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The occupational distribution of foundling apprentices during the English Industrial Revolution

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a new analysis of the distribution of apprenticeships brokered by the London Foundling Hospital, England's pre-eminent charitable foundation in the eighteenth century for orphaned and abandoned children. It explores the similarities and differences between charity apprenticeship and parish apprenticeship systems in supplying pauper children's labour during the critical first phase of the English Industrial Revolution, within a wider European context. The results of this analysis illustrate that foundling children were set to work in agriculture, mainly in northern England, and in a variety of small manufacturing and retailing industries in the London area. For a short time, foundling girls were sent in batches to work in textile factories in the North and Midlands, but this practice was soon ended over concerns for children's welfare. The extensive patronage networks of Foundling Hospital Governors and inspectors, the location of provincial branch hospitals set up to cope with the high volume of so-called 'General Reception' children, and gendered expectations of the life courses of the labouring poor were the most significant factors in determining where foundling children were sent as apprentices, and how they were employed.

KEYWORDS

Charity apprenticeships; eighteenth-century England; foundling hospital; child labour; industrial revolution

Orphaned and abandoned children in history, as in the present day, were among the most marginalised groups in societies around the world. Without the support of friends and family, such children were and are particularly vulnerable to labour exploitation and other forms of abuse. In cultural contexts and time periods where the employment of children for money, payment in kind or simply under duress was relatively 'normal', the life course of orphans and their experiences are extremely difficult to recover in the archives. Historians of early modern Europe have noted the particular contribution of orphans to emerging and industrialising regions and nations, as vulnerable children who were often regarded as cheap and exploitable workers. For example, Nicholas Terpstra and Sandra Cavallo

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have highlighted how centres of textile production, notably silk industries in Italy, were reliant upon orphan labour from as early as the sixteenth century.¹ Many experimental schemes emerged in the context of growing state interventions in children's welfare from the second half of the eighteenth century. Isabelle Robin has recently examined the system of fostering that was implemented by state-run Paris orphanages in the 1760s as a means of distributing children for agricultural work in provincial France,² while Nicoleta Roman has presented a pan-European comparative study arising from her research on Bucharest orphanages of the nineteenth century.³ Common themes emerge in the employment of orphaned children. European orphanages as geographically distant as Dubrovnik, Florence, Vienna, Lisbon and Madrid, whether originating as medieval charities set up by religious orders or workhouses funded by local administrators of the poor, tended to want to despatch children as soon as possible from their care. 'Unfree' child apprentices (those raised at the expense of a charitable institution or a local authority, rather than their own families) were often put out to work with minimal premiums, to masters or mistresses who were under less scrutiny than those who employed adolescents with living relatives, who might demand better conditions for their kin. For some workshop owners and other manufacturers, employing orphans was an attractive prospect: the children had few 'friends' in the world and could be moved wherever their labour was needed, for minimal remuneration either in terms of 'bed and board' under traditional apprenticeship systems, or for minimal wages as the cash nexus became increasingly common in the nineteenth century.

The demand for orphans' labour, and potential for their larger-scale exploitation, intensified over time with the onset of European industrialisation, particularly where there was a shortage of adult male (or female) labour, and where adult wages were rising. England was at the vanguard of the industrialisation process at the end of the eighteenth century, but our knowledge of how 'unfree' child labour was distributed via both parish and charity apprenticeships remains fragmentary. Part of the problem, as Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries have observed, is that the history of children's work in general, like women's employment, is often 'under-recorded, inconsistently measured, and buried in the family economy'.⁴

¹N. Terpstra, 'Working the cocoon: gendered charitable enclosures and the silk industry in early modern Europe' in K. Kippen and L. Woods (eds), *Worth and Repute: Valuing gender in late medieval and early modern Europe: essays in honour of Barbara Todd* (Toronto, 2011), 39–72; S. Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, 1995). See also M. Prak and P. Wallis (eds), *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2020).

²I. Robin, 'A foster placement project for abandoned children from Paris in the countryside, 1760–1770' in N. Roman (ed.), *Orphaned and Abandoned Children in European History* (London and New York, 2017).

³Roman, *op. cit.*

⁴S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Child labour and British industrialization' in M. Lavalette (ed.), *A Thing of the Past? Child labour in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Liverpool, 1999), 76.

The subject of this article is the unfree children who were raised under the auspices of the London Foundling Hospital and who survived long enough to enter into apprenticeships. The Foundling Hospital was the pre-eminent children's charity in eighteenth-century England, established by royal charter in 1739 to care for orphaned and abandoned infants. Its founder and governors looked to the Continent for inspiration and guidance on running an institution for orphans, and some of the practices were adopted from abroad, but the London Foundling Hospital was unique in its combination of secular character, accuracy of record-keeping, scale of enterprise and duration. At first, the number of infants admitted was strictly controlled. There were also legal safeguards to ensure babies not admitted to the hospital would not be abandoned to the charge of local ratepayers, nor would those leaving the hospital gain local settlement simply by virtue of having been raised there. During part of the Seven Years' War (1756–63) the charity was in direct receipt of government funding from the Westminster parliament, on the condition that no infant or child would be refused entry. This resulted in a rapid scaling-up of the charity's enterprise, which became a matter of national concern and debate during the period of so-called 'General Reception'.⁵

The purpose of this article is to trace the occupational destination and geographical distribution of Foundling Hospital apprentices based upon previously under-studied data about child and adolescent first apprenticeships. This will enable a more detailed understanding of where and how charity apprenticeship, in this case the specific example of foundling labour, contributed to economic activity during a critical early phase of modern industrialisation in England. The present study examines the period from approximately a decade after the start of infant admissions to the Hospital in 1741, when the hospital despatched its first children as apprentices, covering the period of General Reception and the decade-long rise in the number of children apprenticed via the charity, through to the Poor Law Reform Act of 1834, which represented a comprehensive overhaul of the operation of parochial relief systems in which charities such as the London Foundling Hospital operated. The present analysis centres upon a previously under-studied 411-page apprenticeship register from the London Foundling Hospital, which records nearly 6000 first apprenticeship indentures issued during this period. The register indicates where and to whom foundlings were apprenticed from both the London Hospital and its six branch

⁵D.S. Allin, 'The early years of the Foundling Hospital, 1739/41–1773' (unpublished, 2010), 55. See also H. Berry, *Orphans of Empire: The fate of London's foundlings* (Oxford, 2019).

institutions.⁶ The information contained in the register is analysed through the application of the PST (primary/secondary/tertiary) coding system developed by the Cambridge Group, and application of their system for categorising occupations by sector and group.⁷ The resulting data highlights the role of charity apprenticeships in the first phase of the English Industrial Revolution, and how the placing of poor ‘unfree’ children by this means differed from parish apprenticeships and private apprenticeships. Contrary to some previous assumptions, there is little evidence that foundling children were apprenticed in significant numbers to factory employment. This is in contrast to the widespread practice from the 1760s onwards of the placing of parish children, particularly girls, in batches to textile factories, as documented by Katrina Honeyman. Closer examination of apprenticeship books reveals that the pattern of foundling apprentice distribution was shaped by the hospital governors’ concerns over the charity’s reputation, considering their reliance upon public support and their ability to face down criticism over the children’s’ welfare, particularly over the sensitive issue of the children’s assumed illegitimacy. The logistics of where and when children were sent to work, and in which occupations, was also largely determined by the network of local inspectors in the orbit of the Foundling Hospital and its branch institutions, of which Ackworth in Yorkshire was by far the most successful at putting out a high volume of children, mostly to agricultural labour.

Like other forms of private and parish apprenticeship, the brokering of charity apprenticeships by the Foundling Hospital was overlaid with gendered ideas about the most suitable roles for boys and girls and according to social rank. Although statistically much smaller in number than either private or parish apprenticeships brokered in the latter half of the eighteenth century, this particular form of charity apprenticeships represented a hybrid model, overlaid with the ideology and priorities of philanthropic initiative and the effects of a brief period of state funding, which in different contexts and decades conformed only to certain aspects of either the parish or private system.

Charity apprenticeships and the parish system: similarities and differences

In English historiography, the general history of child labour in classic accounts of the Industrial Revolution forms a cornerstone of a particular kind of labour history that emerged in the early twentieth century, one that

⁶The London Foundling Hospital register of apprenticeships, London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA)/A/FH/A12/003/001-411.

⁷See L.S. Taylor and A. Erickson, ‘The occupational structure of Britain, 1379–1911’, <https://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/occupations>, updated 17/10/22, accessed 28/02/23.

sought to uncover the often shocking details of the exploitation of children for capitalist ends. Among leading socialist campaigners such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who were motivated to reveal the conditions under which children had toiled (with a view to introducing further ameliorative legislation in their own day), to the work of E.P. Thompson in the 1960s, the history of child labour was represented as the quintessential example of capitalist exploitation, particularly in relation to the treatment of parish children and the urban poor. A growing interest in eighteenth-century urban history 'from below' arose at the start of the twentieth century as part of a modernising narrative of the transformation of English society.⁸

In recent years, a revisionist approach to histories of production in the first era of modern industrialisation has brought fresh insights into the history of child labour. Jane Humphries has observed the 'ubiquity' of child labour, free and unfree, in all sectors of the economy around the turn of the century, estimating that apprentices counted for about 5% of the early industrial urban labour force, rising to 10% in some parts of London where boys clustered for training (which is likely to be an underestimate). Patrick Wallis estimates that non-agricultural apprentices alone made up between 7.5 and 10% of the labour force in the eighteenth century.⁹ Establishing national data on the overall number of children engaged in apprenticeships at this time, and the ratio of private placements compared with parish and charity apprenticeships, is challenging given the difficulty in piecing together disparate data for different parts of the country. Deborah Simonton estimates that as many as 3000 children in eighteenth-century Essex and Staffordshire could have been serving out their time in any one year in all categories of apprenticeship – equivalent to up to 56,000 children across the country. By far the highest proportion of placements in Simonton's analysis were private: between 1750 and 1799, 62% of 18,309 indentures fell into this category, compared to 36% issued under the parish system, and just under 3% by charitable institutions.¹⁰ Although this ratio varied according to location, the example of Essex and Staffordshire gives a fair overview of the scale and proportion of apprenticeships according to type, although this was an ever-changing picture in relation to the social and economic upheavals that were witnessed in England during the second half of the eighteenth century. Parish apprentices had a particularly significant role to play in the supply of labour that enabled the rise of northern

⁸J.L. Hammond and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer, 1760–1832* (London, 1917); M.D. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1925); B. Webb and S. Webb (eds), *The Public Organisation of the Labour Market: Being part two of the Minority report of the Poor Law Commission* (London, 1909); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

⁹J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010), 258–59; P. Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and training in premodern England', *Journal of Economic History*, 68, 3 (2007), 832.

¹⁰D.L. Simonton, 'The Education and Training of Eighteenth-Century English Girls, with Special Reference to the Working Classes' (Ph.D., University of Southern Denmark, 1988), 218.

industrial manufacturing, especially the textile industries, in the first phase of the Industrial Revolution, as Katrina Honeyman's seminal work demonstrated.¹¹

A distinctive feature of the Foundling Hospital apprenticeship system within the wider history of pauper apprenticeships was the ambition for the charity to run its operations on a national scale, funded directly by the Westminster parliament. Donna Andrew details how the London Foundling Hospital became a national concern during the period of the General Reception (June 1756 to March 1760), when the outbreak of the Seven Years' War spurred the Westminster parliament to fund the Foundling Hospital by direct government aid, on the condition that the selective admission of babies to the hospital would end.¹² The consequences, by any measure, were disastrous: 5510 children were received between June 1756 and the end of December 1757 alone, with perhaps exaggerated reports of babies being brought in pannier baskets from all over provincial England. Struggling to meet demand and to maintain what had previously been a fairly efficient system, the hospital's governors set up six satellite institutions at Ackworth in North Yorkshire, Chester, Shrewsbury, Aylesbury (Bucks), Westerham (Kent) and Barnet (formerly Hertfordshire). Infants from all over the country were mainly siphoned through the London Foundling Hospital's admissions system and redistributed to branch hospitals. What had started as a scheme to tackle metropolitan social problems became, for a short time, a national welfare programme. Joanna Innes sets this within the context of a shifting dynamic between local authorities and central government, as successive governments launched new initiatives in the second half of the eighteenth century to address the strain that population increase, urbanisation, crime and poverty were placing upon parochial relief. She demonstrates that the vast sums ploughed into the Foundling Hospital by the Westminster parliament during the General Reception (about £30,000 a year between 1756 and 1771) were still relatively small in comparison to the £700,000 spent on prison hulks on the Thames in the quarter century after 1776, or the £1 million spent on transportation to Australia between 1787 and 1797.¹³ The Foundling Hospital was not unique in its receipt of state funding, nor did it deter other charitable social experiments, but, as an experiment in state-subsidised philanthropy, the scale of its influence on welfare provision for pauper infants and children was without precedent.¹⁴

¹¹K. Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780–1820* (Aldershot, 2007).

¹²D. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London charity in the eighteenth century* (Princeton, 1989), 57–64.

¹³J. Innes, *Inferior Politics: Social problems and social policies in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), 59–61.

¹⁴*ibid.*

'Putting out' foundlings

The method of putting out foundlings as unfree charity apprenticeships in some respects mirrored that of parish apprenticeships in relation to the issuing of indentures with premiums, and finding places with masters or mistresses, but the *modus operandi* of the Foundling Hospital charity was distinctive, and also without precedent in terms of scale in comparison with other charitable foundations. Since the Elizabethan period, as Alys Levene has described, Christ's Hospital had apprenticed the children of men employed in traditional London Guilds in semi-skilled and skilled trades, dealing and manufacturing. Foundling children and other charity apprentices were raised within a nexus of patronage and support that they would not have been able to access via the parochial system.¹⁵ From the mid-1700s, the Foundling Hospital attracted the patronage of royalty, aristocrats (particularly high-status society women) and leading parliamentarians, while the Marine Society (founded by Jonas Hanway, who had been a Foundling Hospital Governor) specialised in finding placements for the sons of men employed in sea-service.¹⁶

During the General Reception period, and in the immediate aftermath, the age at which children were put out, and the level of premiums, could differ considerably between parish children and foundlings. While the charity's operations were at their maximum scale in the 1760s and 1770s in the wake of the General Reception, the average age at which children were apprenticed was lowered (which was more similar to, but not the same as, parish children's experience). This was in contrast to pre- and post-general admission policies at the hospital, when children received a longer period of education than pauper children raised at the expense of parishes, and to a higher educational standard. Premiums could also be higher for foundlings than for parish children, with 'sponsored' children put out with far higher premiums than was usual for poor, unfree apprentices.¹⁷

D.S. Allin calculated that of the 14,934 infants admitted during the General Reception, 10,413 died in the care of the hospital, and 4339 survived to be apprenticed. Allin's focus was on survival rates and numbers of children, rather than numbers of apprenticeships issued (which was not

¹⁵A. Levene, 'Charity apprenticeships and social capital in eighteenth-century England' in N. Goose and K. Honeyman (eds), *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and agency, 1750–1914* (Basingstoke, 2013), especially 46–51.

¹⁶Among these three charities, the London Foundling Hospital has been the subject of several major studies, although less attention has been given to the life histories of children raised in the institution than to the regimes of institutional childcare imposed upon them. See, for example, R. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the eighteenth century* (New Haven, 1981); T. Evans, *Unfortunate Objects: Lone mothers in eighteenth-century London* (Basingstoke, 2005); J. Styles, *Threads of Feeling: the London Foundling Hospital's textile tokens, 1740–1770* (London, 2010); A. Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741–1800: 'Left to the mercy of the world'* (Manchester, 2007). A significant new history of the London Foundling Hospital is currently being researched by Janette Bright.

¹⁷McClure, *op. cit.*, 126–28; Honeyman, *Child Workers, op. cit.*, especially 24–26.

Table 1. Number of foundling first apprenticeships by sector and county, 1751–1834.^a

County	Sector			Total
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
London and Middlesex	27	1147	786	1960
Yorkshire	707	793	395	1895
Surrey	27	155	84	266
Staffordshire	9	157	5	171
Shropshire	19	76	38	133
Cheshire	33	65	22	120
Essex	40	55	21	116
Kent	19	24	39	82
Lancashire	3	37	12	52
Hertfordshire	20	11	19	50
Worcestershire	1	33	6	40
Northumberland and County Durham	3	4	27	34
Berkshire	9	16	8	33
Hampshire	10	9	7	26
Cumberland and Westmorland	3	-	23	26
Buckinghamshire	6	2	17	25
Derbyshire	3	17	5	25
Nottinghamshire	1	9	7	17
Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset	1	1	15	17
Lincolnshire	-	4	11	15
Sussex and Suffolk	3	2	9	14
Bedfordshire	2	2	6	10
Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and Huntingdonshire	-	-	10	10
Wiltshire	3	3	3	9
Norfolk	1	2	4	7
Gloucestershire	-	-	5	5
Warwickshire	-	2	3	5
Northamptonshire	-	2	2	4
Leicestershire	-	-	3	3
Total	950	2628	1592	5170

^aOut of a total of 5885 records, of which 682 have no recorded masters'/mistresses' occupation. Blank records have been excluded, as have apprenticeships to Wales and Scotland (17), Jersey (15) and Newfoundland (1), leaving a total of 5170.

Source: London Foundling Hospital apprenticeship register, 1751–1834, LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001-411.

coterminous owing to the number of re-apprenticeships).¹⁸ McClure's figures demonstrate that the first cohort to emerge in any significant number was in 1760. The details of each foundling apprenticeship were entered in an apprenticeship register which provides the admission date, the name and identifying serial number of each foundling, on what date they were apprenticed, their masters' and mistresses' occupations and parish of residence, the term of their apprenticeship and the premiums with which they were bound. Additional lines in the register were sub- or superscribed next to a foundling's name, indicating from time to time whether they were re-apprenticed (although this was not always recorded comprehensively, making it an incomplete source for re-apprenticeship data). The accuracy of this register is difficult to verify given the patchy survival of other records: for example, the Chester branch of the London Foundling Hospital kept its own register of apprenticeships, but only for a brief period of less than two years

¹⁸Allin, *op. cit.* See Table 1.

between 1767 and 1769.¹⁹ The high degree of correlation between the Chester and London registers (and the short-lived, fragmentary nature of the branch hospitals' attempt at keeping their own apprenticeship registers) suggests that this was an experiment in supplementary record-keeping, rather than an indication that there were potentially larger cohorts of apprenticeships issuing from the branch hospitals that went unrecorded in London.²⁰ The practice of securing apprenticeships and issuing all indentures was coordinated by the Secretary of the London Foundling Hospital, acting upon the instruction of the governors via meetings of the General Committee and Sub-Committee. It is reasonable to assume that the main apprenticeship register compiled in London is the most comprehensive and accurate record available for Foundling Hospital first apprenticeships. In terms of associated documentation, some but not all of the original indentures survive, as do testimonial documents from a brief period between 1800 and 1823 (plus a small sample from the 1770s) when apprentices who had completed their term petitioned the governors for a bonus for good behaviour. The testimonials studied by Alys Levene give remarkable insights into master/apprentice relations, but represent only 303 out of nearly 6000 first apprenticeships documented in the register.²¹

The register contains details of foundlings admitted to the hospital between 25 March 1741 and 9 March 1816, and those same children apprenticed between 7 August 1751 and 30 January 1834. The total number of apprenticeships recorded between these dates amounted to 5983. Of these, a fairly low number of 567 apprenticeships (just under 10%) were terminated before the indenture had been served in full with the explicit reason being given as transfer of an apprentice to another master. Chris Brooks's research found that between a third and a half of apprenticeships among the middling sorts ended before the expiry of the formal indenture between 1550 and 1800: Ben Amos's figure for seventeenth-century Bristol apprentices was 24–35%.²² Levene estimates that it could have been even higher for London apprentices, particularly pauper children, and Wallis's evidence from late-Stuart London corroborates this, showing demonstrably high levels of 'departure' by apprentices throughout

¹⁹LMA/A/FH/D4/6/2, 'A list of the Orphan Children Apprenticed in the Year 1767 belonging to the Hospital for the maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted young Children'. The register is 20 pages in length, with an average of 10 apprentice names per page.

²⁰A sample of 11 apprentice names recorded on p. 1 of the Chester register (LMA/A/FH/D4/6/2) indicated a 100% correlation with information recorded about the child's name, number, master/mistress details and location in the London register (LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001-411), suggesting a remarkably high level of accuracy in record-keeping on the part of Foundling Hospital administrators.

²¹A. Levene, 'Honesty, sobriety and diligence: master/apprentice relations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England', *Social History*, 33, 2 (2008), 183–200.

²²C. Brooks, 'Apprenticeship, social mobility and the middling sort, 1550–1800' in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, society and politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), 74–75; I.K. Ben Amos, 'Failure to become freemen: urban apprentices in early modern England', *Social History*, 16, 2 (1991), 155–72.

the term of indentures.²³ Honeyman estimates an 80% completion rate for apprentices sent to northern textile trades and a comparable rate for metropolitan pauper apprenticeships studied by Leonard Schwarz, but a higher overall attrition rate than for London apprenticeships in general.²⁴ Minns and Wallis calculated that 1 in 10 apprenticeships ended before the full term had been served between 1710 and 1804, which tallies with the rate of apprenticeships terminated before completion recorded in the Foundling Hospital register. Considering other evidence from comparative studies, this is likely to represent the most conservative estimate of rates of non-completion of foundling apprenticeships, allowing for under-recording. Apprenticeships ended prematurely for many reasons: temperamental differences between master and apprentice, discontent on the part of the apprentice who may have wished to find alternative training and employment, or the apprentice opting to work for pay rather than as an unpaid labourer working for 'in kind' remuneration such as clothing, bed and board.²⁵ No reason was usually given in the foundling apprenticeship register for the termination of apprenticeships, so it is difficult to tell how many of these served out their full time, which was usually 'until 21 or married' or 'until 24'.

Only 55 apprentices are recorded as having died in the Register of Apprenticeships, although this was most likely a substantial under-recording: the actual mortality rate could have been two to three times higher, although the migration of foundlings across a wide geographical area makes this difficult to estimate with any certainty.²⁶ Entries recording apprentice deaths in the register are skewed towards those in London and Middlesex parishes, with 35 entries (64%) reporting local deaths less than 10 miles away from the Foundling Hospital, doubtless reflecting the difficulty in maintaining effective communication with inspectors in more distant parishes. Those children suffering disease and dying in hospitals such as St George's or in private residences near the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury were reported regularly: only a small number farther afield were noted in the register, perhaps because of the unusual circumstances of their deaths. For example, William Spadewell (no. 626) died on the coast of Guinea (December 1770), Charles Bristed (no. 18,940) drowned [no date],

²³Levene, 'Honesty, sobriety and diligence', *op. cit.*, 186; Wallis, *op. cit.*

²⁴L. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, labour force and living conditions, 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1992), especially 220–21; K. Honeyman, 'Compulsion, comparison and consent. Parish apprenticeship in early nineteenth-century England', in K. Honeyman and N. Goose (eds), *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and agency, 1750–1914* (Aldershot, 2013), 85.

²⁵C. Minns and P. Wallis, 'The price of human capital in a pre-industrial economy: premiums and apprenticeship contracts in eighteenth-century England', *Explorations in Economic History*, 50, 213 (2013), 338.

²⁶Wrigley and Schofield estimate the death rate in Middlesex parishes to be 21.46 per thousand in 1800, although in the 1770s (at roughly the same time as the majority of General Reception foundlings were apprenticed) there was considerable variation between mortality rates in the metropolis, the parishes covered by the Bills of Mortality, and provincial England. E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981), 67, 78.

and William Pen (no. 533), apprenticed 2 April 1760, was 'killed on the spot' in an accident in July 1767.²⁷

Comparison with parish apprenticeships: premiums, age at apprenticeship and duration

Jeremy Boulton has shown how the parish workhouse of St Martin-in-the-Fields offered a paltry premium of only £2 per apprentice, which similarly acted as a deterrent to would-be profiteers. Campbell's 1747 *London Tradesman* suggests that £5 was at the bottom range of premiums for a large number of artisan trades.²⁸ Minns and Wallis's study of 9000 apprenticeships using Stamp Tax records from 1710 to 1804 illustrated the typicality of premiums of less than £10 for apprenticeships to handicraft trades, clothing, footwear, textiles and metal manufacture.²⁹ Similarly low premiums were usually offered by the Foundling Hospital governors to employers who took a foundling apprentice at £5, similar to the premiums paid for pauper children apprenticed to semi-skilled trades in London, Bristol and southern English counties up to the mid-eighteenth century, and was a comparable premium to those paid by other charities, for example with boys entering sea-service via the Marine Society.³⁰ Modest premiums were designed to deter the 'wrong' kind of master (that is, someone seeking to profit from the premium obtained).³¹

Much higher premiums could be paid for foundling apprentices than was usual for parish apprenticeships, and these were more similar to amounts paid for private children to learn a skilled trade. This was in large part due to the distinctive arrangement by which certain infants ('private children') were admitted on a paying basis to the hospital and provided with additional support by anonymous benefactors, who were widely assumed by censorious public commentators to be the fathers of illegitimate babies admitted to the hospital. The example of George Grafton was one such case, who was despatched with a very high £21 premium and much better prospects than most unfree child apprentices, since the shoemaking business 'was of such a nature that no Man that was properly instructed in it need be out of employ a day in the Year'.³² This feature of Foundling Hospital apprenticeships did not have a parallel in the parish system, although other charities such as Christ's Hospital undertook private placements, which extended

²⁷LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001-411.

²⁸R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman: Being an historical account of all trades, professions, arts, both liberal and mechanic* (London, 1747), 331–40. See also Wallis, *op. cit.*

²⁹Minns and Wallis, *op. cit.*, 340–42.

³⁰I.K. Ben Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven, 1994), 81; K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social change and agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1987), 232–36; R. Pietsch, *The Real Jim Hawkins: Ships' boys in the Georgian Navy* (Barnsley, 2000), 9.

³¹Pietsch, *op. cit.*, 9.

³²General correspondence, LMA/A/FH/A12/23/1 [n.f.]. See also, for example, Felix Coram, no. 16,327, a 'Private Child'. General correspondence, LMA/A/FH/A12/003/327.

patronage networks between governors, patrons, employers and apprentices.³³

Another aspect of Foundling Hospital apprenticeships found a closer parallel in the traditional 'free' apprenticeship system that had operated since the Elizabethan period (with many modifications) than with the parish system. Specifically, this relates to the age at which children were apprenticed. Evidence from the seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries indicates that free adolescents were bound over as apprentices in London between the ages of 15 and 17, and slightly younger, aged 13 or 14, in small towns in provincial England.³⁴ Humphries' analysis demonstrates that the average age of free apprentices was falling rapidly towards the end of the eighteenth century, at just over 10 years old between 1791 and 1820, falling to below the age of 10 after 1821.³⁵ Horrell and Humphries found from analysing family budgets of the labouring poor that low-wage agricultural workers between 1787 and 1816 put their children to work at the age of 11, while factory workers' children were put to work at just under 10 years.³⁶ By comparison, some parish children were put to work as young as four, at an age when foundling children were normally still with their country nurses. In Essex and Staffordshire, half of children placed out by parishes between 1750 and 1799 were under the age of 10; at Colyton in Devon, the most common age for parish children to be apprenticed was eight.³⁷ Before the General Reception, foundling children were apprenticed at an age that was more similar to private apprentices than parish children, although the age at which foundlings were apprenticed fell during the 1760s as a result of the General Reception. The mean age of apprenticeship was 11 for children admitted to the Hospital in 1756, but cases of apprenticeship as young as 3 to 5 years old in this cohort are documented. These remained exceptional and were granted only by special dispensation of the Foundling Hospital Governors. One example was foundling Abraham Western (no. 5035), apprenticed at the age of 5 on 27 January 1762 to John Richardson, an Essex farmer, whose wife had wet nursed the boy.³⁸

Inspectors were under considerable pressure to despatch large numbers from the General Reception period in the late 1760s, just as parliamentary subsidies for the Foundling Hospital, including special grants to

³³Levene, 'Charity apprenticeships', *op. cit.*, 63–67.

³⁴The most authoritative recent discussion of apprenticeship ages for 'free' children and adolescents is P. Wallis, C. Webb and C. Minns, 'Leaving home and entering service: the age of apprenticeship in early modern London', *Continuity and Change*, 25, 3 (2010), 377–404.

³⁵Humphries, *op. cit.*, table 7.1, 176.

³⁶Horrell and Humphries, *op. cit.*, table 3.4, 88, 97.

³⁷Simonton, 'Education and training', *op. cit.*, 191; P. Sharpe, 'Poor children as apprentices in Colyton, 1598–1830', *Continuity and Change*, 6, 2 (1991), 254.

³⁸These details emerge from comparing the Apprenticeship Register entry with the Sub-Committee Minutes of the General Committee of the Foundling Hospital, LMA/A/FH/A/03/005/00 (Jan. 1762).

support child apprenticeships, were running out.³⁹ Demand for apprentices was partly brokered by prospective employers in sectors and geographical locations where there were labour shortages, sometimes via branch hospitals, and on other occasions via direct petition to the London Governors.⁴⁰ Written confirmation was required from a reputable neighbour of the prospective master or mistress regarding their suitability.⁴¹ There is little evidence before the end of the General Reception of foundlings being sent out to prospective masters 'on a liking', although this was common practice for pauper children put out from St Martin's and other workhouses. More commonly, prospective masters were treated to a 'lineup' of six or eight foundling children whom they could inspect for health and fitness to work before making their choice.⁴² By the 1830s, there is reference elsewhere in the Foundling Hospital archive to girls being sent into service to prospective employers on a one-month trial basis, but by this period much smaller numbers of foundlings required employment.⁴³ Standard practice was for two copies of the indenture to be signed and sent to receive the Hospital's seal, with one copy returned to the master and the other retained by the London Foundling Hospital, even if the apprentice was employed via a branch hospital at a distance from the metropolis.⁴⁴ The General Reception put an enormous burden on the Foundling Hospital's administrative system, but records were kept with an accuracy that was unparalleled in the parish system, particularly in relation to how the number given to each child aligns with subsequent documentation relating to their putting out, and any other correspondence with the Hospital Governors.

We have seen so far how there are parallels to be drawn with both parish and private apprenticeship systems in the organisation of charity apprenticeships under consideration. The Foundling Hospital children supplied 'unfree' labour, but their employment followed a distinctive set of priorities that were shaped by the philanthropic nature of the charity's mission, and the logistics of where and how children were distributed depended upon the reach of its nationwide branch institutions and network of inspectors. While the most socially exclusive and lucrative trades (such as mercers, vintners, goldsmiths and haberdashers) were beyond the reach even of the hospital's 'private children', some did have better prospects than unfree children

³⁹B. Scott, 'Ackworth Hospital, 1757–1773', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 61 (1989), 162, 166.

⁴⁰See, for example, General Committee minutes, LMA/A/FH/K02/05-06 (1755–57), 14 January 1756, 19–20 ff.

⁴¹Indentures could be issued quickly, for example to a captain going to sea 'immediately' who needed two boys for sea-service LMA/A/FH/A6/9/5/1 [n.f.] undated [1767].

⁴²Levene, 'Honesty, sobriety and diligence', *op. cit.*, 187.

⁴³LMA/A/FH/A12/30/1 ('List of Girls Ordered to be Apprenticed'). A brief document covering the years 1828–41, it contains references to 'Girls on Trial' in 1832 and 1833, such as 'Agnes Hammond went 22 June 1833 to Miss Ruscoe of Highgate on trial for one Month/see Gen. Committee [minutes] 24 July 1833'.

⁴⁴Anon., *Account of the Hospital* (London, 1749), 46.

raised and apprenticed under the auspices of the Poor Law. It is to a more precise analysis of where, and how, foundling children were put out on first apprenticeship that we now turn our attention.

Geographical distribution of foundling apprentices and types of employment

The Foundling Hospital apprenticeship register makes it possible to map the geographical distribution of first apprenticeships.⁴⁵ A total of 98 records could not be mapped because of inadequate or inaccurate records or because individuals were immediately sent abroad. This produced a data set of 5885 first apprenticeships. These points were clustered, and allowed the geographical distribution of apprenticeships to be plotted across Britain by parish (Figure 1). This presents a clearer image of their geographical clustering nationally, showing the six branches of the London Foundling Hospital. Several clusters are immediately apparent, the largest around the branch hospitals in Ackworth, Yorkshire, with smaller but notable clusters in Cheshire, Shropshire and the West Midlands. In the context of changing population size by county, the most striking feature of Figure 1 is the absence of foundling apprentice clustering in the North West beyond the parishes immediately surrounding the Chester and Shrewsbury branch hospitals. This is surprising since Lancashire was by far the fastest-growing English county in the second half of the eighteenth century, experiencing rapid growth in textile industries during the exact period in the 1760s and 1770s when the bulk of 'General Reception' foundlings were of an age to be apprenticed.⁴⁶

Table 1 presents the global figures for foundling first employment by sector and county, between 1751 and 1834. The percentage of foundlings employed in London and Middlesex in the primary sector is low, consistent with the small size of the primary sector in the metropolitan area. In Yorkshire, the high number of foundlings employed in agriculture is consistent with the employment rate of men over 20 years of age in the East Riding, slightly lower than in the North Riding and much higher than in the West Riding where industrial employment was growing rapidly, as will be discussed in more detail shortly. Agriculture did not absorb many foundlings in any county other than Yorkshire, even though in Essex (for example) this remained a relatively large sector of the economy. The high volume of foundlings in agricultural employment overall is consistent with the

⁴⁵Kain's *Electronic Map of Historic Parishes Boundaries of England and Wales before 1850* was imported as a Geographic Information System (GIS) layer, and this historic parishes layer was simplified by combining the component parts of parishes, such as townships, into one polygon feature for each parish. The GIS package used was ArcGIS 10.2, with particular and grateful acknowledgement of the work and expertise of Dr Caron Newman.

⁴⁶E.A. Wrigley, 'English county populations in the later eighteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 60, 1 (2007), 53, 58, esp. table 5, 54.

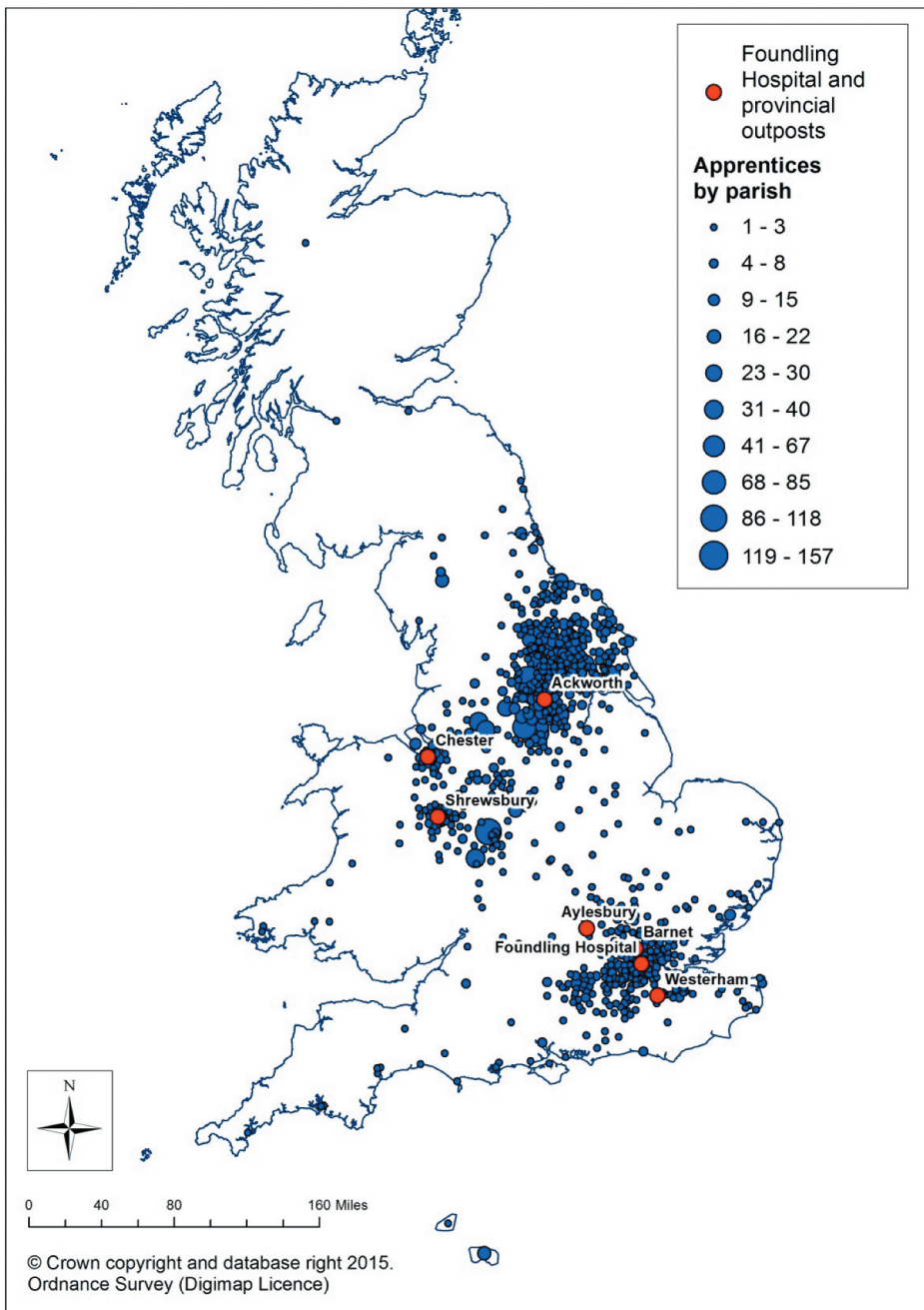


Figure 1. Clustering of foundling apprentices by historic parish boundaries, 1751–1834. Source: Foundling Hospital Apprenticeship Register, 1751–1834, LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001-411.

pattern of parish children's labour: in Essex and Staffordshire, for example, twice as many parish children went into agriculture and three and a half times the number went into service when compared to private 'free'

apprenticeships.⁴⁷ However, the concentration of foundlings in agricultural work in Yorkshire is a pattern that is particularly striking, plausibly owing to the labour shortages resulting from rural–urban migration and emigration and the presence of the Ackworth branch of the Foundling Hospital, considered in more detail below.

Among the underlying indicators of the origins of demand for child labour is the effect of inward and outward net migration between counties experiencing different rates of economic growth, and between rural and urban areas. Of the top seven counties absorbing large numbers of foundling apprentices shown in [Table 1](#), London and Middlesex experienced a net inward migration of nearly 270,000 in the half-century between 1750 and 1801, continuing a longer term trend of inward migration to the metropolis that was the main cause of its remarkable population growth during the eighteenth century. The diversity of secondary-sector apprenticeship opportunities, as well as high demand for domestic servants, meant that the labour market in the capital absorbed a total of 1960 foundling apprentices. The close proximity of the London Foundling Hospital to diverse networks of prospective employers via their system of inspectors reporting to the General Committee of the Hospital made employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors relatively easy to broker. Surrey also proved to be the location for a large proportion of foundlings destined for secondary-sector employment (58% of 266 Surrey-bound children). Although dwarfed in scale by neighbouring London and Middlesex, Surrey absorbed a rapid population growth of nearly 129,000 over the half-century before 1801. Another county with a growing industrial base, Staffordshire, received 133 foundlings, of whom a notable 92% entered secondary-sector occupations. In Cheshire, where inward migration reached nearly 10,000 across the same period, 120 foundlings found work, mostly in secondary employment. But by far the greatest proportion of foundlings apprenticed to primary-sector agricultural employment were sent to Yorkshire, where net migration loss in the North Riding (–18,084) contrasted with an increase of nearly 22,000 in the East Riding and 95,547 in the West Riding, an area of rapid industrialisation. Shropshire and Essex also appear in the top seven counties for foundling employment, with net losses of just over 27,600 and 50,500 individuals, respectively, in the half-century before 1801.⁴⁸

Another factor in the distribution of foundling apprentices, in addition to demand from labour shortages in some areas and economic opportunities in others, was the function of the six branch hospitals as distribution centres. Essex and Surrey were within the orbit of the London Hospital, while Ackworth, Shrewsbury and Chester provided bases for apprenticeships

⁴⁷Simonton, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸E.A. Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010), table 5.3, 256–57.

brokered in Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire. The London register of foundling apprenticeships does not record from which branch hospital each foundling was apprenticed, making this impossible to quantify definitively, but from the data presented in both [Figure 1](#) and [Table 1](#) it is reasonable to infer the predominance of Ackworth among the branch hospitals in placing apprentices. In contrast with the success of Ackworth in despatching a large volume of foundling apprenticeships, advertisements placed at Westerham and Sevenoaks markets in Kent informing potential masters that parliament had given ‘Small Sum by way of Fees to promote the putting out of Foundling Children Apprenticed’ evidently failed to attract prospective masters or mistresses in any great number, although it was later noted by the Sub-Committee in London that ‘very few persons Apply for Children at this Hospital therefore this Committee have no chance of Apprenticing of the oldest Boys’.⁴⁹ Westerham was at the additional disadvantage of having had its funds embezzled by the overseeing Governor, John Wilkes Member of Parliament, and seems to have had marginal impact.⁵⁰

The success of Ackworth in placing a high volume of apprentices was the result of a combination of forces: the patronage of local elites, a network of energetic inspectors, and a dynamic labour market stimulated by the booming industrial economy of the West Riding, which after Lancashire and Surrey was one of the fastest-growing English counties in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁵¹ The London Foundling Hospital had close associations with Yorkshire from as early as the 1740s, when an energetic inspector, Rev. Thomas Trant, brokered apprenticeships for boys sent from London in the Hemsworth area.⁵² Many of the great landowners of Yorkshire, such as Sir Rowland Winn of Nostell Priory, were persuaded to become governors and helped to raise subscriptions to fund the purchase of premises that became the Ackworth branch hospital. Of the many hundreds of foundlings who were employed in their first apprenticeship in the agricultural sector in Yorkshire, 186 parishes took 1–5 foundlings, 20 parishes took 6–10 foundlings, six parishes took 11–15, and just four parishes took more than 15: Alne in the North Riding (16), Newton Upon Ouse (18), Topcliffe (19) and the City of York (28). Foundlings were distributed evenly across 216 parishes in total, with the number of foundlings per parish almost equalling the number of masters/mistresses. The most frequent distribution was between 1 and 3 foundlings per parish in the period up to 1834, with the greatest concentration of numbers being in the decade after the General Reception. Some parishes took 11 to 15 foundlings

⁴⁹Allin, *op. cit.*, 340.

⁵⁰G. Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children: Thomas Coram and the Foundling Hospital* (Stroud, 2007), 46.

⁵¹Scott, *op. cit.*, 158–59; E.A. Wrigley, ‘Rickman revisited: the population growth rates of English counties in the early modern period’, *Economic History Review*, 62, 3 (2009), table 4, 723.

⁵²Scott, *op. cit.*, 157–58.

apiece, for example, Escrick (11 foundlings, 10 masters), Featherstone (11 foundlings, 9 masters) and Kirkleatham (11 foundlings, 9 masters). There is some evidence that the distribution of foundlings was to the 'improving' farmers known for creating model estates at the time, such as Christopher Turner of Kirkleatham, a governor of the Ackworth Hospital, who requested 30 boys to be apprenticed to his tenant farmers.⁵³

The evidence for foundling employment in the primary sector is perhaps not surprising given that Humphries demonstrated the continuing importance of agricultural employment for male children aged 10 to 14 years: young males in her sample group worked most commonly as farm boys, crow scarers, livestock-minders and ploughboys.⁵⁴ The employment of foundlings in agricultural labour is also consistent with Kirby's analysis of national figures for child employment by sector from the 1851 census, in comparison with London. His results demonstrated that agriculture, livestock and fisheries formed the numerically largest occupational sector for young provincial males, accounting for more than a third of the national labour force aged 10 to 14.⁵⁵ However, a further breakdown of the Foundling Hospital register by sector and gender (Table 3) indicates that the primary sector absorbed 921 children, with an almost equal split by gender (512 boys and 409 girls). The vast majority of these were in the farming/husbandry group, although from the apprenticeship register alone it is impossible to discern the exact nature of the children's employment.

The continuing importance of the agricultural sector in Yorkshire, observed by Arthur Young in the eighteenth century, contributed to the employment of foundling apprentices in a wide geographical spread of parishes where they could obtain a settlement by virtue of their apprenticeship and be absorbed into the local labour market.⁵⁶ Although comparative data for the 1760s is lacking, Wrigley's estimate is that in 1831 a total of 42,000 men aged over 20 were employed in agricultural labour in the West Riding alone.⁵⁷ Foundling children could have successfully 'backfilled' labour demand in rural parishes that were experiencing shortages through emigration to industrial towns and overseas. Their geographical spread over a large area to a large number of parishes may have helped absorb their intake into local labour markets and communities. A preliminary investigation of the East Riding quarter sessions records yielded no examples of disputes over the settlement of former foundlings. There are some indications, however, of locality persistence in the settlement of children in parishes where they were apprenticed. Ann Brent (no. 6356), apprenticed

⁵³*ibid.*, 166.

⁵⁴Humphries, *op. cit.*, 211–13.

⁵⁵P. Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870* (Basingstoke and New York, 2003), 52.

⁵⁶A. Young, *A Six Months Tour Through the North of England* (Dublin, 1770).

⁵⁷Wrigley, 'English county populations', *op. cit.*, table 8, 62.

to a farmer in the parish of Wheldrake in 1768, was still a resident of that parish when she named the father of her illegitimate child before a Beverley magistrate in 1781. Some years later, in 1796, another former foundling, Edward Offley (no. 1185), apprenticed without fee as a farm labourer, was bound over to keep the peace with his wife in Great Driffield, the parish where he had been sent in December 1768, presumably (like Ann Brent) from the Ackworth branch of the Foundling Hospital.⁵⁸ Other bodies of evidence relating to disputes involving pauper apprentices, including former charges of the London Foundling Hospital, may emerge from further research.

Some historians have assumed that foundlings were put to work predominantly in factories, but a closer analysis reveals that there is little evidence for this.⁵⁹ The apprenticeship register indicates that the greatest concentration of employment for foundlings (1562 boys and 1076 girls) was within the secondary sector, with particularly high concentrations in London and Middlesex, Yorkshire, Surrey and Staffordshire (Table 1). Employment in clothing (n = 468) and textile manufacture (n = 455) represents 35% of employment in this sector overall, a comparable number in aggregate (923) to the number of apprentices employed in agriculture. In percentage terms (49%), this was slightly higher than national employment in the secondary sector according to Shaw-Taylor and Wrigley (42%).⁶⁰

Table 2 locates the high watermark of foundling textile apprenticeships between 1767 and 1771. From the late 1760s, Foundling Hospital governors accepted some petitions from northern manufacturers to take batches of apprentices, perhaps as an experiment to see whether this would be an effective solution to despatching a high volume of General Admission children. The most concentrated period of foundling apprenticeship to textile industries was between 1767 and 1771 (n = 285), with the maximum in any single year rising from 70 in 1768 to 177 in 1769. Some manufacturers in the North and Midlands saw the availability of foundlings in bulk as an attractive prospect. In 1760, industrial magnate Sir James Lowther requested a batch of 13 boys from Ackworth, some for employment as 'banksmen' in open-cast mining. He later took 20 boys and 23 girls for his carpet manufactory, reflecting labour shortages in Westmorland at this

⁵⁸East Riding RO, QSF/294/C/11 Recognisance of William Clough of Wheldrake, servantman, and Ann Brent of Wheldrake, singlewoman (19 September 1780); QSF/251/C/8 Recognisance of Edward Offley of Great Driffield (11 February 1796). The serial number for each child was assigned upon their admission to the hospital as infants, and was recorded with remarkable consistency and accuracy.

⁵⁹M.B. Rose, 'Social policy and business: parish apprentices and the early factory system, 1750-1834', *Business History*, 31: 4 (1989), 7-11; Honeyman, *Child Workers*, *op. cit.*, 99, 103.

⁶⁰L. Shaw-Taylor and E.A. Wrigley, 'Occupational structure and population change' in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Vol. 1: 1700-1870* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2014), table 2.2, 59.

Table 2. Number of foundlings employed in textile industries by year.^a

Year of apprenticeship	No.
1752–1756	4
1757–1761	34
1762–1766	31
1767–1771	285
1772–1776	31
1777–1781	16
1782–1786	2
1787–1791	5
1792–1796	17
1797–1801	16
1802–1806	2
1820–1824	2
1825–1829	2
1830–1834	2
Total	449

^aTotal of 449 entries out of 455 for apprentices to the textile industries with complete information.

Source: London Foundling Hospital apprenticeship register, 1751–1834, LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001-411.

time.⁶¹ Richard Blackburn, ‘a very Considerable Silk Manufacturer’ in Stockport, Cheshire, needed ‘a greater number of hands of all ages than can be procured in the neighbourhood’ and sought to employ ‘as many as would enable him to proceed in a more Extensive way’. He faced opposition from local Magistrates, who sought guarantee that pauper children imported *en masse* would not become chargeable to the parish. Having secured the necessary assurances, Blackburn took on 11 foundling girls between the ages of 10 and 14, re-apprenticed to him on the same day (23 November 1773) following the death of their previous master Thomas Tatlock, who, like Blackburn, was described as a ‘Silk Throwster’.⁶²

Foundling children could be deployed in new industries where there was a shortage of adult labour, or to save wage costs. In Staffordshire, one such employer was Job Wyatt. At the height of the supply to industries of 9- and 10-year-old apprentices admitted during the General Reception period, Wyatt took 11 girls in February 1767 for his new venture, a ‘wood screw manufactory’ in Tatenhill, near Burton-on-Trent. This was followed by a further 10 girls of the same age range the following year (April 1768). In 1760, Royal Letters Patent had been granted ‘to Mess. Wyatts, of Burton upon Trent, for a new-invented Machine to make Screws of Iron, commonly called Wood Screws’.⁶³ The Wyatt brothers, Job and William, bought a watermill at Tatenhill and converted it to a screw

⁶¹Scott, *op. cit.*, 166; on the fluctuating population of Westmoreland (in decline between the 1760s and 1780s), see Wrigley, ‘English county populations’, *op. cit.*, table 5, 55.

⁶²LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001-411. These were Maud Archer, Frances Bonner, Elizabeth Brooks, Susan Bridgeman, Matilda Burr, Letitia Bury, Tabitha Carter, Sarah Hawson, Sarah Langford, Mary Pigot and Jane Thwaites.

⁶³*Derby Mercury*, 6 June 1760.

factory in about 1776 at a cost of £1100. The factory produced 700 gross of screws of all sizes every week, and since Tatenhill had a population of only 2180 in 1831, it is likely that from the outset the Wyatt business chose to speculate in using foundling girls' labour.⁶⁴ This kind of employment could have catastrophic consequences for the children's welfare, as revealed by factory visits by Foundling Hospital inspectors, who were instrumental in revealing shocking cases of neglect and abuse.⁶⁵ Surviving letters from foundling girls expressed (perhaps formulaic) gratitude to the governors for removing them from abusive masters.⁶⁶ By the early 1770s, just as demand for parish apprentices for factory employment was ramping up, the governors discontinued batch apprenticeship, fearful of the reputational damage that news reports could inflict upon their already controversial charity.

Apart from clothing and textile manufacture, which absorbed a roughly equal number of boys and girls, foundling labour was deployed within a wide variety of industries, trades and manufactures in the secondary sector, with gendered patterns of employment in certain manufactures. Humphries shows how the subdivision of work and reorganisation of labour in manufacturing (including the introduction of new technologies that removed the need for adult male strength) provided more opportunities to employ boy workers in cotton, boot and shoe production, while some types of manufacturing (for example, certain kinds of food processing) actually relied upon child labour from the outset.⁶⁷ In all, 70% of foundlings apprenticed to employers engaged in footwear manufacture were boys, as were 66% of those who found apprenticeship to employers in iron manufacturing, 82% in machine and toolmaking, and 78% engaged in 'dirty' industries using leather, bone and other materials associated with 'noxious' processes (Table 3). This evidence suggests that certain kinds of manufacture continued to be gendered as 'male domains' even though less physical strength was necessary in certain kinds of production through the introduction of new technologies.

London had a distinctive economy that relied on small-scale trades and manufacturing rather than factory production, and higher adult wages.⁶⁸ The employment of male children in workshops and handicrafts was higher in London than in other parts of England and Wales, whereas factory employment was much higher for male and female children outside of London (15.9% of boys and 25.6% girls in the 10 to 14 age group) than within London (1.5% of boys and 0.5% of girls).⁶⁹ The importance of London as a centre of production, and the

⁶⁴W. Pitt, *A Topographical History of Staffordshire* (Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1817).

⁶⁵Scott, *op. cit.*, 163–64.

⁶⁶See, for example, a letter written by female foundling apprentices removed from the care of Thomas Tatlock, an abusive textile manufacturer, A/FH/A/12/023/001, Memorandums of complaints between masters and apprentices [13 July 1780], n.f.

⁶⁷Humphries, *op. cit.*, 213.

⁶⁸P. Kirby, 'A brief statistical sketch of the child labour market in mid-nineteenth century London', *Continuity and Change*, 20, 2 (2005), 229–33.

⁶⁹*ibid.*, table 2, 234.

Table 3. Foundling apprentice employment by gender, sector and group, 1751–1834.

Masters'/mistresses' occupational Group	Male apprentices	Female apprentices	Total	% Male apprentices	% Female apprentices	% of sector
<i>Primary</i>						
Agriculture	512	409	921	56%	44%	93%
Miscellaneous ^a	36	32	68	53%	47%	7%
SUB TOTAL (<i>Primary sector</i>)	548	441	989	55%	45%	100%
<i>Secondary</i>						
Clothing	269	199	468	57%	43%	18%
Textiles	220	235	455	48%	52%	17%
Footwear	168	72	240	70%	30%	9%
Food and drink industries ^b	136	100	236	58%	42%	9%
Iron manufacture and products ^c	152	78	230	66%	34%	9%
Building and construction ^d	98	96	194	51%	49%	7%
Industries using leather, bone etc.	134	37	171	78%	22%	6%
Minor manufactures and trades ^e	89	69	158	56%	44%	6%
Wood industries	69	80	149	46%	54%	6%
Machines and tools, making and operation	118	26	144	82%	18%	5%
Miscellaneous industries ^f	39	27	66	59%	41%	3%
Printing	31	25	56	55%	45%	2%
Road transport vehicles, public works	18	15	33	55%	45%	1%
Miscellaneous manufactures ^g	21	17	38	55%	45%	1%
SUB TOTAL (<i>Secondary sector</i>)	1562	1076	2638	59%	41%	100%
<i>Tertiary</i>						
Distinguished, titled, gentlemen	254	187	441	58%	42%	26%
Professions ^h	206	202	408	50%	50%	24%
Miscellaneous sellers, shopkeepers and small traders ⁱ	139	196	335	41%	59%	19%
Dealers in textiles	23	129	152	15%	85%	9%
Transport (sea/road/inland navigation)	115	26	141	82%	18%	8%
Miscellaneous dealers ^j	47	45	92	51%	49%	5%
Food, drink and accommodation services	33	46	79	42%	58%	5%
Miscellaneous service industries	30	37	67	45%	55%	4%
SUB TOTAL (<i>Tertiary sector</i>)	847	868	1715	49%	51%	100%

^aIncl. estate work (1), fishing (17), forestry (4), mining and quarrying (9); labourer (unspecified) (37).

^bIncl. drink (31) and tobacco (1) industries.

^cIncl. instrument making (77).

^dIncl. boat and ship building (9).

^eIncl. non-ferrous metal manufacture and products (49); precious metals and jewellery (40).

^fFurnishing (7), glass (12), industries producing products from fibres (20); paper industries (22); stone and mineral processing (5).

^gBrick and tile (5); earthenware and pottery (12); chemicals, soap, adhesives (12).

^hIn addition to professions (262): armed forces (21); professional support (58); financial services (21), commercial and administrative services (26); national (10) and local (5) government services; owners and possessors of capital (5).

ⁱSellers of leather, hair, bone (2); fuel (10); paper (19); chemicals (6); clothing and accessories (29); printed products (12); textiles (25); precious metals and jewellery (17); food (97) and tobacco (3); other (115).

^jDealers in food (12); drink (31); earthenware, pottery (1), glass and glass products (1), iron; wood and wood products (10); leather, hair and animal products (13); chemicals (15); clothing and accessories (6); minor products (2); printed products (1).

Source: London Foundling Hospital apprenticeship register, 1751–1834, LMA/A/FH/A12/003/001-4.

sizeable manufacturing industries located in the capital, is highlighted by the 146 (31%) foundling apprentices who were sent to employers in London or Middlesex, in a range of masters'/mistresses' occupations from tailoring, to

makers of breeches, stays, mantuas, hats, gloves and stockings.⁷⁰ Outside of the metropolis, the regional specialisation of clothing manufacture is mirrored in the employment of foundlings, for example, to button manufacturers in the West Riding of Yorkshire.⁷¹

In terms of tertiary employment, Kirby highlights that domestic service was the largest single occupational grouping for girls up until the mid-nineteenth century, constituting 64% of the total employment of all 10 to 14 year olds.⁷² The apprenticeship register records that, across all three sectors where this information is recorded (and, as has already been observed, 'Apprentice Occupation' was not always specifically recorded), 1416 foundlings were employed in 'household business', presumably in domestic service. Of these, 1275 (90%) were girls, and just 141 were boys. A distinctive feature of the pattern of employment of foundlings is the despatch of 441 foundlings (Table 3) to the houses of what the PST coding system labels 'Distinguished, titled gentlemen', from as far afield as Devon, Lincolnshire, Kent and Shropshire, and 408 to the homes of professional employers. The employment of foundlings in gentry and professional households in domestic labour may mark the ongoing 'charity prestige' of supporting the Foundling Hospital. The sizeable number of foundlings employed in service industries is a reminder that this was already a large and growing sector of the economy at the end of the eighteenth century, a pattern to which the foundling apprenticeship data adds an additional corroboration.

Considering that the original project of the Foundling Hospital's founder and governors, and many of their patrons, was to provide labour for soldiering and sea-service, relatively few foundling first apprenticeships were to merchants, mariners or captains. Some foundlings did find employment in various kinds of maritime and inland transportation, including sea transport ($n = 141$), with a wide geographical distribution across sea ports and dockland areas, from Whitby to Scarborough and Northumberland in the North, but particularly in London and the South East, in areas such as Rotherhithe, Wapping and Ramsgate. Sea-service was for boys, although the relative scarcity of this kind of employment now has a context following presentation in the present study of the scope and distribution of foundling apprenticeships. More usually, particularly after the foundation of the Marine Society by one of the Foundling Hospital's most influential governors, Jonas Hanway, putting boys to sea became more of a punishment for miscreants than a source of regular employment for former foundlings.

⁷⁰A.L. Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley and other milliners in the City of London companies, 1700–1750', *History Workshop Journal*, 71, 1 (2011), 147–72.

⁷¹Wrigley, 'English county populations', *op. cit.*, 39–40.

⁷²Kirby, *Child Labour*, *op. cit.*, 52.

Conclusion

This article has provided further illustration of how the shifting economic and demographic profile of eighteenth-century England absorbed and was sustained in part by the availability of unfree child labour. This included the labour of charity apprentices, including orphaned and abandoned children raised at the expense of philanthropic institutions, of which the leading example was the Foundling Hospital. We now know that nearly a fifth of first apprenticeships issued by the Foundling Hospital's charitable enterprise put children to agricultural work, notably to parishes in Yorkshire.⁷³ Across English counties, reasons for labour shortages were local and particular, influenced by factors such as rural–urban migration towards London, port towns and northern manufacturing centres, and even large-scale transatlantic migration to the American colonies from the North and East Riding, which accelerated from the late 1760s. The usefulness of having a foundling apprentice to work in the fields or in domestic labour was especially apparent to improving farmers, 'leading citizens' and gentry, who may have wished to demonstrate both their philanthropy by taking on a foundling apprentice, and the utility of this additional source of labour at a time when many young people were moving away from rural areas or emigrating.⁷⁴ Some industrial entrepreneurs in the Midlands and North exploited the availability of charity apprentices, but were curtailed for reasons of social concern on the part of the Foundling Hospital Governors and the charity's patrons over children's welfare, long before Victorian campaigners took up the cause of child labour exploitation. Another 40% of foundlings were despatched to work in diverse forms of secondary manufacturing, particularly in London, the Home Counties and the Midlands, illustrating the ongoing importance of the 'industrious' economy in the 1760s and 1770s. The finding that 90% of foundlings employed to domestic work were girls is perhaps unsurprising given the gendered pattern of household domestic employment. Unlike other documentary evidence in the Foundling Hospital archive, the apprenticeship register alone gives no indication of the different life trajectories of foundling girls (depending, for example, on the size and status of the household in which they were employed, or whether employment in domestic service was their lifelong fate).

The gendered expectations and strict parameters placed upon foundling children's life chances presented here are set within a Georgian paradigm of patronage, limited education and very few examples of social mobility. Their prospects were, however, sometimes better than those of other unfree child labourers, notably those put out from the parish system, with many foundlings

⁷³Specifically, 921 apprentices (both boys and girls) put to agricultural work out of 5170 first apprenticeships (or 17.8%) included in Tables 1 and 3.

⁷⁴B. Bailyn, with the assistance of B. DeWolfe, *Voyagers to the West: A passage in the peopling of America on the eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1986), especially 374–429.

experiencing a longer period in education than other pauper children before being put out to work, and fewer being despatched under the notorious batch apprenticeship system to textile factories. The experiences of foundling children are another strand in demonstrating how the supply of unfree child labour was brokered and distributed in the face of increasing demand. But where, when and how foundling children were sent out to work was as much at the whim of the Governors of the Foundling Hospital, who were strongly influenced by their sensitivity to the public reputation of their charitable cause, as it was about the impersonal market forces of supply and demand. Societal concern about 'respectable' trades for boys and girls was a strong consideration when choosing occupations for foundling children. Where foundlings were sent at the point of apprenticeship was subject to scrutiny by the hospital's inspectorate and governors, and by the local circumstances of geographical concentration via branch institutions and patronage networks exerted by those who oversaw the charity. Although some caution is needed to avoid painting too favourable a picture of child workers' experiences, the Foundling Hospital's care over its children's welfare extended beyond their putting out, as numerous letters and appeals to the governors testify, with active intervention by the governors if and when cases of abuse, neglect or abandonment were brought to their attention. The experience of a charity apprentice may have been only marginally better than that of a parish apprentice, but the modicum of better education, and a source of refuge and lifelong support available to children raised under the auspices of the London Foundling Hospital, could make the difference between basic subsistence and complete destitution.

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