualified this by stating that this could not account for 'the great increase which appears to be found in all parts of the County'.<sup>120</sup> Likewise, the Brackley guardians were aware that the railway brought many tramps to the town, but again as one member of the board, Revd Worsley, made clear this would not provide a reason for the increase across the country.<sup>121</sup>

The statements of Holmes and Worsley did of course reflect a truism in so far as railway construction may have impacted on the level of vagrancy from a local perspective, but it was unlikely to have influenced to any significant degree the situation nationwide. It is difficult to determine precisely what was meant by reference to tramps: were these in fact tramping navvies or vagrants of a more generalised character? Intentionally or not, a Leicester poor law guardian did make a connection between tramps and casual navvying when stating that due to works on the Midland Railway in and around Leicester the board became aware that: 'a large number of the tramps that came to them were being employed on the line'.<sup>122</sup> This does raise the interesting question as to why men, albeit described as tramps, who were employed were making use of the casual ward. This implies they could either not find, or were unwilling to occupy alternative accommodation. Petty sessional cases do provide some indication of the approach that was being taken to tackle the problem. For one sessional district that of Daventry, over a twelve month period (August 1895 – August 1896) seventeen different men were convicted of

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<sup>120</sup> RecOLR, DE3831/4, Leicestershire Constabulary Police Committee Minute Book, 1893-1900, 19 January 1895.

<sup>121</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 27 February 1896.

<sup>122</sup> From a report of a Poor Law Conference held at Leicester. See *Leicester Chronicle*, 12 June 1896.

either vagrancy or sleeping rough without visible means of subsistence, with one man, George Williams, convicted twice within a matter of weeks in the autumn of 1895.<sup>123</sup> Lack of information means it is not possible to establish whether or not these men were tramping navvies, but their offences were all committed in or around four villages in close proximity to each other, and all adjacent to the new line. It is difficult therefore, to conclude other than that the presence of the men was associated in some way with the ongoing railway works. It is conceivable that the men were being specifically targeted by the police and judiciary as a means of setting an example, given that at one of the locations, Woodford, the parish council had complained about men sleeping rough in early 1895. However, in response the contractors responsible for that stretch of line had indicated their intention to erect huts, and as such, it is likely that any problem of lack of accommodation would have eased prior to the majority of the cases coming to court.<sup>124</sup> The 1824 Vagrancy Act was the principle legislation available to law enforcement authorities to bring charges against such individuals, and was far reaching in its provisions giving the police considerable discretion in terms of what constituted an act of vagrancy. In fact the onus was placed on the suspect ‘to clear themselves of any mistrust levelled against them’.<sup>125</sup> The act also formulated a hierarchical categorisation of offenders into those who were deemed: ‘idle and disorderly’, ‘rogues and vagabonds’, and ‘incorrigible rogues’.<sup>126</sup> Paul Ocobock has made the important observation that under the law vagrancy exhibits a unique characteristic: most crimes are ‘defined by actions’ whereas ‘vagrancy laws are based on personal condition, state of being,

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<sup>123</sup> NRO, B.2, Daventry Petty Sessions Register, 1887-1896.

<sup>124</sup> NRO 372P/WMC 28, Woodford cum Membris Parish Council Minute Book, 1894-1907, 20 May 1895; 17 June 1895.

<sup>125</sup> Humphreys, *No Fixed Abode*, p. 83.

<sup>126</sup> An Act for the Punishment of Idle and Disorderly Persons, and Rogues and Vagabonds, in that Part of Great Britain Called England, 1824, 5 Geo. IV, c. 83, pp. 698-700

and social and economic status'.<sup>127</sup> Prison sentences, it has been claimed were common for all who contravened the vagrancy laws,<sup>128</sup> and the fate of the men sentenced at Daventry certainly followed this pattern. Other than two whose sentences are unrecorded, all received seven days imprisonment with hard labour with the exception of two who received fourteen days. What is apparent from reports of petty sessional proceedings relating to crime more generally, is the distinction that was made between defendants described as 'navvies' and those described as 'tramping navvies'. Clearly, such men were not deemed to constitute a single category and the separation was seen as important. Amongst middle-class observers in particular there was a clear division between the genuine hard working bone fide navvy who could demand respect and the more disreputable elements who sought to exploit the situation for their own ends. It was the latter that caused the problems for the judiciary according to John Stratton, local magistrate, who when addressing the Brackley branch of the Northamptonshire Licensed Trade Association opined that:

the magistrates tried to do their duty without showing partiality to either side ... They had no doubt had drunken men about Brackley during the past twelve months, but they were not the navvies on the new line. The navvies as a body were a capital, well-conducted set of fellows; the men who offended were men who came and hung around and fawned on the navvies.<sup>129</sup>

One individual who may have exemplified the type of character that Stratton was referring to was George Hallam who coincidentally appeared before the Brackley

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<sup>127</sup> Paul Ocobock, 'Introduction', in A. L. Beier and Paul Ocobock (eds), *Cast Out: Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global and Historical Perspective* (Athens, Ohio, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>128</sup> See Humphreys, *No Fixed Abode*, p. 104. Rose, ' "Rogues and Vagabonds" ', p. 140.

<sup>129</sup> As reported in the *Banbury Guardian*, 27 May 1897.

bench in March 1895. He was found sleeping rough without visible means of subsistence in a cow crib on a local farm and taken into custody. In court it was revealed that he had been discovered in a straw rick on the same farm only a few days previously and on that occasion the police constable who apprehended him had taken pity on him and taken him to his house ‘to give him a warm’, with Hallam maintaining that he was due to start work on the new railway the following day. Given that in the interim had been seen sponging on the streets and frequenting local pubs, the bench showed little sympathy and sentenced him to fourteen days hard labour.<sup>130</sup> The theme of ‘hangers on’ was also evident at the Rugby licensing sessions in August 1896. In presenting his report for the year, Superintendent Wilson noted that one hundred and one persons had been proceeded against for drunkenness compared to forty-seven the previous year. The increase he stated was due not only to the presence of navvies in the neighbourhood, but also ‘persons who follow them on the new railway’, fifty-seven of ‘those persons’ having been apprehended in the last twelve months.<sup>131</sup> The *Leicester Chronicle* reflected on the distinction between the genuine and quasi-navvy in an editorial early in 1895 when commenting on the problem of increasing numbers of tramps in the district:

they are more than troublesome locally just now, because the railway works are attracting an exceptionally large number of them ... the authorities are somewhat perplexed how to properly deal with those who only make the railway works a pretext for coming to sponge on the ratepayers.<sup>132</sup>

The paper went on to argue for acceptance of a great many deserving cases: for example, migrating navvies who had run out of money before they could secure employment, and thus, ‘the Guardians ... must act with discrimination, or hardship

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<sup>130</sup> NRO, Brackley Petty Sessions Examination Book, 1890-1897, 21 March 1895.

<sup>131</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 29 August 1896.

<sup>132</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 26 January 1895.

will be inflicted ... they ought to be treated differently from the idle, loafing, cadging “shack” ’.<sup>133</sup> Significantly, this categorisation was not merely parochial in its application. The NMS was equally keen to stress the divisions evident within the ranks of the construction workers. Acknowledging the labourers who took pride in their work, criticism was reserved for the ‘loafing’ navvies who were highly troublesome and who tried to impose on their work mates by pretence in order to extract money for no good reason.<sup>134</sup> Patrick MacGill has made reference to the experience of the tramp navvy. Coping with the extremes of the weather, sleeping rough, and begging or even stealing in order to obtain food all figure in his narrative, but above all what defines such men in his view is the contempt shown by society at large: ‘The women shun us as lepers are shunned ... The children hide behind their mothers’ petticoats when they see us coming, frightened to death of the awful navvy man ... shunned and despised by all men’.<sup>135</sup>

It was not then the itinerant workforce per se that was considered detrimental to social harmony but the idler and loafer. The importance of distinguishing between the deserving and undeserving did of course permeate much of nineteenth century discourse, most obviously in matters relating to poor relief. No doubt the perennial problem of the vagrant had much to do with the threat supposedly posed by the underclass, but as has been pointed out, this threat may have been ‘an imagined reality’.<sup>136</sup> Men such as those referred to earlier who were charged with vagrancy were in no sense a danger to society. They may have been troublesome and something of a nuisance, but hardly a threat. The vagrant may

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> From a report of the NMS Annual General Meeting, 31 May 1900, included in the *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1899-1900*, p. 15.

<sup>135</sup> MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, see esp., pp. 153-54.

<sup>136</sup> A. L. Beier, ‘“Takin’ it to the Streets”: Henry Mayhew and the Language of the Underclass in Mid-Nineteenth Century London’, in Beier and Osofsky (eds), *Cast Out*, p. 92.

have offended middle-class sensitivities to some degree, but it has been argued that they were equally disapproved of by the respectable working class who felt aggrieved by ‘their evident lack of the work ethic and their crass behaviour’, so much so, that they were supportive of the effects of the police in their attempts to combat the menace.<sup>137</sup> The unemployed, travelling with intent to obtain work, might be worthy of support whilst the habitual vagrant was a blight on society at large.<sup>138</sup> These individuals were physically separated from society but they were also mentally divorced. It was this combination that made them unfit for citizenship. Exploring the construct of the citizen’s body during the nineteenth century, Pamela Gilbert has noted the desire to ‘foster a ... healthy body and mind’.<sup>139</sup> Citizenship carried certain responsibilities, and the workshy and homeless were deemed ‘unsocialised’ and ‘undomesticated’, and fell well short of middle-class ideals.<sup>140</sup>

In some instances, poor law unions instigated a ticket system to control the movement of itinerants through a designated area. A ticket issued to an individual could be used to obtain overnight relief in casual wards on less onerous terms than that applicable to confirmed vagrants provided a pre-determined route was followed and there was a genuine attempt to secure work.<sup>141</sup> The Church Army Lodging House Union instigated a similar scheme across parts of the country with Daventry earmarked for inclusion late in 1897. Prepaid work tickets were to be distributed amongst ‘leading residents’ in the area with the intention that these would be given to tramps or beggars asking for help. The recipient was then obliged to take the

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<sup>137</sup> Burke, ‘Policing Bad Behaviour’, p. 71.

<sup>138</sup> Vorspan, ‘Vagrancy and the New Poor Law’, p. 65.

<sup>139</sup> Pamela K. Gilbert, *The Citizen's Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England* (Columbus, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>141</sup> Vorspan, ‘Vagrancy and the New Poor Law’, p. 70.



ticket to a labour yard and undertake work up to a certain value specified on the ticket, only then, would he or she receive payment in the form of food and accommodation at a lodging house.<sup>142</sup> The aim of the Church Army was the rehabilitation and spiritual welfare of the masses, but the ticket system was in essence another attempt to weed out undeserving vagrants who it was claimed were already avoiding areas where the scheme was operational. Needless to say this could be seen as somewhat self-defeating given the prospect of merely shifting the problem elsewhere. It is worth reiterating that vagrants were not universally derided. It has been argued that organisations such as the Church Army and the Salvation Army developed what was essentially a form of social service later in the century. As such, they did at least recognise that there was a need to provide alternative accommodation and assistance to the homeless and needy.<sup>143</sup> Margaret Crowther has highlighted the fact that the freedom from responsibility enjoyed by the vagrant gave rise to a sense of envy, and a romanticisation of the life in literary representations helped to establish somewhat contradictory myths: ‘the vagrant was simultaneously poor and a hoarder of ill-gotten wealth; a criminal, and yet spiritually richer than the householder’.<sup>144</sup> Julie-Marie Strange has explored a similar theme in showing that attempts to sentimentalise the tramp were used as a means of eliciting compassion for the homeless and could underpin philanthropic endeavours.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 18 November 1897.

<sup>143</sup> David Lynch, *Chariots of the Gospels: The Centenary History of the Church Army* (Worthing, 1982), p. 37; Norman H. Murdoch, ‘From Militancy to Social Mission: The Salvation Army and Street Disturbances in Liverpool, 1879-1887’ in John Belchem (ed.), *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays In Liverpool History, 1790-1940* (Liverpool, 1992), p. 160.

<sup>144</sup> M. A. Crowther, ‘The Tramp’, in Roy Porter (ed.), *Myths of the English* (reprint, Cambridge, 1994), see esp. pp. 103-6, 109.

<sup>145</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, ‘Tramp: Sentiment and the Homeless Man in the Late-Victorian and Edwardian City’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 16:2 (2011), pp. 242-258.

Reference to lodging houses has resonance both for the vagrant and for navvies in view of the fact that they were places commonly thought to accommodate large numbers of such men particularly in more urban areas. Common lodging houses had gained a reputation for overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions and as a haven for disease, but above all for the debased nature of their clientele. Tom Crook has characterised contemporary depictions of those frequenting lodging houses as tending to reflect: ‘displaced, residual figures, whether as exiles or human rubbish’.<sup>146</sup> Navvies did frequent these establishments in some areas as the comments from the *Loughborough Monitor and News* quoted above appear to confirm, and if they were deemed by many to be the refuge of the dregs of society then navvies were effectively tainted by association. I have noted nine separate references in a Leicester newspaper to navvies appearing in court charged with a variety of petty offences, all recorded as residing in Britannia Street within the town. Further investigation reveals that this street contained two common lodging houses. It seems safe to assume that the men were living in one or other of these establishments.<sup>147</sup> Lodging houses had in theory been controlled since 1851 with the passage of the Common Lodging Houses Act, which in the view of Enid Gaudie: ‘was entirely a public health measure’.<sup>148</sup> Subject to inspection by local authorities, the experience of lodging houses in Nottingham in connection with the railway works is particularly revealing. The prospect of increased business as a result of the line had some impact on the availability of accommodation with an increase by fifteen, equating to 122 beds, in the number of common lodging houses in the town between 1893 and 1894, ‘doubtless due to the

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<sup>146</sup> Tom Crook, ‘Accommodating the Outcast: Common Lodging Houses and the Limits of Urban Governance In Victorian and Edwardian London’, *Urban History*, 35:3 (2008), p. 418.

<sup>147</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (London, 1895), p. 132.

<sup>148</sup> Enid Gaudie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing 1780-1918* (London, 1974), p. 239.

expectation that the new railway works would bring additional lodgers'.<sup>149</sup> If this seemed justified during the winter of 1894/5 when business was initially buoyant, it was something of a false dawn as by the end of 1895 the medical officer of health for the borough, Philip Boobyer, reported a falling off in activity and, 'the complaint of lack of lodgers was universal among the keepers of houses'.<sup>150</sup> In Boobyer's opinion 'the explanation appears to be, that the navvies, labourers, and other work people regularly employed ... prefer to put up at private houses, as lodgers or boarders by the week or other longer period'.<sup>151</sup> By 1896, he indicated that the railway had failed to fulfil the expectations of the lodging houses chiefly because the 'accommodation of the average common lodging house is certainly not sufficiently good for the regular navvies'.<sup>152</sup> Clearly, this represents the views of one man, but what is perhaps telling is Boobyer's reference to both those 'regularly employed' and 'regular navvies'. By implication he seems to be stressing the distinction previously noted, between what might be termed 'proper' navvies who sought regular work and who by definition were prepared to stay in the area for a prolonged period, and casual labourers. The former, possibly in possession of a reasonable level of disposable income, were more discerning in their choice of accommodation and shunned the common lodging houses and thus, exhibited higher standards than perceptions of this body of workers had led many to believe.

This chapter has demonstrated how change, in this case the advent of a new railway, could bring about uncertainty and a fear of perceived consequences that may or may not materialise. In such an environment rumour and speculation could thrive, driven by a lack of accurate information. Contemporary literature and

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<sup>149</sup> NottA, CA/HE/2/1/2, Borough of Nottingham Annual Health Report 1895, p. 54.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>152</sup> NottA, CA/HE/2/1/2, Borough of Nottingham Annual Health Report 1896, p. 61.

newspaper reporting can underpin our understanding both of how misconceptions about migrant railway workers may have arisen, and how actual experiences often led to more nuanced attitudes. The influx of railway workers was initially at least, seen as raising the risk of infectious disease, but in the event this fear proved groundless. There was clearly an impact upon local agencies such as health services and the poor law in terms of the demand for additional resources, but the benefits accruing often outweighed any detrimental effects. An increase in vagrancy may in part have been due to the movement of men in connection with the railway, but there was a realisation that this resulted from the existence of the tramping navvy rather than main body of respectable workers. Although the police and judiciary were involved in attempts to control vagrancy, the full implications of contact between navvies, their communities and the law forms the subject of the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **The Navy Community and the Law**

The last chapter dealt in some depth with general perceptions of railway workers, and the reactions that their presence provoked in areas affected by construction of the London Extension. I did make reference to the fact that in the minds of some contemporaries, even at the end of the nineteenth century, the navy was still associated with criminality. This may have been overly exaggerated given David Brooke's assertion that for the most part offences linked to railway construction did not unduly trouble the 'resources of the forces of law and order'.<sup>1</sup> But, inevitably the navy community did from time to time have involvement with the law and the legal system both as alleged perpetrators and victims of crime of one sort or another. Local press reports in particular indicate that navvies and their dependents did come to the attention of the police, and did appear before the courts on a not infrequent basis. Whilst I do not suggest that this in itself necessarily set them apart from the wider working class, it does I believe provide an opportunity to explore the relationship that they had with the law, and perhaps more importantly, reveal attitudes to behaviour, concepts of respectability, and of what constituted social norms.

### **I Policing the Navy**

The prospect, and indeed reality, of many workers flooding into the Midlands to build the new railway certainly focused attention on the issue of policing. The fear of possible disorder found a voice in the perceived need for additional police resources that was apparent in a number of areas during the early months of the

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<sup>1</sup> Brooke, 'The Criminal Navy in the West Riding of Yorkshire', p. 366.

works. Northamptonshire's Chief Constable was authorised 'to appoint the necessary number of additional constables in connection with the Manchester & Sheffield Railway' in January 1895, although protection was afforded to the ratepayers by the proviso that no pension or gratuity was to be claimed against the county by any constable for death or injury whilst so engaged.<sup>2</sup> The Chief Constable of Warwickshire likewise advised that the strength of the police district most directly affected by the railway works should be temporarily increased by two constables, one of whom should be paid for by the railway company.<sup>3</sup> The appointment of additional constables in this manner was not uncommon as Carolyn Steedman has made clear. She has pointed out that since the 1840 Police Act it had been possible to appoint constables who although they wore the uniform of the local force and were subject to its discipline, were funded by private individuals or in this case a company, rather than via the public purse. An example as she puts it of 'money paid out for protection within the context of a local community'.<sup>4</sup> In reiterating this point, Clive Emsley has highlighted the funding of temporary officers by railway contractors to police gangs of navvies.<sup>5</sup> This was very much then, an instance of private commerce taking some responsibility for the impact of its own activities on wider society. However, the question of liability for providing funding for additional police resources does appear to have been a grey area. For instance the issue did fall under the spotlight at Loughborough in 1895 when a dispute arose between the contractor, Henry Lovatt, and the railway company (MS&L) over the payment of a special constable appointed within the town in response to the growing number of workmen employed on the railway. An

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<sup>2</sup> NRO, ML762, Chief Constable's Minute Book, 5 January 1895.

<sup>3</sup> WRO, CR 2770/3, Chief Constable's Report Book, 1877-1910, 16 April 1895.

<sup>4</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community: The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80* (London, Boston and Melbourne, 1984), pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> Emsley, *Crime, Police, and Penal Policy*, p. 164.

application for a constable had been lodged with the town's petty sessions in May 1895, and as a result an individual was sworn in, and an order for payment made against the contractors.<sup>6</sup> Lovatt subsequently appealed against the order and an impasse ensued forcing the Chief Constable, Edward Holmes, to seek confirmation of the appointment from the court. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the Home Secretary had previously declined to sanction the provisional order on the grounds that it should have been made on the company, the petty sessions found the company to be liable. Nonetheless, the ruling seems to have surprised Holmes, who stated that in relation to all other engineering projects he had witnessed over some twenty years, the order had always been made on the contractor.<sup>7</sup>

The example provided by Loughborough in seeking a special constable may seem a reasonable response in view of the estimate that some 500 navvies were employed in the vicinity, many, it was alleged, 'very rough and loose characters'.<sup>8</sup> But even small communities were apparently keen to seek the protection afforded by an increased police presence, although whether this sprang from heightened criminal activity or merely a fear of such, remains open to debate. The parish council at Eydon in Northamptonshire petitioned for a police constable to be stationed in the village due to 'a good deal of annoyance being caused to the inhabitants by the rowdiness of a section of the new comers'. Although the initiative proved unsuccessful, the deputy Chief Constable, perhaps in an attempt to offer reassurance, did make arrangements for the constable based in a nearby village to devote more of his time to Eydon.<sup>9</sup> In similar vein, the parish council at Wolfhampcote in Warwickshire made a request in the spring of 1895 for a

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<sup>6</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 25 Jul 1895, 30 May 1895.

<sup>7</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 10 August 1895.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 5 September 1895, 10 October 1895.

constable whilst the new railway was being built, but this was considered unnecessary by the Chief Constable on the grounds that a policeman was normally stationed in neighbouring Napton and Grandborough. This did not deter the parish council which issued the request again in 1896 and 1897. The Chief Constable remained adamant that the situation did not warrant specific action although he may have been anxious to avoid setting any sort of precedent given the potential impact on the police budget. However, the arguments he deployed to substantiate his decision do appear convincing. In 1896 he reported that despite the fact that twenty-five navvies had been residing in the nearby village of Flecknoe for six months, there had only been three cases of drunkenness, one of obscene language and two of fowl stealing. Added to this, no complaints had been received from anyone at Wolfhampcote ‘respecting any depredations by navvies or other persons’.<sup>10</sup>

## **II The Drunken Navy?**

The range of offences described above holds resonance for much of the criminality associated with the railway workers. Where individuals were brought before the courts charges related in the main to incidents of petty crime: small scale theft, poaching, and common assault; however, within this overarching category, drunkenness was the offence for which the vast majority of prosecutions were brought. In some cases this was unsurprisingly associated with assaults on police officers attempting to make an arrest. Reports provided for both local police committees and licensing sessions do suggest that there may have been a linkage between the railway workers and the problem of drunkenness and disorderly behaviour. For instance, the annual report of Leicestershire’s Chief Constable for

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<sup>10</sup> CR 2770/3, Chief Constable’s Report Book, 1877-1910, 6 July 1896.



1895 highlighted that the number of non-indictable offences had increased by 197 compared with the previous year, but that this fell ‘almost entirely under the head of drunkenness there being 813 of such cases, or 171 more than last year. This is undoubtedly caused by the large number of navvies now in the county’.<sup>11</sup>

Loughborough appears to have been a particular trouble spot, and indeed I made mention in the last chapter of an area of the town known as ‘The Rushes’ where many of the men were lodged. The town witnessed an increase in the number of individuals proceeded against for drunkenness from 128 in 1894 to 250 and 284 in 1895 and 1896 respectively, before falling to 166 in 1898. Once again the cause was ascribed to ‘the great influx of navvies ... brought into the neighbourhood by public works’.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the situation within Leicestershire was not exclusively negative. The Lutterworth Brewster sessions of September 1896 heard that although there had been a considerable rise in the number of temporary residents within the town and marginally more convictions for drunkenness during the past twelve months, ‘the conduct of the men employed on the line had been generally good’.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, convictions showed a decline in the subsequent two years. Nonetheless, neighbouring counties felt what were considered to be the consequences of the railway works. The police report to the Rugby licensing sessions of August 1895 noted that 101 persons had been proceeded against for drunkenness in the past year compared with forty-seven for the previous year. This was blamed in part on the presence of the navy population.<sup>14</sup> Likewise the Daventry licensing sessions of

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<sup>11</sup> DE3831/4, Leicestershire Constabulary Police Committee Minute Book, 1893-1900, 18 January 1896.

<sup>12</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 27 August 1896.

<sup>13</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 5 September 1896.

<sup>14</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 29 August 1896.

1895 was informed that the increase of twenty-one summonses over the previous year had much to do with the navvies working on the new railway.<sup>15</sup>

The perception that navvies were heavy drinkers did have wide currency. Elizabeth Garnett made much of the fact that within navy encampments, the women in particular often sought to make extra money by selling alcohol illegally.<sup>16</sup> In relation to the London Extension there is some evidence to support this assertion as several prosecutions were brought against hut occupants for selling beer without a license.<sup>17</sup> In an attempt to limit both the supply and consumption of alcohol, the city corporations of Leeds and Birmingham set up and operated licensed canteens at the large navy settlements connected with the construction of major waterworks undertaken late in the century at Leeds and the Elan Valley in Wales. The canteen at the Elan Valley project was restricted both in terms of opening hours and access. Women were not allowed in the bar other than to fetch beer for use in the huts, and no hut keeper could be supplied with more than one and half gallons in the evening or two gallons for consumption with the midday meal.<sup>18</sup> Needless to say, a regime such as this was fully endorsed by the NMS, given its promotion of temperance. Indeed, it was in many ways reflective of the temperance movement more generally. Late century discourse moved, so it is argued towards 'greater regulation of the drink trade',<sup>19</sup> and the 1872 Intoxicating Liquors Act had prohibited the sale of alcohol without a license, and laid down procedures for the granting of licenses.<sup>20</sup> By the end of the century magistrates were

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<sup>15</sup> *Northampton Mercury*, 30 August 1895.

<sup>16</sup> Garnett, *Our Navvies*, p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> For example prosecutions were brought against a navy ganger and his wife residing at Rothley, Leicestershire, and a brick maker at Sulgrave, Northamptonshire. See *Leicester Chronicle*, 7 December 1895; *Banbury Guardian*, 3 October 1895.

<sup>18</sup> Navy Mission Society, 'Canteens Among the Navvies', October 1894 (bound with Annual Reports, 1877-1896).

<sup>19</sup> Weiner, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, p. 188.

<sup>20</sup> An Act for Regulating the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors, 1872, 35 & 36 Vict., c. 94.

exercising stricter control over the ‘number of licenses awarded’.<sup>21</sup> Whilst it may have been possible to restrict access to alcohol within the context of a water supply project, a similar approach in respect of the London Extension, even if considered desirable, might have faced insurmountable obstacles. The vast majority of the workers at the Elan Valley site were accommodated in a large ‘model village’ settlement which was remotely located, and in many ways self-contained. The checks placed on alcohol there can perhaps be seen as yet another strand in the system of control and surveillance exerted at settlements such as Gretna and Birchinlee. On the London Extension by contrast, the men and their dependents were well scattered being accommodated in local centres of population, and in small encampments close to resident communities which provided easy access to public houses.

Police forces were required to submit annual crime figures to the Home Office, and at Table 3.1 I have summarised the cases of drunkenness as reported between 1893 and 1899 for those midland force areas which encompassed localities affected to a greater or lesser extent by the new railway. It will be noted that the figures for Leicester County confirm those cited by the Chief Constable in respect of 1895 and also show reductions of 71 and 255 for 1896 and 1897 respectively although 1898 did see a reversal of this trend with an increase of thirty-seven, and a substantial jump in 1899 following the completion of the line. Interestingly, Leicester Borough shows a decline over the years 1893 to 1896. The situation at Leicester was alluded to by the attorney, Mr Storey, representing Henry Lovatt at the hearing to resolve the dispute about the special constable at Loughborough’s petty sessions in 1895. Clearly, he was arguing in support of his client, but he made

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<sup>21</sup> James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester and New York, 2009), p. 143.

much of the fact that although some 700 navvies were then working in Leicester, there had been no request for an additional constable nor had any serious complaints been received about the men's conduct.<sup>22</sup> As far as the neighbouring counties are concerned, Northamptonshire shows an overall increase up to 1896 and a decline thereafter, whilst Warwickshire exhibits a steady increase from 1893 onwards, which implies that something more than the impact of the new railway was at play there. Cases increased to a peak in 1896 in both Nottingham County and Borough followed by declines in 1897 and what amounts to a steady state thereafter. Given the various indicators that I have introduced, it is possible to make any informed judgements?

*Table 3.1: Cases of Drunkenness Reported by Police Forces, 1893-1899.*

	<u>Year</u>						
	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899
<u>Police Force</u>							
Leicestershire	619	642	813	742	558	595	731
Leicester Borough	660	434	400	388	415	491	415
Northamptonshire	571	653	669	795	708	570	490
Nottinghamshire	923	1100	1155	1250	1063	1087	1078
Nottingham Borough	1131	1164	1238	1627	1461	1441	1488
Warwickshire	1080	1211	1266	1451	1482	1678	1773

*Source: Judicial Statistics, England and Wales Part I: Criminal Statistics, 1893-1899.*

<sup>22</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 10 August 1895.

Clearly, the lack of any breakdown showing the relative incidence of drunkenness between railway workers and other sections of the community limits the ability to draw meaningful conclusions. Equally, it has to be admitted that whilst the figures for the various force areas may point to the relative incidence of cases year on year, they are all encompassing and thus, fail in many instances to highlight those specific locations that were subjected to the greatest impact arising from the presence of the railway workers. I am of course stating the obvious, but where pointers are available they appear to indicate that the situation varied from place to place, and also that where increases in cases of drunkenness were recorded, comments emanating from police authorities linked this trend in some instances with the influx of navvies. A more nuanced interpretation is, I think, aided by reference to the debate that has taken place about the accuracy and indeed usefulness of nineteenth century crime statistics. In a recent article John Walliss has produced a helpful overview of the existing historiography.<sup>23</sup> He notes that differing views have been forthcoming ranging from those of Ron Sindall who has questioned the whole basis of the crime statistics, through those of V. A. C. Gatrell, who although accepting the limitations of the figures, argues they can give an indication of crime patterns, and to those of Howard Taylor who has postulated that the figures were manipulated to reflect the fact that prosecutions were limited by police budgetary and manpower constraints.<sup>24</sup> Of particular interest to my mind is

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<sup>23</sup> John Walliss, 'Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics?: Nineteenth Century Crime Statistics for England and Wales as a Historical Source', *History Compass*, 10:8 (2012), pp. 574-583.

<sup>24</sup> R. Sindall, 'The Criminal Statistics of Nineteenth-Century Cities: A New Approach', *Urban History Yearbook*, 13 (1986), pp. 28-36; V. A. C. Gatrell, and T. Hadden, 'Criminal Statistics and Their Interpretation', in E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Social History: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 336-96; H. Taylor, 'The Political Economy of Criminal Statistics Since 1850', *The Economic History Review*, 51:3 (1998), pp. 569-90.

Walliss's reference to, and support for, the "interactionist" approach to the statistics whereby they should 'be read not simply as representations of crime in the past, but rather as the outcome of changes within the justice system, such as differing policing or sentencing patterns'.<sup>25</sup> This approach I think has relevance when considering the potential impact of railway workers on the statistics for drunkenness during the mid-1890s. In a study of police returns within the city of Sheffield at mid-century, Chris A. Williams has shown that in relation to summary prosecutions the police appear to have been mostly concerned with offences involving disorder where 'there was generally no identifiable victim' giving the individual police officer the discretion to decide what constituted a crime. The police were acting with the intention of 'imposing a certain idea of acceptable behaviour on a population'.<sup>26</sup> In other words, they were operating at that time with a specific agenda. Barry Godfrey has identified a similar trend more generally claiming that police tactics could push up crime statistics as with a rise in public order offences between 1890 and 1920, when 'the police attempted to control public space and curb drunken disorder'.<sup>27</sup> It has also been asserted that minor crimes in their totality were easier to deal with than more serious offences and arrests for drunkenness for instance could literally be made on 'the spot', and clearing the streets of undesirable behaviour was popular with the public.<sup>28</sup> Of course it is important to bear in mind several other factors that may have had a bearing on levels of drunkenness. For instance, attention has been drawn to the possibility of a correlation between alcohol consumption and prosecutions for

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<sup>25</sup> Walliss, 'Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics?', p. 579.

<sup>26</sup> Chris A. Williams, 'Counting Crimes or Counting People: Some Implications of Mid-Nineteenth Century British Police Returns', *Crime, History & Society*, 4:2 (2000), see esp. p. 83, 91.

<sup>27</sup> Barry Godfrey, 'Changing Prosecution Practices and Their Impact on Crime Figures, 1857-1940', *British Journal of Criminology*, 48 (2008), p. 174.

<sup>28</sup> Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* (3rd edn, Harlow, 2005), p. 245.

drunkenness and the state of the economy. Thus, the very end of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century saw a buoyant economy and an increasing number of prosecutions for drunkenness. However, this has been heavily caveated in so far as prosecutions can never relate precisely to ‘the actual incidence of drunkenness’.<sup>29</sup> Of relevance also is the fact that the navy population along the route of the new line was not static, but varied according to the progress of the works, and this probably influenced the apparent level of offending year on year. An increase in the size of the population, albeit of a temporary nature, within the areas affected by the railway, and caused by an influx of predominantly male workers might in any case be expected to have had some knock-on effect in terms of low-level criminality, and in particular that pertaining to drunkenness. Perhaps the most pertinent aspect is that in certain localities the railway workers were effectively being targeted as potential troublemakers given that additional police resources were being deployed specifically to monitor them. Consciously or not, extra vigilance by both the police and the judiciary may have led to increased apprehension and prosecution of perceived ‘offenders’ giving rise to a peak in recorded offences such as witnessed in Leicestershire during 1895, followed by a gradual reduction. I would certainly argue that there is a lack of conclusive evidence to indicate that the railway workers showed any greater propensity to break the law—particularly in terms of drunken and disorderly behaviour—than their working-class peers. Nonetheless, the railway workers did contain within their ranks men who fell into the category of persistent drunkards. One such was navy Thomas Coyle who seems to have been resident in and around Brackley for much of the duration of the railway works. He first came to the attention of the police on

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Jennings, ‘Policing Public Houses in Victorian England’, *Law, Crime and History*, 3:1 (2013), p. 63.

5th September 1895 for being drunk in a public street. He compounded the offence by going in and out of several private and public houses as well as the Church schools where he 'frightened the teachers and children'. He pleaded guilty and was fined ten shillings with four shillings costs, but only five days later was brought before the police court for the same offence. Defaulting on the fine he was sentenced to fourteen days.<sup>30</sup> Thereafter, bouts of drunkenness became a regular occurrence to the extent that by November 1897 he was deemed to be a nuisance to the town having been convicted so often, and was sent to prison for one month without the option of a fine.<sup>31</sup> When Thomas Taylor appeared at the Shire Hall in Nottingham in February 1897 charged with being drunk and disorderly and with assaulting a police constable, it was his sixteenth appearance before the bench. No doubt recognising his stubborn recalcitrance the magistrates fined him £1 1s or seven days imprisonment for the first offence and sentenced him to twenty-one days without the option of a fine for the assault.<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that in the majority of instances, magistrates were in no way overly harsh in their treatment of navvies, and it was only in response to multiple offending as in the case of Taylor that more punitive measures were applied.

I noted above increased attempts to regulate the drinks trade. At the same time greater emphasis was being placed on the fact that drunkenness was a medical problem that required suitable treatment rather than something that could be eradicated by a policy of deterrent criminal sentencing. This has been seen as reflecting changing attitudes to social and criminal policy in that whilst 'moral improvement remained the goal' it was recognised that individuals such as habitual drunkards were also victims of environmental factors and their own character traits,

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<sup>30</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 12 September 1895.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 November 1897.

<sup>32</sup> *Nottinghamshire Weekly Express*, 12 February 1897.



and thus, there was a ‘movement in the direction of diminished responsibility’.<sup>33</sup>

Gerry Johnstone has argued that although reformers and medical professionals promoted the case that drunkenness should be seen as a disease, and the drunkard as in need of institutionalised treatment, they envisaged the problem as being strictly limited to a specific group: those who through dependence on drink could not ‘discharge their obligations to their families and to society’.<sup>34</sup> Going further he points to the ‘poorest and most troublesome sections of the “labouring classes”: the “residuum” of unemployed and vagrants or tramps’ as being targeted.<sup>35</sup> It might be thought that Coyle and Taylor were prime candidates for treatment of this kind. The Habitual Drunkards Act of 1879 had made provision for the detention of drunkards, but it only applied to those who had voluntarily entered what the act described as a retreat, that is, an establishment set up to provide care and treatment.<sup>36</sup> But as Johnstone points out it was not until the passage of the Habitual Inebriates Act in 1898 that the courts had the power to commit individuals to a reformatory for not more than three years. This was applicable under two conditions: where a person was convicted of an indictable offence punishable by imprisonment and was proved to be an habitual drunkard, and where a person was ‘convicted summarily of drunkenness four times within one year’.<sup>37</sup>

I could be taken to task for giving so much attention to drunken navvies since it may seem a somewhat trivial issue, but I would counter this by pointing out that the topic clearly had resonance for contemporary law enforcement. Indeed, it does perhaps say something about the relationship of the railway workers with the

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<sup>33</sup> Weiner, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, see esp. p. 187, 295.

<sup>34</sup> Gerry Johnstone, ‘From Vice to Disease?: The Concepts of Dipsomania and Inebriety, 1860-1908’, *Social & Legal Studies*, 5:1 (1996), p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>36</sup> Habitual Drunkards Act, 1879, 42 & 43 Vict., c. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Johnstone, ‘From Vice to Disease’, p. 43.

legal system, and society in general that with the possible exception of vagrancy, it was drunkenness and associated disorderly behaviour that was seen as the principal issue of concern particularly for the press, and proved to be the main business falling to the lower level courts.

### **III The Nature of Criminality**

If those railway workers who offended were by and large guilty of petty crime, it is necessary to consider how they stood in relation to the nature of criminality evident within Victorian society as a whole. It is probably true to say that their experiences were very much on a par with the wider working class of which they formed a part. Far from being pre-meditated or planned most crime was opportunistic in nature, and this was characteristic of many petty thefts. Living and working together provided a potential context for acts of dishonesty and railway workers were not immune from such temptations as is evinced by Joseph Smith, who stole a silver ring from his fellow railway labourer James Wakefield, as the latter slept in a field at Newton in Warwickshire in June 1896. Smith was fined five shillings with fifteen shillings costs.<sup>38</sup> This is but one example of a number of cases where one navvy was the victim of a petty crime committed by another. Recourse to the law was of course a legitimate response, but inevitably the motives for doing so whether out of a desire for justice, retribution or merely a point of principle, are often difficult to decipher. For example, navvy James Rickard brought a prosecution against fellow navvy George Stone for the theft of two eggs.<sup>39</sup> But a case such as this does indicate that navvies were not slow to call upon the law when they were victims of a crime, however trivial.

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<sup>38</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 20 June 1896.

<sup>39</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 23 September 1897.

The complexion of the criminality that occupied the law enforcement agencies can also be informative, and the indication appears to be that it was not unlike that which still dominates modern day policing: essentially routine and predominantly low level. In his study of the Lancashire constabulary during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, W. J. Lowe has argued that the majority of police work involved dealing with petty crime with drunkenness ‘by far the largest category of offence’.<sup>40</sup> This view has also been postulated by Tom Williamson, who stresses that the police were above all concerned with the enforcement of petty offences with drunkenness, assault and gambling amongst those most commonly encountered.<sup>41</sup> It is perhaps worth reiterating the fact that the vast majority of individuals who came before the courts at the end of the nineteenth century did not constitute a threat to society. The habitual drunkard is a good example: an annoyance within the local community, but perhaps a greater danger to himself than to anyone else. It is also becoming clear that for the most part the offences committed by railway workers were of a degree that fell within the remit of petty sessional and police courts, and thus, subject to summary jurisdiction. Inevitably, there were some indictable offences that reached either Quarter Sessions or Assizes, but these were very few in number. Most of the crime I have surveyed as might be expected took place within the wider community: the streets, or other public spaces in respect of relatively minor acts of interpersonal violence and drunken and disorderly behaviour, and of course inside or just outside public houses. Living accommodation, by which I mean private residences or huts where

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<sup>40</sup> W. J. Lowe, ‘The Lancashire Constabulary, 1845-1870: The Social and Occupational Function of a Victorian Police Force’, in Louis A. Knafla (ed.), *Crime, Police and the Courts in British History* (Westport and London, 1990), p. 223.

<sup>41</sup> Tom Williamson, ‘Policing a Myth, Managing an Illusion: Victorian and Contemporary Crime Recording’, in Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson (eds), *Behaving Badly: Social Panic and Moral Outrage – Victorian and Modern Parallels* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT., 2003), p. 52.

navvies lodged, saw its share of criminality, particularly petty theft. The home environment was also the scene of domestic disputes which could develop into violence, and this is an area I will devote more detailed attention to later in the chapter. What then of the workplace? Did it give rise to any acts of illegality on the part of the workers? The answer is very little of note as I am aware of only three cases that reached the courts: a robbery, a theft and an alleged fraud. That said they do exhibit some interesting characteristics and share a number of common threads. The robbery took place at the offices of Walter Scott & Co at Woodford Halse, when a safe was stolen and about twenty-three pounds taken. The fraud, which was small in scale, was also perpetrated against the same company. The safe was crowbarred open in a nearby field but the fact that upwards of seven pounds in gold coin was reportedly scattered about the field indicates a hurried, and less than thorough enterprise. The chief suspects were three navvies who had been discharged on the day of the crime, and although seen in the vicinity of Catesby huts the following day were not apprehended.<sup>42</sup> Seventeen year old Willie Prestige, was indicted at Northampton Assizes for fraud in June 1896, and was found guilty of having dishonestly obtained ten shillings more than he was due by altering a payment ticket from 4s 10d to 14s 10d.<sup>43</sup> Although described as a navvy it seems almost certain that he was a local man in light of the fact that a school teacher from his place of residence appeared as a character witness.<sup>44</sup> Like the suspected robbers, Prestidge had recently been discharged from his position with the railway contractors. Both cases were suggestive of a sense of grievance or an attempt to obtain funds to negate the loss of employment. The offences were certainly opportunistic, showed little in the way of sophistication, and seemingly lacked

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<sup>42</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 24 October 1895.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, ASSI 12/41, Midland Assize Circuit Indictments, 1896.

<sup>44</sup> *Banbury Guardian*., 25 June 1896.

premeditation. Much the same could be said of the theft of £5 13s 6d from Messrs Topham, Railton and Jones by railway employee, Albert Alden, who admitted taking the money from the chief cashier's bag as the latter paid the men.<sup>45</sup>

#### **IV The Domestic Sphere and the Concept of Respectability**

Up till now I have concentrated exclusively on offences that have involved male railway workers either acting alone or in association with other males. What then of matters pertaining to the wider navvy community and particularly the family environment? In terms of what might be termed juvenile crime, I have failed to note any instances where the offspring of railway workers were charged with an offence in their own right. The apparent absence of this group from the records may simply be due to the fact that there is no information available providing a conclusive linkage to the navvy community, i.e. no parental occupation recorded. The only references to minors where a direct connection can be established with the railway workers relate to offences where legal responsibility rested with, and the charge was laid against, the parent. The most obvious example of this was school attendance cases. Even here it has only been possible to identify those cases where either parental occupation has been recorded or where the names of defendants match those of known railway workers previously obtained from school admission registers. This approach has allowed me to highlight a small cluster of seven cases involving five railway workers which came before Daventry petty sessions during the course of 1896. All of the families lived in the vicinity of Charwelton and Hellidon, with two at least residing in Catesby huts. Given that two heads of household were also tunnel miners, it seems likely that all of the men were engaged

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<sup>45</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 13 March 1897.

on the construction of Catesby tunnel. Three of the cases involved one man, Thomas Webley, although on the first occasion I am aware of, the case was dismissed, as was that against tunnel miner, Walter Tirrell. In each case, the grounds for dismissal are not recorded. This may indicate that attendance officers were possibly being overly vigilant and targeting this population without good cause. Equally, as has been suggested by Nicola Sheldon, the attitudes of magistrates towards the attendance legislation could vary, with some reluctant to fine parents.<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to determine from such a small sample and over a limited timescale, whether the navvies in this location were giving rise to particular problems, although one attendance officer when referring to a nearby area did claim that the ‘navvies were giving him a great deal of trouble in school matters, and setting a bad example to other parents in the village’.<sup>47</sup> The question arises as to the degree of control parents were willing or able to exercise over their children to prevent truancy. No doubt this did depend to a great extent on attitudes towards education. Sascha Auerbach has demonstrated that parents often contested the concept of compulsory attendance using a variety of strategies while operating from within what they considered to be reasonable parameters. She argues that they were deciding ‘as individuals and communities, what their entitlements were with regard to their households, and where the state was overreaching its authority’.<sup>48</sup> What was perceived to be in the best interests of the child or perhaps the family economy, or possibly even the child’s own eagerness to join the masculine world of work, may have been undercurrents that help explain the appearance of tunnel miner,

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<sup>46</sup> Nicola Sheldon, ‘Policing Truancy: Town Versus Countryside - Oxfordshire 1871-1903’, *History of Education Researcher*, 77 (2006), p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 28 May 1896.

<sup>48</sup> Sascha Auerbach, ‘“The Law Has No Feeling For Poor Folks Like Us!”: Everyday Responses to Legal Compulsion in England’s Working-Class Communities, 1871-1904’, *Journal of Social History*, 45:3 (2012), p. 700.

Thomas Lawrence, before Daventry petty sessions in January 1896 where he was fined 2s 6d for not sending his son Richard aged twelve to school. On the same day the contractors for that section of line, Thomas Oliver & Son, appeared to answer a charge of employing Richard when he was not exempt from school. In mitigation, the firm's foreman stated that he had been told the boy was in fact thirteen and had passed the labour test. The bench pointed out that the firm should have required a certificate to the fact, but agreed to dismiss the case on the payment of 7s 6d costs.<sup>49</sup> In the meantime the boy was re-admitted to Charwelton school on 5th January.<sup>50</sup>

In common with other sections of the working class, it is evident that the domestic environment within navvy communities gave rise to situations that could have an impact on the legal system. This is perhaps best illustrated in terms of cases that were concerned with disputes that often involved violence, and which crossed the gender divide. Incidents of domestic violence can reveal deep seated causes of tension, and also the immediate stimulus that proved to be the flashpoint giving rise to the act of violence. That a husband might on occasion censure his wife and children in the form of physical 'punishment' was by no means unusual. Indeed, such acts were it has been claimed, 'endemic before and during the nineteenth century and largely popularly accepted'.<sup>51</sup> Of course the home was by no means the only arena where physical chastisement took place given that corporal punishment was resorted to on many occasions within the schoolroom. The press has been pinpointed as playing a prominent role in perpetuating a stereotypical image of

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<sup>49</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 25 January 1896.

<sup>50</sup> NRO, ZB 122/17, Charwelton School Admission Register, 5 January 1896.

<sup>51</sup> Weiner, *Men of Blood*, p. 171.

domestic violence, that it was exclusively perpetrated by the working-class male.<sup>52</sup> Research has revealed that the reality was very different by demonstrating that domestic violence was far from class specific.<sup>53</sup> The argument has also been put forward that there was a level of tolerance to much that went on within the privacy of the home, and that women took a certain amount of physical abuse for granted.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, some cases did reach the courts and imply that for the party bringing the prosecution, events had breached what to their mind was deemed acceptable. Notwithstanding, it was not uncommon for a woman to withdraw her complaint before the case reached court, possibly out of fear, but also in some instances as ‘a tactical strategy to expose husbands’ conduct to public scrutiny’.<sup>55</sup> However, it seems clear that even when cases were heard in court, there could be reluctance on the part of the complainant to proceed. Mary Corkett took out a summons against her navvy husband, James Corkett for assault but failed to appear at Banbury Police Court and the case was adjourned. When the two parties finally appeared in court, Mary alleged that James had knocked her about when in a drunken state but in the interim she had ‘freely forgiven her husband’, which may explain her initial non-appearance. She was ordered to pay 13s 6d in costs or be sentenced to fourteen days imprisonment. Whether this represented a genuine example of reconciliation, second thoughts on the part of the complainant, the result of pressure applied by the husband or indeed, an attempt by Mary Corkett to make some kind of statement, is impossible to determine. Mixed messages can emerge from what facts were

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<sup>52</sup> Joanne Bailey, ‘Cruelty and Adultery: Offences Against the Institution of Marriage’, in Anne-Marie Kilday and David Nash (eds), *Histories of Crime: Britain 1600-2000* (Basingstoke and New York, 2010), pp. 39-59.

<sup>53</sup> A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 35-36.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>55</sup> Shani D’Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (London, 1998), p. 70.



revealed in the courtroom. Frances Witts admitted to Daventry magistrates that she exaggerated the degree of violence used by her husband John, who held a 'good position' on the new railway. He had not as she originally claimed, seized her by the throat and attempted to throttle her, but had on arriving home after being called from the pub, pushed her against the ash bucket.<sup>56</sup> Understandably she may have felt anger, and possibly frustration and a desire for retribution as there appears to have been a history of conflict during their fourteen years of marriage.

Interestingly, it was reported that Frances reacted to her husband's aggression by throwing the ash bucket at him, suggesting that she was prepared to fight back and attempt to give as good as she got. This in itself was probably not untypical allowing for the view that 'the image of wives as delicate and passive, immobile victims of brutal husbands ... was probably inaccurate'.<sup>57</sup> It has also been pointed out that many working women were physically strong, and violence between women arising from neighbourhood disputes was far from uncommon.<sup>58</sup> For example, an argument about a box of window plants led to blows being exchanged between navvy's wife Charlotte Boyles and her neighbour Martha Onions in Loughborough, with both advised to try and live more peaceably.<sup>59</sup> Frances Witts obviously had a change of heart, as in the event she stated that she did not wish to press the charge, and had only two months earlier asked the bench to allow her to withdraw a charge she had preferred against her husband. We cannot know the complexities permeating this particular relationship, but as in the previous case, the complainant sought at a late stage to spare a violent partner from the judgement of

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<sup>56</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 6 December 1896.

<sup>57</sup> Ellen Ross, '“Fierce Questions and Taunts”: Married Life in Working-Class London, 1870-1914', *Feminist Studies*, 8:3 (1982), p. 592.

<sup>58</sup> Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 160-61.

<sup>59</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 2 July 1896.

the courts. In fact Frances's pleas were ignored. Despite her less than honest declaration concerning her husband's behaviour, the bench felt it in order to fine him one pound and also bound him over in the sum of ten pounds for six months.<sup>60</sup>

J. Carter Wood has noted both the 'broad consensus on the long-term decline in violence', and the fact that this was far from a linear process and did encompass short-term increases.<sup>61</sup> Crime that involved serious violence on the part of railway employees was certainly notable by its almost complete absence. The conviction and imprisonment for three months at Nottingham Assizes of Ulick Jordan, for the stabbing of miner Hiram Stewart was probably the one incident of note.<sup>62</sup> There has also been some support for the view that due to changing attitudes during the nineteenth century, society and the legal system more specifically, was becoming more sympathetic to the plight of women subjected to violent assaults, with the courts concerned to 'discipline men for violent behaviour'.<sup>63</sup> This has been seen as having antecedents in evangelicalism, and linked to a re-evaluation of gendered identity and the product of a 'civilising' advance.<sup>64</sup> Of late a body of scholarship has emerged which contests this opinion, and emphasises a less clear cut change in attitudes, and the persistence of traditional modes of masculinity.<sup>65</sup> Granted, I have identified only a limited number of cases, but the sanctions applied by the judiciary in each instance do not seem particularly harsh, with a fine and/or being bound over the outcome in every case. Perhaps we can see evidence of what

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<sup>60</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 6 December 1896.

<sup>61</sup> J. Carter Wood, 'Criminal Violence in Modern Britain', *History Compass*, 4:1 (2006), pp. 79-80.

<sup>62</sup> *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 20 August 1898, 10 December 1898.

<sup>63</sup> Emsley, *Crime and Society*, p. 103. This view has been given particular emphasis by Martin Weiner. See Weiner, *Men of Blood*, esp. pp. 29-35.

<sup>64</sup> This has been postulated above all by Martin Weiner. See Weiner, *Men of Blood*, esp. pp. 29-35. See also Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship*, esp. pp. 38-39.

<sup>65</sup> Annmarie Hughes has stressed the degree of continuity evident in Scotland. See Annmarie Hughes, ' "The Non-Criminal" Class: Wife Beating in Scotland (c. 1800-1949)', *Crime, History & Societies*, 14:2 (2010), pp. 31-53. For a consideration of attitudes prevalent in England up to the mid-nineteenth century, see Joanne Bailey and Loreen Giese, 'Marital Cruelty: Reconsidering Lay Attitudes in England. c. 1580-1850', *The History of the Family*, 18:3 (2013), pp. 289-305.

Gail Savage has noted: judges in higher courts were holding husbands accountable for the treatment of their wives, but that this ‘consensus’ was often less rigorously seen to apply in magistrate’s courts.<sup>66</sup> One magistrate presiding at London’s South Western Court at the end of the century, and responding to press criticism that his lenient sentencing encouraged violence against women was unrepentant: ‘There were hundreds of such cases, and if every man who struck his wife was to be sent to goal, the prisons would be fuller than there are already’.<sup>67</sup> However, as Judith Rowbotham has explained, binding over was a strategy that could be used by the judiciary as a way of exposing the guilty to public shame. The person bound over usually ‘had to find friends, neighbours or employers to put up the money’. This of itself might inflict embarrassment, but since cases were often reported in the press it also served as a form of ‘societal shaming’.<sup>68</sup> It is also important not to lose sight of the fact that the promotion of reconciliation between couples had entered the public discourse, and was a strategy often employed by the judiciary.<sup>69</sup> During the period covered by the construction of the London Extension, women had in theory several options available to them. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 had allowed for separation and maintenance if a husband was convicted of assault.<sup>70</sup> The coverage was extended under the Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act of 1895 whereby a woman could apply for a separation, custody of any children, and the payment of maintenance if her husband had been convicted of an aggravated assault

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<sup>66</sup> Gail Savage, ‘“... the Instrument of an Animal Function”: Marital Rape and Sexual Cruelty in the Divorce Court, 1858-1908’, in Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills (eds), *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain Since 1800* (Basingstoke and New York, 2009), pp. 53-54.

<sup>67</sup> *Daily News*, 19 June 1897.

<sup>68</sup> Judith Rowbotham, ‘The Shifting Nature of Blame: Revisiting Issues of Blame, Shame and Culpability in the English Criminal Justice System’, in Judith Rowbotham, Marianna Muravyeva and David Nash (eds), *Shame, Blame and Culpability: Crime and Violence in the Modern State* (paperback edn, Abingdon and New York, 2014), p. 76.

<sup>69</sup> Hughes, ‘“The Non-Criminal” Class’, p. 32.

<sup>70</sup> D’Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, p. 10.

on her, or an assault which resulted in a fine of more than five pounds or imprisonment exceeding two months.<sup>71</sup> The terms of the act also applied in cases of desertion and ‘persistent cruelty or wilful neglect’.<sup>72</sup> It seems that navy wives were exercising discretion in these matters and did on occasion attempt to take advantage of the legal redress available. However, they could face the problem common to all women in such circumstances: indifference, or as Anna Clark has highlighted, a reluctance on the part of local magistrates to grant maintenance or separation orders due to the continuing belief that wives were guilty of provoking their husbands.<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Selby residing at Ruddington, brought a prosecution against her husband Arthur, a steam navy driver for assault, and said she did not wish to live with him any longer due to his continual ill-treatment of her. The bench found him guilty and fined him one pound but were of the opinion that the couple must make their own arrangements for a separation.<sup>74</sup> This was in marked contrast to the experience of Elizabeth Humphrey who alleged that her husband Thomas, then employed as a navy, had deserted her and their children. As a result she applied for a separation order, custody of the children, and given that she was able to work to support herself, a sum of five shillings per week to help maintain the children. In court Humphrey countered by arguing that he had been working along the line and that his wife had known his whereabouts all along. The evidence given by a local policeman was probably key in determining the outcome. He stated that he had known the couple for six or seven years implying that they were long term residents and not an itinerant railway worker and his wife, but also claimed that Humphrey

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, pp. 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act, 1895, 58 & 59 Vict., c. 39.

<sup>73</sup> Anna Clark, ‘Domesticity and the Problem of Wife Beating in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Working-Class Culture, Law and Politics’, in Shani D’Cruze (ed.), *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950* (Harlow, 2000), p. 36.

<sup>74</sup> *Nottinghamshire Weekly Express*, 26 July 1895.

had treated his wife well before the railway works began but had since taken to drinking. This calling into question of his familial commitments maybe did enough to convince the bench that his wife was indeed the wronged party. They responded by stating that five shillings a week was insufficient and made an order for seven shillings, and ordering the defendant to pay all costs. Interestingly she asked, as she was quite entitled to do, that the weekly maintenance be paid through a third party, in this case the local police constable. She may have felt this was a better way of securing the money rather than rely on her husband to make a direct payment.<sup>75</sup>

Of those cases of domestic violence that I have located which relate to railway workers, the majority were perhaps unsurprisingly associated in some way with drunkenness. Drink invariably acted as the catalyst for behaviour that was either a precursor to a potential assault, or manifested in actual violence. This is evinced by the example of railway labourer, Charles Barnes of Hellidon, charged with threatening to murder his wife Ann. Barnes was alleged to have been drunk when he grabbed a knife and threatened 'to cut her heart out'.<sup>76</sup> Ann testified that he was quiet when not in drink but she was afraid of him when drunk. In this instance the defendant was in a drunken state when the offence took place, but what is perhaps more unexpected is the fact that in a number of cases the female complainant was portrayed as being in some way responsible for the violent encounter by virtue of her own predilection for drink. The idea that female drunkenness could constitute provocation inevitably raises the question as to how far this was thought to somehow justify a man's threatened, or actual, violent reaction. When navvy Evan Oliver was brought before Lutterworth magistrates for an aggravated assault on his wife Louisa, it was reported that on the day of the alleged

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<sup>75</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 27 February 1896

<sup>76</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 10 October 1896.

assault the police found her to be drunk, and moreover, had taken her home drunk on several previous occasions. The bench clearly felt this was a contributory factor as although Oliver was found guilty, the provocation attendant on his wife's fondness for drink was deemed sufficient to give rise to a more lenient sentence, and he was let him off with a one pound fine.<sup>77</sup> A wife's drinking also appears to have been influential in the case of James Chandler, a navvy residing in Rothley, Leicestershire, who was summonsed in January 1896 for threatening to kill his spouse Charlotte. References to Charlotte's drinking imply that this may have initiated the altercation, and in fact she admitted that on the day in question she had had too much to drink. Chandler was bound over to keep the peace for three months but was in court again in April for supposedly deserting his wife. Following submissions by his defence attorney refuting the charge and making clear that Chandler was willing to live with his wife, the bench determined that there was no desertion. That Charlotte was prone to drunkenness was given credence by the fact that she was subsequently charged with being drunk and disorderly in the nearby town of Quorn.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the stress on alcohol, this case also illustrates the part that arguments over money could play in domestic disputes. The Chandlers' ran what was described as a lodging house for navvies, and the division of profits arising from the enterprise seems to have been a cause of underlying tensions within the relationship. The newspaper reports highlight that James Chandler insisted on having control of the money whilst Charlotte felt she was not getting an equal share. For Ginger Frost there is a clear link between marital violence and concepts of masculinity, which for many working-class men equated in large part 'to

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<sup>77</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 18 September 1897.

<sup>78</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 23 January 1896; 30 April 1896; 11 June 1896.

providing, controlling women and children, and being masters in their home'. A failure to achieve or maintain this state of affairs she postulates, could result in a violent reaction.<sup>79</sup> It was usual practice for a man to allocate a portion of his weekly wage to his wife in order that she could manage the household expenses. The amount she received was often determined in 'part by husbands' tastes and habits', but the distribution of funds was contested, in some instances leading to bad feeling concerning 'the utterly different hopes, plans, and interest husbands and wives had for the weekly wage packet'.<sup>80</sup> Although we are left to speculate whether or not money was at the core of the dispute between navvy George Gittings, and his wife Sarah, the latter reportedly said 'they had some words about domestic affairs' before she was struck on the face by her husband.<sup>81</sup>

The link noted above between excessive drinking and the incidence of domestic violence brings into focus the issue of respectability, which in turn ties in with my earlier discussion of domesticity. As noted above, male drunkenness was frowned upon for its association with anti-social behaviour, but also from a moralistic stance. It was deemed particularly problematic if it threatened the breadwinners' role as provider. Among contemporary observers, Florence Bell saw the tendency towards drinking to be one of the 'main channels of the waste and leakage of the workman's funds'.<sup>82</sup> If male intemperance was an issue, female drunkenness was regarded as anathema given that it called into question the fulfilment of the fundamental role of the woman within the family. In her study of the representation of violence in Victorian popular literature, Judith Rowbotham

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<sup>79</sup> Ginger Frost, '“I am Master Here”: Illegitimacy, Masculinity, and Violence in Victorian England', in Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills (eds), *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain Since 1800* (Basingstoke and New York, 2009), p. 38.

<sup>80</sup> Ross, '“Fierce Questions and Taunts”', see esp., pp. 582, 584.

<sup>81</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 4 April 1895.

<sup>82</sup> Bell, *At The Works*, p. 117.

has shown that it was never acceptable for a woman to drink heavily not least due to the perceived ‘debauching impact of alcoholic excess on the female frame and mind’.<sup>83</sup> As Shani D’Cruze has outlined, the respectability of the family depended in large part on the ability of the woman to both manage the affairs of the household, and care for, and socialise the children.<sup>84</sup> Reputation has also been shown to be crucial to a woman’s standing within the neighbourhood, and to her success in maintaining a working relationship with local traders; so important for example, if she hoped to obtain goods on credit.<sup>85</sup> These and other attributes including industry, self-help, thrift, cleanliness, and of course temperance, were deemed to be among the outward signs of respectability. These were at the heart of attempts to civilise the working classes, and as I will show in a later chapter, integral to the work of the NMS. In many ways respectability represented a set of criteria against which the middle classes, certainly in the guise of the judiciary, could make a judgement about an individual, a family or a wider grouping. If we accept this premise, I can see nothing to indicate that the navy community was treated or judged any differently than other sections of the working population.

As far as the working classes were concerned respectability was not necessarily a constant attribute. In exploring the notion of respectability Peter Bailey has drawn attention to the individual as social actor. He sees respectability for the working class as something of a moveable feast in so far as it could manifest in a ‘limited and situational sense’ whereby an individual might adopt a certain role merely for presentational purposes. For example, in citing the fact that working men might wear their Sunday suits to the pub, he suggests that outward signs of

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<sup>83</sup> Judith Rowbotham, ‘“Only When Drunk”: The Stereotyping of Violence in England, c. 1850-1900’, in Shani D’Cruze (ed.), *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950* (Harlow, 2000), p. 165.

<sup>84</sup> D’Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, p. 18.

<sup>85</sup> Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives*, pp. 72-73.



respectability did not mean a move away from traditional leisure pursuits. As such, the distinction drawn between the respectable and non-respectable based upon perceptions could prove highly misleading.<sup>86</sup> Lynn MacKay has recently pointed out that the historian is faced with difficulty in determining the degree to which the concept of respectability was in fact a commonly held tenet of working-class culture. She also echoes Bailey when suggesting that respectable behaviour might best be viewed as situational.<sup>87</sup> The courtroom provided one such situation, and the judiciary invariably made assumptions about both complainants and defendants based on bearing, manner, dress, and reputation. Equally, newspaper reports were no doubt influenced by impressions gained on the part of those reporting proceedings. Input from solicitors and witnesses and wider opinion also added to the perceptions that might be formed. When alluding in the last chapter to the issue of vagrancy, and in particular its association with the new railway, I highlighted the concern that was prevalent with regard to disreputable elements and those lacking either permanent employment or accommodation: the so called ‘quasi-navvies’. I also noted the use of the term ‘loafing’ in the press to denigrate such men. Unsurprisingly, this focus spilled over into matters pertaining to the law more generally. The term ‘loafer’ or ‘loafing’ to describe or even categorise individuals appears to have developed widespread usage as a term of disapproval, at least in respect of the working class.<sup>88</sup> For example, John Archer has noted that during the second half of the nineteenth century the local press in Liverpool often described

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<sup>86</sup> Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, 1998), see esp. pp. 31-36.

<sup>87</sup> Lynn MacKay, *Respectability and the London Poor 1780-1870* (London and Brookfield, Vt, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Loafer’, seemingly a pejorative term when applied to non-respectable members of the working-class. The image of the modern loafer or idler has been somewhat rehabilitated. See for example Tom Hodgkinson, *How to be Idle* (London, 2005).

men who resorted to violence as “loafers” or “roughs”.<sup>89</sup> Thomas Humphreys, referred to above when accused of deserting his wife, may have taken to drinking of his own volition, but it was claimed had also been foolish enough to spend his money recklessly ‘treating the loafers who came about the line’.<sup>90</sup> The use of an alias often raised particular suspicion, and did much to question an individual’s integrity. So it was in the case of railway labourer George Barnes, alias Edward Barnett, brought before Lutterworth petty sessions for a violent assault on an elderly woman, Hannah Childs. Barnes appears to have had a violent history as a warrant had also been issued for his arrest for highway robbery at Rugby which had left his victim in a critical condition. If possible, his reputation was further diminished by the allusion to his status as an ex-army man who had of late led a dissolute life, ‘loafing around Rugby for the last two years’.<sup>91</sup>

Attitudes pertaining to respectability can, I think, be seen to have had a bearing in several other areas where railway workers and their families came into contact with the legal process. The inquest held into the death from the effects of burns of the seventeen month old son of foreman navvy John Harris living at Hillmorton in Warwickshire, provides a clear example. The boy, it was surmised, had suffered the burns when upsetting a lighted candle placed on a table ready for bed when he was left alone in the house while his parents were outside. The coroner reportedly told the jury that he ‘understood the people were decent and respectable’, and there may be reason to believe this resulted in a more favourable view being taken of the incident, given a verdict of accidental death was returned.<sup>92</sup> By the latter part of the century the care and welfare of children particularly within the

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<sup>89</sup> John E. Archer, ‘“Men Behaving Badly”?: Masculinity and the Uses of Violence, 1850-1900’, in Shani D’Cruze (ed.), *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950* (Harlow, 2000), p. 48.

<sup>90</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 27 February 1896.

<sup>91</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 16 October 1897.

<sup>92</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 4 September 1897.

domestic sphere was an issue that had assumed much greater importance. As Sian Pooley has argued, the period was one of ‘pioneering state, institutional and philanthropic intervention in relationships between parents and their children’, with she claims, parenting seen very much from a moral perspective, and child neglect the result of ‘ignorance, inattentiveness or obstinate immorality’.<sup>93</sup> Philanthropic societies had been active throughout the nineteenth century, but by its end the NSPCC had become the lead agency for bringing prosecutions for child neglect and child abuse. In part this has been attributed to the fact that along with women, ‘children were ... the ... least protected participants in the legal process’.<sup>94</sup> Stressing that prior to the passage of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act of 1889 there was no law covering child neglect, Monica Flegel has argued that it was the NSPCC more than any other organisation which established child abuse as ‘a new form of criminality’. She points to the society’s clever use of publicity, particularly in the form of newspaper reports and “before” and “after” photographs, both to laud its success in rescuing children, but also to influence public discourse on the subject, and ultimately to bring about legislative action.<sup>95</sup> In the very rare instances of child neglect or abuse that resulted in railway workers or their spouses appearing before the courts, it was the NSPCC that initiated each prosecution. The press were certainly interested in the cases, not I would contend, because of the involvement of navvies, as other cases drew similar levels of attention, reflecting no doubt the fact that Maria Luddy has emphasised, that the society was ‘adept at using newspapers

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<sup>93</sup> Sian Pooley, ‘Child Care and Neglect: A Comparative Local Study of Late Nineteenth-Century Parental Authority’, in Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills (eds), *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke and New York, 2009), see esp. pp. 223-6.

<sup>94</sup> Kim Stevenson, ‘Fulfilling Their Mission: The Intervention of Voluntary Societies in Cases of Sexual Assault in the Victorian Criminal Process’, *Crime, History & Societies*, 8:1 (2004), p. 97.

<sup>95</sup> Monica Flegel, ‘Changing Faces: The NSPCC and the Use of Photography in the Construction of Cruelty to Children’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 39: 1 (2006), pp. 1-20.

and journalists to further its cause'.<sup>96</sup> In two cases of neglect before Loughborough Petty Sessions, and one at Nottingham Shire Hall, the reports were naturally enough concerned with the physical appearance of the children and the filthy state of the respective homes. In each case, there was also reference to drinking on the part of one or both of the parents. James Glover, a navvy of East Leake was described as a man of 'drunken habits',<sup>97</sup> whilst when the NSPCC inspector visited John and Clara Hoyland at their room in the infamous 'Rushes' area of Loughborough to check on their two children, the parents were he said, both under the influence of drink.<sup>98</sup> These examples give the clear implication that this particular failing was in some way responsible for their behaviour. The NSPCC used several approaches to the problem of child abuse and neglect: 'warning, supervision, and prosecution'.<sup>99</sup> This is evident in relation to the Dalmer family. Sarah Dalmer, the wife of a navvy, was charged with wilful neglect of four children at Loughborough in December 1895 after her husband had left the family home. The couple had first come to the NSPCC's attention at Loughborough in late 1894, but had been identified as something of a problem family at their previous place of residence, Daventry. The couple had, it was stated, been given the benefit of the doubt, and the NSPCC monitored the situation allowing opportunity for improvement.<sup>100</sup> If, as in this case, the parents failed to heed the warning, prosecution was the ultimate sanction. In terms of outcome, these three cases were proved and the defendants were each given a prison sentence ranging from fourteen to twenty-eight days. A further case at Loughborough saw Clara Pearson, wife of a railway worker, charged with wilful assault and ill-treatment of her young daughter. The NSPCC inspector claimed that

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<sup>96</sup> Maria Luddy, 'The Early Years of the NSPCC in Ireland', *Éire-Ireland*, 44:1/2 (2009), p. 66.

<sup>97</sup> *Nottingham Weekly Express*, 20 August 1898.

<sup>98</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 22 April 1897.

<sup>99</sup> Luddy, 'The Early Years of the NSPCC in Ireland', p. 80.

<sup>100</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 21 December 1895.

the child was seen to be struck by Pearson with a ‘hogs leather collar’, and an examination revealed extensive weals and bruising on various parts of the body which would appear to confirm a violent assault.<sup>101</sup> The report of the case highlights a number of factors. Firstly, a neighbour who witnessed the incident, intervened and remonstrated with the mother; a possible reaction against what has been termed ‘angry or unfair parents’ who contravened accepted standards of behaviour.<sup>102</sup> Conversely, another neighbour appeared for the defence and stated that Pearson had only tapped the child on the shoulder for going into the road. Given that Pearson admitted hitting the child with a strap this seems implausible. Secondly, the husband who was absent at the time was exonerated in that he ‘knew nothing at all of his wife’s conduct’. But if his wife’s statement that ‘I would catch it too’ if he had known is to be believed, we are left with the contradictory image of a man who may have detested excessive punishment of his daughter whilst at the same time reacting in a potentially violent way towards his wife.<sup>103</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century suicide had ceased to have implications in terms of Christian burial and forfeiture of property. That said, it was still a criminal offence and gave rise to a degree of social stigma. Georgina Laragy has highlighted the fact that although inquests tended to return a verdict of suicide whilst temporarily insane as a means of lessening the shame that might attach to both the deceased and their relatives, this was increasingly challenged by medical professionals at the end of the century.<sup>104</sup> Temporary insanity was indeed the verdict pronounced upon Samuel Martin, a ganger who committed suicide in the hut where he lived with his family at the site of Catesby tunnel. The details of the

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<sup>101</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 5 September 1895.

<sup>102</sup> Ross, *Love & Toil*, pp. 155-6.

<sup>103</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 5 September 1895.

<sup>104</sup> Georgina Laragy, ‘“A Peculiar Species of Felony”: Suicide, Medicine, and the Law in Victorian Britain and Ireland’, *Journal of Social History*, 46:3 (2013), pp. 732-743.

case do suggest that Martin was probably suffering from a form of mental illness at the time of his death. He had been discharged from his job several weeks earlier and according to his wife had been acting in a somewhat irrational manner. Perhaps significantly, aspects of his behaviour were highlighted in the local press report: he had been drinking in the two weeks leading up to his suicide, and although described by his wife as a good husband, was nonetheless ‘unmanageable when in drink’.<sup>105</sup> It has been claimed that the implied moral character of a suicide victim could influence the tone of a newspaper report with drink being one aspect that was often seen to have ‘encouraged the loss of all rational male qualities of restraint’.<sup>106</sup> Drink was also said to be pertinent to the attempted suicide of John Speed, engine driver, when he was appeared on indictment before Leicester County Quarter Sessions. The tone of the newspaper report was in general sympathetic perhaps in part due to the fact that he ‘had a wife and three children dependent upon him’, but the more so I would argue, because of the local NMS missionary speaking on his behalf, to the effect that he was penitent and would be re-engaged by his employer.<sup>107</sup> Whilst to some eyes Speed’s actions might have shown moral weakness, the intervention by the missionary may have promoted the impression that Speed did at least retain an element of self-respect. The identity of the missionary in question is not recorded, but it may well have been a Mr Johnson who was responsible for the section of line encompassing Loughborough. Johnson certainly appeared as a character witness on behalf of a navy defendant on one other occasion that I am aware of. This related to a charge of indecent assault against Frederick Mansfield at Loughborough petty sessions. No doubt as a nod to

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<sup>105</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 8 May 1897.

<sup>106</sup> Ian Miller, ‘Representations of Suicide in Urban North-West England c.1870-1910: The Formative Role of Respectability, Class, Gender and Morality’, *Mortality*, 15:3 (2010), p. 201..

<sup>107</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 4 January 1896.

the nature of the offence, the *Nottingham Weekly News* reported it under the heading of ‘A depraved navvy’.<sup>108</sup> Mansfield was alleged to have indecently assaulted a six year old girl, Sarah James, but the bench decided that there was no evidence to support the charge as he had only lifted up the girl’s dress when her back was towards him, and she had come to no harm. In mitigation, Johnson stressed that Mansfield was of good character and claimed that his behaviour was influenced by his ‘intellectual incapacity’ which saw him subjected to ‘taunts and pranks’ whilst at work.<sup>109</sup> In the event Mansfield was convicted of common assault for which he was sentenced to two months imprisonment with hard labour.<sup>110</sup> This may have reflected Home Office advice that where violence was absent or minimal in an assault of this nature, the most appropriate charge was one of common assault. This avoided the necessity for a full trial.<sup>111</sup> Johnson’s intervention may not have been typical of navvy missionaries in general, but it does illustrate levels of commitment and support and the extent to which their work could become intertwined into the lives of members of the navvy community.

## **V The Navvy as Victim**

As I alluded to above, navvies were not exclusively perpetrators of crime; in some instances they were the victims. The most serious incident I have identified was an assault on a navvy, Harry Bevan, by two policemen in Brackley in 1896. The assault coincided with another high profile prosecution, and the two cases combined to cause much soul searching on the part of the town’s elite, and in the

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<sup>108</sup> *Nottingham Weekly Express*, 19 July 1895.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 18 July 1895.

<sup>111</sup> Kim Stevenson, ‘“Ingenuities of the Female Mind”: Legal and Public Perceptions of Sexual Violence in Victorian England, 1850-1890’, in Shani D’Cruze (ed.), *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950* (Harlow, 2000), p. 97.

process exposed concerns about the moral condition of the town and also laid bare many of the underlying currents defining the perceptions of the railway workers and their relationship with local authority. Brackley was by no means exceptional. It was a small market town with a population of 2,591 in 1891 located in a predominantly agricultural area. Other employment was limited, although 'Lace making formerly gave employment to many persons in this town and neighbourhood; there are still two large breweries'.<sup>112</sup>

The two policemen, Charles Henry Peacock and John Andrew Radford Betts appeared before Brackley petty sessions on 22nd September 1896 charged with assaulting Bevan on the 27th August, and were committed for trial at Northamptonshire Quarter Sessions.<sup>113</sup> The trial itself was the subject of lengthy reports in the local press and these provide the main source of information concerning the case. It would appear that Bevan had been working on the railway prior to the assault but returned to the town after a short absence. He was unable to obtain lodgings at a local public house, The Bell, and on the evening of 27th August, in company with three other navvies, attempted unsuccessfully, to seek shelter in the watchman's hut at the railway works. At this point there is a discrepancy in the newspaper reports with one indicating that the navvies laid down and slept near the watchman's fire, while another stated that the men moved away towards the railway out of sight of the watchman.<sup>114</sup> The two police constables had presumably been alerted to the presence of the navvies as one witness claimed they had come to the watchman's hut in search of the men although their motive was not made clear. There is no indication that the men had committed any offence earlier

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<sup>112</sup> 'Northamptonshire' in *Kelly's Directory of Bedfordshire, Hunts and Northamptonshire* (London, 1898), pp. 29-30.

<sup>113</sup> NRO, Brackley Petty Sessions Minute Book, March 1877-October 1953, 22 September 1896.

<sup>114</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 29 October 1896; *Northampton Herald*, 24 October 1896.



in the evening although they had been drinking, but not they claimed, excessively. It may be that they were seen as a legitimate target as according to the *Northampton Herald* the defence counsel stated this was not the first time the police had found it necessary to move men away from the watchman's fire. Notwithstanding, there is a suggestion that the policemen were prepared for violence as they had, it was claimed, borrowed a stick that night from a local resident. It has been postulated that the use of such weapons by policemen in general was not uncommon, with some admitting to carrying sticks which, whilst providing a form of defence, could be discarded with relative ease should a superior officer make an appearance.<sup>115</sup> The use of illicit violence was also not unknown with acts pertaining to be of self-defence often manifested 'in the form of pre-emptive action'.<sup>116</sup> There seems to have been no question of deploying self-defence in this instance as the assault launched by Peacock and Betts was totally unprovoked. A local shoemaker, John Wilkins, appearing as a prosecution witness testified that Betts was the worst for drink which implies that this may have contributed to the lack of restraint shown by the latter. If true, Betts' drunken state may in any case have been grounds for dismissal from the force.<sup>117</sup> The oldest navvy present, Robert Head, known as 'Cambridge Bob' was subjected to an initial assault and the press was keen to present the image of a comparatively old, defenceless man with the *Banbury Guardian* reporting that he shouted: 'don't knock an old man about, old enough to be your father'. When Head managed to escape they then fell on Bevan with one of the policemen allegedly saying: 'here's one of them, let's give it to him' which

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<sup>115</sup> Clive Emsley, '“The Thump of Wood on a Swede Turnip”: Police Violence in Nineteenth-Century England', in Louis A. Knafla (ed.), *Crime, Police and the Courts in British History* (Westport, Ct and London, 1990), p. 200.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>117</sup> Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community*, p. 107.

suggests they were intent upon inflicting gratuitous violence.<sup>118</sup> Bevan was badly beaten, but he crawled away to seek refuge in a nearby field where he lay until the following morning, when Head went off in search of a doctor. Bevan was eventually removed to the workhouse infirmary where a subsequent examination by Dr Parkhurst the medical officer, revealed that he had suffered a ruptured urethra, severe bruising to his thighs and internal bleeding. Indeed, his injuries were described as ‘dangerous to life’.<sup>119</sup>

Both Peacock and Betts were found guilty of assault and imprisoned for three and four months respectively which effectively ended their police careers. The sentences may appear unduly lenient, but were probably in line with what might be expected for an offence of that nature. The case does highlight the fact that given the victim was both a non-resident of the town, and more significantly a navvy, and thus a member of a group still perceived in some quarters to be associated with disorder, his plight did elicit some sympathy amongst the district’s elite. As we have seen by the late nineteenth century there may have been less tolerance of interpersonal violence, but the police were nonetheless granted considerable discretion as to the level of physical force they could employ as representatives of a state that had ‘assumed a monopoly on “legitimate” violence’.<sup>120</sup> Despite this dispensation, Peacock and Betts were clearly deemed to have overstepped the boundary of what was acceptable, and Bevan’s status as a navvy was not, at least in this instance, seen as material. This very fact was stressed by the chairman of the magistrates when addressing the jury: ‘He saw no reason why navvies should not be treated with as much consideration as other people: there was no reason why they

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<sup>118</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 29 October 1896.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> J. Carter Wood, ‘Self-Policing and the Policing of the Self: Violence, Protection and the Civilising Bargain in Britain’, *Crime, History and Societies*, 7:1 (2003), pp. 119.

should be put in a class by themselves, nor why they should not be accorded the common courtesy usually shown to others'.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, a number of local people were also prepared to give evidence against the policeman. It has been pointed out that police training during much of the nineteenth century was undeveloped and 'learning on the job' was the main form of instruction, but even so it is difficult to see this as an excuse for the action of these police constables.<sup>122</sup> In any case, there had seemingly been some disquiet within Brackley about the overly robust approach taken by the police in general. Following the verdict, and perhaps in a show of contrition the defence counsel informed the court that his clients were anxious to be allowed to compensate Bevan for the injuries he had received. A sum of twenty-five pounds was eventually agreed.<sup>123</sup>

As a result of the assault Bevan remained in the workhouse infirmary for just over eight weeks and his demeanour seems to have impressed several of the guardians, but this did not prevent the board from discussing the matter of payment for the time he had spent in the infirmary, especially in light of the compensation he eventually received. In the event, the board waived their claim no doubt swayed in large part by expressions of support for Bevan from elements within the community that clearly had some influence in such matters. The *Banbury Guardian* whilst not denying that the guardians had a case for seeking payment opined that: 'it seems to us, for the paltry sum in question it would be more dignified—not to say humane—if the Brackley Guardians forego their claim'. William Whitehorn, the attorney who had represented Bevan at the trial expressed similar sentiments in a letter to the board: 'could not the Board, who had already behaved so well to his client ... agree

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<sup>121</sup> *Northampton Mercury*, 23 October 1896.

<sup>122</sup> David Taylor, 'Conquering the British Ballarat: The Policing of Victorian Middlesbrough', *Journal of Social History*, 37:3 (2004), p. 763.

<sup>123</sup> *Northampton Herald*, 24 October 1896.

to forego their claim ... he was told it would be a long time before the poor fellow would be fit to maintain himself by labour'.<sup>124</sup>

The discomfort occasioned by the Bevan case was confounded by the events surrounding the trial at Northampton Assizes in November of the same year, of eight young men aged from seventeen to twenty-two, and a boy aged twelve (accused of aiding and abetting) from Brackley for the rape of a local woman, Fanny Sheppard, on 28th June. On initial inspection there appeared to be no connection between the case and the new railway, but at a committal hearing at Brackley petty sessions, one of the accused, William Waters, was described as a navvy.<sup>125</sup> Cross checking of the names of the accused against census returns leads me to believe that six of the men were local residents. I have been unable to ascertain the origins of William Waters and the remaining accused, James Waters and the boy John Waters, but the surname common to all implies the possibility of a family relationship. That all of the men were in fact local is given some credence by the fact that Sheppard stated that all were known to her, although of course this in itself is not conclusive. It is possible that Waters was a regular navvy, but given he was the only one designated as such (of the remaining men one was described as a striker, the others as labourers), he may merely have obtained employment on the railway on a casual basis. All nine defendants were found not guilty, but the case caused consternation not so much for the serious nature of the alleged crime, but for the fact that the judge, Mr Justice Day, with some justification, was highly critical of the way the police had handled the investigation and subsequent prosecution. He expressed the opinion that the police had deliberately withheld evidence in order to obtain a conviction. This, coming in the wake of the Bevan assault did little for the

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<sup>124</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 19 November 1896.

<sup>125</sup> Brackley Petty Sessions Minute Book, March 1877-October 1953, 18 July 1896.

good name of the Northamptonshire Constabulary generally, and the Brackley police division in particular. Unsurprisingly, the Chief Constable, Captain Kellie McCullum, was embroiled in the aftermath of these events.<sup>126</sup> The outcome of the trial rested on the question of consent, and the testimony of two women who had seen Sheppard soon after the alleged rape proved crucial. The salient facts of the case were that Fanny Sheppard, accompanied by her friend Ada Jeacock, had gone for a walk on a Sunday evening and encountered the men when passing a field. Sheppard claimed one of the men, Joseph Wootton had grabbed her and forced her to the ground at which point the others held her down while the alleged rape took place. Jeacock meanwhile had run off in a frightened state to get help, and later returned together with the two women. In his testimony, Wootton claimed Sheppard made no attempt to resist and was a consenting party. Day expressed surprise that the women were being presented not as prosecution witnesses but as witnesses for the defence, and it soon became apparent that neither woman had been interviewed by the police during the course of their investigation which the judge obviously felt was a deliberate omission. In court both women stated that although Sheppard admitted the lads had been pushing her around, she was ‘not in the least distressed’, and had made no attempt to raise the alarm.<sup>127</sup> Fanny Sheppard could offer no other explanation than that she was too ashamed which, for a young woman was perhaps understandable.<sup>128</sup> However, the evidence of the women combined with the fact that Sheppard showed no signs of bruising was no doubt sufficient to sway the jury. The men may have been found not guilty but Mr Justice Day, also expressed his

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<sup>126</sup> It was reported that the Chief Constable visited Brackley immediately after Bevan’s assault to undertake his own investigation, and he was much concerned by Mr Justice Day’s comments. See *Banbury Guardian*, 27 August 1896; ML762, Chief Constable’s Minute Book, 28 November 1896.

<sup>127</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 19 November 1896.

<sup>128</sup> Carolyn A. Conley, ‘Rape and Justice in Victorian England’, *Victorian Studies*, 29:4 (1986), p. 527.

disgust that such immoral behaviour had taken place, and with somewhat less justification, seems to have questioned the moral character of the whole town. He may well have been aware of the previous conviction of the two policemen, and this may have influenced his views, but he singled out, 'the ruffians who congregated at Brackley, and who did a great deal of harm, and who wandered up and down the country'.<sup>129</sup> Was he referring to itinerant railway workers or possibly the 'quasi-navvies' who followed the works? This is possible, although as I mentioned earlier any specific connection between this case and such men is less than clear cut. This seems to be confirmed by subsequent discussions at the town council. Needless to say, the district's leading men were concerned that the judge's comments would reflect badly on the town's reputation. Although there was some acceptance that the condition of the town was lacking in certain areas, this according to one councillor was due to 'a very small residuum', and with an emphasis that has resonance for the modern day he pinpointed youngsters of fifteen or sixteen years of age who congregated in groups 'making a disturbance'.<sup>130</sup> Reference to a 'residuum' once again gives rise to the issue of respectability and the idea that many of society's ills could be identified with a small minority, in this case young people. Indeed, there was general agreement amongst the council members that the problem might be alleviated by the provision of an 'improving' reading room or club for this very section of the community. This does echo the widespread concern at the end of the century about the state of the nation's youth. There were fears, particularly in the larger towns and cities, that young men were exhibiting anti-social behaviour on the streets 'engaging in loud vulgar language, smoking and gambling and generally

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<sup>129</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 19 November 1896.

<sup>130</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 3 December 1896.

acting in a mischievous manner'.<sup>131</sup> What is perhaps most revealing about the reaction at Brackley is the fact that other than a reference to a rise in the incidence of bad language within the town, there appears to have been no suggestion that the presence of the navy community was in any way considered to be a disruptive force, or responsible for its perceived social or moral shortcomings.

There is some evidence that the concern about disorder in the district which was brought to prominence by these events did have a tangible and lasting effect upon the sentencing policy of the Brackley bench. In the spring of the following year, three publicans appearing before the petty sessions for allowing drunkenness on licensed premises were handed what were considered harsh penalties. In one case specific reference was made to navvies frequenting the pub and the fact that the landlord being newly installed had 'no knowledge of the navy population'. This was dismissed by the chairman of the bench who insisted they were determined 'to put a stop to publicans allowing drunkenness'. The subsequent fine of five-pounds and in particular the endorsement of his license led the defending attorney to point out that it was not the usual practice to endorse a license in respect of a first offence. Dismay was also expressed at the size of the fines, four pounds and three pounds respectively, in the other cases heard that day.<sup>132</sup>

It is perhaps fitting that I should return to the subject of drunkenness, given the fact that in many ways it was at the core of the relationship between the forces of law and order and the navy community engaged in the construction of the London Extension. As we have seen, it was the one issue that preoccupied both the police and the lower courts, and was probably perceived as the main threat to public order arising from the presence of the work force. If the attitudes of those upholding

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<sup>131</sup> Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain*, p. 114.

<sup>132</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 15 April 1897.

the law have become evident to some degree, those of the men and women brought before the courts are less easily discernible. It is probably true to say that the construction workers differed little in their response to the law from their working-class peers. In large part this manifested in a grudging acceptance of the due process of the law, and of the consequences incumbent upon breaking the law. That is not to deny that displays of resistance did take place. This could be seen in resisting arrest and assaults upon the police, but more often than not this resulted from the influence of alcohol. In terms of legislation that mandated compulsion as in the case of school attendance, working people it is claimed, often developed their ‘own standards of morality and justice’.<sup>133</sup> Thus, navvies like many others, did defy the law in this respect and on occasion failed to ensure the regular attendance of their children at school. But the law was not viewed from an exclusively negative perspective. Some sought to achieve justice or perhaps retribution via the courts, after suffering loss or injury as a result of criminal activity. For spouses faced with violent or abusive partners, the courts offered the possibility of remedies such as legal separation and financial settlements. The evidence suggests that navvies and their dependents were treated by the courts very much on a par with other working people. The experiences surrounding the events at Brackley in 1896, illustrate that navvies were for the most part afforded the same protection by the law as other members of the working class, even when, as on that occasion, the fault lay with the supposed upholders of the law. In common with their dealings with many other local agencies, it is evident that perceptions played a crucial role in influencing the manner in which the adult workers and their spouses experienced the legal process. So far the experiences of navvy children have received little attention, and it is to

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<sup>133</sup> Auerbach, ‘ “The Law Has No Feeling for Poor Folk Like Us” ’, p. 687.



this theme that the focus is directed in the next chapter as I explore the subject of education.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **‘“Navy” Import alions [sic]’: Navy Children and Elementary Education in the Midlands, 1894-1900**

As we have seen, there were probably many hundreds of children within the navy communities working on the new railway. The statutory framework that mandated compulsory attendance meant that at the end of the nineteenth century the vast majority of children including the offspring of construction workers were, at least in theory, exposed to the schoolroom and the demands of elementary education at some stage during their formative years. It was here that they came up against authority in the form of the schoolmaster or schoolmistress. This was the one area where we can perhaps gain the greatest insight into the experiences of the children. But equally the opportunity arises to gauge the reactions of the school authorities who were responsible for providing their education. The movement of railway construction workers into the Midlands began in earnest from late 1894, and from that point onwards their children were admitted to local elementary schools lying close to the course of the new line. From evidence presented by extant school records it has been possible to identify a number of schools that were affected. Starting with the northernmost county of Nottinghamshire, these included Carrington Boy's School within the Carrington district of Nottingham. This was described in 1894 as 'a residential village on the east side ... 1¾ miles north of Nottingham'.<sup>1</sup> There was also the school at Ruddington which was situated five miles south of Nottingham. The town had a population in 1891 of 2,370, and was a centre for lace and hosiery manufacture.<sup>2</sup> Moving south into Leicestershire were schools in Whetstone, Quorn and Rothley attended by navy children. In

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<sup>1</sup> *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Nottinghamshire* (Sheffield, 1894), p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 633.

Northamptonshire a number of small village schools in a predominantly agricultural area saw intakes: Staverton to the west of Daventry, Charwelton and Hellidon both adjacent to the site of Catesby tunnel, Culworth, Helmdon, and Thorpe Mandeville close to the Woodford Halse to Banbury link. Finally, navy children were also admitted to the village school at Hillmorton in Warwickshire.

Although I have been able to confirm the presence of navy children in each of the schools referred to above, it is not possible due to the scarcity of information, to quantify with confidence the total number of children admitted to any one school. Whilst I have noted only a handful of children in several of the schools, numbers certainly exceeded that level in many. For instance Ruddington saw at least twenty-two admissions, and Hillmorton at least twenty-one.<sup>3</sup> The Church of England school at Hellidon was probably one of the first to admit navy children with several entering the school during November and December 1894, and it is also the school for which I have been able to trace the largest number of children, totalling seventy-six.<sup>4</sup> Admissions here and at other schools reached a peak in 1895 and 1896 with much reduced levels apparent into 1897 and 1898 as the construction work reached its conclusion. However, the majority of children had left the areas concerned well before the official opening of the line in March 1899. In the cases of Thorpe Mandeville and Culworth schools, admissions correlate with the slightly later date of construction (1897-1900) of the Woodford to Banbury link but, practically all of the children had left by the middle of 1900.

Based principally on the records of the various schools affected by the intake of navy children, this chapter explores a number of issues relevant to their

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<sup>3</sup> SA143/1/3, Ruddington Endowed C of E Boys School Admission Register, 1892-1910. WRO, CR36/30, Hillmorton School Admission Register, 1881-1904.

<sup>4</sup> ZB 122/69, Hellidon School Admission Register, 1875-1932.

educational experience. In order to establish a contextual framework, the first section provides a brief overview of the operation of elementary education at the end of the nineteenth century. This includes reference to both voluntary and board school provision following on from the 1870 Education Act, and an analysis of the Education Codes and curriculum which determined the scope and focus of teaching in schools. Attention will then be directed to the impact of navy children on individual schools with emphasis placed on a central theme of the thesis: the perceptions that formed within the minds of the resident population about the incoming construction workers. In this instance the focus is on the perceptions of teaching staff as to the behaviour, characteristics, and abilities of the children, and how this influenced issues such as the use of corporal punishment. This leads on to a discussion of, and engagement with, existing scholarship relating to the nature and purpose of elementary education during the late nineteenth century. Consideration is also given to the contemporary interest in children with special educational needs. Finally, the logistical impact of increased pupil numbers is reviewed, giving further insight into the distinctions evident between small voluntary schools and larger and often better resourced board schools.

## **I Elementary Education at the End of the Nineteenth Century**

What the general intake of navy children brings into sharp focus is the inherent characteristics of the elementary schools within the communities affected by the new railway. Church of England schools were predominant in the rural areas, and these present a notable contrast with urban schools like the one at Carrington which were managed by large school boards. The 1870 Education Act allowed for the formation of school boards where voluntary provision was inadequate to support

demand; however, it was permissive and unless provision failed to meet the need or there was a desire within a community to establish a board, voluntary schools, many of which existed prior to that date, were able to continue. The local incumbent often played a leading role in the management of Anglican schools, and the Church was anxious to maintain its influence within the field of education, especially in light of the Cowper-Temple clause within the 1870 Act.<sup>5</sup> The clause, named after William Francis Cowper-Temple who was responsible for an amendment to the act, specified that religious instruction in board schools should be non-denominational.<sup>6</sup> Checks on the influence of the clergy had, at least in theory, been in place prior to 1870, in so far as parents had the right to withdraw their children from religious instruction, and the management of individual schools was a shared responsibility between clergyman and a board of managers with lay representation.<sup>7</sup> In the rural areas in particular, the Church of England exercised something of a monopoly and parents had little choice other than to send their children to these schools.<sup>8</sup>

If denominational education was a continuing feature of the late nineteenth century, it was financing that made the demarcation between board and voluntary schools most apparent. All schools, both voluntary and board, subject to government inspection were eligible for annual grants. However, board schools had a distinct advantage in so far as they were able to supplement grant income with support from local rates. However, even where available, the extent of the rate support depended upon the rateable values operative within the local area, and the

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Daglish, *Education Policy-Making in England and Wales: The Crucible Years, 1895-1911* (London and Portland, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> An Act to Provide for Elementary Education in England and Wales, 1870, 33 & 34 Vict. c. 75, clause 14.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Digby and Peter Searby, *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London and Basingstoke, 1981), see esp., pp. 17, 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

size of the rate that could realistically be levied in relation to the number of rate payers.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, board schools in small rural communities tended to be less well financed in comparison with those located in more populous urban environments. State aid was denied to voluntary schools until 1897, and up to that time they were forced to rely on additional income from voluntary subscriptions. Under the terms of the Voluntary Schools Act of 1897 such schools either individually or in association, were thereafter eligible for a parliamentary grant not exceeding five shillings per scholar.<sup>10</sup> The accounts of Culworth endowed school illustrate the vital importance of the various government grants together with charitable funding, for the survival of a small voluntary school. The annual endowment of £65 combined with the main government and fee grant varying between £65 and £75 per year in total, constituted some eighty per-cent of the school's yearly income during the 1890s. The school managed to maintain a reducing surplus each year until 1898 when expenditure on the fabric of the school and the purchase of new desks resulted in a deficit of £4-11s-5½d. This was despite raising £18-8s-6d in voluntary contributions.<sup>11</sup>

By the mid-1890s, the structure of elementary schooling was well established, and regulated by the Day School Code. No attendance was recognised for any child less than three years of age with initial instruction being undertaken in either a separate infants department or an infant's class, usually until age seven. Older children were thereafter educated sequentially in a series of standards running from I to VII whereby 'In ordinary circumstances, scholars should be advanced not

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<sup>9</sup> Daglish, *Education Policy-Making*, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Voluntary Schools Act, 1897, 60 & 61 Vict., c. 5.

<sup>11</sup> NRO, 94P/59 (ML 2688), Culworth School Account Book, 1854-1898.

less than one Standard in a year'.<sup>12</sup> The core curriculum as specified in the Code consisted of the so called 'elementary subjects' of reading, writing, and arithmetic, plus needlework for girls and drawing for all older boys. In addition, from the school year beginning 31 August 1895, object lessons and one 'suitable occupation' were made compulsory for all children in standards I, II and III.<sup>13</sup> As the name implies, object lessons were centred on the study of objects that related to one of a number of general topics specified in the Code such as botany, horticulture, or sound, light and heat. Suitable occupations meanwhile, sought to improve manual dexterity and included 'modelling, simple geometrical drawing, weaving, plaiting, [and] building with cubes'.<sup>14</sup> Children were initially introduced to exercises of this nature in infants schools, but their inclusion within the curriculum of upper schools was also meant to help with 'diversifying the day's employment in the lower standards'.<sup>15</sup> Recitation was also usually included on the timetable. One class subject chosen from a list of options had to be taken by classes throughout the school. It was possible for two class subjects to be taken, but since both object lessons, suitable occupations and needlework were included in the list of class subjects, many children were taught only one additional subject.<sup>16</sup> Object lessons were often taught to children in standards above standard III. The schedule of teaching for the year 1894/5 drawn up by the head teacher at Ruddington C of E Boy's School illustrates this point. Table 4.1 shows that objects lessons were taught to all standards with specific topics chosen for the three highest standards, V, VI and VII. Class subjects here consisted of geography and grammar for standards II-

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<sup>12</sup> 1895 [C.7652] LXXVI, *Education Department, Code of Regulations for Day Schools with Schedules and Appendices*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> BPP, 1895 [C.7653] LXXVI, *Education Department: Revised Instructions Issued to Her Majesty's Inspectors, and Applicable to the Code of 1895*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

IV and history and grammar for standards V-VII. History and geography were in fact the class subjects most commonly taught in all of the schools where details exist. At Carrington object lessons (unspecified) were only taken by standards I-IV, with history and geography forming the class subjects in all standards with standards V-VI additionally taking elementary science. It was also possible for individual pupils in the upper standards of schools to take up to two specific subjects selected from an approved list, but this seems not to have been the case in the schools of interest here. Issues surrounding the extension of the curriculum late in the century to include subjects such as science have been explored by Jacob Middleton. He points out that fears were expressed by some that schooling was spiralling out of control and that children were suffering from an excess of education. Proponents of the teaching of science such as Thomas Huxley, prominent scientist and member of the School Board for London, saw it as a valuable addition that taught children to 'observe, think and analyse'. This, Middleton maintains, was a challenge to those who considered that state funded education should only provide the basics. He also argues that charges of over education did not rely on any specific criteria as to what might constitute too much schooling, but merely reflected the fact that a broadening of the curriculum appeared excessive when compared to what had gone before.<sup>17</sup>

Even allowing for the expansion of the curriculum, it remained narrow in concept by modern standards. Object lessons had initially been introduced to provide a degree of depth with the aim of increasing children's awareness of the

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<sup>17</sup> Jacob Middleton, 'The Cry For Useless Knowledge: The Fear of Over-Education in Late Nineteenth-Century England', *History of Education Researcher*, 76 (2005), pp. 91-99, see esp. pp. 94, 97.



world around them.<sup>18</sup> The Ruddington example combines everyday items that would have been familiar to most children such as the potato, the candle, the horse and coal with the more exotic like the elephant, tiger, sugar cane and silkworm. Actual examples of the more common items may have been used in class, and for others visual aids were available. These lessons seem also to have been designed to encourage some interaction within the class. For example the teacher was encouraged to question the pupils with the intention of drawing out the wider applications of the object. Thus, in the case of the silkworm this might seek to establish the linkage with the production of silk used for ladies' dresses.<sup>19</sup> Pinpointing what she sees as the 'empirical philosophy deriving from Locke' which underpinned the object lesson, and founded on the 'belief that all ideas derive from impressions received by the senses', Karen Clarke has also noted the limitations evident in the approach as applied in Victorian schools. In respect of many common objects there was no attempt to stress the role of human labour: 'the labour involved in their production appears as a natural quality of the object itself'.<sup>20</sup> With attention concentrated on such a disparate range of objects it may have been difficult to establish both a sense of context and relevance to the children's lives, but ultimately as with all the subjects taught in elementary schools, it was no doubt down to the ability of individual teachers to engage with the children in creative and imaginative ways. Other attempts to broaden the scope of education and perhaps engender the sense that schooling might aim to bring enrichment rather than merely being a means to an end, can be detected in the 1895 Education Code whereby

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<sup>18</sup> Pamela Horn, (ed.), *Village Education in Nineteenth-Century Oxfordshire, The Whitchurch School Log Book (1868-93) and Other Documents* (Oxford, 1979), p. xxxix.

<sup>19</sup> J. Walker, *The Handy Book of Object Lessons: From a Teacher's Note Book* (London, 1875), pp. 35-36.

<sup>20</sup> Karen Clarke, 'Public and Private Children: Infant Education in the 1820s and 1830s' in Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Urwin and Valerie Walkerdine (eds), *Language, Gender And Childhood* (London, Boston and Henley, 1985), p. 80.

schools were allowed to reckon visits to museums and art galleries or ‘other institutions of educational value approved by the Department’ against total attendance.<sup>21</sup> Of course this is where urban board schools might have the advantage as such institutions were more readily assessable in those areas. The same is true regarding permitted physical exercise; the availability of nearby baths for instance could offer opportunities for swimming, and indeed the chance to learn to swim.<sup>22</sup>

*Table 4.1: Ruddington C of E Boy's School – Object Lessons 1894/5*

<u>All standards</u>	<u>Standards V, VI, VII only</u>
The elephant	Potato
The lion	Gold
The tiger	Mahogany tree
The ostrich	Iron
The reindeer	Steel
The wolf	Salt
Gold	The spider
Wheat	Sugar cane
Barley	Thermometer
Potato	Rice plant
Turnip	Cork tree
Iron & steel	Candle
The buck	The heart
The beaver	Coal mine
The horse	
Silkworm	
Whale	
Coal	

*Source: NottRO, SL143/1/1, Ruddington C of E Boy's School Log Book 1876-1911.*

From the perspective of the individual school, the scheme of instruction was closely aligned to finance in that only approved subjects were eligible for

<sup>21</sup> 1895 [C.7652] LXXVI, *Education Department, Code of Regulations for Day Schools*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> For example twenty one boys from Carrington school were taught to swim during 1895. See NottA, SL125/C2/3, Carrington Board School (Boys Dept) Log Book, 1894-1896, 21 October 1895.

government grants. The so called payment by results regime had been introduced under the Revised Code of 1862 whereby grants depended upon attendance and the successful annual examination by Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) of Schools of each pupil in the basic subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic.<sup>23</sup> The pressure to ensure that pupils passed the examinations meant that in some cases teachers were preparing for inspectors months ahead.<sup>24</sup> The system was modified so that by the 1890s individual examination was no longer an automatic requirement, indeed, schools did not necessarily undergo an annual inspection, as HMI were able to make two visits without notice in lieu if so sanctioned by the Education Department. Higher grants were now also payable for attendance together with additional payments related to discipline and organisation.<sup>25</sup> To give some indication of the size of grants that were payable to both board and voluntary schools, Infants schools could earn a fixed grant of nine shillings (in all cases the amount equates to each unit of average attendance) if the children were taught in a separate department with a dedicated certificated teacher. If these conditions were not met, the payment was reduced to seven shillings.<sup>26</sup> Grants to day schools for older children were based upon a similar schedule. The principal grant amounted to either 12s 6d or 14s dependent upon HMI's assessment of the children's proficiency in the elementary subjects; however, the higher figure was not payable unless the scholars achieved the required standard in recitation, which explains its almost universal adoption. Additional grants were also payable for the first and second class subjects. There was a limit to the total annual grant that could be awarded to a school, the lower of: 'a sum equal to 17s 6d for each unit of average

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<sup>23</sup> BPP, 1862 [2986] XLI, *Education: The Revised Code of Regulations*, clause 48.

<sup>24</sup> Pamela Horn, *Education in Rural England 1800-1914* (Dublin, 1978), pp. 130-31.

<sup>25</sup> Horn (ed.), *Village Education in Nineteenth-Century Oxfordshire*, p. xxv.

<sup>26</sup> A variable grant of 2s, 4s, or 6s was also payable dependent upon the report and recommendation of HMI.

attendance' or 'the total income... of the school from all sources whatever other than the grant'.<sup>27</sup> From 1891 schools could also apply for a fee grant, effectively a per capita payment offered by the state in lieu of parental contributions or school pence. Where taken up this meant that elementary education became free at the point of access. For example, the managers of Thorpe Mandeville School took the decision to accept the fee grant, and became a free school from 1 September 1891.<sup>28</sup>

## **II '“Navy” Import Aliens [sic]': Perceptions of Navy Children and a Resort to Corporal Punishment?**

Earlier in the century a link was often established between the unsettled lifestyle associated with construction workers and the perceived lack of educational opportunities for their children. This was certainly another theme that was developed by the Select Committee on Railway Labourers with reference made to the 'absence of provision ... for ... the education of their children'.<sup>29</sup> Two decades later this still had currency, with one writer articulating the view that the navy's regular migration in search of work meant that 'their children seldom have many opportunities of education'.<sup>30</sup> The work of church missions with the navy community, most notably that of the Navy Mission Society from 1877, and the legislation from 1870 that had extended the provision of elementary education and mandated compulsory attendance, clearly alleviated the problem. However, the regularity of school attendance by navy children at the end of the century still merited attention.

The incoming workers and their dependents no doubt aroused if not suspicion, at the very least a degree of curiosity. The then schoolmistress of

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<sup>27</sup> 1895, [C.7652] LXXVI, *Education Department, Code of Regulations for Day Schools*, clause 107.

<sup>28</sup> NRO, 323P/53, Thorpe Mandeville School Manager's Minute Book, 1871-1903, 28 August 1891.

<sup>29</sup> 1846 [530] XIII, *Report from the Select Committee on Railway Labourers*, p. iii.

<sup>30</sup> W. H. O. 'A Few Words About Navvies', p. 327.

Charwelton school Edith Watson, reacting to the first tranche of navy children, six boys and five girls, who entered her school in 1895 was uncompromising in her assessment, describing them as “‘Navy’ Import alions [sic]”<sup>31</sup> The apparent spelling mistake apart, her choice of words appears rather curious. We can only speculate as to her reasoning, but it is possible that she may have been drawing a comparison between navvies and foreign immigrants. The term ‘alien’ was used in an official sense to designate the latter, and there was some disquiet during the mid-1890s concerning the influx of pauper aliens into the country.<sup>32</sup> What is clear is that her stark comment locked into the negative image of the navy, and leaves little doubt that she saw them very much as outsiders, distinct and set apart from the resident children. This is of course a truism in so far as they were indeed incomers with family backgrounds seemingly at odds with local inhabitants in what was still a heavily agricultural based economy. Watson singles out the boys in particular for criticism as they seemed not to conform to the accepted standards of behaviour. They ‘are proving very rough and unruly. Only one amongst the six seems to have any sense of order’ she complained. Such was the situation that one ‘of these rude boys lately admitted was (caned) punished for disobedience and obstinacy’.<sup>33</sup>

What stands as a stark rebuttal of Watson’s position, and indeed provides a striking contrast, are the views of her successor Estelle Haynes. Taking charge of the school in 1898, Haynes was the proverbial new broom. Clearly unhappy with the organisation of the school she set about rearranging the schoolroom and revising the timetable. For Haynes the navy children were a breath of fresh air:

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<sup>31</sup> NRO, SLB17, Charwelton School Log Book, 1871-1911, 25 October 1895.

<sup>32</sup> An annual return detailing the number of alien immigrants arriving at UK ports was produced by the Board of Trade. See *The Times*, 15 December 1894, for a report of a meeting of the Association for Preventing the Immigration of Destitute Aliens.

<sup>33</sup> SLB17, Charwelton School Log Book, 9 August 1895.

I am greatly impressed with the great difference between the children of the persons employed on the railway and the native village children. In the former case one and all seem most anxious to learn, take great interest in the class subjects, while the latter are as listless and inattentive as possible. The cause is not far to seek. The people on the railway have in most cases come from large towns, their children have attended some of the best 'Board' schools, while the village children seem to resent any attempt to teach them anything new.<sup>34</sup>

For Haynes then, the children had benefited from attending what to her mind, were better schools. Implied also is a sense that the children had a broader outlook on life, were perhaps more worldly wise and less insular than their resident peers. She bemoaned the loss of 'a family of our most intelligent children' when with the railway construction nearing completion the parents left for Bradford.<sup>35</sup> She apportions much of the blame for the lack of interest on the part of the village children to the parents who 'present the greatest obstacle'. In particular she notes their hostility towards the teaching of history and object lessons. In consequence children were often kept at home when these lessons were taken, with threats, she claims, that they would be removed to other schools 'where they don't learn such rubbish as that'.<sup>36</sup>

The reactions described by Estelle Haynes imply that parental attitudes were important and that some subjects were not seen as either useful or necessary. This may be a reflection of the lack of interest in schooling that it has been suggested arose from the isolation and insularity of rural schools.<sup>37</sup> Like all of the villages

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 19 August 1898.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 23 September 1898.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 19 August 1898.

<sup>37</sup> Horn, *Education in Rural England*, pp. 147-8.

referred to here, Charwelton was small in size with a population of two hundred and three in 1891.<sup>38</sup> However, whether these views were restricted solely to local residents while parents among the railway workers took a more positive outlook is open to question. In somewhat disparaging remarks, Haynes suggests the negativity arises from the fact that the parents themselves ‘can neither read nor write’.<sup>39</sup> Whether or not their opinions were reached on an informed basis, these parents were not prepared to accept the format of elementary education in a passive manner and clearly made their feelings known. Indeed it has been shown that parents were often concerned with those aspects of their children’s education that had ‘some bearing on their employment opportunities’.<sup>40</sup>

Several years separated the disparate views of Edith Watson and Estelle Haynes. Children had come and gone by the time Haynes took charge although records suggest that some at least of the children who so affronted Watson were still at the school in 1898. Of course by then, the navy children were no longer strangers, and by Watson’s own admission, the children had gradually settled down and by October 1895 are ‘more amenable and orderly’.<sup>41</sup> Any attempt to explain the disparity in the perceptions these women had of the navy children must I think take cognisance of their differing backgrounds, brief details of which I have been able to discern. Edith Watson was a local woman born in Hellidon, the daughter of a schoolmaster. Estelle Haynes was herself an incomer, originating in Bath. It seems that both women began their teaching careers as pupil teachers, in Watson’s case this was in her father’s school, whilst Haynes was based in Bristol. From its instigation in 1846, the pupil teacher system allowed prospective teachers to begin

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Northamptonshire’, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> SLB17, Charwelton School Log Book, 11 November 1898.

<sup>40</sup> Silver, *Good Schools*, p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> SLB17, Charwelton School Log Book, 25 October 1895.

training from age thirteen to eighteen for a five year period, although the lower age was reduced to fourteen in 1877 and fifteen in 1900.<sup>42</sup> The path taken by the two women in their subsequent training is unclear, but in their final year pupil teachers were able to sit the Queen's Scholarship examination, success in which, led to the possibility of a subsidised place at an elementary training college.<sup>43</sup> Both Watson and Haynes are recorded as certificated teachers during their tenure at Charwelton. The key aspect that differentiated the women was that whilst Watson appears to have spent the whole of her professional life in that area of Northamptonshire, Haynes had gained experience at schools across the country, significantly in larger communities including Walton on Thames and Walton on the Hill just outside Liverpool. As such, the former was perhaps more in tune with the rural environment and local custom; for her the navy children were an apparently unwelcome challenge. No doubt Haynes had encountered a wider spectrum of both parents and children and the atmosphere in a small village may have seemed stifling and constrained. It is difficult therefore, not to think that the attitudes of the women were shaped to some degree by their contrasting career experiences and their comments perhaps say as much about them as they do about the children.

Edith Watson's negative experiences of the navy children had led her to resort to the use of corporal punishment, and she was not alone in dealing harshly with such children. In January 1896, Mr Walton headmaster of Carrington Boy's School recorded that John Musson, son of navy Richard Musson, was given one stroke of the cane. The log book entry is a little unclear as to whether the stroke of the cane was the final punishment or the catalyst for the events described. Walton records how Musson allegedly replied 'I shan't' when told to proceed with his work

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<sup>42</sup> Frances Widdowson, *Going Up Into the Next Class: Women and Elementary Teacher Training 1840-1914* (London, 1980), see esp. pp. 14, 39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.



and picked up a slate threatening to throw it at the teacher's head if further punishment was administered. Walton was forced to disarm the boy and punish him severely. He goes on to claim that this was a premeditated act on Musson's part as he had apparently told other boys that he would almost certainly throw a slate if he was chastised. This was a major breach of discipline, which according to Walton, represented a situation 'not without an element of danger'; he said he had treated the boy in such a way as to prevent any reoccurrence.<sup>44</sup> Maybe the navy community was less misunderstood by the 1890s, but it was still haunted by a reputation for indiscipline and seen to be on the margins of society. This certainly seems to be the image portrayed by Edith Watson's comments, and the dramatic event at Carrington involving John Musson only adds to this perception. Do these incidents indicate a group of children who were by nature unruly and had yet to learn the social norms? The evidence is not totally convincing.

I am aware of fifteen navy children who were admitted to Carrington school between December 1894 and February 1896, and a number are recorded as having been punished by Walton including John Musson's brother, William, 'for lying and refusing to answer the Head Teacher'.<sup>45</sup> But other than the entries in the log book referring to the punishments administered, Walton never drew particular attention to the navy boys as being especially poorly behaved compared with their fellow pupils. In fact the mid-1890s at Carrington were characterised by the liberal use of corporal punishment in response to a variety of misdemeanours including disobedience, truancy, dishonesty, lateness and poor work. Walton appears not to have discriminated when administering the cane and as far as I can ascertain the navy boys were not specifically targeted. He did, however, ensure that all cases of

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<sup>44</sup> SL125/C2/3, Carrington Board School (Boys Dept), Log Book. 1884-1896, 14 January 1896.

<sup>45</sup> NottA, SL125/C2/4, Carrington Board School (Boys Dept), Log Book, 1896-1907, 22 November 1896.

corporal punishment were recorded in the log book. The ability to resort to corporal punishment was a legitimate sanction available to all head teachers, although it was invariably only boys that suffered in this way, which may go some way to explaining its prevalence at Carrington. Charwelton was of course a mixed school, and the use of the cane by Edith Watson was a rarity, or at least the records would suggest so. Although the use of corporal punishment was common in schools, the seemingly harsh regime at Carrington was probably not typical, and may have been symptomatic of a fundamental lack of control. In a study of schools in Birmingham and Leicester, Susannah Wright has shown that the heavy reliance on corporal punishment could indicate that teachers were struggling to control their pupils, and that in extreme cases, perhaps analogous to that of John Musson's clash with Walton, this led to 'tense and violent encounters between teachers, pupils and parents' with the possibility of the 'danger of physical harm to both teachers and pupils'.<sup>46</sup> Parents did intervene if they thought punishment was excessive or unjustified, and a visit to the school in question to complain was not unknown. Such was the case at Rothley School when a local man was alleged to have used abusive and threatening language when confronting the head teacher following the punishment of his child.<sup>47</sup>

The National Union of Teachers (NUT), whilst accepting that corporal punishment should be reduced to a minimum, felt it should be available to teachers more widely, and did take issue with existing prohibitions on its use by assistant teachers, arguing that it fostered 'a spirit of defiance', and tended 'to increase the

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<sup>46</sup> Susannah Wright, 'Teachers, Family and Community in the Urban Elementary School: Evidence from English School Log Books c. 1880-1918', *History of Education*, 41:2 (2011), pp. 166-7.

<sup>47</sup> RecOLR, DE4607/1, Rothley School Log Book, 2 December 1897.

amount of corporal punishment inflicted'.<sup>48</sup> The union did have some success in persuading a number of the larger school boards including London, Birmingham, Nottingham and Cardiff to authorise certificated assistant teachers to administer corporal punishment.<sup>49</sup> This was reflected in regulations issued by the Nottingham Board, but these also contain guidance that indicates official policy sought to apply restraint and encourage the use of punishments that were appropriate to the circumstances:

Teachers should be made to consider punishment of any kind as a grave evil—a form of violence indicative of comparative weakness—and when they are *compelled* to administer it, they should make it as far as possible *natural* ... such as might naturally be expected to follow from the offence, e. g., enforced silence and quiet for undue restlessness, the re-writing with special care of some part of a carelessly written exercise, a period of sharp mechanical drill for idleness or ordinary disobedience.<sup>50</sup>

The reference to 'comparative weakness' certainly implies that the use, or more specifically, excessive use of violent punishment was viewed in the context of failings on the part of the teacher, and this may add to the impression that someone like Walton was unable to control matters without resort to physical force. The guidance must I think, be seen in the context of a shift in emphasis that was becoming apparent within society towards punishment more generally. Thus, the application of a system of punishment that was punitive almost for its own sake, gave way to one that was more nuanced in character which Martin Weiner sees as

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<sup>48</sup> MRC, MSS.179/1/63/3, National Union of Teachers, Special Committees Minute Book 1891-1896, Meeting of Special Committee on Corporal Punishment, 14 September 1892.

<sup>49</sup> MRC, MSS.179/1/9/22, *National Union of Teachers 25th Annual Report 1894-5*.

<sup>50</sup> NottA, SB47/1/1/17, Nottingham School Board, Regulations for the Transaction of Business Including the Management of Schools, 1896, p. 36.

being ‘calculated to promote the development of inner behavioural controls’.<sup>51</sup> The Department of Education for its part actively sought to limit the use of corporal punishment. J. S. Hurt maintains that the Department ‘showed a greater humanity’ in attempting via its inspectors to prevent excesses.<sup>52</sup> This approach is reiterated by W. B. Stevens who stresses that school inspectors often advised against the use of corporal punishment.<sup>53</sup> If the punishment was considered particularly severe or unwarranted, teachers might even face prosecution. One such case was brought before Middleton Cheney petty sessions in Northamptonshire in 1898 when Thomas Goodwin, schoolmaster at Helmdon was charged with an alleged assault on James Cochrane, son of the local NMS missionary, Samuel Cochrane.

Cochrane had initiated the prosecution claiming that Goodwin had used excessive force on his son for failing to follow an instruction issued to the class to fold arms. It was argued that since the boy was slightly deaf he did not hear the order. Nonetheless, Goodwin had told the boy to hold out his hand for the cane. In an act of resistance, James withdrew his hand before the blow could be delivered, and as a result Goodwin seized him, bent him over the desk and beat him on the back. The boy’s reaction in resisting the initial punishment was perhaps illustrative of a pattern of behaviour that has been shown to have manifested itself in a refusal to submit. If the punishment was considered to be undeserved it was not uncommon for a child to ‘remove their hand at the last second before impact’.<sup>54</sup> The NUT invariably supported teachers in their defence and such was the case here with the local secretary instructing the defence solicitor. In the event the case against Goodwin was dismissed. This despite the boy having exhibited a number of

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<sup>51</sup> Weiner, *Restructuring the Criminal*, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> J. S. Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes 1860-1918* (London, 1979), p. 164.

<sup>53</sup> W. B. Stevens, *Education in Britain 1750-1914* (London and Basingstoke, 1998), p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels?: An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939* (reprint, Oxford and Cambridge Mass., 1997), p. 74.

contused wounds the day after the incident, and the argument having been put forward that Goodwin's action was excessive when viewed against the guidance laid down in the Education Code that punishment must be reasonable and not excessive. The counter arguments relating to Goodwin's seventeen years of service with the school board without previous complaint, and that the boy was inherently troublesome no doubt played a part in the decision. But above all the belief that a school teacher should be allowed to maintain order without undue interference probably proved significant. As the defence solicitor maintained: 'The schoolmaster's authority could not be set at defiance, and he had done no more than to endeavour to maintain the discipline of the school'.<sup>55</sup>

### **III The Aim of Elementary Education and the Social Control Thesis**

Having discussed the use of corporal punishment in schools, it is apposite at this stage to consider the purpose of elementary education as conducted during the second half of the nineteenth century. There has been much debate amongst scholars about the ideology underpinning elementary education in light of the move towards universal education from 1870 onwards. Much of this has centred on the degree to which both the state and those organisations providing voluntary schooling, sought to impose middle-class values on children and prepare them for their role in life, and thus, perpetuate social hierarchies. More specifically, discussion has covered the issues of social control and socialisation. From the standpoint of the sociologist, Neil Smelser postulates that education is part of the process of socialisation whereby the individual acquires above all else, core values, and interpersonal and cognitive skills. Culturally, education is the 'mechanism by

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<sup>55</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 31 March 1898.

which societies transmit values, ideologies, meanings, and group identity from generation to generation'. He sees the history of the development of education as a struggle between various groups competing to impart their own values and interests. During the nineteenth century he highlights in particular religious groupings; the Anglican Church seeking to retain its grip on education vying with other denominations who resented its position and doctrinal emphasis. He argues that few reformers saw the provision of education as being in response to a perceived need on the part of the working-class and links the desire to maintain social order and stability with explicit social control.<sup>56</sup>

In his survey of the involvement of religious institutions in education, John T. Smith argues that the prime motivation was 'to prepare children for church and then for heaven'. He also claims that the concept of social control cannot be dismissed out of hand. Denominational hierarchies whether Anglican, Catholic or Nonconformist, could see school as a means of maintaining social order, and local clergy often sought to influence the religious basis of education whilst at the same time attempting to bolster their position within the community.<sup>57</sup> Brian Simon follows the premise that the educational system that emerged during the mid-nineteenth century sought to reinforce the hierarchical society in 'which each stratum knew, was educated for, and accepted its place'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the reform of education was not modernising in concept but predicated on preserving the status quo. A more nuanced argument is put forward by Anne Digby and Peter Searby. Addressing the issue of social control they reject the notion that state involvement

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<sup>56</sup> Neil J. Smelser, *Social Paralysis and Social Change: British Working-Class Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991).

<sup>57</sup> John T. Smith, '“A Victorian Class Conflict?”', *Schoolteaching and the Parson, Priest and Minister, 1837-1900* (Eastbourne and Portland, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Brian Simon, *The State and Educational Change: Essays in the History of Education and Pedagogy* (London, 1994), see esp. p. 28.

sought to indoctrinate working-class children with middle-class values per se. They promote the term ‘cross cultural transformation’, arguing that upper and middle-class values were unlikely to have been fundamentally different from those across society in general. They do make the important point that for social control to be effective required the imposition of free and compulsory education from the outset whereas it was not in place until the 1890s two decades after the 1870 Education Act.<sup>59</sup> W. B. Stevens firmly rejects the social control thesis. He argues that all education policy ‘seeks to have some socialising effect on those being educated, and naturally reflects the norms of the society which provides it’.<sup>60</sup> In her work covering childhood, Anna Davin relates how schooling was seen as part of a socialising process, children needed to ‘be broken in’ and acquire the habits of order and obedience.<sup>61</sup>

I see little merit in the concept of explicit social control. If the working classes and specifically their children, were the subject of such control, who were the agents of control? The state became heavily involved in the provision of elementary schooling from 1870 and sought to implement compulsory attendance; however, as indicated earlier, it did not seek to replace the predominantly religious based voluntary provision that already existed, merely to supplement it. In addition, it is suggested that differences were apparent both in middle-class values and also amongst the various religious denominations who administered voluntary schools.<sup>62</sup> The education legislation may have provided a framework within which all schools had to operate but both church schools and boards schools were of course administered locally and their effectiveness was dependent upon the assiduousness

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<sup>59</sup> Digby and Searby, *Children, School and Society*, see esp., pp. 26-28.

<sup>60</sup> Stevens, *Education in Britain*, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor* (London, 1996), p. 134.

<sup>62</sup> Stevens, *Education in Britain*, p. 15.

of managers. Education in general was certainly class based with elementary schools being predicated on the instruction of the working class, but as David Vincent has suggested, this did not necessarily equate to social exclusivity. Vincent has posited that schooling acted as a social leveller in so far as all children sat together and were in theory treated the same.<sup>63</sup> This is evident to some degree from admission registers I have examined. For instance, the offspring of both farmers and labourers attended local elementary schools, thus, potential employers and employees were being educated together.

Questioning the social control thesis, it seems to me, does not detract from the expectation that children should appreciate and come to attain certain minimum standards of behaviour and discipline. This is by no means unique to the nineteenth century or even to education for that matter. A key aspect of social convention since the 1890s has been predicated on the assumption that children in general should be brought up in this manner and indeed, modern experience surely reinforces this point. If late nineteenth century elementary education involved some form of socialisation then it is of course pertinent to children from all backgrounds, including the sons and daughters of navvies.

#### **IV Aspects of Home Life and the Concept of the Backward Child**

If one considers the behavioural patterns of children generally, and specifically the children of construction workers, it is probably true to say that their home life exercised a significant influence, and certainly cannot be ignored. For navvies it was disrupted by the constant need to move, and for those living in huts in particular, their accommodation was of a temporary nature. I previously drew

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<sup>63</sup> Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy*, p. 82.



attention to the fact that by the end of the century such accommodation had improved considerably, and it is evident that huddled accommodation did not necessarily equate with poor living conditions. I have also made clear that the taking in of lodgers, usually unmarried or unaccompanied fellow railway workers, was a common occurrence. Consequently, the children were used to sharing their homes with non-family members, and this no doubt influenced their attitudes and behaviour. A late nineteenth century observer relating his experiences of navvy life when spending time close to a navvy encampment recalls a woman telling him that her lodgers, for a joke, taught her older child to hit its baby sibling, ‘a characteristic specimen of the worse side of navvy life’ he opines. Yet he admits the children were not without virtue in so far as they ‘pick up some idea of manners from the instruction of their mothers, or more educated friends’. In general the navvies were ‘kind and hospitable’.<sup>64</sup> Of course the taking in of lodgers was in no way restricted to the navvy community, it was a widespread practice among working families.

I have come across an isolated reference to a lack of cleanliness in a navvy child. The log book of Rothley school contains an entry: ‘Sent John Thewsey home to be washed’. One’s initial reaction is that this was an extreme measure, and the boy was probably in a particularly filthy state. The very fact that the head teacher thought it necessary to make the entry implies that this was out of the ordinary, and not something that he regularly encountered.<sup>65</sup> The importance of cleanliness particularly within the working home has been likened to ‘a badge of honour’, with dirtiness reflecting badly on the parents, and specifically the mother.<sup>66</sup> I have been unable to ascertain any details about Thewsey’s family other than several references to his father who was summonsed for neglecting to send his child to school. The

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<sup>64</sup> Curtois, ‘The Navvy Woman’, p. 571.

<sup>65</sup> DE4607/1, Rothley School Log Book, 29 November 1895.

<sup>66</sup> Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives*, p. 129.

head teacher made no further comment with reference to the boy or his home background, but in the context of an urban setting, Susannah Wright has observed that log books were often used by head teachers to record what they perceived as parental failings, such as drunkenness or laziness.<sup>67</sup> A lack of cleanliness was certainly not limited to a single navvy boy. Leicester's Medical Officer of Health thought fit to comment upon its prevalence amongst many of the children admitted to the town's fever hospital, and may be indicative that this was an issue of relevance to large parts of the local working population:

Unwashed is not a sufficiently strong term to use, for in some cases hot water and soap, frequently applied, do not remove the filth, that must have taken weeks to collect upon the child. Every cottage does not possess a bath, but I imagine very few families are without a wash tub.<sup>68</sup>

In the minds of some then, there was little excuse for uncleanliness, but given the differentials in income levels experienced across the working population as a whole, and the often precarious existence of many families, some children were inevitably more deprived than others. This did manifest itself in children who were poorly attired at school, or those who were completely lacking in suitable clothing or footwear. On one occasion attendance at a Nottingham school was low due to sickness, but also 'a number of others have no boots to come in.'<sup>69</sup> At Carrington school, the better off families contributed items for distribution amongst those in need, and Walton was able to record: 'It is very gratifying to report that those children who are well provided with clothes and boots take a real pleasure in supplying their less fortunate schoolfellows with sufficient cast off clothing to make

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<sup>67</sup> Susannah Wright, 'The Work of Teachers and Others in and Around a Birmingham Slum School 1891-1920, *History of Education*, 38:6 (2009), p. 741.

<sup>68</sup> Borough of Leicester, 48th Annual Report Upon the Health of Leicester, 1896.

<sup>69</sup> NottA, SL125/F1/5, Forster Street School Log Book, 7 October 1895.

them comfortable.<sup>70</sup> Navvies and their families were not of course immune from hardship. Contemporaneously with the building of the London Extension, the NMS highlighted that many of the men building the Keyham docks in Plymouth, together with their wives and children were housed in very poor conditions in ‘cellars and dark rooms, in houses with 7 or 8 families, lodging-houses, public-houses and beer shops’.<sup>71</sup> The severe winter of 1894-95 caused the widespread laying off of many manual workers including men working on the new line. Some local schools became involved in efforts to alleviate the distress by providing meals to the children of families so affected. Thus, Belgrave school in Leicester gave ‘Bread and milk ... to 54 children for breakfast’ on one morning in January 1895, whilst at the Emmanuel school in Loughborough a ticket system was put into operation to enable deserving cases to obtain free meals.<sup>72</sup> A number of local authorities also established relief funds. Interestingly while the fund operating in Leicester was willing to include navvies within its scope, the officials at Nottingham refused to extend the help to navvies.<sup>73</sup> There seems little doubt that the question of finance dictated the decision here with the scheme restricted to residents and ratepayers.<sup>74</sup>

The one factor that perhaps distinguished the navy children from the local population was the often short duration of the children’s stay at schools. Whilst some of the children remained on the registers of local schools for two or three years, the majority stayed for less than twelve months, and in a number of cases for only a few months. Moving regularly with their parents as work demanded made for a disrupted school career and the constant need to adjust to new surroundings.

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<sup>70</sup> SL125/C2/4, Carrington School (Boys Dept) Log Book, 1896-1907, 16 December 1898.

<sup>71</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1896-97*, p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> RecOLR, 18D69/4, Belgrave School Log Book, 15 January 1895; RecOLR, E/LB207/16, Loughborough Emmanuel National School Log Book, 15 February 1895.

<sup>73</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 14 February 1895.

<sup>74</sup> *Nottinghamshire Weekly Express*, 15 February 1895.

Nonetheless, the children attending the various schools were not unfamiliar with the demands of schooling. Excepting those amongst the intakes who due to their age were being admitted to school for the first time, the vast majority had previously attended school. This is unsurprising given the gradual move to compulsory school attendance from 1870. The 1870 Act itself had given school boards the ability to make bye-laws requiring parents to send their children to school and had set parameters in terms of the age of attendance that could be applied, thus, ‘not less than five years nor more than thirteen years’.<sup>75</sup> Six years later areas without school boards were given like powers to make bye-laws relating to school attendance to be enforced by school attendance committees.<sup>76</sup> The 1876 Act also made it illegal both to employ a child under the age of ten or above that age if the child had not achieved a certificate of proficiency in reading, writing and arithmetic. The permissive nature of this legislation clearly hindered enforcement, and it was not until 1880 that all local authorities were directed to make bye-laws or face imposition of such bye-laws by the Education Department. The 1880 Act also prohibited the employment of children between ten and thirteen without a certificate; this effectively made attendance compulsory to age ten<sup>77</sup>. For the children who were of school age during the final decade of the century, legislation in 1894 raised the lowest age at which a child could obtain total exemption from school attendance by means of a certificate of proficiency to eleven, and the Elementary Education Act of 1900 amended the upper age for attendance from thirteen to fourteen.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> An Act to Provide for Elementary Education in England and Wales, 1870, clause 74.

<sup>76</sup> Elementary Education Act, 1876, 39 & 40 Vict., c. 79.

<sup>77</sup> Elementary Education Act, 1880, 43 & 44 Vict., c. 23.

<sup>78</sup> Elementary Education Act, 1900, 63 & 64 Vict., c. 53.

The lack of stability surrounding the schooling of navy children did have one very significant impact. This was the association that was drawn in a number of instances either directly or by inference, between the lifestyle of the navy children and learning disabilities or, more precisely, poor learning attainments. This is most noticeable at Hillmorton school where the headmaster makes mention in this context of several children who I have identified as being the sons and daughters of construction workers. He appears to have made his assessments of the children on the day on which they were admitted, and this for the purpose of deciding which standard they should be placed in. For example, Albert Sidley, aged about ten was described ‘as very backward, considering his age’ whilst Bessie Gunn, aged thirteen when admitted in 1898 was deemed ‘barely fit for St II’.<sup>79</sup> In relation to Ellen Rigby, aged eight, the connection between learning progression and a transient way of life was made explicit: ‘She is very backward considering her age, but as she is a child of a person who is moving about in the construction of Railways, and has therefore had little chance of making much progress’. However, he did express some optimism by adding: ‘the master has put her in St II, she appearing to be a child anxious to get on’.<sup>80</sup> I have noted a number of references to this issue at other schools where navy children were being taught. At Whetstone Church of England school Frederick and Elizabeth Johnson were assigned to standard I with the head teacher describing them as ‘very backward, probably owing to the nomadic habits of their parents, as the father follows his work on the railway’.<sup>81</sup> In a similar manner, the head teacher of Culworth school in Northamptonshire made mention in the spring of 1898 of eighteen children he had recently admitted. They were he said ‘in the majority of cases not so far advanced in their work as our own children,

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<sup>79</sup> WRO, CR36/33, Hillmorton School Log Book 1891-1902, 8 July 1895, 10 January 1898.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 23 March 1896.

<sup>81</sup> RecOLR, DE3525/3, Whetstone C of E School Log Book, 1893-1925, 5 January 1899.

much of the work, especially in arithmetic, has had to be gone over again'.<sup>82</sup> The head teacher of Quorn school had an issue with children he termed as 'casual' in so far as they attended at intervals depending upon their parents working patterns. Needless to say, he saw navvy children very much in these terms. Whilst I cannot be sure that he was referring to a navvy child, among the entries he made in his log book was the comment: 'I find that this girl is a most awful dunce, of nearly ten and cannot do simple subtraction or any of standard two work. She must be one of the irregular brigade'.<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, he appears not to be sure on this point.

That some navvy children did exhibit a level of progress that fell below what was expected was clearly evident to some teachers. But this does raise the question as to whether these were isolated examples or indicative of a general trend. On balance it seems unlikely that this perceived problem was limited to these specific schools, but if this was the case why did the issue not feature more widely in the school records I have researched? It has to be born in mind that the records for some schools in the areas affected by this particular railway are no longer extant, but perhaps more importantly in the case of log books, individual head teachers did have discretion to decide what information they recorded. That said, it might be thought that this was a matter of sufficient merit to warrant mention. It may be that some teachers had a greater awareness of the subject, or conversely that others simply did not wish to draw attention to the presence of the children in their schools. It is significant that the headmaster of Hillmorton school did not single out the navvy children in this respect; he also made reference to the children of hawkers who led a similarly peripatetic life, one of whom aged ten, 'hardly knows her

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<sup>82</sup> NRO, 94P/64, Culworth Mixed School Log Book, 29 April 1898.

<sup>83</sup> RecOLR, E/LB258/1, Quorn School Log Book, 2 July 1894.

alphabet'.<sup>84</sup> What can be said with certainty is that these references do fit in with the discourse that was current at the time with respect to backward, and also those who were described as defective children.

The issue of backward children came to prominence during the late nineteenth century due in part to the existence of several official enquiries tasked with investigating related matters. The years 1885-6 saw contemporaneous Royal Commissions established namely, the Royal Commission on the Elementary Education Acts, and the Royal Commission on the Blind, the Deaf, and the Dumb usually referred to as the Cross Commission and the Egerton Commission after their respective chairmen. The background to both commissions has been extensively researched by Ian Copeland with emphasis in particular on the emergence of the concept of the 'exceptional pupil' in relation to those children who were unable for a variety of reasons to cope with the demands of elementary education. Jane Read has remarked that many features of elementary schooling, particularly large class sizes and the form of instruction, did little to meet the specific needs of children with learning disabilities: 'Such a model was wholly inappropriate for these children'.<sup>85</sup> In fact the remit of the Egerton Commission was extended to include the consideration of these children on the advice of the Cross Commission, and it was the former that effectively gave substance to the hierarchical categorisation of these children according to the extent to which they were deemed to exhibit characteristics of mental impairment. Thus, five degrees of impairment were recognised: idiot, imbecile, feeble-minded, backward, and dull.<sup>86</sup> A debate centring on the identification of, and appropriate provision of educational

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<sup>84</sup> CR36/33, Hillmorton School Log Book, 28 January 1895.

<sup>85</sup> Jane Read, 'Fit For What?: Special Education in London, 1890-1914', *History of Education*, 33:3 (2004), p 286.

<sup>86</sup> Ian Copeland, 'The Long Shadow of Segregation', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 32:2 (2000), p. 13.

facilities for, ‘exceptional’ children was certainly ongoing at the time the London Extension was under construction. Although coincidental, the 1890s also saw the establishment of a number of special educational facilities, and a further enquiry, the Departmental Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children issued its report in 1898.

The terms of reference of the Departmental Committee were: ‘To inquire into the existing systems for the education of feeble-minded and defective children’ but this was not to include ‘idiots or imbeciles’, thus, it did not consider the more severely disabled. It was also tasked with ‘discriminating between those children who may properly be taught in ordinary elementary schools by ordinary methods and those who should be taught in special schools’.<sup>87</sup> Copeland has highlighted some of the evidence given to the Committee, and in particular that of Henry Major, Inspector of the Leicester School Board. Leicester had been the first board to establish separate provision for ‘children of undeveloped or feeble intellect’.<sup>88</sup> Dull and backward children were also assigned to a Standard 0 in ordinary elementary schools, both as a means of aiding their progress and shielding them from the rigours of Government examination. In some instances children were also held back in the infants school for another year; up to age eight ‘if they were very dull’.<sup>89</sup> Part of Major’s evidence quoted by Copeland is that which relates to the type of children who were taught within the Standard 0 classes: ‘“cases not of congenital want of development or arrested development ... but are cases of children who have come in as navvies’ children in the building of railways, and

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<sup>87</sup> BPP, 1898 [C.8746] XXVI, *Report of the Departmental Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children*. Vol. I—The Report, p. iii..

<sup>88</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 24 November 1894.

<sup>89</sup> BPP, 1898 [C.8747] XXVI, *Report of the Departmental Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children*. Vol. II—Minutes of Evidence, Appendices, Etc., p. 135.



immigrants from country districts where they are not very well looked after” ’.<sup>90</sup>

Copeland has drawn attention to the fact that although Major implied that these children were not necessarily suffering from inherent mental disability, there was perhaps a correlation between frequent migration and a lack of progress at school.<sup>91</sup> Major’s specific mention of navvies’ children, although topical in view of the works going on at that time within the environs of Leicester, also indicates that they were associated in some minds with the issue of backwardness, and this seems to accord with the comments of the head teachers I have referred to above.

Segregation of pupils, including at least some of the children of railway workers, within Standard 0 classes even if considered beneficial, does evoke an image of isolation. Equally it might be seen to exacerbate the perception of this particular grouping as social outcasts. Major did however, stress that attempts were made to integrate these children into the normal routine of the schools as although they did receive separate instruction ‘they do their writing and arithmetic with the others’.<sup>92</sup> It is of course interesting to note the suggestion that these children were also somehow less well cared for, and whilst this may be debateable, as I mentioned earlier, the home environment undoubtedly played a crucial role.

In his evidence to the Committee, Major made reference to the number of pupils in Standard 0 classes, and stated that in some middle-class areas children so assigned ‘ “are very few ... only 3 or 4 out of 600” ’ whereas ‘ “we have other schools in the slums, where there is quite a fair class—15 or 20” ’.<sup>93</sup> In a study of special education in Hertfordshire during the first half of the twentieth century,

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Ian Copeland, *The Making of the Backward Pupil in Education in England 1870-1914* (London and Portland, Or., 1999), p. 97.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>92</sup> 1898 [C8747] XXVI, *Report of the Departmental Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children*. Vol. II—Minutes of Evidence, Appendices, Etc., p. 137

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Ian Copeland, ‘The Making of the Dull, Deficient and Backward Pupil in British Elementary Education 1870-1914, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 44:4 (1996), p. 389.

David Parker has noted that the County and School Medical Officer ‘believed that a root cause of mental deficiency was the inability or unwillingness of some parents to care for their children adequately’ and that this was reflected in ‘the lowly social class of most families of children selected’.<sup>94</sup> This does perhaps suggest that there was a more widespread contemporary belief in a connection between both lower social class status and poor parenting, and special educational needs. That the lax attitude of some parents towards education, and in particular the need to ensure regular attendance did have an impact on their children’s progress was not lost on one HMI: ‘the worst kind of irregularity, that of children who through indulgence and indifference on the part of their parents only make seven or eight attendances a week ... The number of dull and backward children may be taken as an indication that there are always some children who almost altogether escape the trammels of school’.<sup>95</sup>

The Leicester School Board may have adopted what to us may appear a more enlightened approach to backward children, but it cannot be said to have represented the norm. Granted, other large authorities did follow similar policies at that time, the London School Board being perhaps most notable in this respect. The Nottingham School Board also ran two centres for mentally defective children.<sup>96</sup> Such provision was in marked contrast to the situation in smaller rural schools. Even within Leicester itself the board could not influence all schools: Henry Major

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<sup>94</sup> David Parker, ‘“Carefully Coached and Pandered”. Identifying and Providing for Children with Severe Learning Difficulties: Hertfordshire’s Trials and Errors 1914-1939’, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 28:1 (1996), p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> F. T. Green, HMI for Warwickshire. See BPP, 1898 [C.8946] XXIII, *General Report, For the Year 1897, by the Revd C.D. du Port one of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspectors, on the Schools in the East Central Division, Comprising the Counties of Berks, Buckingham, Leicester, Northampton, Oxford, Rutland, and Warwick*, p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> NottA, SB47/1/1/16, Nottingham Schools Board Triennial Report, December 1892-November 1895, p. 566, (bound with Nottingham School Board Minute Book, 1895).

admitted they had no control over denominational schools.<sup>97</sup> Separate classes or use of Standard 0 was no doubt possible for a well-resourced urban school board, but this was hardly a realistic option for schools like those at Hillmorton or Whetstone. Here the head teachers, whether or not they were receptive to the special needs of children such as those of construction workers, had to cope within the existing structure of their schools. The children were dealt with on the basis of what was thought appropriate to their intellectual abilities. The distinction between large authority schools and village schools in this respect remained an issue well into the twentieth century. In the 1930s the Education Department was still admitting that village schools were often at a disadvantage in not 'being able to offer a sufficiently wide range of activities and teaching method, or the stimulus that comes from a group of children of like abilities working at the same subjects'.<sup>98</sup> Of course this statement pre-dates many significant developments in the assessment and management of learning disabilities, but in many respects it appears surprising that the categorisation of mental impairments noted by the Egerton Commission was still in common use at this time. Yet as far as the causes of backwardness were concerned there remained a recognition that absence from school at critical periods could be highly detrimental for the children concerned, and this was linked among other things with frequent migration.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> 1898 [C8747] XXVI, *Report of the Departmental Committee on Defective and Epileptic Children*. Vol. II—Minutes of Evidence, Appendices, Etc., p. 135.

<sup>98</sup> Ministry of Education, *Educational Pamphlet No. 112, The Education of Backward Children With Special Reference to Children Who Are Backward Because They Are Dull* (London, 1937), p. 56.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, see esp., pp. 9; 15.

## **V Attendance, Finance, and Staffing: The Logistical Impact of the Navy Children**

The children at school at the end of the nineteenth century were amongst the first few generations to experience compulsory attendance, which for them was mandated by law to be until at least age eleven. The existence of voluntary church schools as well as privately run establishments meant that many working-class children had attended school, even if irregularly, prior to 1870,<sup>100</sup> but the legislative activity of the last three decades of the nineteenth century did make schooling the norm for the vast majority of children. Some historians have seen this as a defining moment in the experience of childhood. For Eric Hopkins this represents a transformation of childhood from ‘a life dominated by employment from as early as six or seven (or even earlier) to a life spent at school until twelve or even older’.<sup>101</sup> The theme is taken up by Hugh Cunningham who argues that the introduction of schooling in the late nineteenth century not only in Britain but across Western Europe was pivotal in the transformation of the experience of childhood.<sup>102</sup> That the late nineteenth century witnessed an evolving concept of childhood is given prominence by Harry Hendrick. This he describes as ‘new ideas or, in the language of social science, “social constructions” of children and childhood’.<sup>103</sup> He argues in support of an improvement in the way that both working-class and middle-class parents viewed and treated their children. Referring to institutional intervention more widely, Sian Pooley has made the point that childhood could not be transformed ‘without the cooperation of, or conflict with, both mothers and

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<sup>100</sup> For an account of working class private educational provision pre 1870 see Phil Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England* (London and Sydney, 1984).

<sup>101</sup> Eric Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: Working-Class Children in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester and New York, 1994), p. 1..

<sup>102</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (2nd edn, Harlow, 2005), p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 9. Social construction is defined by Hendrick as ‘the way in which our lives and our institutions are socially produced, i.e. by ourselves, rather than naturally or divinely given’; see p. 10.

fathers'.<sup>104</sup> Compulsory schooling can be seen as part of the movement towards mass literacy traced by David Vincent. He postulates a decisive shift in the distribution of communication skills across Europe from about 1860 with literacy becoming commonplace amongst the upper and middle ranks of society and a gradual spread to urban and rural workers. As a result universal literacy became the 'inevitable destination' with support from both church and state. Vincent also stresses the fact that schooling represented a sacrifice on the part of parents for much of the century in terms of lost earnings for the household. However, he suggests that increasing prosperity and the lack of suitable employment for youngsters meant there was greater willingness to 'commit a child to a sustained period of attendance over a number of years between about the sixth and the twelfth birthdays'.<sup>105</sup> This may be true in general terms but even when schooling was compulsory, as in England at late century, the demands of regular attendance and work, paid or otherwise, were often at odds.

The attendance of pupils was a constant concern for all schools not least because of the need to maintain a healthy average in order to earn the highest grant. In some cases this pressure led to a stressful existence for the teacher: 'Attendance worse and worse—most disheartening—av[erage] only 72 ... never felt such relief before, when breaking up on Friday afternoon for Easter holiday'.<sup>106</sup> Thus, if navy children were on the books of local schools the incentive existed to ensure their regular attendance. Other than a tendency for several boys attending Hellidon School who went home to the railway huts at dinner time and returned too late for their attendance to be recorded, there is no clear indication that as a group the navy children were more problematic than local children. Nonetheless, I have

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<sup>104</sup> Pooley, 'Child Care and Neglect', pp. 238-9.

<sup>105</sup> Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy*, see esp., pp. 11, 56.

<sup>106</sup> NRO, SLB76, Hellidon School Log Book, 4 April 1896.

noted elsewhere in this thesis that navvies were from time to time brought before the courts for a failure to ensure the regular attendance of their children. Ironically, the very presence of navvies within resident communities could be seen as an obstacle to regular attendance on the part of local children due to the extra demands placed on households. The head teacher of Rothley school complained that ‘the children are much engaged at home owing to the large number of “navvies” lodging in the village. The girls are most irregular’.<sup>107</sup> Overall the school inspectorate nationally appeared sanguine about the navy community. This contrasts with the concern shown towards the offspring of another group of itinerant workers: canal boat children. Canal boats were constantly on the move meaning that school authorities had great difficulty in monitoring attendance by school age children who resided on the boats, even though they had obligations under the Canal Boat Acts of 1877 and 1884. Paul Bowen has argued that in many instances schools did not welcome these children, and often refused them entry on the basis of lack of accommodation.<sup>108</sup> This seems not to have been the case with navy children in connection with the London Extension, at least I have no evidence to indicate that they were ever refused entry to schools. It was the continual movement of canal boats unlike the situation with navvies who at least remained in situ for periods of time, that gave rise to the belief that ‘many of the school boards and school attendance committees are alike ignorant of and indifferent to the subject’, and that further legislation was required to enable the ‘prohibition of the occupation of canal boats by children of school age’.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> DE4607/1, Rothley School Log Book, 1872-1907, 2 November 1895.

<sup>108</sup> Bowen, ‘English Canal-Boat Children and the Education Issue 1900-1940: Towards a Concept of Traveller Education?’, *History of Education*, 30:4 (2001), p. 363.

<sup>109</sup> Views expressed by John Brydone, H. M. Chief Inspector under the Canal Boat Acts, see BPP, 1896 [C.8248] XXVI, *Report of The Committee of Council On Education (England and Wales)*, p. 166.

For many schools bad weather and epidemics proved a constant barrier to regular attendance.<sup>110</sup> In rural areas in particular the needs of agriculture still influenced the structure of the school year, with the date of the long summer holiday dependent on the timing of the harvest. Ruddington exemplifies a community where on many occasions boys were recorded as absent due to being at work in the fields.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, where landowners and farmers were prominent members of school boards, vested interests in the form of a desire for cheap labour could overcome the demands of school attendance. Thus, many managers were content to pay lip service to the legislative framework that sought to enforce compulsory attendance. As one anonymous teacher recounted to the NUT: ‘Several of the children are employed by the farmers—the two worst cases I have, are boys in the second standard, who were away last year quite half their time employed by two members of my board.’<sup>112</sup> The failure of school managers to perform their duties in a conscientious manner was not limited to the enforcement of attendance. Soon after the appointment of Estelle Haynes as head teacher at Charwelton in April 1898, the death of the local incumbent, the Revd Valentine Knightley led to a rapid deterioration in the oversight of the school: ‘I never had such hard work in my life before. Unfortunately we have no clergyman and the managers never come in, so I have no one to advise me.’<sup>113</sup> Without Knightley’s leadership the other managers showed little interest in the day to day running of the school, so much so that in November of that year, ‘He (HMI) also noticed that the Registers have not been checked for nearly 6 months, that the last report remains unsigned, and that no

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<sup>110</sup> A. C. O. Ellis, ‘Influences on School Attendance in Victorian England’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 21:3 (1973), pp. 321-23.

<sup>111</sup> NottA, SL143/1/1, Ruddington Endowed C of E Boys School Log Book, 1876-1911.

<sup>112</sup> NUT Special Committees Minute Book, Report by Isobel Gleghorn to the NUT Special Committee on Rural Schools, 20 September 1895.

<sup>113</sup> SLB17, Charwelton School Log Book, 1871-1911, 19 August 1898.

manager's name appears in the "log" as having visited for a long time past.' <sup>114</sup> I referred earlier in the chapter to the dominant part played by the clergy in the management of church schools, and we can gauge something of this from the example of Knightley at Charwelton. For some the influence of the clergy could be overbearing and its effect prejudicial. One railway worker who signed himself 'A Welsh Blacksmith', and who was obviously not an adherent of the Anglican Church, made what was under any circumstances a rare intervention in matters of public concern. Writing to a local newspaper he made an eloquent argument against the state funding of voluntary schools, stating that teachers were often placed under pressure to bow to the clergy in matters of faith. His own child he claimed, had been treated unfairly and other children warned not to play with her 'lest she should contaminate their minds against the clergy'. When complaints were made that the conscience clause was being ignored, teachers who referred the matter to managers were often told by those in authority '“never mind, they are only navvies [sic] children”'. In what was conceivably a plea on behalf of all his fellow workers he concluded: 'Has the navvy done anything to deserve such treatment.' <sup>115</sup> There is an intimation here that navvy children may have been ostracised within the school environment, although in this instance it was more to do with religious belief rather than the social grouping per se.

The state of rural schools was at the forefront of NUT debate at the end of the century, with finance, attendance, and staffing seen as key issues. Lack of funding may have hindered many voluntary schools, but in the opinion of F. B. Gale, member of the NUT executive, 'the managers are, generally speaking more alive to the claims of education and anxious to treat teachers with fair liberality but

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 25 November 1898.

<sup>115</sup> A letter to the editor from 'A Welsh Blacksmith', *Northampton Mercury*, 5 February 1897.



CANNOT find the means'.<sup>116</sup> It would be comforting to think that rural school boards on the other hand, given their access to rate funding, might have striven to provide teachers with the wherewithal to prevent such shortcomings. However, some again saw vested interests as an obstacle to adequate funding: 'The rural School Boards seem to be very often more parsimonious—more cheeseparing—than the Managers, who have to depend on voluntary aid instead of rates ... to keep down the rates seems to be the "be all and end all" of their existence.'<sup>117</sup>

The admission to schools of navy children needs to be viewed against this background. Even before the railway construction commenced, the question of adequate accommodation, staffing and equipment had occupied the minds of inspectors and school managers alike. The Church of England school at Thorpe Mandeville originally built in 1864 exemplified many small village schools consisting as it did of a single schoolroom in which both infants and older children were instructed. Indeed schools of this design were still being constructed well after 1870.<sup>118</sup> HMI had raised concern about the lack of adequate accommodation as early as 1893 and despite minor improvements it was observed four years later that, 'There is not space enough to admit of the infants being occupied suitably to their age. It is very desirable that the school-room should be increased in size to provide better accommodation'.<sup>119</sup> Lack of staff to give suitable instruction to the infants was also an observation raised on a number of occasions. Inspectors could recommend a reduction in the grant payable if conditions within a school did not meet requirements. However, it seems to have been something of an empty threat in

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<sup>116</sup> NUT Special Committees Minute Book, Report by F. B. Gale to the NUT Committee on Rural Schools, 20 September 1895.

<sup>117</sup> NUT Special Committees Minute Book, Report by Isobel Gleghorn to the NUT Special Committee on Rural Schools, 20 September 1895.

<sup>118</sup> Hurt, *Elementary Schooling*, p. 167.

<sup>119</sup> NRO, SLB/156, Thorpe Mandeville School Log Book, 24 August 1897.

the case of this school as despite repeated warnings that the grant was at risk, the sanction was not imposed even though improvements were not forthcoming. HMI made use of the interim visit or inspection without notice to monitor what was clearly considered a problem school. It was not until 1898, just after the first navy children were admitted, that work to extend the school commenced. There is little doubt that lack of finance was the main stumbling block. The appointment of an assistant to take charge of the infants was dependent upon an aid grant for this specific purpose received in 1899, and a year later the managers were forced to write to HMI asking to be allowed to postpone providing a separate entrance to one of the closets as they were still in need of funds.<sup>120</sup>

The immediate impact arising from the admission of navy children to Culworth mixed school during the course of only a few weeks in April 1898, led the schoolmaster to concede that their presence ‘has necessarily checked a little the progress of the school’.<sup>121</sup> At Staverton the school managers recognised the extra work caused by the increased number of pupils to the schoolmaster and schoolmistress with a bonus addition to their annual salary over successive years.<sup>122</sup> School inspectors were also mindful of the developing situation. At Helmdon School, ‘the work of the school is carried on under difficulties owing to the presence of a temporary population connected with construction of the new railway’ with insufficient staffing in the infants department.<sup>123</sup> Here average weekly attendance had been about sixty in 1892 but by early October 1896 peaked at 115.6.<sup>124</sup> The very large intake of navy children to Hellidon school led HMI to

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<sup>120</sup> SLB156, Thorpe Mandeville School Log Book, 24 February 1899; 323P/53, Thorpe Mandeville School Manager’s Minute Book, 21 December 1900.

<sup>121</sup> 94P/64, Culworth Mixed School Log Book, 29 April 1898.

<sup>122</sup> NRO, 300P/72, Staverton Church of England School, Manager’s Minute Book, 1895-1898.

<sup>123</sup> NRO, LA1/ES/142/2, Helmdon School Log Book, 1872-1909, Summary of HMI Report 1897

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 2 October 1896.

note in his report for 1896 that ‘The railway operations which are being carried on in the immediate neighbourhood of the school have caused a great influx of children during the year, and it is not surprising that the Teacher finds some difficulty in maintaining the efficiency of the school’.<sup>125</sup> Attendance levels appeared to peak at just over one hundred by the middle of that year. This compares with a fall to the mid-forties by late 1898 when the railway work neared completion. However, the school appears to have had similar issues to that of its near neighbour Charwelton. The lack of a separate room for the teaching of infants was highlighted in 1892 and although a new classroom was in use by April 1896 the school managers were not overly extravagant in terms of its decoration given that even after most of the navy children had left it ‘could be improved by the painting of the bare bricks’.<sup>126</sup>

The disparity in staffing levels between small voluntary schools and urban board schools is readily apparent. Thorpe Mandeville was staffed by a single teacher, Martha Webb; an assistant teacher was not recruited until late 1898 when her daughter Mary was appointed to instruct the infants. A certificated teacher and assistant constituted the staff at Charwelton while Ephraim Watson and his wife formed the complement of Hellidon school supported by a monitoress. Ruddington boy’s school was slightly better staffed with a head, assistant and two pupil teachers. As the HMI comments indicate, additional teaching resources were never easily secured irrespective of any added burden arising from the navy intake. Allowing for the fact that it was a much larger school, with just under three hundred scholars on the register,<sup>127</sup> Carrington Boys School could boast nine staff in total;

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<sup>125</sup> SLB76, Hellidon School Log Book, Summary of HMI Report 1896

<sup>126</sup> SLB76, Hellidon School Log Book, Summary of HMI Report 1899.

<sup>127</sup> As recorded during 1894 and 1895. See SL125/C2/3, Carrington Board School (Boys Dept) Log Book, 22 October 1894; 25 February 1895.

Mr Walton the head teacher, a principal assistant, a certificated assistant and no less than six pupil teachers at various stages of their training. Carrington of course operated under the auspices of the Nottingham School Board, and no doubt both the school and the pupils were the potential beneficiaries of this association. Despite exhibiting a degree of self-promotion, the Nottingham Board's Triennial Report for 1892-95 does illustrate the fact that urban authorities could offer enhanced facilities and greater opportunities that were largely absent from small schools, and were reflective, one might hazard, of the 'best "Board" schools' that Estelle Haynes was so keen to praise. Emphasis it was claimed was laid upon sport with gymnastics taught in all schools, swimming lessons offered to all children, and football and cricket encouraged by the formation of school clubs. Periodic open afternoons were held in infants schools whereby parents were invited to visit to watch their children under instruction, and aimed at promoting 'a bond of sympathy between parents and children'. The board also operated five higher grade schools, where in addition to subjects taught in ordinary schools, the curriculum included conversational French or German, bookkeeping, commercial correspondence, typewriting and science.<sup>128</sup> Higher grade schools have been described as offering 'quasi-secondary instruction', although it has also been pointed out that access for working-class children was limited by family circumstances, and the scarcity of such schools with only sixty in existence outside London by the mid-1890s.<sup>129</sup> The NUT was again eager to draw attention to the funding gap that so favoured the large school boards. In his presidential address, T. B. Ellery made this very point: 'Voluntary Schools are almost entirely deprived of the advantages offered in the neighbouring Board

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<sup>128</sup> SB47/1/1/16, Nottingham Schools Board Triennial Report, December 1892-November 1895, see esp., pp. 548, 564, 568, (bound with Nottingham School Board Minute Book 1895).

<sup>129</sup> Pamela Horn, *The Victorian and Edwardian Schoolchild* (Gloucester, 1989), pp. 63-4.

schools in the shape of manual training in wood and iron work, cookery teaching, laundry work, Science and Art teaching'.<sup>130</sup>

From a logistical perspective, the increase in pupil numbers probably affected the small schools, particularly those in rural areas, far more than larger urban board schools. This was largely due to the very real differences in the level of financial resources, but I think it also reflected the essential nature of the towns and villages themselves. The vast majority of the villages featured here maintained small and fairly static populations of a few hundred at most, and the influx of a significant number of transient school age children represented an exceptional event which inevitably put pressure on the local educational facilities. For the schools in the large urban areas the outcome was probably somewhat less severe. Nottingham for example, was an expanding city growing from some fifty thousand inhabitants in 1831 to a quarter of a million by 1914.<sup>131</sup> Additional pupils resulting from the temporary settlement of the railway workers was merely one facet of the general management of demand faced by the Nottingham School Board, and engendered by population growth.

This chapter has highlighted the diversity that was apparent in the perceptions of the navy children on the part of individual schoolteachers. Such perceptions may have arisen in part from a clash of the social and cultural norms of both the incomers and residents, but also from the differing experiences and backgrounds of the schoolteachers themselves. We have seen how corporal punishment was regarded as a normal part of the experience of elementary schooling. Navy children were on occasion punished in this way but this did not necessarily mark them out as unduly badly behaved. Within the wider debate

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<sup>130</sup> MSS.179/1/9/22, National Union of Teachers 25th Annual Report 1894-5.

<sup>131</sup> John Beckett, 'Nottingham', < <http://www.nottsheritagegateway.org.uk> > (14 May 2012).

around the causes and management of backwardness, there was a recognition that navy children did suffer from the effects of migration, and an unsettled school career. As a result they often exhibited a rate of progress in the classroom that fell below the level of many of their peers. The need to absorb additional children did disrupt the normal routine of many of the schools affected. But for the small village schools in particular, the situation greatly exacerbated many pre-existing problems which the NUT reports suggest were common to rural schools across the country. This thesis has looked closely at the contact between the railway workers and various local agencies, and of course for the children the school represented a venue that gave them regular exposure to authority, and the chance to mix on an equal footing with resident children. There was however, another organisation which the children were almost certainly familiar with, and which for many of their parents probably came to symbolise permanency within their lives. This was the Navy Mission Society and its role during the construction of the London Extension forms the background of the final chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Religion and Home Mission: The Navy Mission Society and the London Extension**

On the 31st May 1895 a public meeting was held at the Assembly Rooms, Leicester with the Bishop of Peterborough presiding.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the meeting was twofold: to discuss the role of a special mission, the London Railway Extension Mission Society (LREMS), which had recently been formed to minister to the men employed on the new railway, and perhaps more pressing, to secure subscriptions and donations towards the estimated £1,500 annual running costs. Given the context, it is not surprising that a specific mission was considered necessary under these circumstances. Although a separate entity, the LREMS, was in effect part of, and operated under the auspices of, the Navy Mission Society. The latter, from its formation in 1877 was, as the name implies, the Anglican church's lead organisation in its endeavour to achieve a measure of spiritual and moral reformation not only amongst men engaged on railway construction, but throughout the wider navy community. Principally through its executive committee, the NMS coordinated the work of local and regional mission activity such as that of the LREMS, whilst determining overall policy and providing a basic level of funding. The NMS has been dismissed as a 'quintessentially temperance movement', and while it is true that this represented a branch of its work it would be incorrect to suggest that this was its only, or even its main concern.<sup>2</sup> Scholars of navvies such as David Brooke and Terry Coleman have explored the NMS but without giving attention to the much wider subject of home mission of which I suggest it formed

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<sup>1</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 1 June 1895.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Richardson, 'The "Broad Gauge" and the "Narrow Gauge": Railways and Religion in Victorian England', in A. K. B. Evans and J. V. Gough (eds), *The Impact of the Railway on Society in Britain, Essays in Honour of Jack Simmons*, (Aldershot, 2003), p. 107.

part.<sup>3</sup> My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate that the NMS was in many ways central to the life of railway construction workers and, welcome or not, the one organisation with which they and their families had most regular contact. Indeed, in extreme cases it represented a quasi-welfare system which was available in the absence of any alternative support.

## **I The Origins of the Navvy Mission Society and Home Mission**

The NMS is generally accepted as having evolved from the Christian Excavator's Union established in 1875 by Lewis Moule Evans, who at that time was the vicar of Leathley near Otley in Yorkshire. Both Evans and Elizabeth Garnett were active amongst the navvies constructing a reservoir for the city of Leeds at Lindley Wood near Otley, and Garnett is often credited as co-founder of the Union.<sup>4</sup> It was whilst ministering to the men at Lindley Wood that Evans became aware of the lack of any widespread involvement by the Church amongst navvies, and thus, saw the need for a coordinated approach to address the spiritual, moral, and material welfare of the men and their dependents. In 1877 he issued a written appeal for funds under the title 'Navvies and Their Needs' with the aim of establishing a dedicated mission to those he perceived as being subject to neglect. In his view the Anglican Church had an obligation to act so as to 'be no longer reproached for the existence among us of a class of men, a whole tribe of human beings, for whose moral and spiritual welfare less care is taken than for the heathen in foreign lands'.<sup>5</sup> We have already seen Evans compare the navvy to the gypsy, and here he uses the collective 'tribe'

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<sup>3</sup> Brooke, *The Railway Navvy*, see esp., pp.132-145; Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*, see esp., pp. 144-161.

<sup>4</sup> D. K. Drummond, 'Garnett, Elizabeth (1839–1921)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, Sept 2004), < <http://www.oxforddnb.com> > (14 September 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Lewis Moule Evans and Gerard Nevile, *Navvies and Their Needs, An Appeal of Behalf of a Navvy Mission*, (London, 1877).



to describe the men, indicative once more of an alien group set apart. Perhaps inevitably he also makes reference to the heathen overseas. As a result of the appeal the project gained the sanction and active support of the Anglican hierarchy, and by the end of 1877 the initial structure of the society had emerged with a central committee forming the main executive forum.

Although the NMS was dedicated specifically to the navvy community, the concept of mission was not of course in any sense exclusive to navvies. The fact that many construction workers were itinerant and often portrayed as isolated from the rest of society perhaps made them an obvious target for Christian proselytising, but other distinct groups of workers exhibiting similar characteristics were also targeted for special attention during the course of the nineteenth century. Initiatives were made by the London City Mission to connect with canal boat workers, and there were several societies dedicated to mission work with seamen including the Seamen's Friend Society and Bethel Union and the Seamen and Boatman's Friend Society.<sup>6</sup> Such narrowly defined missionary activity was however, merely one aspect of a far wider campaign to reform and 'civilise' the working classes throughout the country. Indeed, there was recognition from those close to the NMS that its efforts were no more or less important than those being carried out elsewhere thus, Canon Stocks of St Saviours parish, Leicester, when referring to the work of the LREMS, declared that there was no presumption that 'they thought navvies the worst class of the community, or that they needed it more than any other class'.<sup>7</sup> Missionary zeal owed much to the enduring legacy of the evangelical tradition. From its beginnings in the eighteenth century, the evangelical revival is

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<sup>6</sup> Bowen, 'English Canal-Boat Children', p. 364; Martin Crossley Evans, 'Christian Missionary Work Among the Seamen and Dock Workers of Bristol 1820-1913', in Joseph Bettey (ed.), *Historic Churches and Church Life in Bristol* (Bristol, 2001), p. 164.

<sup>7</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 1 June 1895.

perhaps most closely associated with the rise of Wesleyan Methodism, however, as Herbert Schlossberg has highlighted the revival also had roots securely based within the mainstream of the Church of England.<sup>8</sup> Much of the focus of missionary activity both within the Anglican Church and across Nonconformity centred on overseas mission. In part this reflected genuine religious conviction springing from the essential tenets of evangelicalism which as David Bebbington has shown included conversionism that is the need for individuals to undergo conversion and accept Christ, and activism, the innate drive of evangelicals to spread the gospel and seek the conversion of others.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Britain this fervour was allied with imperialist ambitions in so far as the empire was expanding throughout the nineteenth century. Susan Thorne has explored this theme in her study of mission within the Congregational church. Whilst acknowledging that those engaged in missionary activity did often show a concern for the welfare of indigenous people, the missionaries themselves ‘operated on the front line of the colonial encounter’ and ‘formed the advance column of imperialism’s cultural assault’.<sup>10</sup> From the point of view of the London Missionary Society, an ostensibly nondenominational agency founded in 1795 but which became largely dependent upon Congregational support, this assault she argues, saw a gradual change of emphasis by mid-century from one based solely on the gospel message to one that also focused on secular outreach. This included a focus on the provision of health and education services

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<sup>8</sup> Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus, 2000), p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), pp. 2-17.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford, CA, 1999), p. 9.

which were deemed necessary to achieve cultural change as a prerequisite of Christianisation. This reflected the ‘adoption of the civilising mission’.<sup>11</sup>

The civilising mission it has been argued, was concerned with both the regeneration of the working classes at home and the civilisation of indigenous populations abroad, particularly in Africa.<sup>12</sup> As such, it forms a link between the complementary activities of home and foreign mission given that both were an ongoing aspect of Victorian socio-religious activism. For Simon Gunn, the imperatives of the cross denominational civilising mission in its home manifestation were ‘order, discipline, subordination’. Acknowledging that it sought to instil middle-class values in the working classes, he also argues the movement says much about the middle classes themselves viz a viz their ability to cooperate and shape the social agenda.<sup>13</sup> Alison Twells has also stressed the links with the formation of middle-class identity in so far as they saw themselves as the natural leaders of society in terms of reforming the working classes. For Twells, the role of women was highly significant, particularly in relation to what she sees as ‘a spiritually sanctioned expansive “missionary domesticity”’.<sup>14</sup> But the prime motivation for the mission she believes was religious belief: ‘middle class Christians had *faith*; they believed the message of the Bible which gave shape to their entire spiritual and material world and an understanding of their purpose within it’.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century a parallel was repeatedly drawn between the heathen overseas in need of civilisation and the notion of heathenism at home. This image often centred on ‘darkness’: the dark continent of Africa, an image born

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Gunn, ‘The Ministry, the Middle Class’, pp. 32-3.

<sup>14</sup> Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class*, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

of imperialism, and darkness in the form of degradation, ignorance, and immorality associated with the working poor but more especially located in the urban slums. William Booth for instance, drew on this analogy when comparing the experiences of Henry Morton Stanley detailed in *Darkest Africa* with the state of London's East End: 'As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England'.<sup>16</sup> Alison Twells has linked the idea of the heathen at home and abroad to the contemporary understanding of the term 'race'. Although it could 'refer to a permanent, fixed, physical or biological type', it was 'closer in meaning to modern conceptions of the terms "type" and "group"', thus, elements of the population could be viewed in terms of race.<sup>17</sup> Lewis Moule Evans's use of the word 'heathen' in his appeal was clearly apposite, but the notion also helps to explain the widespread reference to navvies as forming a separate 'class'. The concepts of 'darkness' and 'light' also appear to have been utilised by the NMS to reflect its *raison d'être*: the reformation of the navy. There is an obvious biblical connotation, but in Chapter Two I noted the reformed navy who according to Evans passed physically, but more importantly spiritually, from 'darkness into light', and in 1908 this same theme was still current in a pamphlet produced by the NMS detailing its work entitled *Light After Darkness*.<sup>18</sup> Fear of the underclass and the perceived threat of social disorder, a concern that exercised the minds of many within the middle classes, has been highlighted as a factor in the growth of missionary organisations which sought to instil in the poor, 'acceptance of the moral and political code of their superiors'.<sup>19</sup> Whilst some home missions were denominationally based, cooperation was evident in movements such as the London City Mission seeking to reach working people in

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<sup>16</sup> William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London, 1890), p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, 'Navvies and Their Needs, Part I', p. 53. Navy Mission Society, *Light After Darkness*.

<sup>19</sup> Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 189.

large cities.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, denominational differences seem consciously to have been put aside in the interests of the communal project to reform the working classes.<sup>21</sup>

The belief that the spiritual and moral welfare of railway construction workers was a matter of some importance was first brought to official attention around the middle of the century. The Select Committee on Railway Labourers of 1846 expressed some concern about the ‘absence of provision, for ... religious instruction’, noting that the situation suggested a threat ‘that intemperance, disorder, and demoralization, run a better chance of growth than decency, frugality, and improvement’.<sup>22</sup> The deliberations of the Select Committee make clear that direct intervention in terms of religious and spiritual stewardship was at that stage limited to ad hoc activity on the part of local clergy, or initiatives undertaken by interested laymen, railway companies and contractors; however, there was little that could be described as organised or co-ordinated. As I indicated earlier in the thesis, the worst of the abuses facing navvies were addressed during the course of the century, but clearly the need, or at least the perception of need, for spiritual and moral guidance was to be an ongoing issue, and was still deemed pertinent when construction of the London Extension commenced.

In the decades following the Select Committee Report organised religion, and to a great extent that meant the Anglican Church, did make some more determined efforts to engage with railway construction workers, however, much still depended upon local commitment. On occasion this led to quite extensive operations as in the case of the Bishop of Peterborough’s Railway Mission formed in the 1870s to minister to the workers on the Midland Railway’s Kettering to

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<sup>20</sup> David Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Illinois, 2005), p. 99.

<sup>21</sup> Gunn, ‘The Ministry, the Middle Class’, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> 1846 [530] XIII, *Report From the Select Committee on Railway Labourers*, p. iv.

Manton line, and to which the Revd D. W. Barrett was seconded in 1876. The influx of navvies into otherwise undisturbed areas and the impact this might have on the local community seems to have been the catalyst for the creation of the Mission which was given formal sanction following a visit by Bishop William Connor Magee of Peterborough who was conscious that ‘ “they [navvies] need, therefore, some missionary agency which may bring the message of the Gospel to their homes” ’.<sup>23</sup> Magee was one of a number of evangelical churchmen appointed to bishoprics from the mid-century, including Archibald Tait to London, and Robert Bickersteth to Ripon.<sup>24</sup> Magee actively supported mission within his own diocese, sponsoring a Society of Mission Clergy with the aim of holding missions at least once a year in parishes at the invitation of incumbents. He also promoted the idea of using members of the laity as lay readers, seeing the number of such reach sixty-four in the diocese by 1891.<sup>25</sup> As such, it was no surprise that he should have been persuaded of the desirability of the railway mission. He was not overly judgemental and saw much that convinced him that navvies were often unjustly defamed for their behaviour, nevertheless, he was conscious that the very lifestyle of these working men and the environment they inhabited posed a danger in so far as they were ‘ “surrounded and pressed sore by the temptations incident to the life of those living in large numbers in huts and engaged on public works” ’.<sup>26</sup>

Magee’s words and even the earlier work of the Select Committee, do suggest a recognition that in relation to what was admittedly a small but distinct grouping, environmental factors such as social exclusion and living conditions may

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<sup>23</sup> Circular letter issued by Bishop Magee, 7 June 1876, quoted in Barrett, *Life and Work*, p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Hennell, *Sons of the Prophets, Evangelical leaders of the Victorian Church* (London, 1979), p. 57-58.

<sup>25</sup> Gerald T. Rimmington, ‘Bishop W. C. Magee and the Town of Leicester 1868-1891’, *Midland History*, 23 (1998), p. 130-31.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, April 1897, pp. 26-27.

have played a part in shaping what were deemed anti-social behavioural patterns. As I stress throughout this thesis these issues were in many respects of limited importance by the time the London extension was constructed, but they do have some relevance in the context of the much wider debate that took place during the second half of the nineteenth century which centred on housing. As we have seen, major concerns were expressed about the urban slums and specifically those in London. The issue was brought to widespread attention by the publication of the *Bitter Cry of Outcast London* by Andrew Mearns in 1883 which highlighted the terrible conditions in certain parts of the city and cast doubt on the success of Christian mission unless the housing issue was first addressed.<sup>27</sup> This view was in stark contrast to that of many reformers who believed moral reformation was a necessary first step, only then would an improvement in conditions have a truly beneficial effect. This was very much the position taken by Octavia Hill, and which was manifested in her management of housing stock in deprived areas of London using both volunteer and paid female rent collectors. Hill's approach has been compared to that of 'an authoritative mother, disciplining the characters of her unruly infantilised tenants'.<sup>28</sup> In essence she sought the moral improvement of the worst of her tenants which was achieved through the efforts of the rent collectors in educating them to understand the values of decency, thrift and self-reliance. Only when the tenants were in a position to appreciate it, was it worthwhile to improve the standard of the housing:

The spiritual elevation of a large class depended to a considerable extent on sanitary reform ... but I was equally certain that sanitary improvement itself

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<sup>27</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (reprint, London, 1992), p. 222.

<sup>28</sup> Ruth Livesey, 'Women Rent Collectors and the Rewriting of Space, Class and Gender in East London, 1870-1900', in Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (eds), *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950* (Aldershot and Burlington, Vt., 2007), p. 90.

depended upon educational work among grown-up people; that they must be urged to rouse themselves from the lethargy and indolent habits into which they have fallen.<sup>29</sup>

It was by no means unusual for the relationship between the working poor and those who sought to remould their characters and rescue them from degradation or destitution to be compared with that between the child and loving parents. It has been shown that the concept of the 'social mother' was widespread in relation to philanthropic activity by middle-class women in particular, who often equated the adult poor with children in need of both protection and discipline.<sup>30</sup> The parent and child relationship is also evident in relation to the labour homes operated by the Church Army, and which were intended to give short term accommodation for the destitute. As the Revd Wilson Carlile, founder of the movement explained, each home had a 'mother' and a 'father' and the men and women who stayed there were regarded as 'sons and daughters'. The 'parents' in this case were themselves working people but were nonetheless in a position to exercise authority over the inmates and instil appropriate values given that reincorporation back into society could only be achieved 'by cleanliness, by hard work, by total abstinence, by personal influence and genuine religion'.<sup>31</sup>

Much of the ideology underpinning Octavia Hill's housing work was also evident in the activities of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) of which she was a founder member in 1869. Envisaged as an agency to coordinate charitable activity, its methodology relied to a great extent upon social investigation, case work and home visiting to establish the veracity of applications for charitable

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Whelan (ed.), *Octavia Hill and the Social Housing Debate: Essays and Letters by Octavia Hill* (London, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> Eileen Janes Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class* (London, 1996), See esp. pp. 122-3, 143.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from W. Carlile to the *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 9 January 1896.



assistance. The interest of the poor were best served it was believed by a strict control of charity to prevent unconditional giving which invariably led to dependency.<sup>32</sup> Once more the benefits of self-reliance, and the virtues of middle-class values were pushed to the fore with the aim that each individual should develop ‘a sense of membership in society’.<sup>33</sup>

If there was a perceived need to reform large swathes of the working classes and bring them into organised religion, it is perhaps appropriate to relate this to the state of worship within the country. Much attention has focused on the 1851 Religious Census which sought to establish the prevailing situation with regard to both the number of people attending places of worship and the availability of church and chapel accommodation. In his report to the census, Horace Mann indicated that if all those able to attend worship on any given Sunday chose to do so there would be a deficit of about 1.6 million sittings. More to the point was his assertion that just under 5.3 million of the people who were in theory able to attend were in fact absent from church.<sup>34</sup> On this basis Mann was probably correct to say that ‘a sadly formidable portion of the English people are habitual neglecters of the public ordinances of religion’. He went on to refine this statement by pinpointing the labouring classes as being in the main responsible for the neglect, and particularly so in large towns and cities.<sup>35</sup> Discussing how the recalcitrant masses might be reached he did stress that they were ‘much in need of missionary enterprise’.<sup>36</sup> There has been much debate as to the statistical accuracy of the census given that all attendances on Sunday 30 March 1851 were recorded and

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<sup>32</sup> Judith Fido, ‘The Charity Organisation Society and Social Casework in London 1869-1900’, in A. P. Donajrodzki (ed.), *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1977), p. 212.

<sup>33</sup> Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain* (Aldershot, 1995), p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> BPP, 1852-53 [1690] LXXXIX, *Census of Great Britain, 1851, Religious Worship, England and Wales*. Report and Tables, p. clxvii.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. clviii.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. clxii.

there was no attempt to determine how many people attended more than one service. It has also been claimed with some justification that the census was in any case merely a snapshot and could not indicate trends over time.<sup>37</sup> Equally, there remains dispute as to how far and how rapidly church attendance was declining throughout the nineteenth century, although there is some consensus that by the very end of the century attendance had declined significantly, the more so in urban areas.<sup>38</sup> Of course, non-attendance at a place of worship does not necessarily equate to non-belief, and can say little about individual matters of conscience.

Irrespective of doubts subsequently cast upon the veracity of the 1851 census, it did give rise to contemporary concern, not least on the part of the Church of England whose attendances appeared to be suffering more than other denominations. The census thus provided added impetus to the home missionary endeavour. The nineteenth century certainly saw a proliferation of new parishes resulting partly from the separation of ecclesiastical and civil parishes, but above all from the need for the formation of additional parishes to accompany a policy of church extension which was concentrated on urban areas. Between 1835 and 1875 some 3,765 new or rebuilt Anglican churches were consecrated.<sup>39</sup> This policy no doubt sprang in part from fears that existing accommodation was insufficient, but it has been argued that it reflected the desire to counter the decline in churchgoing.<sup>40</sup> As the century progressed the mission room did become a common sight across much of the country as attempts were made to connect with the working class.

These were often consciously erected in areas where church provision had

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<sup>37</sup> A fuller discussion of the census has been afforded by amongst others: K. S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11 (1960), pp. 74-86; Callum G. Brown, 'Did Urbanization Secularize Britain', *Urban History*, 15 (1988), pp. 1-14.

<sup>38</sup> See Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (Basingstoke and London, 1996), p. 172; Robin Gill, *The "Empty" Church Revisited* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2003), p. 125.

<sup>39</sup> Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, see esp. pp. 387, 390, 405.

<sup>40</sup> Gill, *The "Empty" Church Revisited*, see esp., p.7, 33.

previously been absent. For example, in one of the areas of interest to this study, a non-conformist mission room was erected in Nottingham Road, Loughborough in 1892, in an area of the town otherwise devoid of a place of worship.<sup>41</sup> Such was the energy expended in the cause that at the beginning of the final decade of the nineteenth century the Church of England could claim that its home missionary crusade was in rude health:

The list of Mission Preachers now embraces upwards of three hundred names ... each year hundreds of missions are held, tens of thousands meet to attend them, and in this way the spiritual life and zeal of the Church are wonderfully stimulated ... Fifteen dioceses have constituted associations for lay workers, whose sphere of action varies from almost purely secular work to holding services in mission halls, and even in some cases consecrated buildings.<sup>42</sup>

What this does re-emphasise is that navvies, albeit outcasts to some, were only one community within the large body of the working class believed to be lying outside of religion. Some elements it was believed had never been embraced, and others had drifted away. Despite the existence of a specialist mission in the form of the NMS, all working people were the target of home mission.

## **II Outreach: The NMS Missionaries**

The above provides a context against which the NMS was formed. From its inception the executive committee of the NMS was in the main staffed by clergymen. Robert Bickersteth, Bishop of Ripon was a prominent member who during his episcopate ‘threw himself’ into city missions and supported the erection

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<sup>41</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 13 February 1896.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Church Progress and Church Defence’, *The Official Year Book of the Church of England*, reproduced in *Quarterly Review*, 173:346, (October 1891), p. 528.

of mission rooms in urbanised areas.<sup>43</sup> W. R. Fremantle, Dean of Ripon acted as its chairman from the time of its inception until 1893. In 1896, however, the chairmanship did pass to a layman, Colonel Robert Williams, M. P. A banker, Williams was also the longstanding president of the Church Missionary Society, and a man who according to his obituary embodied the ‘evangelical piety’ of the Victorian era.<sup>44</sup> Evans was to play only a limited part in the established society due to ill health and his death in 1878. Elizabeth Garnett in contrast remained a prominent figure both as a member of the executive committee and as editor of what was to become the society’s main publication *Quarterly Letter to Navvies* (renamed *Quarterly Letter to Men on Public Works* in 1893). Indeed, her fervent evangelical Christianity comes to the fore in her many contributions to the magazine. Central control and policy formation then remained very much in the hands of middle and upper-class people with distinct evangelical leanings. The essential aim of the society was stated thus: ‘It is the object of the Navy Mission Society to assist in providing on all works a Missionary, a Church, Sunday School, Day School, Night School, Reading Room, Lending Library, Savings’ Bank, &c, &c.’ I suspect this was left deliberately open ended in so far as Evans had envisaged that the society would strive ‘to bring within reach of the Navy the benefits already enjoyed by other working men’.<sup>45</sup> Evans also realised that given the lifestyle of the navy, it was pointless to minister to them in only one location. If a Christian mission was to have any hope of lasting success it was necessary to follow the workers from one project to the next in order to sustain the message. This issue was a source of some concern for Barrett when working with the Bishop

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<sup>43</sup> D. M. Hempton, ‘Bickersteth, Bishop of Ripon: The Episcopate of a Mid-Victorian Evangelical’, *Northern History*, 17 (1981), p. 186.

<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 17 April 1943.

<sup>45</sup> Evans and Nevile, *Navvies and Their Needs*.

of Peterborough's Mission as he considered it was very much a race against time. He found it necessary to adapt religious practices to the circumstances and concentrate on the crucial task of 'reclamation and conversion' rather than 'edification', given that 'no sooner had we got to know something of man's life and state, than we found he either had left, or was about to leave'.<sup>46</sup> To counter the problem the NMS, resources permitting, supported separate missions acting under its patronage which were attached to each major civil engineering project. It was in this way that the LREMS came into existence in 1894.

The NMS was fundamentally an evangelical Christian mission and preaching the gospel and bringing men and women to God was its central tenet. Moral improvement is of course intrinsically bound up with this, but we can see its imperative in the society's adherence to collectives such as savings banks and sick clubs with the associated connotations of thrift and self-help, and above all in its support for temperance promoting discipline and self-control. For Elizabeth Garnett 'the two greatest temptations which beset a navvy ... [were] drink and immorality'.<sup>47</sup> From the outset Fremantle was clear that the approach of the society needed to be both pragmatic and proactive. To draw the body of the country's navvies into the orbit of organised religion required a clear strategy. Expecting navvies to respond to a plea to attend religious services would have only limited success without proper preparation: 'first of all men need to be taught to desire and appreciate a service'. Education was the key and to this end 'the backbone of successful work under God's blessing is the night school, ... and the Sunday school'.<sup>48</sup> Much of the day to day work of the mission fell to the lay missionaries

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<sup>46</sup> Barrett, *Life and Work*, p. 110.

<sup>47</sup> Garnett, *Our Navvies*, p. 140.

<sup>48</sup> The Very Revd W. R. Fremantle, *The Church's Work Among Navvies, Being a Paper Read at the Church Congress Held at Sheffield, Oct 3rd 1878* (London, 1878), see esp., pp. 7-8.

recruited predominantly from within the ranks of the working class. In many cases these were ex-navvies. Coincidentally, the LREMS began its work at the same time as the NMS was reviewing its criteria for the recruitment of missionaries, and this gives an impression of the minimum requirements necessary. Potential candidates were to be at least twenty one years of age and to be able to produce a medical certificate 'of sound health' issued by a doctor approved by the society. In addition, candidates were to be supplied with examination papers, and were required to achieve a satisfactory standard in six areas: personal, Old Testament, New Testament, the church, mission work and night school.<sup>49</sup> Not unexpectedly, prospective missionaries were subject to interview and vetting to establish that their private lives were beyond reproach. There was for instance some doubt as to the legality of John Bellamy's marriage, and it was not until the matter was investigated and the marriage declared valid, that his position as missionary at Catesby tunnel was confirmed.<sup>50</sup> Even when confirmed in post a missionary was under some pressure to perform, and if progress was not deemed satisfactory the ultimate sanction was dismissal.<sup>51</sup> Limited references to salary levels suggest that missionaries assigned to the LREMS received in the order of £85 per annum of which a third was usually provided in the form of a grant from the NMS, with the balance coming from the mission's own funding. By 1896 fifteen missionaries were employed by the LREMS with twenty-two mission rooms opened along the course of the route.<sup>52</sup> Given that the annual cost of the mission had been estimated at £1,500, the payment of the missionaries would have taken up the vast majority of that sum. In terms of the overall funding situation, by 1896-97 the NMS was

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<sup>49</sup> LPL, MS 4005, Navy Mission Society Executive Committee Minutes, 8 January 1895.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 30 July 1895.

<sup>51</sup> LPL, MS4003, Navy Mission Society Executive Committee Minutes, 26 September 1883.

<sup>52</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1896-97*, p. 6.

contributing £380 per year, the railway company and contractors about £650, with the remainder presumably coming from donations and subscriptions.<sup>53</sup>

That the responsibility for engaging with the target population should have been laid upon working-class recruits was perhaps unsurprising. Its adoption had been anticipated some decades earlier by one clergyman who had himself made tentative attempts to engage with navvies working on the London and North Western Railway in the vicinity of his parish of Harrow Weald in the 1850s. The Revd Edward Munro quickly appreciated that his efforts were insufficient and that something more needed to be done: ‘Nevertheless, I strongly feel that this population loudly calls for a distinct mission-work of its own, it needs new machinery. It wants something more than the parochial system’. He also raised the prospect that missionaries might be recruited from amongst the navvies themselves: ‘so exactly suited as they are to go forth as navy missionaries among the navvies’.<sup>54</sup> The NMS was in fact not alone in relying upon the working class for its manpower as a number of other missionary and social reforming organisations dating from the second half of the nineteenth century adopted a similar course. The Salvation Army and the Church Army, although militaristic in style and hierarchy, both drew recruits from working men and increasingly from women. Some organisations in fact drew exclusively on the support of working women. These included the Belfast Female Mission which used women as front line ‘agents’ in its attempt to reach poor working women within the city, and Ellen Ranyard’s mission founded in 1857 and which initially engaged women as Biblewomen to sell Bibles

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<sup>53</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1896-97*, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Edward A. Munro, *The “Navvies” and How to Meet Them: A Letter to a Friend*, (London, 1857), pp. 14, 22.

and undertake a programme of home visits.<sup>55</sup> This strategy did facilitate contact on more equal terms and perhaps gave rise to a presumption that greater affinity and mutual respect would lead to better acceptance. When referring to the work of Mr Dennis, an ex-navvy and missionary in charge of the mission room at Cosby camp in Leicestershire, the Revd Ernest Everard, chaplain to the LREMS made this very point. Dennis he said:

had lived the life of and could enter into the needs and feelings of the men, and he was eminently fitted to assist and advise them ... was exercising a salutary and beneficial influence on many of the employees, who held him in great respect as their friend and helper.<sup>56</sup>

Continuity and familiarity became synonymous with the Society's claim to be the specialist agency in its field. Mandell Creighton, Bishop of London, argued:

the fact had to be faced that the Navy Mission, with its body of experts, had to be made the executive for providing suitable men to carry on this particular class of work ... it did that work consistently, the same missionaries meeting the same men on different jobs'.<sup>57</sup>

The Salvation Army apart, which did allow its recruits both male and female, a degree of influence in decision making, few organisations gave their working-class adherents leeway in this direction.<sup>58</sup> This was certainly true in the case of the other missionary bodies referred to above: the Belfast agents each had a lady superintendent drawn from the 'the educated and professional classes', and the

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<sup>55</sup> J. N. Ian Jackson, 'Evangelical Religion and Victorian Women: The Belfast Female Mission, 1859-1903', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55:4 (2004), p. 709; Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2001), p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 22 February 1896.

<sup>57</sup> From a report of the Annual Meeting of the Society, 29 May 1899. See *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1898-9*.

<sup>58</sup> Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down*, pp. 51-2.



Church Army's work within any given parish was always under the control of the incumbent and under the general direction of the diocesan bishop.<sup>59</sup> The LREMS was similar in this respect in so far as the Revd and Hon. Robert Grimston, secretary to the NMS, undertook the supervision of all missionaries, and Ernest Everard was appointed as permanent chaplain to the mission. A network of groups was also set up to oversee sections of the route, each with local incumbent clergymen as chair and secretary. This very much conformed to the policy that the NMS would seek to be inclusive and not attempt to usurp the authority of parochial clergy in so far as it would 'always and fully recognise the existence of the parochial system of the country, and will seek in every way to accommodate its plans and operations to the wishes of the Clergy in whose parishes its aid may be required'.<sup>60</sup> The working men and women in such organisations may have formed the bedrock of the activism but they were working to an inherently middle-class agenda.

As an organisation aimed at a reasonably well defined occupational grouping, the NMS did differ somewhat from others in that it looked to attract men who had previously belonged to that very grouping. This certainly implies familiarity with the work, but leaving aside what must be regarded as a calling to Christian witness, the lifestyle of a NMS missionary was also in many respects similar to that of the men he sought to influence. Itinerancy was very much a prerequisite of the role. The NMS was able to call upon a pool of about forty permanent or semi-permanent missionaries who were in theory available for employment at the separate missions as and when they were set up. Many of the missionaries were married men, and together with their families they often

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<sup>59</sup> Jackson, 'Evangelical Religion and Victorian Women', p. 709; Lynch, *Chariots of the Gospels*, p. 31.

<sup>60</sup> Evans and Nevile, *Navvies and Their Needs*.

occupied huts alongside the construction workers in the temporary encampments. The broad outline of the career of one missionary illustrates this general pattern. Samuel Cochrane was born in Scotland in about 1858 and after possibly working as a coal miner in Tweedmouth he spent some time employed as a labourer working on the Manchester Ship Canal in the early 1890s. Thereafter he left the ranks of the navy cadre to make the transition to NMS missionary, and by 1896 was stationed at Helmdon in Northamptonshire on the London Extension. His subsequent career apparently spanned at least another two decades with the demands of his calling involving geographical relocation. The year 1901 saw him at railway works at Hullavington in Wiltshire where he resided in a hut forming part of a navy encampment with his wife and family, and a further move led to the site of a reservoir under construction at Garstang in Lancashire in 1911.<sup>61</sup>

Living amongst the workers did help facilitate the missionary's daily activities as they were conveniently situated so as to maintain close contact with the men and their families. On the London Extension each missionary was responsible for a stretch of the embryonic route so an element of travel would have been involved. Nonetheless, they sought to ensure that as many men as possible were visited on a regular basis. To this end, most of the missionaries were supplied with a bicycle.<sup>62</sup> Mr Dennis seems to have been particularly conscientious in this regard as during one twelve month period he was said to have travelled no less than 4,000 miles visiting the men, and giving 200 addresses at various points along the works.<sup>63</sup> There was of course a form of protocol to be observed. As a visitor to the site of Tilbury docks noted while observing the work of the missionary: 'to talk to the men actually at work would be a distinct breach of faith, as tending to hinder

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<sup>61</sup> Census of England and Wales, RG11/5131, 1881; RG12/3155, 1891; RG13/1915, 1901; 1911.

<sup>62</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1895-6*, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1896-7*, p. 48.

them in their duty. But a book or tract may be placed under a stone or into their jackets ready for them to carry away when work ceases'. Welcome or not, visits to the men at their mess huts during the dinner hour were an accepted part of the daily routine: 'as long as the dinner hour lasts these visits go on'.<sup>64</sup> Ernest Everard also seems to have made a point of making regular contact with the men at the workplace, a captive audience perhaps, noting that he 'frequently addressed groups of the men during their mealtimes, when they usually listened with respectful attention'.<sup>65</sup> I have located one photograph that suggests that in addition to the semi-permanent mission rooms the NMS may have used mobile mission vans although there is no documentary evidence to corroborate this fact, possibly this was a one off event. There would however, appear to have been some logic in using vans more widely as the mission rooms were static and limited to the more obvious centres of population. Mobile vans would have provided another asset in the drive to contact as many people as possible and they were certainly adopted by other missionary organisations. For instance, the Bishop of Lichfield was able to report 'excellent work' in respect of activity by the Church Army based on the deployment of vans within his diocese in 1897, and horse drawn 'gospel cars' were a feature of Methodist evangelical outreach into rural areas from a base in Derbyshire at late century thus, freeing preachers from the constraints of only using chapels.<sup>66</sup> In addition to approaching the men at the workplace the missionaries undertook home visits both to enquire after the sick and family members. As such, the coverage was extensive and most of the target population would have had some

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<sup>64</sup> Buckland, 'A Day With the Navvies at Tilbury', p. 692.

<sup>65</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 22 February 1896.

<sup>66</sup> *Rugby Advertiser*, 4 September 1897; David Petts, 'Landscapes of Belief: Non-Conformist Mission in the North Pennines', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 15:3 (2011), p. 471.

form of contact with the mission, and of course this was an ongoing process possibly over many years given the itinerant nature of the missionaries themselves.

However committed the missionaries, there would always be some men who were determined to avoid all religious overtures whether out of indifference or even as a matter of principle. Patrick MacGill for one detested missions and by default organised religion for the hypocrisy he saw in its bid to save the souls of working men:

A missionary canvasses the working classes for their souls just in the same manner as a town councillor canvasses for their votes ... it is in the nature of things that piety should preach to poverty on its shortcomings, and forget that even wealth may have sins of its own.<sup>67</sup>

Obstacles could also be placed in the way which made it difficult for the missionary to gain access. Some of 'the roughest of the men' living in Leicester, and no doubt a prime target for the Christian message, were reported to be accommodated in common lodging houses, and the proprietors, no doubt conscious of their business interests, withheld permission for access and the holding of religious services.<sup>68</sup>

Whatever the cause, the inability of the mission to reach the men did on occasions call for a degree of ingenuity and this might mean adopting a course of action with a view to achieving more than one end. For example, within the Southern Division of the line the missionary Mr Bird established a sick club in that 'by these means he gets in touch with men who might otherwise avoid the Missionary'.<sup>69</sup> The creation of sick clubs was of course, among the stated aims of the NMS and whilst it did show a genuine concern for the wellbeing of the workers, it also promoted the important concept of self-reliance a key concern for those seeking to improve the

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<sup>67</sup> MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 257.

<sup>68</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1895-96*, p. 43.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

behaviour of the working classes.<sup>70</sup> By making provision in the form of a contribution of a few pence per week, there was the prospect of a material benefit when misfortune befell the individual member. In the case of this particular sick club over the course of a four month period during 1895, £11. 18s was paid out for between one and four weeks to nine men for either injury or sickness.<sup>71</sup> Without these payments the men would presumably have been without any other source of income.

### **III The Mission Room and the Written Word**

The efforts of the NMS were directed first and foremost towards the male workers, but in practice the mission sought to reach the entire community: men, women and children. The mission room was at the heart of this effort. A number of Newton's photographs record these mission rooms, and unsurprisingly they are fairly standardised, and austere but functional in character. Most are temporary structures of timber or corrugated iron, although a few were established in existing permanent buildings. Internally they consist of a single room with wooden chairs or benches arranged in rows with a lectern and a harmonium. All have biblical texts adorning the walls. Figure 5.1 shows the interior of the mission room at Loughborough. Religious services were a central feature of the missionary crusade and all were encouraged to attend the regular Sunday services. The mission rooms were, however, multi-functional in that they were also used for Sunday, night, and even day schools, reading rooms and as the venue for entertainments such as concerts and magic lantern shows. The objectives of the society detailed earlier indicate that the scope of activity was fairly wide which to a degree reflected Evans's belief that

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<sup>70</sup> Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector*, p. 31.

<sup>71</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1895-96*, p. 47.

navvies were denied much that was available to their working-class peers. There is no doubt that genuine altruism was evident in the desire to provide material and practical assistance, but the religious and moral tenets of the mission were never far below the surface. Fremantle's championing of education seems to have left an enduring legacy as night schools were certainly a key feature at some mission stations on the London Extension. This also explains why the subject was included in the examination papers that potential missionaries were expected to sit; some teaching ability or knowledge of a more specialised nature may have been desirable. The classes were aimed specifically at adults given that elementary school attendance for children was by that stage compulsory. In the main, classes concentrated on basic literacy skills: reading, writing and arithmetic, reflecting the fact that older adults in particular may have had little in the way of formal education. In some cases, more practical skills were taught such as ambulance classes and shorthand. The efforts of the missionaries in this respect were not always rewarded, as the advice given by Mr Burton to his fellow missionaries in 1887 appears to indicate. There might be an initial influx of men to the classes, but a lack of ability and commitment on the part of some might lead to disappointment: 'After a time he [the missionary] will find some are **lazy** and won't work, others get **discouraged**, especially with figures, and will fall away.'<sup>72</sup> However, the spiritual agenda underpinning night school was not hard to find; classes might end with 'a short prayer offered, and a hymn sung', and there was the hope if not expectation of furthering the recipient's religious instruction: 'the best regulated and most successful night school fails if it is not a stepping stone to a Bible class'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Quarterly Letter to Navvies*, No 35, Mar 1887.

<sup>73</sup> Garnett, *Our Navvies*, p. 113.

The written word is obviously a much used method by which to communicate a message and the NMS fully appreciated the potential presented by this particular medium. The type of literature that railway workers and their families, or the working classes in general for that matter, might read was of concern. This was particularly the case in the home but at least in a more public arena such as the school there was scope for middle-class surveillance.<sup>74</sup> Provision of reading rooms and libraries by the mission whilst proving a means of recreation, could also facilitate the circulation of literature deemed to be of the right moral tone and thus 'improving' in nature. The promotion of quality literature was not the only positive aspect of the reading room; its availability to the men during the evening in particular, would it was hoped, prove a worthy alternative to the public house.<sup>75</sup> Distribution of literature to individuals or to homes was also a favoured way of introducing religious themes, but above all it was another tactic that could be employed to make contact with the families, thus, it brought 'much useful religious literature into the homes of the men, and helped the missionary and his helpers to get about amongst them'.<sup>76</sup> The NMS relied heavily on the output of the Religious Tract Society which had been founded in 1799 as an evangelical society to distribute religious reading to a working-class audience. As early as the 1840s it was publishing over 15 million tracts a year and at the end of the nineteenth century it was making grants of tracts to many organisations in the form of free or subsidised material.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the NMS acknowledged a debt of gratitude for the

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<sup>74</sup> Troy Boone, *Youth of Darkest England: Working Class Children at the Heart of Victorian Empire*, (London, 2005). p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Garnett, 'Navydom in the North', p. 405.

<sup>76</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1897-98*, p. 51.

<sup>77</sup> Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford and New York, 2006), p. 18; Aileen Fyfe, 'Commerce and Philanthropy: The Religious Tract Society and the Business of Publishing', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9:2 (2004), p. 179.

*Figure 5.1: Interior of Mission Room at Loughborough*



*Source: The Newton Collection. Reproduced by permission of Leicestershire County Council.*



support lent by ‘the great leading Tract Societies of the country’.<sup>78</sup> Despite their ubiquity, it is perhaps unsurprising that doubt has been cast on the use of tracts as an effective method of promoting religious or moral messages amongst the working population. They were simply ignored or seen ‘as irrelevant in the lives of many of the working classes’.<sup>79</sup> As we have seen, religiously inspired literature of a more broadly based character such as *Leisure Hour* and *Quiver* did become increasingly popular although they were aimed essentially at a middle-class readership. Frank Murray has noted that the *British Workman*, an illustrated broadsheet which began publication in 1855 proved more successful in conveying a religious message to working people than tracts due the fact that it gave a ‘more visually attractive and persuasive face to religion and temperance publications’.<sup>80</sup> The example provided by the success of these publications may have influenced the NMS in its decision to produce its own ‘in house’ journal the *Quarterly Letter*, although it was intended for a limited readership within the navy community. It was above all else heavy with Christian didacticism. By the 1890s the publication was standardised and simple in format, and rarely carried illustrations. It usually contained an introduction by Elizabeth Garnett under the title ‘Dear Friends’ which provided a platform for her own Christian witness. This was followed by a main article with a religious theme, and reports or ‘observations’ from missionaries based at mission stations around the country. For some of its readers, the less overtly religious content may have held greater interest. This included a ‘wanted’ section whereby people could seek news of men who might be engaged on construction work, and a summary of all construction projects being undertaken across the country.

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<sup>78</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1895.*

<sup>79</sup> Murray, ‘Often Taken Where a Tract is Refused’, pp. 151-2.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

#### **IV Looking to the Future?: Targeting the Children**

Mission Sunday schools were ubiquitous, and seem to have been well patronised. For instance, on the stretch of the line running from East Leake in Nottinghamshire to Aylestone just south of Leicester, the Mission was able to report that during a thirty-five week period between April 1896 and April 1897, 1,572 had attended Sunday school with an average attendance of forty-three.<sup>81</sup> The apparent success of the Sunday schools in attracting children suggests that the railway communities were very much in tune with the rest of working-class society in this respect. Sunday schools were present in large numbers across all denominations, and according to Hugh McLeod the majority of working-class children attended Sunday school between the ages of five and thirteen, and that as a proportion of the population aged under fifteen, attendance reached a peak of fifty per-cent between 1880 and 1914.<sup>82</sup> The Church of England had been particularly successful in attracting youngsters to its Sunday schools at mid-century, capturing over forty per cent of all recruits.<sup>83</sup> That most parents, non-churchgoers included, sent their children to Sunday school has also been stressed by David Hempton.<sup>84</sup> Such schools had been important as a means whereby children could achieve a basic level of literacy, but this aspect was of less relevance by the late nineteenth century by virtue of compulsory school attendance.<sup>85</sup> Among the possible reasons put forward for the popularity of the Sunday school are the desire of parents to get their children out of the house for a period on a Sunday, and the contribution it made to working-class culture and more specifically to a youth sub-culture in so far

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<sup>81</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1896-97*, p. 47.

<sup>82</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*, p. 78-79.

<sup>83</sup> K. D. M. Snell, 'The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales, Denominational Control and Working-Class Culture', *Past and Present*, 164 (1999), p. 164.

<sup>84</sup> David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c. 1750-1900* (London and New York, 1996), p. 66.

<sup>85</sup> Snell, 'The Sunday-School Movement', p. 129.

as anniversary celebrations, prizes and outings were a recognised feature.<sup>86</sup> The Mission Sunday schools certainly conformed to this pattern given that the summer excursion and tea was an annual event as was the awarding of prizes to regular attenders. There was also an annual appeal among mission supporters for the donation of Christmas gifts particularly toys and clothes, with missionaries providing details of the number of children at the various locations. To a degree this represented reward for appropriate behaviour as the distribution of gifts was linked with attendance at Sunday school. Reporting on Christmas 1898 Elizabeth Garnett expressed consternation that some missionaries had been asked to ‘guess’ numbers with the result that they were over supplied and thus, gifts were given to ‘those who did not deserve them by attendance at the Sunday Schools’.<sup>87</sup> The view advanced that children themselves wanted to attend and actually enjoyed the experience especially with the prospect of the treats on offer must have validity.<sup>88</sup> The appeal of Sunday school within the wider population and the number of children that could be involved with the annual treat can be gauged from local press reports. Thus, the Sunday school attached to All Saints church, Loughborough attracted some 700 children to its treat in July 1896.<sup>89</sup> Given that the NMS was an Anglican organisation there was perhaps a natural link between the Sunday schools it operated and the Church of England day schools which, as we have seen, many of the navy children attended, particularly in rural areas. Of course it was not always possible to run a mission Sunday school, and some of the railway children may have attended local Sunday schools. Equally, cooperation between mission and

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<sup>86</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*, p. 78; David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 125; James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford, 1976), p. 314.

<sup>87</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1898-1899*, p. 31.

<sup>88</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*, p. 81.

<sup>89</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 16 July 1896.

Anglican Sunday schools may have taken place. At one Northamptonshire village in 1895, the annual church Sunday school tea at the vicarage was a much larger affair than had previously been the case because: 'The number of children has greatly increased since last year, in consequence of the M. S. & L. extension bringing a great many strangers into the village.'<sup>90</sup> Whatever the situation prevailing here, the navvy children appear far from isolated and were gradually being absorbed into the normal patterns of village life.

For the churches in general, and this applies equally to the Mission, children were 'a critical point of entry into the working-class community' and represented 'pure potential', and to connect with the young generation might bring its own reward.<sup>91</sup> Sunday school presented the opportunity to lay foundations for the future hopefully without prior prejudice, in terms of a specific denominational form of the Christian message. There was as well, the opportunity to develop interest in associated youth groups for example, the Band of Hope which championed the cause of temperance.<sup>92</sup> As Lilian Shiman has detailed, the Band of Hope movement dated from 1847 and although non-denominational, individual bands often associated with a particular denomination. It recruited mainly working-class children, with membership entailing regular meetings and parades as well as taking the pledge of teetotalism although only with parental permission.<sup>93</sup> Sunday school also provided a means of access to the parents. If they took interest in their children's activities or took heed of the message brought into the home they could be encouraged to engage with religion or at least take on board the moral lessons.

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<sup>90</sup> *Northampton Mercury*, 6 September 1895.

<sup>91</sup> Thorne, *Congregational Missions*, p. 145.

<sup>92</sup> A Band of Hope was certainly established at Loughborough and in connection with the Mission at the London end of the route. See *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 9 July 1896; *Annual Report of the Navvy Mission Society, 1897-98*, p. 65.

<sup>93</sup> Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (Basingstoke and London, 1988), p. 134-141.

No doubt there were successes on both counts, but for the most part however, reality did not always match expectations. Attendance at Sunday school did not necessarily lead to adult church attendance with perhaps only a minority of scholars going on to become church members.<sup>94</sup> Equally, with reference to the example of temperance, taking the pledge at an early age did not automatically translate into adult abstinence nor did it lead in many instances to a change of habit on the part of parents.<sup>95</sup> The Sunday school then, was a favoured medium for promoting both a religious and moral message among the children, but it was recognised that it had limitations in this respect. It probably had less appeal or relevance to those youngsters who had entered the world of work and were employed on the railway. The need to engage with the ‘nippers’ seems to have been a matter of some concern. One supporter of the Mission was eager to impress the importance of targeting these youngsters whilst they were still impressionable. They should be encouraged to come to the mission room for amusement and instruction and in this way it might be possible to ‘keep them away from other and evil influences’.<sup>96</sup>

The education of navy children by the Mission extended to day schooling, although this was very much the exception. Where such schooling was concerned, NMS policy was that each case should be considered on its own merit. The necessity of ensuring some provision for the education of the children of itinerant construction workers had of course been evident from earlier in the century, but successive education legislation during the latter half of the century had made such concerns in the main redundant. It was only in the case of works which were situated in remote districts and thus, the children effectively excluded from local schools by virtue of the distances involved, was there a need to make provision. For

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<sup>94</sup> Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture*, p. 125.

<sup>95</sup> Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink*, p. 154.

<sup>96</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1897-1909*, p. 18.

this reason a school was set up contemporaneously with the London Extension at the isolated site of the Cardiff waterworks Cwn Taff reservoir. It was recognised that the children of men working on the new railway would in the main attend elementary schools within the communities bordering the route. Nonetheless, a mission school was established at the site of the hutted encampment close to Catesby tunnel. Ironically, the tunnel was not particularly remote, despite being several miles from the nearest village, and access across country to adjacent schools was not difficult especially in light of the distances that children in general might be expected to walk to and from school on a daily basis. In fact, as described in the previous chapter, many of the children of the men engaged on the construction of the tunnel did attend either Charwelton or Hellidon school. Clearly the mission was reacting to a perceived need, and it may be that the pressure on these schools in terms of accommodation was just too great, but there is no evidence to indicate that any children were refused entry.

The mission school closed in September 1897 by which time much of the work on the tunnel, and the route in general, had been completed. However, work continued at a reduced level for another twelve months, and several children did subsequently transfer to Hellidon school. Parents may in any case have been exercising choice prior to this as at least two children moved to Hellidon well before closure.<sup>97</sup> Despite a fairly healthy attendance which averaged thirty-six during 1896, even by the standards of many small village schools and the curriculum then prescribed, the mission school does appear to have been somewhat limited in scope which no doubt reflected a lack of resources. The school's main income was a grant of £60 from the NMS of which £52 per annum was paid to a

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<sup>97</sup> ZB 122/69, Hellidon School Admission Register, 1875-1932.

schoolmistress; for a period immediately prior to closure this was Mrs Bellamy, wife of the resident missionary John Bellamy. Attention was directed to the core elements of reading, writing and arithmetic which were taught to standard IV, and drill, singing and needlework for the girls also featured. Perhaps unsurprisingly religious instruction was ‘carefully attended to’. The Revd Waters, rector of nearby Staverton and secretary to the local LREM group, acted a manager thus, ensuring a degree of clerical supervision. Assistance, but which I take to be financial, was also provided by Mr Attenborough, beneath whose land the tunnel was cut, and by Lord and Lady Knightley of Fawsley.<sup>98</sup>

## **V Social Action in Practice**

Reference to assistance to the Mission school from members of the local community does bring into focus the issue of how the NMS sought to attract support across a wider front to further its work. Paid missionaries constituted the mainstay of the frontline effort; however, this was insufficient in itself if the Mission wished to reach the navy community across the range of strategies it sought to employ. The fact that the Bishop of Peterborough held the chairmanship of the LREMS did ensure that a high profile churchman was at its head, and both Grimston and Everard seem to have played not insignificant roles in achieving publicity, and raising funds for the mission. The public meeting, such as that described at the opening of this chapter was a useful means not only of seeking financial aid, but also bringing the aims and scope of work to the attention of those within the relevant districts. Grimston for instance, was reported as having urged the elite of the town and surrounding countryside, assembled for the opening of the

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<sup>98</sup> The details of the Catesby mission school are based on information contained in the annual reports of the NMS. See *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1895-96*, p. 45; *1896-97*, pp. 49-50; *1897-98*, p. 54.

Brackley mission room in December 1895 that: 'The public could help the mission in many ways, as Sunday school teachers, and in getting up entertainments, &c'.<sup>99</sup> No doubt at the invitation of the incumbents, Everard made a regular appearance in the pulpits of local churches preaching on behalf of the navy mission and appealing for funds to carry on the work. Among the offertories of parish churches might be those in respect of special objects like the £7 10s collected for the navy mission at Loughborough during 1897-98.<sup>100</sup> The missionaries themselves were often also active in the community raising the profile of the work they carried out. Giving a lecture on the new railway at New Basford, Mr Dawson Parsons, missionary for the northern most part of the route summed up the objective of the mission: 'He [the navy] was rather a rough man, and the mission endeavoured by literature, social intercourse, and public services, to lead him into the right path'.<sup>101</sup> As many of my references indicate, the NMS did of course capture the attention of the press from time to time. Granted, most entries in newspapers did not record run of the mill events, but rather those that involved local dignitaries. The opening of the Brackley mission room was one such occasion as was the opening of an exhibition and sale in aid of the mission by Mrs John Wright wife of the Sheriff of Nottingham in 1896.<sup>102</sup> Such items were obviously deemed to be of interest to the readership and had the added benefit of raising awareness of the Mission.

The public was seemingly not slow to respond to the promptings issued by those closely involved in the work of the Mission. Although not detailed, references in the records of the NMS and local newspapers indicate that men and particularly women came forward to assist in fund raising and offer practical help with

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<sup>99</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 5 December 1895.

<sup>100</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 16 April 1898.

<sup>101</sup> *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 14 December 1895.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 August 1896.



teaching, concerts, and entertainments in the mission rooms, sales and exhibitions. The NMS were perhaps fortunate, like so much other missionary philanthropic activity throughout the nineteenth century, in being able to rely in large part on the concept of Christian service that carried resonance for so many middle and upper-class men and women which again harks back to evangelical traditions. As Frank Prochaska has pinpointed, this manifested itself in the growth of voluntary association and the freedom to engage in activities often of a missionary character without the fear of state intervention. This reflected the fact that ‘benevolence, and neighbourliness, self-help and helping others, were among the most urgent of Christian values’.<sup>103</sup>

Reference to the involvement of women does lead logically to consideration of the role that women played in public affairs, and particularly in the field of philanthropy. Interestingly, Elizabeth Garnett was the only female member of the executive committee of the NMS to hold office for any length of time. Given that she was instrumental in the formation of the society her continued association is perhaps to be expected, but the situation points to male hegemony in so far as in an organisation such as the NMS it was men who in the main still determined the agenda. Garnett may well exemplify those women whom it has been postulated had greater success in achieving positions of some influence by virtue of being single, or in Garnett’s case widowed. Such women it is argued, were often less constrained by both family and motherhood and the property qualifications for municipal franchise that applied to married women until 1894.<sup>104</sup> Frank Prochaska has contended that for middle-class women in general, philanthropy was seen as an obvious vocation given that many were otherwise restricted in the range of

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<sup>103</sup> Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain*, p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain 1815-1867* (Oxford and New York, 2009), p. 260; Martin, ‘Single Women and Philanthropy’, 399.

activities open to them. Philanthropy was a natural extension of the domestic sphere, enabling women to apply their experiences to the world outside of the home.<sup>105</sup> Although as I indicated above there is a lack of detail, most of the women who assisted with the LREMS at local level appear to be middle class. Elizabeth Garnett did issue a regular call in the annual reports of the NMS for women to form ‘Guilds of Help’ as a practical way of getting involved. In the main the women who did come forward were limited to a strictly supporting role and were divorced from the decision making process. There are a few references to the wives and daughters of clergymen and this may to some extent reflect an obligation to present a visible public profile with regard to philanthropic activity due to family position.<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, I have found one reference in the records of the NMS to a Miss Watson, who worked with the men building the Cardiff Dry Dock in the years 1895-6. Other than the fact that she offered to ‘work the station’ which presumably means she acted as a missionary or in lieu of a missionary, and that she may have come from Bristol there are no details as to her background.<sup>107</sup> She was presumably unmarried and probably a woman of independent means as she agreed to work for thirty pounds per annum merely to cover her expenses. However, in accordance with the Society’s policy that all missionary activity must have due regard for local sensitivities, the executive committee required that the local clergy be ‘sounded and consent obtained’ before her offer of assistance was accepted.<sup>108</sup> It was not unusual for women to be engaged directly in missionary work at this time, particularly overseas, but undertaking this role with the NMS does seem to have been something of a rarity.

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<sup>105</sup> Frank Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford, 1980).

<sup>106</sup> Morgan, *A Victorian Women’s Place*, p. 109.

<sup>107</sup> MS4005, Navy Mission Society, Executive Committee Minutes, 24 September 1895.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 October 1895.

Due to the existence of her journals, it is possible to gain a much clearer insight into the experiences of one woman who did become involved with the LREMS, although this was peripheral to the main thrust of the Mission. Louisa, Lady Knightley, was wife of the Conservative MP for south Northamptonshire, Sir Rainald Knightley, 3rd Baronet of Fawsley, and had wide ranging interests across both politics and philanthropy.<sup>109</sup> Although not evangelical in outlook, she did hold strong religious beliefs and was an ardent proponent of the established church. She was concerned to ensure the spiritual and material welfare of those within the ambit of her husband's estate, but as for many in her position this might have been deemed an 'unavoidable public duty'.<sup>110</sup> The range of her interests however, hints at more than mere duty. She was a keen workhouse visitor, a manager of a local church school, and an early activist for the Girls Friendly Society, formed to offer mutual help to working-class girls and particularly domestic servants.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps not necessarily applicable to Louisa Knightley, but the latter is somewhat ironic in that as has been pointed out, the only cross class experience known to many well-to-do women sprang from their relationship with domestic servants.<sup>112</sup> Her political involvement encompassed membership of the Conservative Primrose League, being elected as a parish councillor, and as an advocate of women's suffrage.<sup>113</sup> Accepting her privileged life style, this reinforces the fact that at late century women were making further inroads into areas such as welfare, education and politics.

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<sup>109</sup> Fawsley Hall lies about two miles east of Charwelton which itself lies close to the southern entrance to Catesby tunnel.

<sup>110</sup> Jessica Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy', *Victorian Studies*, 30:2 (1987), p. 184.

<sup>111</sup> *Politics and Society*, ed. Gordon, see esp., pp. 4; 24; 27.

<sup>112</sup> Koven, *Slumming*, p. 193.

<sup>113</sup> *Politics and Society*, ed. Gordon, see esp., pp. 10-11; 15; 23.

Religious conviction was I feel at the heart of Louisa Knightley's philanthropic efforts. Following an inspiring sermon preached at Christ Church, Down Street, Mayfair, in 1890 she questioned the depth and practical expression of her commitment:

what am I doing to forward Christ's work in the world (can I do more?) ... he ended with the wise and true reminder that what we *are* rather than what we say exercises the most influence. I wish I saw my way to do more for our own servants ... and then down at home in the villages – could I not visit more regularly?<sup>114</sup>

As is testified above, much of her contact with the local working population was through home visiting and she was to adopt this pattern with the navy families who came to reside in the locality. Although interested in the actual construction of the new railway in the neighbourhood of Fawsley, her involvement with the navvies seems to date from mid-1895 when she assisted another local woman, Adeline Pym, to establish a reading room for the workers at nearby Charwelton.<sup>115</sup> In addition, Louisa held regular Bible classes for local boys and was delighted when on one occasion among a number of newcomers was 'a young Monk - a navy boy'.<sup>116</sup> Whatever the catalyst, she started to visit the huts at Charwelton ostensibly to meet the women folk living there. A number of the entries in her journal are I believe highly revealing. Towards the end of 1895 she visited the huts: 'where I went round to make the acquaintance of all the railwaymen's wives, 9 or 10, with a view to a Mothers' meeting'.<sup>117</sup> This approach met with rapid success as within

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> NRO, K2909, The Journals of Lady Knightley, 9 November 1895. I believe the reference to Monk is in the context of one of the sons of Thomas Monk, a navy who was resident with his family at Charwelton for a period during construction of the railway.

<sup>117</sup> *Politics and Society*, ed. Gordon, p. 260.

days she: 'went in pouring rain to Charwelton to help ... start a mothers' meeting in the reading room'.<sup>118</sup> Nearly two years later she was still visiting the women in their homes, and once again a sense of purpose is clearly evident: 'visited all the railway folk, tried to persuade Mrs Webley to have her baby daughter baptised and the other children christened and Mrs Clark to be confirmed'.<sup>119</sup>

I would contend that her contact with the women was motivated by a desire to bring the women and no doubt other family members into the sphere of organised religion certainly, but we can also see a link to the concept of encouraging and leading working-class female association as a means of promoting religious, moral, improving and practical imperatives. I have failed to identify Mrs Clark but helping to prepare young men and women for confirmation was high on Louisa's agenda and indeed, the daughters of two railway workers did attend confirmation classes held by her during 1896.<sup>120</sup> Her efforts with Mrs Webley seem to have failed to bear fruit as I can find no reference in local baptismal records to any of her children. The Webleys did not perhaps see the need for baptism, or resented the apparent interference; at the very least they were not convinced or impressed by the argument in favour. Clearly, it was important for Louisa that the children should undergo the sacrament of baptism. A trawl through the parish records of a number of Northamptonshire parishes close to the course of the route has revealed that a number of children born to navvy parents were baptised during the years of its construction. Whether this reflects the influence of the Mission or not is difficult to determine although the incidence of baptisms in this area was

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<sup>118</sup> K2909, The Journals of Lady Knightley, 15 December 1895.

<sup>119</sup> *Politics and Society*, ed. Gordon, p. 280. Lucy Webley, wife of Thomas Webley, a railway labourer. They had at least six other children apart from their baby daughter.

<sup>120</sup> K2909, The Journals of Lady Knightley, 1 March 1896.

noted in its annual report for 1896-97.<sup>121</sup> What it may suggest is that navvies irrespective of their religious beliefs were like many of their working-class contemporaries, using the church for rites of passage.<sup>122</sup>

It is with Louisa Knightley's attempts to organise a mothers' meeting that the wish to translate a message that was not solely religious in nature into action is best exemplified. With regard to the overall mission, this was not in any case limited to Charwelton; there are references to the existence of mothers' meetings at other mission stations along the route. Frank Prochaska in his study of mothers' meetings, has dated their origins to the 1850s, and shown that they were championed across the denominational divide, and were aimed at bringing poor working women together in what were usually small groups on a weekly or fortnightly basis. In Prochaska's view the meetings combined a religious focus in the form of prayer and frequently a religious address with a more secular element concentrating on issues deemed to be of concern to the women such as health, childbirth and needlework. The meetings were he has claimed 'a crucial training ground of religious experience' with an underlying ideology aimed at the promotion of family life and the desirability of reinforcing the key responsibilities of working women.<sup>123</sup> The mothers' meeting, although aimed at the women folk was like the Sunday school, a means of obtaining access to the domestic setting of the home, and thereby help spread what was considered positive guidance which it was hoped, might permeate the entire household. Such meetings were popular with working-class women in general, so it is claimed, and it is highly likely that gatherings of this nature, indeed, the wider coverage of the Mission, appealed to navvy

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<sup>121</sup> *Annual Report of Navy Mission Society, 1896-97*, p. 50.

<sup>122</sup> Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, p. 65.

<sup>123</sup> See Frank Prochaska, 'A Mother's Country: Mothers' Meetings and Family Welfare in Britain, 1850-1950', *History*, 74:242 (1989), pp. 379-399; see esp. p. 390.

women.<sup>124</sup> In large part women were excluded from the world of male sociability which was often centred on the public house or at least a culture of drinking therefore, many may have welcomed the opportunity for female association.<sup>125</sup> This did not mean that these approaches were always appreciated; working women could resent the patronising attitudes and the lack of knowledge of the realities of working life often exhibited by their so called superiors.<sup>126</sup> An argument has been advanced that for a woman like Louisa Knightley, the motives behind her philanthropic attempts to engage with the working class, were based on a purely personal agenda which might include a desire to exercise a degree of control locally, or be linked to political or religious objectives.<sup>127</sup> No doubt as the wife of a Conservative M. P. she was concerned to further her husband's career, and show loyalty to the party. But her wide range of social action does suggest a feminist agenda. It has been pointed out that 'Definitions of "Victorian feminism" continue to be the subject of historical debate', in light of the uncertainty as to what constituted feminism given that whilst many women worked to further the cause of their sex, some advocated women's rights, but others were less clearly motivated in this direction.<sup>128</sup> For Philippa Levine Conservatism offered 'an active though distinctly subordinate political role', which gave rise to 'not a feminist perspective but a seemingly gender-neutral activism'.<sup>129</sup> As I noted above, her religious convictions clearly figured prominently in her dealings with the navvies. There was an attempt to draw the women and other family members into the ambit of the Church and what she

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>125</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*, p. 197.

<sup>126</sup> Gerry Holloway, ' "Let the Women be Alive": The Construction of the Married Working Woman in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1890-1914', in Eileen Janes Yeo (ed.), *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere* (Manchester, 1998), p. 175.

<sup>127</sup> Gleadle, *British Women*, p. 68.

<sup>128</sup> Laura Schwartz, 'Feminist Thinking on Education in Victorian England', *Oxford Review of Education*, 37:5 (2011), p. 669.

<sup>129</sup> Philippa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1990), p. 39.

considered the norms of respectable society. In a sense however, this was no different from what the Mission as a collective entity was trying to do. It does though show the importance placed upon direct personal contact thus, home visits, bible classes, and meetings were a vital tool in trying to influence behaviour. Indeed, these were crucial elements of the ‘civilising mission’, and associated more generally with female activism in this area. Jenny Daggers for example, has put forward the argument that the ‘superior moral qualities’ of women which found an outlet in religion, philanthropy and the ‘civilising mission’, also formed a basis for the ‘achievements of “first wave” feminism’.<sup>130</sup>

I speculated earlier about cooperation in relation to Sunday schools. It certainly took place in other areas of the mission’s work both within Anglican circles and across denominational boundaries. For example, the weekly meeting of the navy mission was held at the Congregational church in Lutterworth. A Church of England Temperance Society mission was held at Loughborough over a nine day period in the summer of 1896. As part of the campaign the navy missionary, Mr Johnson, and the CETS missionary visited all board schools in the town and addressed mothers’ meetings in a bid to further the temperance cause. A joint meeting also took place involving Church Bands of Hope and the navy mission Band of Hope. This shows solidarity and the benefit of sharing resources, but it also reinforces the importance attached to spreading a moral message to those, namely women and children, who could influence matters within the family home. The navy mission room at Loughborough was adjacent to a Gospel mission hall and relations between the two appear to have been cordial, and commending the spirit of collaboration amongst the clergy of the town, a supporter of another non-

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<sup>130</sup> Jenny Daggers, ‘The Victorian Female Civilising Mission and Women’s Aspirations Towards Priesthood in the Church of England’, *Women’s History Review*, 10:4 (2001), p. 652.



conformist mission in the town referred to the fact that they had ‘forgotten their conformity ... and had clasped hands in the interest of the people for the furtherance of the Gospel’.<sup>131</sup> The commonality of purpose in bringing the gospel to, and improving the moral condition of, the masses appears to have overridden any denominational differences. This point also has particular relevance to the relationship between the Mission and the workers. Whatever the extent of denominational allegiance amongst the workforce it is unlikely to have reflected an exclusive attachment to the Anglican Church. No doubt there were adherents to Catholicism and the Dissenting traditions. I have no evidence to suggest that the Mission did not welcome other denominations to the mission rooms, or failed to encourage participation in its wider programmes. From this perspective, its activities appear to have been ecumenically based.

The role of the Mission as a quasi-welfare system should not be underestimated. Its primary purpose was to bring individuals to God and this did encompass the promulgation of the message of thrift and self-help, however, for the majority of the families there was little recourse to formal welfare channels in times of critical need. Men might on occasion be removed to the local workhouse infirmary in the event of illness or injury, but certainly for the itinerant element within the work force there was no guarantee that they would be eligible for poor relief in any given location. For the most part this was not an issue given that the workers on the London extension were in paid employment, and when the work came to a natural conclusion they would move to a new project. It was not however, always possible to legislate for an unexpected turn of events. This is perhaps best illustrated in relation to the very severe winter of 1894-5 which saw several months

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<sup>131</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 13 February 1896.

of very cold and frosty weather across much of the country. As a result work on the new railway ceased and men were thrown out of work in significant numbers without means of support. Many within the local communities did rally to their aid but the navy mission and its supporters were prominent in providing material assistance to the affected men and their dependents. At Rothley in Leicestershire, a sum of £15 provided by the mission was distributed amongst the navvies by the local vicar by means of a ticket system.<sup>132</sup> The local secretary to the mission group covering the Rugby area, the Revd Payne-Smith, was able to facilitate the hiring of the Salvation Army barracks in the town for the use of men who were unemployed; one-hundred and seventy men were housed and fed there for a fortnight.<sup>133</sup>

The question arises as to whether the LREMS or the NMS for that matter was successful. Much of course depends on how one measures success. As one might expect, there is a lack of meaningful data on which to base any sort of assessment. In line with other missionary societies, the NMS did publish statistics in its annual reports detailing the number of visits paid to huts and houses, and the number of attendees at services, Sunday school and Mothers' meetings. This obviously allowed the Mission to both demonstrate the range of its activities and compare relative levels of success year on year. Success, or indeed failure measured on such a basis cannot however, indicate future intentions on the part of any individual especially in relation to matters of conscience. Of course from the viewpoint of a missionary organisation any man or women responding positively to its message would have been regarded as a success, and on this basis the NMS clearly had its successes, but in terms of the core purpose of salvation and moral reform these were probably limited. There is also some anecdotal evidence by way

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<sup>132</sup> *Loughborough Monitor and News*, 28 February 1895.

<sup>133</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1895-86*, p. 44.

of claims on the part of missionaries and a number of personal testimonies by navvies printed in the mission's literature, and one cannot doubt the sincerity of the latter. As highlighted in this chapter, the NMS did operate across a fairly broad front in terms of the range of its activities, and sought to connect with all members of the navvy community. The Mission could also act as a catalyst for social action on the part of the local elite. Sunday schools in particular appear to have been popular, and newspaper reports do suggest that mission rooms were well attended for services in some locations. Equally, missionaries were at times forced to report less encouraging signs such as: 'Attendance at service poor' and 'Our Mission ... is not attended as it should be.'<sup>134</sup> Setting aside purely religious motives, I have no doubt that the communal aspect of the mission allied to the fact that it was such a familiar and enduring part of the lives of the railway workers played a role. Hymn singing for instance could offer 'sentiment, nostalgia or a sense of togetherness'.<sup>135</sup> On a more cynical note, there would inevitably have been those who used the Mission solely for the benefits that might accrue. One historian has expressed the view that the middle-class crusade to remould the working classes ultimately proved to be a failure, and it is difficult to disagree.<sup>136</sup> There may in some cases have been what I might term a reverse reaction in relation to the contact between the navvies and not only the NMS but the clergy and the populace more generally. By this I mean the presence of the men and their families perhaps asked as many questions of those who tried to reach them as they asked of the navvies. This is best summed up by the words of Mandell Creighton, recalling that many clergymen had told him: 'I am so glad we have had the navvies amongst us; they have stirred us

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<sup>134</sup> *Quarterly Letter to Men on Public Works*, No 72, June 1896; No 73, September 1896.

<sup>135</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society*, p. 106.

<sup>136</sup> Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 196.

up, and set an example to my people which has really done them good'.<sup>137</sup> The one area where the NMS made the greatest difference to the workers probably relates to the provision of recreational and material assistance. Even though the overriding intention was to educate and improve, mission rooms often doubling as reading rooms, provided the workers and their families with facilities for entertainment and recreation whilst night schools gave opportunities for education and practical instruction that was not available elsewhere. Mothers' meetings and Sunday schools offered the women and children scope for social interaction and interest outside of the home. Sick clubs and savings banks gave an element of insurance against unexpected events and of course the mission could prove to be a refuge of last resort in so far as it could act as a relief agency as during the harsh winter of 1894-95.

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<sup>137</sup> *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1897-98*, p. 12.

## CONCLUSION

Although it was the last major railway line to be constructed in England, the London Extension did not represent the end of railway building across Britain. Projects, mostly less ambitious in conception, continued into the twentieth century, and indeed we have witnessed significant works in recent years, notably the high speed route connecting London to the Channel Tunnel and the ongoing Crossrail link in the capital. The proposed HS2 route raises the prospect of some interesting parallels with the Great Central London Extension most obviously in respect of the uncertainty and fears of disruption generated amongst the affected population, but also because for part of its course it will be aligned with or close to that of the now defunct railway. What was distinctive about the London Extension however, was the size of the workforce that was engaged. Not since the completion of the line in 1899 have railway construction workers been seen in such large numbers working on a single project within the midland counties of England. This factor has provided an ideal platform for exploring in detail a discrete section of the working population that has often been dismissed as being at the periphery of society. Whilst navvies as a collective entity have been subjected to a number of studies in the past I have shown that there is much more to be said about this topic. The aim of this thesis therefore, has been to broaden the focus of scholarship with particular reference to the concept of community, and the area of the family. Not least in this respect has been my overriding concern to place the navvy communities associated with this particular railway line within the wider parameters of late nineteenth century working-class society.

I use the word ‘communities’ advisably, as early on in the thesis I developed the argument that the construction workers formed both a series of temporary

communities, and also in view of their migration and settlement patterns, something akin to a wider community. The London Extension was certainly one of the biggest projects undertaken during the 1890s, with perhaps 10,000 men employed over the course of its construction, but it only accounted for a fraction of the total navy cadre which according to contemporary estimates amounted to some 100,000 men by the end of the nineteenth century. Single and unaccompanied men formed a large proportion of the total workforce, but my research has confirmed that family groupings were also an integral part of the population sub-set connected with the new railway, with children present in large numbers. The major contractors often retained a core staff of experienced men, but they also engaged men who sought to maintain an alliance with them to ensure a continuity of employment. Local recruitment was an important source of manpower, and although many men probably only worked in the industry while the line was being built, some were seemingly persuaded to prolong their association and move away from their home areas.

Such then was the human component of this particular grouping; but the navy's lifestyle suggests a disconnect from the close connection that has been drawn between community and place. However, I have shown that 'place' did constitute a reality in many respects by virtue of the huddled encampments, forming as they did small discrete settlements where people were brought together, at least in a physical sense, for the duration of the works. Granted they represented an ad hoc response on the part of the contractors, and were not of the magnitude of the pre-planned, and self-contained settlements created at sites such as Birchinlee or the Elan Valley. Nonetheless, both types of settlement met the same need which was for accommodation that compensated for a lack of availability within the local

economy. The settlements alongside the route of the new railway did I contend, conform in a spatial sense to what most people would think of as ‘communities’. Significantly, the workers and their dependents were not necessarily perpetual hut dwellers in so far as housing arrangements could vary from job to job. But even where they did reside in permanent housing they might, as at Ruddington, be found in small clusters within particular streets or neighbourhoods.

Location is not the only determinant of community, and I have explored other facets that are equally crucial to an appreciation of the concept. It is likely that relationships were formed between individuals arising from friendship, familiarity, or by association in the workplace, and the domestic or leisure spheres. These relationships were often perpetuated by common migration patterns and the tradition of single and unaccompanied men lodging with their work colleagues and families. Allied to this were the mental and psychological constructs: the need to belong and the consciousness of being part of a group. The latter, as far as the construction workers were concerned probably involved the recognition, both on the part of themselves and outsiders, of difference. The notion of difference sprang from a number of cultural traditions associated with navvies. The most obvious of course was that related to the constant need to relocate. Mobility was certainly not unusual amongst sections of the working class, but whereas for many individuals and families this might manifest itself in fairly localised movement, the construction workers were attached to an industry that was associated above all else with migration. Such migration might involve movement over long distances and as part of a group or sub-group. It should also not be forgotten that itinerancy of itself may have acted as a catalyst for forging both a sense of belonging and of shared identity. This identity was probably reinforced by other examples of a distinctive

culture that I have drawn attention to such as linguistic characteristics and occupation solidarity. If experiences are a benchmark against which community can be assessed, they also play a major role in defining class, and this study has demonstrated that the construction workers did not form a self-contained grouping in this sense, but had much in common with many of their working-class peers. Neither did they form a single entity but were comprised of a cross section of occupations and interests mirroring the totality of the working class. As Selina Todd has very recently stressed: ‘the working class was never entirely homogeneous’.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis has been arranged thematically, and this does in part reflect the nature of the available source material, but it also brings into focus the fact that for the construction workers and their dependents, a substantial part of their lives was taken up by a series of encounters with officialdom in a variety of guises. It is somewhat predictable therefore, that the images projected have derived in large part from the perspective of the agencies of the Victorian state or voluntary sector with which the subject population had contact. Nonetheless, it has allowed me to elucidate a central argument underpinning the thesis that the perceptions created as a result of these encounters did much to condition the day to day experiences of the workers. I dwelt on this subject at length in Chapter Two describing how perceptions sprang from a number of sources: rumour and hearsay, popular literature and newspapers, and of course direct contact. These perceptions evolved over time, and it is clear that they were fundamental in determining the way in which the incomers were received and regarded within the various local areas. In substituting for the lack of information, rumour by its very nature tends to convert

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<sup>1</sup> Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (London, 2014), p. 5.



falsehood into presumed fact, and in respect of the navvies moving into parts of the Midlands it could reinforce negative connotations. The study of contemporary literature does I think offer the most rewarding insight into representations of the navy. For the most part the literature sought to both inform and entertain, but also to satisfy the penchant of its readership for a glimpse into the less familiar realms of society, and it is this aspect that has particular relevance to the navy. It is here that the notion of difference is brought to prominence. Thus, we see a concentration on what were considered by some to be the defining physical and character traits of the men, women and children, and more generally, on the themes of a nomadic lifestyle, isolation, and neglect. This is an important point to bear this in mind: navvies were still seen by many observers as being separated from the rest of society and this goes some way towards explaining why they were often referred to as a class apart. In fact this was an image that endured into the twentieth century, reinforced most notably by the NMS. The opinion expressed in one local newspaper about the navy workforce engaged on the London Extension is apposite in this respect. Navvies were it was suggested ‘a class of men almost unknown to many of us, whose habits and customs differ widely, as a consequence of the character of their work, from our ordinary British workman’.<sup>2</sup> That there was seen to be a difference between the navy and other sections of the working class is made explicit. Equally telling is the reference to unfamiliarity, and this clearly played a crucial role in the manner in which the workers were both perceived and understood. But overall the impressions created did not necessarily reflect the realities of day to day life. There is no doubt that we can detect some similarities in the views expounded about, and the approach taken towards, other so called

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<sup>2</sup> *Northampton Mercury*, 19 July 1895.

marginal groups such as Irish immigrants and traveller families. It is striking that so many parallels exist with modern day concerns. The travelling community is still viewed with particular suspicion in some quarters and retains a reputation for anti-social behaviour and criminality. We need only consider the current, highly charged domestic debate about immigration, especially from Eastern Europe. What this does show above all else is how powerful perceptions, which in many instances are not based on first-hand knowledge or experience, can be in shaping public attitudes. In some instances this merely reinforced previously held perceptions, but in what appear to have been the majority of cases, it proved to be the catalyst for the creation of, and the modification of, attitudes, and even the reassessment of values. Yet what has become apparent is that for the duration of the line's construction the workers were rarely if ever divorced physically or psychologically from mainstream society, and when subjected to face to face scrutiny, were rarely treated differently from other working people. In Chapter Two I began to illustrate the process whereby existing perceptions conditioned the initial reactions of local organisations, in this instance health authorities and the Poor Law, to the influx of workers into their areas. Thus, they were seen as a threat in light of the association between migration and the incidence of infectious disease and vagrancy. Subsequent events eased such fears, and modified perceptions. In the majority of cases the presence of the construction workers brought about a relationship that was both less problematical in nature to that which had been envisaged, and in the case of local hospitals, ultimately proved beneficial to both parties. However, I did draw attention to an issue that had ramifications for the relationship between a section of the incoming population and local institutions of the state: the distinction between the genuine navvy and the 'loafing' or 'quasi' navvy. It was in relation to the law

that this distinction was perhaps most evident, and demonstrates the connection with another fundamental, and in many ways complementary, concern of Victorian society, respectability. From the middle-class perspective the crucial aspect that determined attitudes was the divide that separated the respectable and the non-respectable. Drawing a comparison with Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, Mervyn Busteed has noted that during the nineteenth century respectability was 'an increasingly significant dimension of hegemonic British cultural values'.<sup>3</sup> The 'quasi' navvy then, often without permanent accommodation, who shirked his responsibilities and sought to take advantage of his more deserving colleagues was seen by many as synonymous with the vagrant and could expect to be treated likewise by police and judiciary. In examining the dealings of the construction workers with the agencies of the law more generally, I have demonstrated that the police, in responding to a perceived threat most obviously associated with drunkenness and disorder, do appear to have targeted the navvies, but in respect of criminality across the board there is little to suggest that they were singled out and made an example of in the courts by way of receiving harsher penalties than other offenders. The family and gender relationships of construction workers that were exposed within the courtroom have been hitherto neglected areas of historical research. By engaging with the existing historiography relating to violence in general and domestic violence specifically, I have shown that it was in these areas that the issue of respectability often influenced the outcome of court cases involving navvies. This encompassed sentencing and the arrangement of separation and maintenance orders. If a husband drank excessively and failed to provide for his family he might be viewed less favourably. Equally a wife who

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<sup>3</sup> Mervyn Busteed, 'Resistance and Respectability: Dilemmas of Irish Migrant Politics in Victorian Britain', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 27:2 (2009), pp. 179-80.

failed to match the domestic ideal, and particularly if she imbibed of alcohol too freely, could well be deemed in part responsible for the breakdown of a relationship and for her partner's violent behaviour. If we accept the proposition that respectability was not a permanent characteristic, but could be both a situationally inspired, and a multi-faceted manifestation, then the scenario as played out in court may well have led to a distorted picture of events. But it was the perceptions created in these situations that mattered. Magistrates, whose official role was brought to public attention on a regular basis via newspaper reporting, seem in general to have viewed navvies and their wives not as a special case per se, but in terms of the general working population. It is abundantly clear that those individuals and family groups that failed to match expectations were regarded as less deserving, and in the more extreme cases were deemed troublingly anti-social. In essence then, the workers were treated no differently from the vast majority of working-class people who were categorised in exactly the same way.

As with all working people the construction workers did have to come to terms with the implications of growing state intervention in their lives. The nineteenth century was characterised by a raft of legislation relating to working hours and conditions: control of child employment and successive Factory Acts being the most obvious, which impinged upon both the working and home environment. Perhaps the greatest impact during the latter part of the century was that associated with compulsory school attendance which came to be accepted as a normal part of family life. Aside from the NMS which was of course a religious and charitable organisation, it was in respect of education that the vast majority of navvy families probably had the most frequent contact with authority.

Contemporaneous with the construction of the London Extension, the mid 1890s

witnessed legislation that saw a further rise in the minimum age at which exemption from attendance could be achieved. Navy children were not excluded from this overall process and they were admitted into local schools, and absorbed into the pupil populations. Neither could their parents expect to avoid the attentions of school attendance officers, and failure to ensure regular attendance by their children did, as we have seen, result in court appearances. Infant vaccination was another area where compliance was legally enforceable, even if this sanction was less than consistently applied. Interventions were of course not limited solely to agencies of the state, given that voluntary organisations were also having an impact. I have for example highlighted the increasing role that the NSPCC assumed in monitoring parental behaviour towards children, and ultimately in initiating prosecutions for child neglect and abuse. The construction workers were certainly not beyond the reach of such agencies and in being drawn within the ambit of their activities witnessed treatment that was common to all who transgressed in this manner.

Continuing with the theme of perceptions and the experiences that they often gave rise to, Chapter Four was devoted to an examination of a topic that has received no previous attention; the education of navy children. Based upon what they saw and heard within the schoolroom teachers derived views about their young charges ranging from outright hostility to quiet acceptance, or even admiration. Thus, we saw evidence of two school teachers from a small village school expressing what were probably the most diametrically opposed opinions recorded about the navy children. In each case a comparison was made against the resident children and the local social and cultural environment, with one teacher, perhaps influenced by what she had read or heard, likening the incomers to aliens. These specific encounters with the children, a few years apart, illustrate better than almost

any other example how important prejudices and preoccupations can be in determining the behaviour of individuals. Disruptive elements within the navy intake at certain schools were subjected to corporal punishment, but they seem not to have been singled out in this respect and were treated in much the same way as their fellow pupils. The lifestyle of the navy children did of course lead in the majority of cases to a lack of educational continuity in so far as they stayed at any given school for only a relatively short period of time. This manifested itself in some instances in poor levels of attainment which caused concern for a number of schoolteachers. Importantly, this can be seen to have had resonance with a broader discourse about, and awareness of, backward children and learning disabilities that was gaining momentum during the latter part of the century. Indeed, there was recognition on the part of some educationalists that a direct link existed between learning disabilities and frequent migration.

The theme of education can be seen to have figured prominently in the activities of the Navy Mission Society which I discussed in Chapter Five. Education was a prime driver influencing the activities of the Society from the date of its formation with concentration on the provision of day schools, night schools and Sunday schools. But these initiatives were always conditioned on the religious crusade to reform the neglected and wayward navy. If the mission day school was of less importance by virtue of the geographical positioning of the London Extension, the ubiquity of the Sunday school and the ambition to establish Mothers' meetings in particular, illustrate the strategy employed to influence and access the family environment by way of the women and children. The Society's then chairman, Sir Douglas Fox, was not afraid to admit in 1900 that 'it was easier to

reach the women and children'.<sup>4</sup> The NMS may have been targeted exclusively at the navy community, but it has been my contention that it is not possible to gain a full understanding of its role and motives without reference to the far reaching, cross denominational home mission movement aiming to 'civilise' the working-class. Indeed, mission was something of a ubiquitous activity to which many working people were exposed, particularly within the urban environment: 'the mission hall became a familiar feature of the slum landscape'.<sup>5</sup> The NMS was certainly not unique in its use of working-class 'foot soldiers' as its primary point of contact with the navy community, but it was perceptive both in recruiting ex-navvies as missionaries, and in undertaking what was effectively an itinerant mission that followed the men from job to job to ensure a high degree of continuity. There were obvious connections between mission and philanthropic endeavour which was directed towards large swathes of the working poor. The case study of Louisa Knightley does throw some light on the expectations that were placed on women of her social standing, but it also highlights the personal commitment that underpinned her involvement with navy families. The work of the NMS, in common with missionary activity in general, also stands testament to the self-confidence and strength of religious belief that underpinned the efforts of all those involved. Thus, there was confidence that they were right to pursue the mission, and that they could succeed in bringing about change in the lives of navvies. Irrespective of the level of success achieved, there is no doubt that the mission did offer genuine material assistance to the construction workers and their families especially during periods of particular hardship.

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<sup>4</sup> From a report of the Society's Annual Meeting, See *Annual Report of the Navy Mission Society, 1900-01*.

<sup>5</sup> Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 192.

Of course opinions about the navvies varied and in some instances they were subjected to criticism, but what emerges above all is the fact that more often than not, the men and their families were judged not by virtue of who they were, the occupation they followed, or where they lived, but by the degree to which they conformed to accepted patterns of behaviour. This was applicable across the generational and gender divide in terms of the demeanour of the children and their response to the demands of authority in the form of the schoolmaster or mistress, and to the adults in the workplace, the home, and the public sphere. But it is important to remember that for elements within the working class, respectability was not merely an abstract concept and measure of judgement applied from above. It did develop meaning, and come to represent a method by which forms of behaviour were assessed and demarcated within their own social sphere. For those building the new railway this is perhaps best illustrated in terms of the link between respectability and domesticity which both photographic evidence and contemporary comment suggests was not necessarily an alien concept even amongst hut dwellers. Standards of course did vary considerably, but for some the aim to achieve a measure of comfort, order and cleanliness and to make a visible display of prized material possessions was not unimportant. For many unaccompanied men employed on a longer term basis and seeking lodgings, the standard of accommodation was by no means unimportant, thus, the common lodging house the haunt of those at the lowest levels of society including the casual navvy, might be best avoided. This, I would contend, points to the fact that the railway workers were not detached from some of the core ideological tenets that permeated Victorian society.



Contrary to many contemporary accounts, and apart from a few isolated incidents there is nothing to indicate that the incomers were ultimately treated as outcasts. The influx did present a challenge to resident communities, although this was overwhelmingly logistical in nature. Otherwise the workers were embraced and absorbed without any undue disruption or rancour. A flavour of what proved a predominantly positive impression is well captured in the response of one town council to the completion of the route in 1899:

We are unwilling, too, that the great courtesy of the engineer, contractors, and general staff invariably maintained during the work of construction should pass unnoticed. They will leave behind them a most pleasant impression, which will long be retained and thankfully and permanently remembered.<sup>6</sup>

Perceptions of course, are not the preserve of any given class or group. Although less easy to identify, the navvies obviously formed attitudes and opinions of their own about the various individuals, institutions and third parties to which they had exposure, and these found substance in the strategies they adopted. Once again these were not unlike those found across a broad spectrum of the working-class. They were certainly not without agency. In common with their working neighbours they could for example make choices about which schools their children attended or more radically, show resistance to the demands of school legislation. In certain circumstances children within the schoolroom acted in what might be considered a wilful manner, but which to them probably seemed a legitimate response to a perceived injustice. The workers might reject the advances of the religious and philanthropic bodies seeking to influence their behavioural patterns.

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<sup>6</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 16 March 1899.

Equally, in terms of their own leisure interests they did seemingly make a conscious decision on occasions to extend statutory holidays and take additional, non-sanctioned time off work if it suited their own purposes, even if as a result they lost income or contributed to delays in the work schedule. The legal process offered opportunities that could be exploited for personal advantage. The spouses of navvies considered the possibilities available to them and where appropriate made use of the courts for the purpose of restraining abusive husbands and to seek beneficial solutions to the situations they found themselves in. Navvies did resort to litigation to seek compensation from contractors for injuries sustained in the course of their work.

For navvies, or construction workers more generally, marginality and isolation were characteristics that possessed much less relevance at the end of the nineteenth century. Even if desired, it was increasingly difficult for their like to avoid the attentions of the Victorian state as it operated at a local and regional level. Neither were they immune from the cultural values that held sway across society. As such, they can be counted as integral to the broadly based working class.

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