

**THE CLIMBING BOY CAMPAIGNS IN BRITAIN,  
c. 1770-1840:  
CULTURES OF REFORM, LANGUAGES OF HEALTH AND  
EXPERIENCES OF CHILDHOOD**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis offers the first systematic analysis of the regulation of child labour in chimney sweeping in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain since George Phillips' *England's Climbing Boys*, 1949. Far from isolated dialogues between progressive and conservative parliamentarians and between humane philanthropists and abusive sweeps (Phillips), we find multifaceted conversations between heterogeneous alliances through a variety of media. This thesis therefore focuses explicitly on the complex *formation* of health policy, integrating a biographic analysis of those who participated in the campaigns, a structural analysis of the procedures that shaped their initiatives, and a discourse analysis of the rhetorical strategies that they adopted in different settings. Through this inclusive approach, the thesis offers new perspectives on the study of reform, medicine and childhood, and shows that labour reform gave rise to new ways of thinking about these issues.

With respect to reform, the thesis highlights the increasing interconnectedness of voluntary activism, law-making, and administrative practice in Britain during this period. It also suggests the need to integrate all three activities in a single analysis when examining social policy formation and to consider the contributions of those targeted by regulation. With respect to medicine, the thesis suggests that the health of children and of workers were prominent topics of medical and political investigation at the time. Debates addressed a broader set of conditions and resulted in different policies to those in the period around 1900, which has often been viewed as the formative period of paediatrics and occupational medicine. These findings invite medical historians to investigate earlier paradigms of child health and occupational health before their onset as formal specialisms. With respect to childhood, the thesis suggests that the regulation of child labour, commonly associated with the discovery of the helpless, dependent child, also extended the opportunities for young workers to influence their own conditions.





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## ABBREVIATIONS

CMCS	Committee of Master Chimney Sweepers
HC	The House of Commons
HL	The House of Lords
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
SPICSA	Society for the Protection and Instruction of Chimney Sweepers' Apprentices
SSNCB	Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys
USMCS	United Society of Master Chimney Sweepers



## CONVENTIONS

When citing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources, I have retained the original spelling and punctuation. Bill appeared with capital and without; chimneys also appeared as chimnies. These have been retained without further reference. Other differences to modern spelling have been indicated with (sic). Parliamentary and SSNCB reports have been given simplified titles for reference purposes. Full titles can be found in the Bibliography.





## INTRODUCTION

# THE CLIMBING BOY CAMPAIGNS IN BRITAIN, c. 1770- 1840: CULTURES OF REFORM, LANGUAGES OF HEALTH AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDHOOD

In 1775, Percivall Pott, professor of surgery at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, wrote about chimney sweeps:<sup>1</sup>

The fate of these people seems singularly hard; in their early infancy they are most frequently treated with great brutality, and almost starved with cold and hunger; they are thrust up narrow, and sometimes hot chimneys, where they are buried, burned and almost suffocated; and when they get to puberty, become liable to a most noisome, and fatal disease.

Few readers will be familiar with this passage in Pott's famous lecture on scrotal cancer. Many medical historians have championed Pott as the founding father of occupational epidemiology for linking the cancer to sweeps' exposure to soot.<sup>2</sup> However, few have noted his concern for sweeps' health beyond this 'noisome and fatal disease' or investigated how his writings related to contemporary attempts to improve conditions in the

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<sup>1</sup> Percivall Pott, *Chirurgical Observations Relative to the Cataract, the Polypus of the Nose, the Cancer of the Scrotum, the Different Kinds of Ruptures, and the Mortification of the Toes and Feet* (3 vols, London, 1775), vol. 3, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> The editors of a recent anthology of historical occupational health documents wrote, 'Today, we honor Pott for his astute observation and for setting the stage for the development of occupational epidemiology'. Dona Schneider and David E. Lilienfeld (eds.), *Public Health: The Development of a Discipline* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2008), vol. 1, p. 100. See also: John R. Brown, 'Percival Pott', *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 14 (1957), 68-70; Richard Doll, 'Pott and the Path to Prevention', *British Journal of Cancer*, 32 (1975), 263-72; M.D. Kipling and Henry A. Waldron, 'Percivall Pott and Cancer Scrota', *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 32 (1975), 244-46.

trade.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, scholars of these campaigns have noted the prominence of health concerns, but failed to examine how medical evidence like Pott's lecture shaped the direction of reform. This thesis argues that these paradoxes are symptomatic of the limitations of current studies of medicine and reform. It proposes a new approach for the study of health reform that fundamentally changes our understanding of the climbing boy campaigns as well as of the character of the relationship between medicine and reform in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain. Furthermore, it shows that the changing conceptions of labouring children that have long been associated with these reforms need to be viewed in the specific procedural contexts in which they were formulated and in connection with shifts in attitudes to child health at the time.

Previous studies of these campaigns assumed that the hazards of sending children up chimneys were such that abolishing the practice was objectively necessary. They treated reform as a natural response to worsening conditions. As the number of climbing boys increased, the dangers of climbing became more obvious and enlightened contemporaries took steps to abolish the practice. This interpretation overlooks the fact that the initial reformers did not deal with climbing at all, that the vast majority of contemporaries did not think any aspects of the trade worthy of collective regulation, and that there were numerous other labourers exposed to comparable hazards (in mining, copper melting,

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Waldron *did* briefly outline contemporary efforts to regulate the work of sweeps: Henry A. Waldron, 'A Brief History of Scrotal Cancer', *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 40 (1983), pp. 390-91.

etc.) but not assisted by similar relief. This thesis approaches the campaigns through the exploration of a different set of questions. Who expressed an interest in the fate of climbing boys at various stages of the campaigns? What practical steps did they take to improve their conditions through a wide range of procedures (legislation, administration and voluntary initiatives)? How did they depict the mental and physical health of sweeps to justify these interventions? How do these campaigns compare to other contemporary reforms? Exploring these questions allows us to determine why these apprentices were singled out and why reform was advanced and contested in particular ways.

The important structural developments that occurred in how change was brought about in Britain during this period can only be understood by studying the intersections between different avenues of reform. Moreover, acknowledging the tremendous breadth of contemporaries' engagement with health allows us to break away from the narrow focus on injury and disease that dominates studies of occupational health. Further, studying the formation of conceptions of children's dependency and agency in different platforms of reform draws our attention to the dynamics of attitudinal shifts.

The remainder of this Introduction considers the significance of these arguments for the history of sweeps and for the study of childhood, medicine and reform. It outlines the sources and analytical moves that will be employed to make these claims. It includes an overview of the key

events in climbing boy reform and a chapter outline to indicate how the argument will be structured through the remainder of the thesis.

## Statement of Context

The only detailed study of climbing boy reform to date is George Phillips' *England's Climbing Boys* (1949).<sup>4</sup> It sketched how the fate of sweeps' apprentices was first brought to public attention by the London philanthropist Jonas Hanway in 1773. This sparked the earliest statutory restrictions on child labour in 1788 and continued to stimulate relief and regulation throughout most of the following century (until climbing was finally prohibited in 1875). Phillips described key initiatives in detail and discussed disputes between advocates and opponents of abolition. However, it was not his intention to explore the significance of these activities and arguments beyond their impact on climbing boys. His subtitle promised *a history of the long struggle to abolish child labor in chimney sweeping* – an apt description. The end result, abolition, was predestined, and Phillips set himself the task to establish why it took so long to reach.

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<sup>4</sup> Subsequent studies by Kathleen Strange and Benita Cullingford provided much additional information about the trade, but no significant reinterpretation of the campaigns. Strange reiterated Phillips' assertion – that the use of climbing boys was an evil that needed abolishing but that this was slowed down by insensitive reactionaries; Cullingford provided a more balanced overview of arguments in favour and against, but did not explain how this evidence should change our understanding of the dynamics and significance of the reforms. Benita Cullingford, *British Chimney Sweeps: Five Centuries of Chimney Sweeping* (Lewes: Book Guild, 2000); Kathleen H. Strange, *Climbing Boys: A Study of Sweeps' Apprentices, 1773-1875* (London: Allison, 1982).

This sentiment is captured in his closing statement, where Phillips imagined how Lord Shaftesbury, the last of the great climbing boy reformers, might:<sup>5</sup>

In retrospect [...] have traced the rough path, illuminated by the feeling of duty to God and to man, over which Jonas Hanway, David Porter, Sir Thomas Bernard, Henry Grey Bennet, Stephen Lushington, William Wilberforce, J.C. Hudson, William Tooke, and Robert Steven had stumbled before him. Undaunted by public apathy, undismayed by parliamentary action, and unhesitant in pushing aside the brambles of ignorance and callousness, one after the other had sought to succor the young sweeps, at first, by improving their working conditions before machinery was invented to supersede them; and, afterwards, by advocating abolition of the practice employing climbing-boys; Lord Shaftesbury's "boys".

Apart from the heroic determination of those advocating better conditions for climbing boys, note the 'ignorance' and 'callousness' of their opponents. These were poor conditions that required redress – a conclusion that no-one prepared to look into the matter, could avoid. Hence, this was not a conflict in judgement, but a test of character to allow necessary change.

This interpretation can only be understood from Phillips' own attitude to climbing. He found it too hazardous for the children and considered abolition the only sufficient remedy. This is clear from his assessment of the origins of the campaigns:<sup>6</sup>

Climbing-boys, shouting their shrill cry of "all up" from the chimney-tops, were heard more and more frequently throughout eighteenth-century England as the demand for their services, resulting from narrow flues and coal fires, constantly increased. As an institution, the climbing-boys became a sociological and economic problem [...] the hardships of their

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<sup>5</sup> George L. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys: A History of the Long Struggle to Abolish Child Labor in Chimney Sweeping* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1949), p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 1.

trade [were] so horrible that Parliament was forced to enact various regulatory measures

From this statement, it is unsurprising that Phillips focused on tracing how parliament eventually succeeded in banning the practice, but showed little interest in other initiatives not aimed at statutory prohibition, in disputes among abolitionists over how such drastic measures should be justified and in other preoccupations of those interested in climbing boys. In fact, Phillips considered all of these topics, but in separate publications.<sup>7</sup> They were not part of, what he called:<sup>8</sup>

the long struggle waged between a reactionary privileged class to maintain the *status quo* of the climbing boys and a liberal-minded, socially conscious group of persons striving to do away with child labor in sweeping flues by winning enough popular support to persuade Parliament to outlaw the accursed social and economic evils of the practice.

This interpretation is problematic. By treating reform as an automatic response to bad conditions, Phillips failed to consider *why* these conditions came to be seen as evils that required a collective response while other trades with similar hazards provoked no reaction. In treating statutory prohibition as the necessary remedy, he failed to examine *why*

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<sup>7</sup> For other initiatives not aimed at abolition: George L. Phillips, 'Sweeps' Feasts in the Nineteenth Century', *Notes and Queries*, 195 (1950), 68-70. For analysis of the lives of exemplary campaigners: George L. Phillips, 'Mrs. Montagu and the Climbing-Boys', *The Review of English Studies*, 25 (1949), 237-44; George L. Phillips, 'Quakers and Chimney Sweeps, Part 1', *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association*, 36 (1947); George L. Phillips, 'Quakers and Chimney Sweeps, Part 2', *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association*, 39 (1950). For disputes among abolitionists about appropriate rhetoric for promoting their cause: George L. Phillips, 'The Chimney Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing-Boy's Album', *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, VI (c. 1944-50). For public perceptions of sweeps: George L. Phillips, 'The Chimney-Sweepers' Assimilation of the Milkmaid's Garland', *Folklore*, 62 (1951), 383-87; George L. Phillips, 'Dickens and the Chimney Sweeper' (undated).

<sup>8</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 6.

legislation came to be considered an appropriate intervention and restrictions on climbing the desired measure – important omissions considering the fact that the early initiatives were *not* directed at the legislature and did not address climbing. It also led him to disqualify other initiatives as non-reform and those who proposed alternative remedies as obstructers of necessary change. This is clear in his binary division between ‘liberal-minded’ abolitionists and ‘reactionary’ others. Treating attitudes to reform in such a judgmental fashion stopped him from considering why proposals were justified in particular ways.

Apart from obscuring the dynamics of reform, such a teleological approach stops us from seeing the significance of these campaigns for the history of childhood and medicine. We will now turn to these three fields of scholarship.

## Childhood

Historians of childhood have shown that Phillips’ treatment of climbing boy reform as a ‘natural’ response is indeed problematic. Ludmilla Jordanova and Hugh Cunningham have pointed out that it was unusual for contemporaries to discuss child labour at length or to respond to pauper children sympathetically.<sup>9</sup> Instead of assuming that climbing boys were

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<sup>9</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1991), chapter 4; Ludmilla J. Jordanova, ‘Conceptualising Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: The Problem of Child Labour’, *British Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies*, 10 (1987), 189-99.



treated differently because their conditions were exceptional, they stressed the importance of considering changes in perceptions. By analysing the language adopted by reformers, they sought to reveal the concerns that underpinned their behaviour. Jordanova emphasised that language was not merely reflective of attitudes; it influenced how conditions were perceived and acted upon. Discourse analysis could thus illuminate why climbing boys were singled out, why particular measures were suggested for their relief and how these initiatives shaped 'ideologies of childhood' – perceptions of 'fundamental life cycle events' including growing up, leaving parents, gaining independence, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, despite her original suggestions, Jordanova did not execute her approach to a degree that allowed her to answer her key questions satisfactorily.<sup>11</sup> Cunningham was more successful. He showed how aspects of the climbing boys' work and appearance were connected with existing associations between labour and slavery to create new conceptions of their conditions. He also suggested that Jonas Hanway introduced emotive language from discussions about infant mortality in

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<sup>10</sup> Jordanova, 'Conceptualising Childhood', p. 190.

<sup>11</sup> Based on a limited range of materials, she considered it 'obvious that child sweeps were well-suited to the uses made of them by philanthropists', and concluded that the climbing boys 'exemplified the exploitation of the young and became symbols because an evocative vocabulary could be built around their appearance and conditions of work', without explaining how their appearance and conditions differed from those of other working children. Jordanova, 'Conceptualising Childhood', 189-99.

reflection on climbing boys and showed how these sentiments gradually dispersed in debates about other working children.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the value of the studies in broadening the scope of child labour studies beyond 'conditions', their work contains several limitations. Firstly, both Cunningham and Jordanova focused exclusively on the emotive aspects of Hanway's reflections on climbing boys. Yet, the mid-eighteenth century saw a growing interest in the health of children between infancy and puberty, and Hanway was closely involved in schemes to improve the health of foundlings and apprentices to the Navy. If these health concerns did not feature in his climbing boy writings then this requires further explanation; if they did feature then these concerns deserve further disposition.

Secondly, they treated language both as an indicator and driver of change. Cunningham traced how certain ways of speaking about children were adopted by an increasingly broad spectrum of commentators, whilst others fell out of favour in the process of labour reform. However, he did not examine *why* specific commentators adopted such language or *why* it was used in particular settings. Clearly, the individual background of commentators and the impact of changes in the procedures of reform on the language used must be taken into account.

Finally, they focused on what adults wrote and said *about* children, without examining the behaviour of the children themselves. Cunningham

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<sup>12</sup> Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*, pp. 51-64.

noted that a growing emphasis on the need to allow children to express their opinions was part of child labour debates, but he did not consider whether children's own behaviour stimulated such preoccupations.<sup>13</sup> Recent studies highlight the importance of considering children as historical actors. In the management of apprenticeships, there is ample evidence that adults took advantage of the vulnerability of young workers but also of children's actions restricting the degree of power exercised over them by adults – for example, in cases where children absconded from their employer or secured the prosecution of an abusive master.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis will develop these points by examining how far health concerns were expressed in connection with the climbing boys' young age, and who spoke in what setting about their conditions. The thesis demonstrates that the conception of children as innocent and helpless, commonly associated with labour reform in this period, only took root in certain strands of the reform procedures, but was complemented in others by increasing opportunities for the boys to make their own judgements and decisions.

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<sup>13</sup> Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Rushton has suggested that children who sought prosecution of their masters for abuse were often successful. Peter Rushton, "'Matter in Variance': Adolescents and Domestic Conflict in the Pre-Industrial Economy of North-East England 1600-1800', *Journal of Social History*, 25 (1991), 89-117. Katrina Honeyman has shown that complaints made by parish apprentices in textile factories regarding diet and education were often acted upon by parish visitors. Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Studies in Labour History, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), chapter 10.

## Medicine

Developments in the medical treatment of sweeps' cancer have been thoroughly investigated, most recently by Henry Waldron.<sup>15</sup> He outlined Pott's discovery of the disease as an occupational hazard, explained that Pott's successors at St Bart's sparked further interest in the cancer during the 1880s finding that it was peculiar to English sweeps,<sup>16</sup> and discussed international studies of the disease during the 1910s and 1920s, when it occurred in epidemic proportions in cotton mule spinners and other workers handling mineral oils or distillates of coal, far beyond the British Isles.<sup>17</sup> Occasionally, Waldron diverted his discussion away from epidemiology, treatment and prevention by pointing to the context in which clinical studies took place. For example, he quoted Pott's description of sweeps' wider hardships, with which we started this chapter, but only to show that the lot of juvenile sweeps was 'a cause of great *social* concern',<sup>18</sup> before returning to the proper topic of his paper: scrotal cancer.

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<sup>15</sup> Waldron, 'A Brief History of Scrotal Cancer'. Waldron edited the journal in which this article appeared, until it was re-launched as *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* in 1993. It has since lost its historical emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> Henry T. Butlin, *On Cancer of the Scrotum in Chimney-Sweeps and Others. Three Lectures Delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons of England* (London: The British Medical Association, 1892). Reprinted from the *British Medical Journal* of 25 June, 2 July, and 9 July 1892.

<sup>17</sup> The epidemic sparked a Home Office inquiry led by the Medical Inspector of factories, Sydney Henry. The papers generated by Henry's enquiry can be found in: The National Archives, PIN 12/33, Mule Spinners' Cancer, 1925-28. Henry's fascination for the history of the disease inspired him to compile a tremendous collection of sweepiana. This 'Ernestine Henry Collection', kept at Leeds City Museum, has been a vital resource for this thesis.

<sup>18</sup> Waldron, 'A Brief History of Scrotal Cancer', p. 390. Emphasis is mine.

This demarcation between 'social' and 'medical' aspects is typical of histories of public health from that time. In his influential study of health in Victorian Britain, Anthony Wohl dedicated his chapter on occupational health to 'the specific industrial processes that were harmful to health and which came under the observation of the public health authorities'. He explained:<sup>19</sup>

While hours and conditions of labour, and industrial accidents belong more properly to economic or social history, industrial diseases are specifically related to public health, that is, to the history of community action to prevent disease.

This narrow definition of occupational health as industrial disease is a product of the emergence of occupational medicine as a specialism during the late nineteenth century. In 1895, the Home Office appointed the first Dangerous Trade Committee. It sparked investigations that led to several Workmen's Compensation Acts, entitling workers whose occupational exposure to specified harmful substances had made them ill to compensation from their employers (including in 1907 sweeps suffering from scrotal cancer).<sup>20</sup> These inquiries encouraged medics to specialise in industrial disease. Universities across Britain established occupational health centres (in Birmingham, Glasgow, London, Manchester and

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<sup>19</sup> Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 259. Chapter 10 is fittingly titled, 'The Canker of Industrial Diseases'.

<sup>20</sup> On the inclusion of sweeps' cancer in the 1907 Act: Waldron, 'A Brief History of Scrotal Cancer', p. 395. Other substances and diseases regulated through similar legislation in Victorian and Edwardian Britain included lead, mercury, arsenic and phosphorus, anthrax and ankylostomiasis. The inter-war period saw particular preoccupation with 'dust-diseases': silicosis (1918), asbestosis (1931) and byssinosis (1940s).

Newcastle during the 1930s)<sup>21</sup> and international conferences and committee meetings brought together experts from different industrialising countries (e.g. the International Committee for Occupational Health (ICOH) held its first annual meeting in 1907).

These early practitioners of occupational medicine showed a keen interest in the history of the diseases that came to their attention. Anthologies of industrial disease<sup>22</sup> and studies on anthrax,<sup>23</sup> lead poisoning,<sup>24</sup> potters' dust diseases,<sup>25</sup> and chimney sweeps' cancer<sup>26</sup> included substantial historical sections. The latter is exemplary for the

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Weindling (ed.), *The Social History of Occupational Health* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Work by John Arlidge, identified by one historian as 'the most influential book on occupational medicine in the Victorian era,' was based on his 1889 Milroy Lectures at the Royal College of Physicians entitled, 'Occupations and trades in relation to public health'. John T. Arlidge, *Hygiene, Diseases and Mortality of Occupations* (London: Percival, 1892). Dr. Thomas Oliver's survey includes a 'Historical sketch of the development of legislation for injuries and dangerous industries in England'. Thomas Oliver (ed.), *Dangerous Trades: The Historical, Social and Legal Aspects of Industrial Occupations as Affecting Health by a Number of Experts* (London: John Murray, 1902).

<sup>23</sup> Sir Thomas Morison Legge, 'The Milroy Lectures on Industrial Anthrax', Delivered before the Royal College of Physicians of London, *British Medical Journal*, 1 (1905), 529-31, 589-93, 641-43. In 1898, Dr. Legge had been appointed as the first Medical Inspector of Factories. He served on various Home Office committees on compensation for industrial diseases, notably anthrax, and lectured extensively on industrial medicine in the UK and North America. Peter W.J. Bartrip, 'Legge, Sir Thomas Morison (1863-1932)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., September 2004, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49286>' (14 August 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Oliver, 'Goulstonian Lectures on Lead Poisoning in Its Acute and Chronic Manifestations', *British Medical Journal*, 1 (1891), 505-508, 571-73, 627-34, 688-91. Dr. Oliver served on the 1893 and 1898 Home Office committees on white lead poisoning and edited the seminal *Dangerous trades* (1892). W.J. Bishop and rev. P.W.J. Bartrip, 'Oliver, Sir Thomas (1853-1942)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35308>' (14 August 2010).

<sup>25</sup> John T. Arlidge, 'The Position of the Study of Industrial Diseases: Its Past Neglect and Its Scope', *Journal of the Sanitary Institute*, XV (1895).

<sup>26</sup> Sydney A. Henry, *Cancer of the Scrotum in Relation to Occupation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946).

origins and character of these works. In 1925, Sydney Henry led the investigation into scrotal cancer in Lancashire cotton mule spinners, as medical inspector of factories. It sparked in him a life-long interest in the disease and those who had been affected by it in the past. He collected a tremendous amount of materials about chimney sweeping and the campaigns to regulate the trade – a vital resource for this thesis.<sup>27</sup> However, although his collection contained extensive discussions of other physical and mental hazards to which sweeps were exposed, in his lectures and publications, Henry focused solely on their proneness to scrotal cancer.<sup>28</sup> He traced its original identification as an occupational hazard, explored medical speculations on its nature, symptoms and spread, and finally, described its investigation by specialists like himself who, by trial and error, had developed effective strategies of treatment and prevention.

By focusing on individual industrial disorders and their progressive medical understanding, accounts such as these treated occupational *disease* as *the* transhistorical concern of occupational *health*. This perspective was reinforced by two publications that dominated the field until the early 1980s: Donald Hunter's *Diseases of Occupations* (1955) and the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* (1941-93). Both contained substantial historical sections, but as they were written by, and for,

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<sup>27</sup> 'Ernestine Henry Collection', Leeds City Museums.

<sup>28</sup> Sydney A. Henry, 'Cutaneous Cancer in Relation to Occupation', *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons of England*, 7 (1950), 425-54; Sydney A. Henry, 'The Study of Fatal Cases of Cancer of the Scrotum from 1911 to 1935 in Relation to Occupation, with Special Reference to Chimney Sweeping and Cotton Mule Spinning', *American Journal of Cancer*, 17 (1937), 28-57; Sydney A. Henry and Edward D. Irvine, 'Cancer of the Scrotum in the Blackburn Registration District, 1837-1929', *Journal of Hygiene*, 36 (1936), 310-40.

occupational therapists, they focused on advancements in clinical understanding and medics' contributions to state regulation of industrial disease.

Since the mid 1980s, social historians of medicine have significantly widened the scope of occupational health studies.<sup>29</sup> A broader set of actors are now considered. Numerous works have examined the roles of medics and public health authorities as well as the press and worker- and employer-organisations in singling out specific ailments for compensation.<sup>30</sup> Scholars have also paid more attention to the ideological underpinnings of responses to occupational disease.<sup>31</sup> Some have started to look beyond the regulation of disease and accidents and examined how workers dealt with the immediate implications and long-term impact of

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<sup>29</sup> In July 1983, the Society for Social History of Medicine organised a conference on 'The History of Occupational Medicine', a signal of and stimulus for historians' growing interest in occupational health. The proceedings were published as: Weindling (ed.), *The Social History of Occupational Health*.

<sup>30</sup> Peter W.J. Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002); Peter W.J. Bartrip, *The Way from Dusty Death: Turner and Newall and the Regulation of Occupational Health in the British Asbestos Industry, 1890s-1970* (London: Athlone, 2001); Sue Bowden and Geoffrey Tweedale, 'Mondays without Dread: The Trade Union Response to Byssinosis in the Lancashire Cotton Industry in the Twentieth Century', *Social History of Medicine*, 16 (2003), 79-93; Mark W. Bufton and Joseph Melling, 'Coming up for Air: Experts, Employers, and Workers in Campaigns to Compensate Silicosis Sufferers in Britain, 1918-1939', *Social History of Medicine*, 18 (2005), 63-86; Arthur J. McIvor and Ronnie Johnston, *Miners' Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Geoffrey Tweedale, *Magic Mineral to Killer Dust: Turner & Newall and the Asbestos Hazard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Carolyn Malone, *Women's Bodies and Dangerous Trades in England, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003); Karen Nolte, 'Carcinoma Uteri and "Sexual Debauchery" – Morality, Cancer and Gender in the Nineteenth Century', *Social History of Medicine*, 21 (2008), 31-46.



nuisances and hazards at work.<sup>32</sup> However, the focus has remained firmly on the era of the dangerous trade committees and no one has historicised the medical paradigm that underpinned the compensation acts.

To clarify this point, one excellent product of recent scholarship, Peter Bartrip's *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades* (2002), is considered. The main body skilfully dissected the complex negotiations that led to compensation for four industrial diseases. In the introduction, Bartrip evaluated earlier responses to work-related hazards. He observed that 'physical damage' was a 'prime worry' in early nineteenth-century factory reform, but only in terms of 'ill treatment, excessive hours of labour resulting in stunted or deformed growth, the prevalence of infectious disease and, to a lesser extent, accidental injury'.<sup>33</sup> Instead of treating these concerns as alternative conceptualisations of occupational health, Bartrip argued that something was missing. He notes that early factory reformers failed to engage with 'occupational illness,' which he defined as 'health hazards [that] arise from exposure to invasive germs or poisons connected with the manufacturing process'.<sup>34</sup> He lamented 'the sad

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur McIvor and Ronnie Johnston interviewed miners, and others employed in heavy labour, about their strategies for coping with the range of hazards experienced at work and for dealing with the long-term damage it caused to their bodily functioning. Ronnie Johnston and Arthur J. McIvor, 'Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries, c. 1930-1970s', *Labour History Review*, 69 (2004), 135-51. Janet Greenlees examined how far strategies for coping with hazards on the shop floor were informed by the financial needs of the women and their families. Her study is based on recorded interviews with females employed in the American textile industries during the first half of the twentieth century. Janet Greenlees, "'For the Sake of the Family": American Women and Health and Safety at Work, c. 1900-1960', *Society for the Social History of Medicine Annual Conference 2008, Glasgow* (unpublished).

<sup>33</sup> Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, pp. 20-21.

neglect of the field' among medics in Britain, which he contrasted to advances in France and Germany, where 'occupational health took its place in the domain of medical research'.<sup>35</sup> Note how he thus equated occupational health with occupational disease and projected this specific conceptualisation backwards as a parameter for historical investigation.

However, the breadth of health concerns in early nineteenth-century labour reforms, including for chimney sweeping, and the chronology of the dangerous trade regulations (medics' preoccupation with industrial disease did not predate but emerged through these investigations) shows that this is problematic. This thesis brings the study of occupational health forward by examining how specific conceptions of worker well-being came about in the process of reform. It examines how various actors spoke about sweeps' health to justify or obstruct particular interventions in the trade and how these discussions influenced both the outcomes of this campaign *and* attitudes to public regulation of worker well-being in general. It shows that the procedural context in which these discussions took place mattered – philanthropic customs and administrative and legislative procedures influenced how health was discussed and these discussions in turn influenced reform practices. Ultimately, it confirms the need to historicise paradigms of occupational health – discussions of sweeps' physical and mental functioning between 1770 and 1840 were very different from occupational health debates during the late nineteenth century, and associated with themes specific to this period: childhood, slavery and

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<sup>35</sup> Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades*, p. 18.

sentiment. Recent work on other aspects of public health reform confirms the value of taking such a multifaceted approach.

## Reform

Christopher Hamlin refuted similar received wisdoms about the history of sanitation. Just as compensation legislation has been treated as the natural outcome of the spread of occupational disease, state-commissioned privies and sewers were long considered the necessary response to deteriorating standards of hygiene. In their classic accounts, Richard Lewis and Samuel Finer credited Edwin Chadwick, author of the *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1843), with uncovering the filthy conditions in overcrowded, industrial centres and propagating the construction of large sanitation works to restore health and morals in urban society.<sup>36</sup> Hamlin criticised this interpretation for failing to engage with the hard-fought negotiations and skilful manipulations that underpinned Chadwick's programme of reform.<sup>37</sup> He reconstructed how filth was rhetorically constructed as *the* cause of collective ill-health in the parliamentary investigations.<sup>38</sup> This position was at odds with the dominant medical opinions of the time that viewed health as the amalgamation of standards of work and living and pointed to a far

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<sup>36</sup> Samuel E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick* (London: Methuen, 1952); Richard A. Lewis, *Edwin Chadwick and the Public Health Movement, 1832-1854* (London: Longmans, 1952).

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice*, chapter 4.

more comprehensive programme of interventions.<sup>39</sup> Chadwick's vision won the day not because of overwhelming medical evidence, but because it was a politically attractive option for Whig and Tory governments to guard off drastic social reforms demanded by revolutionary Chartists.

Hamlin's study highlights the importance of paying close attention to the formation and transformation of targets, remedies and justifications in the process of health reform. His work is part of a broader 'political turn' in British historiography that treats political procedures as vehicles with their own conventions that influence the opportunities available to those who desire to bring about change and thus shape the policies, attitudes and social capital constructed in the course of reform.<sup>40</sup> Joanna Innes, who has written widely on social policy formation in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain, has been prominent in promoting this approach. At one level, her work is an attempt to draw renewed attention to 'the political,' after decades of neglect. However, it is not a return to the kind of political history written by Phillips, Finer and Lewis, which focused on the 'epic struggles' of 'great men'. Rather, it is an attempt to synthesise,

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<sup>39</sup> Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice*, chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>40</sup> This 'political turn' can be observed from studies of slavery abolitionism to work on opera theatre and visual art. For a 'political' take on these and a range of other topics: Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

to bridge the gap between their emphasis on agents,<sup>41</sup> and subsequent preoccupation with structures<sup>42</sup> and values.<sup>43</sup>

Innes set out her approach in a review essay, which urged socio-economic historians to 'give more place to agency', politico-intellectual historians to 'pay more attention to structure', and both to consider 'the intricacies of real decision-making processes'.<sup>44</sup> Clearly influenced by work in the humanities that emphasised the fluidity and cultural specificity of language, identity and solidarities, she proposed:<sup>45</sup>

We might acquire a clearer understanding of the period if we accepted fluidity of aims and personnel, plurality of motives and discontinuities of interest and effort as givens, and bent our efforts to establishing who supported what range of causes; what priorities they attached to their various concerns and how these priorities changed over time; through what networks and chains of connection people came together to plan collective action; and according to what logic people combined and recombined, in more or less broad alliances, under particular campaigning slogans.

Innes has applied this approach to labour reform. She examined how aspects of child employment in textile factories were constructed as 'social problems' and inspired and transformed alliances between

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<sup>41</sup> Philip's *England's Climbing Boys* (1949) is a prime example.

<sup>42</sup> Geographic, economic and political structures dominated the Marxist 'total histories' by the French historians Bloch, Febvre and Braudel and their British counterpart Hobsbawm.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Clark and Boyd Hilton, albeit in different ways, have found the determining factor for policy-making and economic practice in religious values. Jonathan C.D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> Joanna Innes, 'Review Essay On: "English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime by J.D.C. Clark"', *Past and Present*, 115 (1987), 165-200.

<sup>45</sup> Innes, 'Review Essay On: "English Society, 1688-1832"', p. 187.

manufacturers, workers, MPs, Lords, government officials and others in the pursuit of, or resistance to, legislation.<sup>46</sup> The strength of her analysis is in its careful dissection of the impact of procedural conventions on the character of these negotiations and vice versa. She skilfully sketched out how the procedures of petitioning, the nature of Lords and Commons debates, and of public inquiries and the framing of legislation allowed certain issues to be raised and alliances to be formed but others not, and how these norms were themselves scrutinised in the process. However, her focus is firmly on law-making. As a result, Innes considered model-factories in so far as they influenced legislative procedures, but she did not treat them as sources of reform in their own right.

However, Katrina Honeyman has shown that laws and legislative procedures were just two of many factors that influenced changing practices regarding the recruitment and management of child factory workers.<sup>47</sup> Other factors included negotiations between administrators (parish governors, magistrates) and manufacturers, complaints made by parents, and the changing behaviour of the children themselves. Honeyman sketched the legislation that was enacted at the time, but she did not examine systematically how these interactions were influenced by legislative procedures.

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<sup>46</sup> Joanna Innes, 'Origins of the Factory Acts: The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act 1802', in Norma Landau (ed.), *Law, Crime, and English Society, 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 230-55; Joanna Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour in Britain, 1783-1819' (Forthcoming).

<sup>47</sup> Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*.

Yet, studies of abolitionism show the value of considering the intersection between different spheres of reform activity. Historians of the anti-slave-trade and anti-slavery campaigns have elucidated how voluntary associations promoted their cause simultaneously through legislative procedures and community initiatives and how these two sets of activities reinforced one another.<sup>48</sup> For example, the boycott of West Indian sugar and other slave-produced goods put direct strains on the slave-based economy but also attracted signatories for parliamentary petitions. Scholars of labour reform can learn from this multi-activity analysis. Yet, scholars of slavery have not sufficiently scrutinised the interplay between different actors of reform – legislatures, voluntary sector – an aspect in which they can learn from labour historians.

This thesis develops these points by introducing an integrated approach to the study of reform. The framework differs from those adopted in previous studies in explicitly identifying the agencies involved in policy making (legislators, administrators, voluntary activists) and the activities that produced change (law making, administrative practice, voluntary initiatives) and focusing the analysis on their overlap, interaction and where they diverged. This approach enables determination of both how the structure of proceedings influenced the direction of relief and regulation towards climbing boys and how far this campaign encouraged structural change in the way in which reform was pursued in general.

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<sup>48</sup> Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (Paperback edn., London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Oldfield, *Popular Politics in British Anti-Slavery*.

## The Climbing Boy Campaigns

Stone chimneys appeared in different parts of Europe from as early as c. 1200, but records of professional chimney sweeps do not appear before the late fifteenth century.<sup>49</sup> In England, the demand for professional sweeps increased after the Great Fire of London in 1666, with the spread of multi-storey brick houses. During the eighteenth century, the situation in England was unique in three respects. Firstly, unlike their Scottish and European counterparts who generally swept chimneys from top to bottom with ball and brush, the English masters let their child assistants crawl up the flues to detach the soot. As a result, the English climbing boys were particularly prone to injury (burns, broken limbs, suffocation, etc.) and disease (especially lung disorders and scrotal cancer). Secondly, in contrast to the European continent where the trade was dominated by seasonal immigrants from the Alpine borders between Italy, France and Switzerland,<sup>50</sup> in England, the work was carried out by *native* masters and boys. As a result, whereas the continental assistants often returned home

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<sup>49</sup> The earliest reference to a chimney sweep in the English language can be found in *Cocke Lorelle's Bote*, c. 1500 – a poem narrating the journey of a boat sailing through England, whose passengers included 'Chymney Swepers and costerde Mongers'. William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (1588) and Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (1593) offer additional early evidence for the existence of the trade. Shakespeare: 'To look like her are chimney sweepers blacke'. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), consulted online: '<http://dictionary.oed.com>' (23 July 2010). Marlowe: 'I am envy, begotten of a chimney sweeper, and an oyster-wife. I cannot read, and therefore wish all books burn'd'. Cited in Cullingford, *British Chimney Sweeps*, p. 209.

<sup>50</sup> Benito Mazzi, *Emigrazione E Sfruttamento Minorile: Il Fenomeno Degli Spazzacamini. Problematiche Dei Flussi Migratori in Provincia Di Novara* (Novara: Amministrazione Provinciale di Novara, 1985).



after finishing their apprenticeship, carrying their injuries and illnesses with them, English sweeps remained within the community, with the effects of sweeping on their welfare visible. This was particularly so because the English sweeps, unlike many of their European counterparts, were traditionally *not* organised in guilds or associations and their assistants' work not regulated in formal apprenticeships.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, in cases of permanent disability or ill-health, they could not fall back on their colleagues, but depended on public assistance.

Nevertheless, it was not the sweeps' health that initially attracted attention in England. As in other parts of Europe, a rich imagery developed around the trade, attributing sweeps with luck-bringing and amorous powers but also associating them with death, the devil and disorder.<sup>52</sup> A combination of their appearance (blackness from soot and distinctive dress) and the nature of their work (seasonal and entering the private apartments of the well-to-do) made sweeps both visible and peculiar. In England, their visibility was enhanced from the 1750s through their prominent roles in the annual May Day festivities.<sup>53</sup> Around this time the first initiatives were also taken for the relief of sweep's apprentices.

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<sup>51</sup> Jonas Hanway contrasted the unregulated English sweeps particularly with the well-regulated trade in Germany. Jonas Hanway, *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers in London & Westminster* (London, 1785), pp. 100-101.

<sup>52</sup> Anton Blok, *Honour and Violence* (Cambridge MA: Polity Press, 2001), chapters 3 and 4, particularly pp. 75-80. Hugh Cunningham pointed out that John Gay's *Poetry and Prose* (1716) and the anonymous *The Chimney Sweeper, A Town Eclogue* (1773) depicted sweeps 'with humour but without sympathy or sentiment, and all three were involved in crime'. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>53</sup> Due to a change of calendar in 1752, May Day coincided with the coming of spring and the end of the sweeps' busy season. On sweeps' role in May Day processions: Roy Judge, *The Jack-in-the-Green: A May Day Custom* (2nd edn., London: FLS Books, 2000), pp. 12-18;

In 1760, an anonymous correspondent to the *Public Advertiser* complained of the numerous climbing boys that swarmed the streets of London, 'without either shoe or stocking to their feet', pressing magistrates to hold masters accountable in cases of neglect. In 1767, Jonas Hanway proposed a similar monitoring of apprentices in the trade, as part of plans to improve the conditions of working children. And, in 1773, Hanway and twelve other gentlemen appealed to all 'respectable London master chimney-sweepers' to join their 'Friendly Society' and bind their child assistants through proper indentures.

The founding of this fraternity marked the start of a century of charitable and legislative initiatives towards the trade, aimed initially at improving the treatment of metropolitan climbing boys and, after 1800, at introducing machines to replace the boys throughout the kingdom. In 1780, Hanway and his companion David Porter, himself a wealthy master sweep, launched another short-lived fraternity. In 1785, Hanway published *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers* with proposals for legislative restrictions and guidelines on the employment of climbing boys. Two years after his death, in 1788, an Act was ratified that adopted most of his suggestions, including a minimum age for entering the trade and a limit on the number of apprentices per master.

In 1792, Porter published a gloomy assessment of the impact of the Act. Without restricting the work of 'itinerant' sweeps and the

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Charles Phythian-Adams, 'Milk and Soot: The Changing Vocabulary of a Popular Ritual in Stuart and Hanoverian London', in Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp. 97-104.

collaboration of masters, better conditions for climbing boys were an illusion. Porter's *Considerations of the Present State of Chimney Sweepers* attracted the attention of several directors of the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor, (Shute Barrington, Thomas Bernard and William Wilberforce), who assisted him in establishing a 'Society for the Protection and Instruction of Chimney Sweepers' Apprentices' (SPICSA), in 1800. Unlike earlier fraternities, this society was run jointly by sweeps and 'honorary members'. The experiment was no success: the SPICSA was disbanded within a year and a new society was formed in 1803, without the involvement of sweeps bar Porter – the Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys (SSNCB).

The SSNCB changed the focus of the campaign from improving conditions for climbing boys to doing away with their work. It joined the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in searching for mechanical replacements. In 1805, the two societies rewarded carpenter George Smart for his 'Scandiscope', consisting of jointed rods with a brush head that could be thrust up and down the flue by working a cord that ran through the hollow rods [plate 1]. The SSNCB distributed the machine to sweeps in London and elsewhere – a second important transition in the campaign. Whereas earlier initiatives had focused exclusively on the metropolis, the SSNCB promoted mechanical sweeping throughout the kingdom. By the late 1810s, the London SSCNB was at the core of a network of local branches across England, Scotland and Ireland.

The expansion and geographic dispersion of relief coincided with renewed legislative initiatives. In 1817, a Commons Select Committee found that the 1788 Act was constantly evaded, that the work had disastrous health effects, and that immediate measures to abolish the employment of children to sweep chimneys were imperative.<sup>54</sup> But in 1818, similar investigations in the Lords, including extensive hearings of master sweeps, threw doubts on the efficiency of machines.<sup>55</sup> A compromise – proposing gradual abolition with the approval of sweeps – was rejected the following year, as peers questioned the desirability of further interference.<sup>56</sup>

In the wake of these parliamentary setbacks, charitable initiatives fell flat. It was only after a pamphlet by the Sheffield auxiliary society in 1824 received positive press that the London SSNCB renewed its exertions. This in turn provoked sweeps in the metropolis to form the United Society for Master Chimney Sweepers, in 1825, which was to play a crucial role in further legislative procedures in 1834 and in 1840. In the meantime, the number of SSNCB auxiliaries grew dramatically from under thirty in 1828 to over 150 in 1831, stimulated by the introduction of more effective machines designed by Joseph Glass [plate 2].

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<sup>54</sup> The Committee concluded, 'as long as Master Chimney Sweepers are permitted to employ Climbing Boys, the natural result of that permission will be the continuance of those miseries which the Legislature has sought to put an end to'. '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 6. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>55</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence'. See Bibliography for full title; 1819 [9] *Report of Surveyor General of Board of Works on Experiments to Replace Climbing Boys in Sweeping of Chimnies by Employment of Machinery* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 1 February 1819).

<sup>56</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, HL Deb, 24 May 1819, vol. 40, 668-70. Henceforth, 'Hansard'.

With extra-parliamentary activity at a peak, renewed attempts by the SSNCB for statutory prohibition of climbing seemed to stand a fair chance of success. But, dedicated campaigning by master sweeps from London, Bristol and Liverpool, in partnership with local fire insurers, caused major amendments to the 1834 abolition Bill. Crucially, the Act allowed the continued employment of boys under 14 – generally viewed as the age at which children grew too large to climb – under supervision of sweeps with a fixed residency and who paid towards the poor rates. It was a temporary measure, with the view of revisiting the practicality of complete abolition after six years. The Act passed in 1840 raised the minimum age for sweeps to 16 and prohibited anyone under 21 years of age from entering a flue (as per 1 July 1842) – imposing heavy fines on sweeps and householders who caused a child to break the law.

Although largely effective in London, the Act had little impact in other parts of the country. In many places the number of climbing boys increased.<sup>57</sup> This sparked further voluntary initiatives to detect and prosecute offenders and new attempts to introduce legislation that could be effectively monitored. After failed attempts in 1851 and 1852, an Act was ratified in 1864 that obliged the Board of Health or another local authority to inspect all newly built or renovated chimneys for fitness to

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<sup>57</sup> In 1841, Henry Mayhew estimated the number of London climbing boys aged below 10 at 370. The 1851 census indicates just ten boys below that age in the metropolis and only fifty-two under 15. In other parts of England and Wales, the practice was still thriving: in 1851, 1,107 male sweeps aged below 15 were employed, although the 1840 Act prohibited children under 16 to be apprenticed to this trade. Peter Kirby, 'A Brief Statistical Sketch of the Child Labour Market in Mid-Nineteenth-Century London', *Continuity and Change*, 20 (2005), p. 238.

mechanical sweeping. This still brought no end to the use of climbing boys. In 1875, another Act was passed, introducing annual licenses for sweeps and harsh penalties for employing climbers, which effectively ended the practice.

This final stage of the campaigns is not examined here. The thesis is specifically concerned with regulation and relief towards chimney sweeps as a case study of public health reform. Until 1840, the physical and mental health of child and adult sweeps was at the heart of reform initiatives. After 1840, legislative and administrative procedures focused on establishing why the ban on climbing boys was so widely evaded and how effective regulations could be brought into effect. Philanthropic activity centred on convincing masters and householders of the efficiency of machines – the detrimental effects of climbing were assumed to be generally known. These initiatives deserve a study in their own right but lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

## Chapter Outline

This thesis examines the climbing boy campaigns as a case study of the political dynamics of health reform. It studies systematically *who* expressed interest in the fate of climbing boys at various stages of the campaigns, in *which* capacity they advanced or contested intervention in the boys' conditions, by *what* measures they sought to change or maintain the position of the boys, and *which* evidence they presented in particular settings. The thesis has been structured according to these aspects, with

chapter 1 focusing on the reformers, chapters 2-5 on measures, and chapters 6-7 on evidence.

Chapter 1 takes a socio-biographic perspective, providing the first comprehensive overview of those involved in climbing boy reform. It starts with an analysis of the officials, subscribers and donors to a succession of lobby groups: the 'friendly societies' established by Jonas Hanway between 1770 and 1785; the 'legislative committee' founded after Hanway's death by fellow-members of the Marine Society in 1788; the short-lived Society for Promoting the Instruction of Chimney Sweep Apprentices, 1800-1801; the influential Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys, founded in 1803 and active through the middle of the nineteenth century; and the United Society of Master Chimney Sweepers, founded in 1825 in London with branches in Bristol and Liverpool during the 1830s. It focuses on answering key questions, including: what was the composition of these groups in terms of gender, age, occupation, and political and religious orientation? What inspired individuals to join such societies? And how did contributing to climbing boy reform influence other aspects of their lives? The final section introduces the MPs and Lords who took leading roles in legislative initiatives towards climbing boys. For prominent individuals, biographies and biographical dictionaries are partly relied upon; but for these and for less familiar figures, contemporary published and archival documents are investigated.

Chapters 2-5 focus on the activities that constituted climbing boy reform. Chapters 2 and 3 look in detail at voluntary activism, chapter 4

focuses on law making, and chapter 5 explores administrative practices. All four chapters emphasise the interplay with other channels of reform.

Chapters 2 and 3 uncover the practices of philanthropy, examining how collective activism was initiated, how funds were generated, how meetings, petitions and publications were conducted, and how mechanical substitutes for climbing boys were designed, tested and distributed. It places particular emphasis on the importance of interactions between campaigners in different locations and interplay of activism in local, regional, national and international contexts.

Chapter 4 explores in detail parliamentary proceedings about climbing boys in 1788, 1803, 1817, 1818, 1819, 1825, 1830, 1834, and 1840 [Appendices 2 and 3 provide a summary of legislation and proceedings]. It examines whether legislation was approached through Public or Private Bill procedures; how extra-parliamentary agitation influenced the legislative process; why and at which stage committee inquiries were carried out; how proceedings were communicated to Members of Parliament and the outside world; and how Bills were amended or rejected on the way. Instead of treating legislation as the outcome of pressure from outsiders vs. initiatives by insiders, as Phillips did, the analysis highlights the collaboration between legislators, administrators and non-office holders in various facets of law making and the opportunities and challenges this posed for their activities in other channels of reform.



Chapter 5 explores the operation of apprenticeships in the trade. It focuses on the binding of children to sweeps by five London parishes and the management of their indentures by metropolitan magistrates. It examines the degree to which children had a say in their own binding, and explores the relationship between practices and statutes introduced in 1834 that entitled prospective apprentices a trial with their masters and in 1840 that allowed those whose indentures were due to be voided the possibility of leaving their placement instantly. The evidence shows that changes in administrative practice often preceded legislation, and that parish governors and magistrates contributed to statutory change.

All four chapters highlight that procedures mattered: they shaped discussions about the 'conditions' of climbing boys, and were themselves deliberated, contested and amended in the process.

Chapters 6 and 7 look more closely at how climbing boys were constructed as a 'social problem' that required particular remedies. Chapter 6 focuses on chimney sweeps' cancer and traces how it was put to work in legislative and non-legislative contexts. The analysis shows that medics were hesitant to explain its peculiar epidemiology from other than general medical principles; that there are no signs of practitioners promoting 'occupational disease' or 'child medicine' as new fields of expertise. Moreover, the disease sparked a range of rhetorical responses, often highly sentimental, not commonly associated with medicine or science. These findings are important because historians of medicine tend to portray this period as an era of medicalisation and specialisation: with

medics actively seeking a monopoly over increasingly segmented aspects of health.

Chapter 7 shows the breadth of concern for sweeps' health, and the limited role of medics in their formation. The body of the sweep was central to a number of powerful images that dominated discussions about relief and reform: climbing boys as vulnerable children, exploited slaves, and objects of sympathy. But the way these images were constructed, often through depictions of sweeps' bodies but sometimes expressly not, changed considerably over time. The analysis highlights that the transfer of rhetoric from one context to another was often contested, suggesting that the increasing interconnectedness between voluntary activism, law making and administrative procedures posed challenges too.

The Conclusions draw out implications for the character of these campaigns and changes in reform practices and attitudes to medicine and childhood in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain. It also outlines areas for further examination and suggests how the inclusive approach of this thesis may be extended to shed light on the impact of policy on the operation of the trade.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE CLIMBING BOY REFORMERS, c. 1770-1840:

#### A COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY

This chapter introduces the men and women who made the climbing boy campaigns. It assesses the personal, professional and intellectual backgrounds of those who supported or opposed the regulation of sweeps' apprentices. It examines their motivation and how their involvement affected their lives.

Previous studies of climbing boy reform have examined either the steps taken to regulate the trade, or the ideas formulated in the process.<sup>1</sup> Neither can be properly understood without establishing *who* was involved in their formation. This chapter will therefore establish the identity, motivation and experience of the campaigners. It assesses their age, gender, vocation, religion and political preference, the contacts and contexts through which they expressed interest in the cause, and the place of climbing boy reform in their day-to-day activities.

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<sup>1</sup> For the former: Benita Cullingford, *British Chimney Sweeps: Five Centuries of Chimney Sweeping* (Lewes: Book Guild, 2000), chapters 6 and 9; George L. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys: A History of the Long Struggle to Abolish Child Labor in Chimney Sweeping* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1949); Kathleen H. Strange, *Climbing Boys: A Study of Sweeps' Apprentices, 1773-1875* (London: Allison, 1982), chapters 3 and 4. For the latter: Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1991), chapter 4; Ludmilla J. Jordanova, 'Conceptualising Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: The Problem of Child Labour', *British Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies*, 10 (1987), 189-99.

Three points should be clarified. Firstly, the analysis focuses on those activists affiliated with reform societies rather than those who contributed in an ad-hoc manner. This bias is justified as this chapter will move the study of climbing boy reform beyond analysis of how reform came about, to examining the personal experiences of, and social capital created by, participants. Secondly, the chapter studies both pre- and post-1800 campaigns. This reflects the changing composition of the reformers and allows examination of why these changes occurred. Thirdly, the analysis considers sweeps as 'participants' on their own behalf. This is a vital break from previous studies that either treated the sweeps as 'obstructors' of change or disregarded their contributions.<sup>2</sup> Although few sweeps campaigned for abolition, many *were* active protagonists of regulation, particularly after 1800 when masters in Bristol, Liverpool and London formed their own societies. The chapter is therefore divided thematically into two: non-sweep activists (1.1 and 1.3) and sweep activists (1.2 and 1.4). Although there was considerable overlap between members of reform societies and those speaking in parliament about climbing boys, it is important to introduce the latter properly. MPs and Lords who played important roles are presented in 1.5.

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<sup>2</sup> Phillips reserved only two pages of his sixty-one-page work to a 'brief account of [sweeps'] efforts to achieve a strong and united front'. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, pp. 40-42. Cullingford and Strange did not include any sweeps in their discussions of 'reformers'. Cullingford, *British Chimney Sweeps*, pp. 112-20; Strange, *Climbing Boys*, pp. 35-87. The tendency to neglect the contributions of those targeted by reform is not restricted to studies of the climbing boy campaigns. The conclusions to this chapter explore this issue in greater depth.

## 1.1 Climbing Boy Philanthropists, c. 1770-1800

Previous studies have treated the early campaigns as the pursuit of a single man: Jonas Hanway. But despite Hanway's pivotal role in initiating relief during the early 1770s and in lobbying for statutory regulations during the mid 1780s, we need to consider those who came to his aid. In January 1773, Hanway founded a Committee with twelve others; they received donations from twenty-five named and many more anonymous subscribers. In March 1788, after Hanway's death, eighteen men established another Committee to accomplish his legislative aspirations; at least sixty-four others supported them. Who were these people and why did they support this cause?

The 1773 Committee was strikingly coherent in composition. All thirteen founders were male, residing in London, and governors of the Marine Society.<sup>3</sup> Apart from two clergymen, all were active in maritime trades – as merchants, in the navy, or both (as in the case of Hanway).<sup>4</sup> And almost all supported a range of other metropolitan charities. Many shared multiple connections with Hanway. For example, John Anthony Rucker and John Thornton were fellow Russia merchants and served alongside Hanway on the boards of the Magdalen and Foundling Hospitals respectively.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A list with the names of the founders of the Committee can be found in: Jonas Hanway, *The Defects of the Police the Cause of Immorality* (London, 1775), p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. Mr. Burrows of Berkeley Chapel in Mayfair and Rev. Dr. Kay were among the founding members. Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 210-11 and p. 212.

A look at those who subscribed reinforces this image. Besides merchants (including Hanway's Russia partner, Robert Nettleton) and naval officers (including Edmund and Phillip Affleck; the latter was later vice-president of the Marine Society), others involved included clergymen, doctors, gentlemen and others deeply embedded in the same philanthropic circles as Hanway. Dr. William Heberden gave to six charities of which Hanway was director and Lord Robert Marsham was the first chairman and later president of the Marine Society, co-founder of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce to which Hanway belonged, and vice-president to the Magdalen Hospital and Troop Society to whose founding Hanway contributed.<sup>6</sup> Women donated too; at least fifteen, including Lady Clayton and Lady Colebrooke, whose husbands were Marine Society governors. Notable is the large number of anonymous female subscribers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Magdalen Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes, which opened its doors in 1758, was initiated by another Russia merchant, Robert Dingley. Hanway lent it his 'enthusiastic support' and was actively involved in drawing up plans for the diet, working activities and general treatment of inmates. James Stephen Taylor, *Jonas Hanway: Founder of the Marine Society: Charity and Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London and Berkeley CA: Scholar Press, 1985), pp. 76-79. For William Heberden: Ernest Heberden, 'Heberden, William (1710-1801)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12855>' (5 August 2010). For Lord Marsham: D. G. C. Allan, 'Marsham, Robert, Second Baron Romney (1712-1793)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), online edn., May 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38925>' (5 August 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Donna Andrew has shown that some women gave extensively indeed. Of the 138 'super donors' who contributed to at least three of six voluntary associations in mid-eighteenth-century London – the Marine Society, the Foundling Hospital, the Lambeth Asylum, the Lying-in Charity, the Magdalen Hospital and the British Lying-in Hospital – fifteen were women. Male subscribers outnumbered female in all charities, but less so in those dedicated to maternity. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, pp. 87-92.

The strong presence of merchants among the directors and subscribers to the 1773 Committee, as well as those already connected with Hanway, should come as no surprise. Merchants dominated charitable circles in mid-eighteenth-century London. Their prominence only increased after 1750, as new charities recruited support through existing networks of kinship, business and philanthropy.<sup>8</sup> And, by the early 1770s, Hanway, as the principal writer for a host of charities, was *the* figurehead of this community of merchant philanthropists. These factors go some way towards explaining why these groups supported Hanway in this charity, but cannot explain why merchants showed such aptitude for charity and why Hanway singled out this cause.

Three factors should be considered. Firstly, most merchants spent much of their early adulthood in Britain's trading factories abroad.<sup>9</sup> It was here, in the context of the fierce commercial and military rivalry which threatened the future of the Empire, that they were involved with 'Christian Mercantilism'. This worldview, characterised by devotion to the Anglican Church, the British Empire and the well-being of overseas trade, combined earlier beliefs in the economic benefits of putting the poor to work and reinforcing master-servant relations with a novel emphasis on the commercial, military and moral value of life-saving and child-rearing

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> In Hanway's case, first as apprentice to the English factory in Lisbon, 1729-41, then, as trading partner to the Russia Company in St. Petersburg, 1743-50. For Hanway's experiences abroad: Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, chapters 2 and 3.



charitable work. These ideals inspired the founding of various associations in London between c. 1740 and 1760.

Secondly, some trading companies were more committed to charity than others. Russia merchants showed particular zeal.<sup>10</sup> Donna Andrew has suggested that the challenging trading conditions in Russia and the distance from Britain may have boosted their commitment to seek improvement at home.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the reason, as the connection between commerce and charity became more entrenched it was partly self-reinforcing: Russia traders came across colleagues involved in philanthropy, whilst buying into such customs reinforced one's standing in the Company.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, personal motives played a part. Hanway started his philanthropic career with a substantial donation to the Foundling Hospital. It was a strategic and ideological choice – given the Hospital's status and its

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<sup>10</sup> A third of the company's Court of Assistants were on the first General Committee of the Marine Society in June 1756; half were governors to the Foundling Hospital in 1757; and five of the eight founders of the Magdalen Hospital in 1758, including Jonas Hanway and John Thornton, were on the company's Court. Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, pp. 91-92. Hanway's colourful account of his strenuous trading mission from St Petersburg to Persia enjoyed much popularity. Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (4 vols, London, 1753). Further editions followed in 1754 and 1761.

<sup>12</sup> Hanway and others scheduled commercial and charitable meetings on the same day, in the same venue. Stephen Taylor has referred to philanthropy as an 'apprenticeship' in administration for Russia Merchants, a step towards carrying responsibility in the Company. Perhaps not accidentally, Hanway was elected to the Court of Assistant in July 1756 – less than a month after initiating the founding of the Marine Society. The prominence of Russia merchants is also visible in the structure of charities, which clearly mirrored the organisation of the Company. Like the Russia Company, mid-eighteenth-century London charities only employed a few paid officers and relied principally upon the voluntary services of its governors, elected from the ranks of its subscribers. Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, p. 59.

mission to boost the nation's population.<sup>13</sup> But, as Hanway explained, it was also inspired by his background – he entertained great sympathy for 'friendless children', having lost his father before the age of two.<sup>14</sup>

According to Taylor, personal sentiments triggered Hanway's interest, after which he brought to bear religious, patriotic and commercial reasons to justify his continued support. Apparently, climbing boy relief was exceptional: 'Hanway never moved much beyond the humane consideration'; others merely followed out of solidarity.<sup>15</sup> There is much to favour this interpretation.

Hanway traced his interest in climbing boys to an anonymous letter in *The Public Advertiser*, in 1760, which called for improvement of their conditions, in the interest of 'every person that has not lost all sense of feeling for the distresses of his fellow-creatures'.<sup>16</sup> His own writings on the subject are best known for their sentimental tone.<sup>17</sup> And the 1788 Committee identified itself as 'friends of the late Mr. Hanway' –

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<sup>13</sup> The Foundling Hospital was 'London's most fashionable charity' and its governors included a host of peers, gentry and merchants. Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, pp. 61-62. For the Foundling Hospital, see: Alys Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800: "Left to the Mercy of the World"* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Ruth. K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> From: Jonas Hanway, *A Candid Historical Account of the Hospital for the Reception of Exposed and Deserted Young Children* (London, 1759). As recited in Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Letter by 'Ambulator' to *The Public Advertiser*, August 1760, recited in: Jonas Hanway, *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers in London & Westminster* (London, 1785), pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>17</sup> Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*; Jordanova, 'Conceptualising Childhood'.

highlighting he continued to be a figurehead beyond his death. Yet, treating Hanway's motivation as strictly 'humane' and reducing that of others as loyalty is problematic. It ignores how Hanway connected this cause with broader programmes of reform – schemes that will be considered in chapter 2. It also overlooks the inspiration that others drew from these connections to pursue this and other causes. This appears clearly if we consider the members and subscribers of the 1788 Committee.

At first sight this Committee was similar in composition to its predecessor. It consisted entirely of Marine Society governors. Among the eighteen men who attended its founding were six merchants/financiers, three officers, one manufacturer, one legal practitioner, and one clergyman. At least six had connections with the Russia Company.<sup>18</sup> Most were seasoned philanthropists. Eleven served as directors to one or more of the mid-eighteenth-century London charities in which Hanway had played such prominent part.

A closer look shows that their participation was not merely a tribute to Hanway. Four of the eighteen had served on the 1773 Committee and many continued pursuing this cause after 1788, suggesting more than a casual interest in the cause. Several members founded new charities that carried the ideals expressed in climbing boy relief in new directions.

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<sup>18</sup> John Thornton and his sons, Samuel and Henry, were all Russia merchants; so was Thomas Raikes, whose brother William also served on the Committee; John Julius Angerstein was the son of a Russia merchant.

William and Thomas Raikes were crucial early promoters of Sunday Schools, providing the infrastructure for realising Hanway's aim to instruct labouring children in Christian principles and basic literacy.<sup>19</sup> The Reverend Samuel Glasse was a founding member of the Proclamation Society in 1787 that succeeded in realising Hanway's ideal to engage members of the social elite – landed aristocrats, peers, courtiers, bishops, MPs and active magistrates – in moral reform.<sup>20</sup> Also, John Julius Angerstein was instrumental in the founding of the Bettering Society in 1796, which carried forward Hanway's attempts to involve the labouring classes in their own reformation.

A similar picture appears from the sixty-four subscribers. These included sixteen men and women who were directors of, or whose spouse served on the board of, one of the mid-eighteenth-century charities. But many also supported the new charities discussed above. William Wilberforce was one of Glasse's companions in launching the Proclamation

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<sup>19</sup> William and Thomas were younger brothers of Robert Raikes who set up the first Sunday School in 1780 in Gloucester. Anita McConnell, 'Raikes, Robert (1736–1811)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23016> (3 July 2010). In response to his climbing boy letters in the *Public Advertiser*, in 1785, an anonymous London clergyman sought Hanway's patronage for introducing Sunday Schools in the metropolis, 'a scheme which seems well calculated to promote [...] your present undertaking'. Hanway offered advice on how such schools should be organised, but declined a leading role: 'you are to consider me as a storm-beaten antient (sic) man, favoured by Heaven with a long life of incessant toils; and being at length tired, am inclined to go to rest'. The clergyman's plea and Hanway's lengthy reply were reprinted in: Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 135-89. Despite his hesitation to take a leading role in the promotion of Sunday Schools, Hanway dedicated his final publication to the cause: Jonas Hanway, *A Comprehensive View of Sunday Schools* (London, 1786).

<sup>20</sup> On the Proclamation Society, see: Joanna Innes, 'Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in Later Eighteenth-Century England', in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 57-118.

Society; Shute Barrington (the Bishop of Durham) and Thomas Bernard promoted Sunday Schools. All three would be founders of the Bettering Society.

Furthermore, for many it was the start of a long-term commitment to the climbing boy cause. Angerstein, Barrington, Bernard, Glasse and Wilberforce were founders of the SPICSA in 1800 and the SSNCB in 1803. Eleven other members supported these later initiatives. Before considering their directors and subscribers, it is important to consider one group that Hanway desperately, but unsuccessfully, tried to recruit: chimney sweeps.

## **1.2 Reluctant Master Sweeps, c. 1770-1800**

Previous studies have neglected the role of sweeps because of their limited contributions towards the final outcome: climbing boy abolition.<sup>21</sup> However, as signalled in the introduction, sweeps played vital a part in reform, albeit not as abolitionists. Most of their contributions came after 1800. Why did they contribute so little to the earlier campaigns?

Hanway and his associates made consistent attempts to secure their collaboration – attempts that will be explored in chapter 2. They hoped that the masters would assist magistrates in monitoring the trade. As Hanway explained in a circular sent out to all sweeps ‘whose habitations [we] have been able to find out’ in June 1773: ‘I write to *you*, in the same

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<sup>21</sup> George Phillips only briefly considered sweeps’ attempts to assume constructive action: Phillips, *England’s Climbing-Boys*, pp. 40-42.

terms as to others of your trade; it being hardly possible for us to be acquainted with the character and conduct of every particular *master chimney-sweeper*, in these vast cities.'<sup>22</sup> Their recruits were restricted to a single master: David Porter.

Trained and employed as a climbing boy by his father, an 'itinerant' sweep at Peterborough, Porter established a successful sweeping business in London during the early 1770s. It was around this time that Hanway approached him. As Hanway's 'privy counsellor' on the cause, he wrote the statutes for two fraternities, provided vital information about the financial state of the trade for Hanway's *Sentimental History* (1785), and assisted the 1788 Committee in transforming Hanway's proposals into legislation. Porter's assessment of the shortcomings of this Act attracted the Bettering Society to the cause during the 1790s<sup>23</sup> and he was among the initiators of the SPICSA and the SSNCB.<sup>24</sup>

Porter's enthusiasm for reforming his trade was matched by his zeal in business.<sup>25</sup> He was an ambitious and highly successful entrepreneur.

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<sup>22</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Bernard, director of the Bettering Society, explained that his interest in the climbing boys stemmed from reading David Porter's *Considerations Upon the Present State of Chimney Sweepers* (1792), which he 'earnestly recommend[ed] to the reader, as containing the best and most genuine information on the subject'. Thomas Bernard, 'Extract from an Account of a Chimney-Sweeper's Boy, with Observations and a Proposal for the Relief of Chimney Sweepers', in *Reports of the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor* (6 vols, London, 1798-1814), vol. 1, pp. 151-52.

<sup>24</sup> The directors and subscribers to these two societies are examined in 1.3.

<sup>25</sup> Both his writings and his testimony to the 1818 House of Lords Select Committee contain much biographic detail. See: '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 106-18. See Bibliography for full title; David Porter, *Considerations Upon the Present State of Chimney Sweepers* (2nd edn., London, 1801). For an overview of manuscript sources: Sonia W. Addis-Smith, 'Porter, David (1746/7-1819)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National*

After moving from the City of London to Marylebone in the early 1770s, he soon 'ran away with the bulk of the business at the West End of the Town', combining chimney sweeping with work as a smoke jack cleaner and soot trader.<sup>26</sup> In a large and richly decorated trade card [plate 3], he presented himself as 'Chimney Sweeper to Her Royal Highness the Princess Amelia' and offered to 'rectify and cure smoakey (sic) chimneys' with the guarantee 'no cure no pay' – attesting to both his accomplishments and ambitions.<sup>27</sup> From the late 1780s he combined these pursuits with a career as builder and property developer, with remarkable success. By the time of his death in 1819, his name appeared on over 7,000 property deeds across the West End and his estate was valued at just under £60,000.<sup>28</sup>

Porter realised that his success was not representative of the trade. He counted himself among twenty of 200 master sweeps who made a comfortable living in London and its surroundings; most others struggled to provide for their families, journeymen and apprentices and many were 'miserable in the extreme'.<sup>29</sup> He blamed this on the lack of regulation. Too many adults tried to make a living in this trade, driving down the prices of

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*Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/61901>' (3 July 2010).

<sup>26</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 107.

<sup>27</sup> British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, David Porter, 1783. See also trade card of Porter's former apprentice: British Museum, Heal Collection of Trade Cards, 36.27, Jonathan Miller, 1796.

<sup>28</sup> The vestry of Marylebone commissioned him in 1806 and 1814 to design new chapels. Addis-Smith, 'Porter, David', *ODNB*. His background as a sweep and extensive knowledge of chimney construction made him an important witness to the 1818 Lords Select Committee. His testimony is examined in chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, p. 34.

their services. Many took on more boys than they could employ regularly, exposing the children to poverty and preparing them for a trade that was already oversubscribed. Only by reducing the number of apprentices, ensuring that those bound were properly cared for, and assisting former climbers in pursuing alternative careers could the deadlock be broken:<sup>30</sup>

Is it not evident that whatever tends to preserve the health, and improve the morals of these poor boys, must be for the benefit of the master? – Will not their labour be more productive? [...] Another advantage would be derived by the masters, in consequence of their contributing towards binding out boys to other trades, after they arrive at the age of sixteen years. It would thin the trade, and render it better for those who carry it on.

Porter's belief that an unregulated trade equalled poverty and neglect was partly informed by personal experience. He recalled his time as an itinerant sweep in Peterborough, 'trudging the streets [...] excluded from society'<sup>31</sup> and his father's death from scrotal cancer, which he blamed on the negligent treatment he had received as an apprentice: 'they never changed his Shirt till it rotted on his Back; consequently the Pores of his Skin became stopped, and that is the cause of the Cancer'.<sup>32</sup>

Porter experienced that better conditions for his boys improved his business: 'I was patronized by Gentlemen more on that Account than any other, and it assisted me with something handsome to begin some other

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<sup>30</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, pp. x-xi and p. xv.

<sup>31</sup> Addis-Smith, 'Porter, David', *ODNB*. Recited from David Porter's *Considerations on the Present State of Chimney Sweepers*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (London, 1792), p. vii. I have not been able to identify a copy of this edition.

<sup>32</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 108.



Business'.<sup>33</sup> Unlike other masters, he wished to impose this improvement on the trade. Religious and sentimental arguments also featured in his writings. Passages in his 1801 pamphlet closely resembled Hanway's writings.<sup>34</sup> This leads us to consider how this campaign shaped his outlook and experiences.

It aided him both professionally and privately. In 1784, Horace Walpole, the eminent author and politician who later assisted Porter's son's entrance into Cambridge, wrote how he had 'been these two years wishing to promote my excellent Mr Porter's plan for alleviating the woes of chimney-sweepers'.<sup>35</sup> Porter thanked Walpole and Hanway for instructing him in 'the principles of philanthropy'.<sup>36</sup> But he was careful to stress that his views on the trade had not changed. In 1801 he asserted, 'I thought then, as I do now, that the period of apprenticeship might be made more comfortable, and the trade at large rendered more respectable, by means both simple and effectual, in proper hands'.<sup>37</sup>

These core principles, which had impelled him to join the campaign, continued to inform his judgements, even after he stopped practising as a

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<sup>33</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> For example, he invited readers to 'see this poor apprentice as he really is, let us view him in a wintry morning, exposed to the surly blast or falling snow, trudging the streets half naked, his sores bleeding, his limbs contracted with cold, his inhuman master driving him beyond his strength, whilst the piteous tears of hunger and misery trickle down his cheek, which is, indeed, the only means he has to vent his grief'. Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>35</sup> Addis-Smith, 'Porter, David', *ODNB*.

<sup>36</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, pp. v-vi.

<sup>37</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, p. 23.

sweep in 1808. When the SSNCB in 1816 switched its objectives to immediate abolition of climbing boys, Porter left the society. He reiterated this position (for better regulation, but against abolition) to the 1818 Lords Select Committee – criticised by the SSNCB as a betrayal of his long fought cause, but, when viewed in a different light, reflective of his strong character.<sup>38</sup>

Why did other sweeps not sense the opportunities that Porter anticipated and found in reform? Hanway's accounts provide no details of the masters approached, nor did the sweeps express themselves *against* reform. Later sources are of little use. The sweeps who testified to parliamentary committees in the 1810s and 1830s sketched a dark image of their times as climbing boys, to highlight the positive change that had since occurred. But, those who had been set up as masters at the time of Hanway's campaign were not asked why they had ignored these earlier approaches.

The thirty-odd trade cards that survive for London sweeps from the 1780s and 1790s suggest reasons behind the trade's non-engagement with reform.<sup>39</sup> Although not all cards were as elaborate as Porter's, there were a substantial number of sweeps of similar wealth and equal ambition. The

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<sup>38</sup> The Lords Committee, which contained several London SSNCB directors, confronted Porter concerning his earlier writings on the miseries of climbing boys. Porter responded: 'I spoke entirely of the itinerant People; it is those by whom the Boys suffer'. '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> This analysis is based on an assessment of all sweeps' trade cards in the British Museum Prints and Drawings, the Guildhall Library and the Museum of London collections. Of the ninety-four cards found for this trade prior to 1840, thirty could be positively dated to the 1780s and 1790s.

cards also suggest that many shared his concern for the trade's reputation and about the negative impact of 'itinerant' traders, even though few shared his belief in the wholesome effect of formal regulation.

The message conveyed through the cards is strikingly uniform, namely, that this was a valuable, decent, and efficient trade, if masters and householders joined hands to ensure the work was done by capable, respectable traders. The master is depicted as surrounded by his journeyman and apprentices, well-dressed and calmly directing their work. Often one boy can be seen reaching out from a flue, with flames or heavy smoke sprouting from a nearby chimney – hinting at the curative and preventative powers of the service. The image is reinforced by the accompanying text. Customers were told that flues would be swept 'in the best manner', fires extinguished 'with utmost care and safety', and coppers and smoke jacks cleaned 'with greatest expedition' [plate 4].<sup>40</sup>

Compared with the 1780s and 1790s relatively few cards have survived from sweeps for earlier decades – in itself an indication of the increasing affluence of (sections of) the trade and a growing desire for self-promotion. But if we compare their later cards with promotional literature for privy cleaning and rubbish carting from earlier times (tasks that traders combined with chimney sweeping during the latter parts of the century) several things stand out. Like the cards of night men and carters from the

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<sup>40</sup> British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.8, Thomas Davis, 1789.

1750s to 1770s [plates 5 and 6],<sup>41</sup> those of sweeps from the 1780s and 1790s portrayed masters in respectable dress and promised 'decent', 'expedient' service [plates 3, 4 and 7].<sup>42</sup> But the latter made additional gestures to show their personal qualities and business acumen. They referred to respectable patrons already subscribing to their service and they emphasised that they always attended in person.<sup>43</sup>

Rather than an assurance for the decent treatment of apprentices, for which reason Hanway and Porter pleaded for personal supervision,<sup>44</sup> the master's presence guaranteed that the work was done properly and by those intended. Jonathan Miller contrasted his attendance with the careless practices of others who 'send little Boys, who neglect the Work for want of being attended to'.<sup>45</sup> And many sweeps warned their customers against fraudsters – men who sent out boys to solicit for work in the name of established masters.<sup>46</sup> They engraved their names or initials on the

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<sup>41</sup> British Museum, Heal Collection of Trade Cards, 36.36, Robert Stone, 1751; British Museum, Heal Collection of Trade Cards, 36.2, John Bates, 1763.

<sup>42</sup> British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, David Porter, 1783; British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.8, Thomas Davis, 1789; British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.12, Thomas Gainem, c. 1790.

<sup>43</sup> British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, David Porter, 1783. See plate 3.

<sup>44</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 113, clause 16; Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 24-26. The House of Lords omitted the clause 'That no apprentice shall hawk or call the streets for employment, but in company with his master' from the Bill prepared by Porter and the 1788 Committee. Porter considered it a major loss as it was the best guarantee for the boys being attended to properly.

<sup>45</sup> British Museum, Heal Collection of Trade Cards, 36.27, Jonathan Miller, 1796.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Hugh Kernot advised his customers 'against employing any Men or Boys who knock or ring at the Doors, making use of his Name, to solicit Orders, as this is often done with a Design to rob the House, in which they are frequently too successful; and from their sooty Clothes and the Likeness of one Sweep to another, it is scarcely possible

shovels of their climbers and requested householders to check these to ensure that the service advertised was genuine.<sup>47</sup>

Masters thus made considerable effort and expense (printings costs) to promote their reputation and protect their business.<sup>48</sup> But they saw no need for formal regulations. Nor did they view good treatment of boys as a means to improve their standing. Unlike the 1810s and 1830s, when masters *did* engage with the humane aspects of the campaign in promotional literature, promising to use ‘machines where expedient’,<sup>49</sup> trade cards from the 1780s and 1790s show no such sensitivity. Boys appear orderly and obedient, but also bend under heavy loads of soot [plate 4]<sup>50</sup> – a practice fiercely contested by the reformers. Moreover, masters advertised the services of ‘small boys for register stoves’ or ‘little boys for small funnels’ [plate 7]<sup>51</sup> – although the young age of climbers was a primary concern to Hanway and associates.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, the priority was to

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to swear to the Parties, or regain the stolen Property’. Museum of London, Trade Cards, Hugh Kernot.

<sup>47</sup> Abigail Beecher and son requested their customers to ‘Look upon the Boys Shovels and there is our Names’. British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.3, Abigail Beecher & Son.

<sup>48</sup> For discussion of cost of printing and advertising: Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, ‘Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France’, *Cultural and Social History*, 4 (2007), 145-70.

<sup>49</sup> For example, James Steers promised to ‘Sweep chimnies in the best manner, with a Machine or Boys where necessary’. Guildhall Library, Trade Cards, James Steers. See also: Guildhall Library, Trade Cards, Joseph Phillips.

<sup>50</sup> British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.8, Thomas Davis, 1789.

<sup>51</sup> British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.12, Thomas Gainem, c. 1790.

<sup>52</sup> Hanway wrote, ‘Beginning to climb before the bone had acquired a solidity, the daily pressure necessarily gives the leg a twist, if it does not distort the ankles’. Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 79-80.

provide honest, reliable and careful service, not to ensure the well-being of children in the trade.

However, the fact that masters did not draw attention to the care they bestowed upon their apprentices tells us as much about their customers' priorities as about their own preoccupations. Hanway's sentimental engagement with child labour was novel and could not count on wide support. To maintain a successful business the sweeps did not have to appear to be humane. Of greater concern were the carnivalesque associations that continued to be drawn with their trade – in the press, in satirical prints, and in plays.<sup>53</sup> To counter this, the masters emphasised their decency, efficiency and sincerity. Clearly, the public had not developed a degree of sensitivity for the toils of climbing boys for humane considerations to inform their choice of master. This changed with more popular campaigns by the SPICSA and the SSNCB after 1800. It is to these societies that we will turn next.

### **1.3 Climbing Boy Abolitionists, 1800-1840**

The Society for the Protection and Instruction of Chimney Sweepers' Apprentices (SPICSA), founded in April 1800, was governed by a Committee of one president, four vice-presidents, six honorary committee members,

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<sup>53</sup> For an excellent study of London street cries, with extensive discussion of chimney sweeps: Sean Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast: The Urban Poor in the Cries of London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

six trade committee members (master sweeps) and one treasurer. The sweeps on the committee will be examined in 1.4; here we will consider the non-sweeps. These reformers were connected through the Bettering Society. Bettering founders Shute Barrington (president), William Wilberforce (vice-president) and Thomas Bernard (honorary committee member) all served as SPICSA directors. Other committee members had existing links to them. Of the other vice-presidents, Patrick Colquhoun had initiated the Spitalfield Soup Society with Barrington and Wilberforce,<sup>54</sup> Matthew Montagu supported the latter's anti-slavery campaign, and Sir Thomas Hill supported the Bettering Society.<sup>55</sup> Honorary committee member, Rowland Burdon was a large estate holder in Barrington's diocese.<sup>56</sup> No further information could be found about the remaining four: Robert Harper, John May, William Price and John Walker. The Princess Mary, acting as patroness, had supported a Sunday School for climbing

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<sup>54</sup> Patrick Colquhoun, London magistrate and police reformer, was one of the initiators of the Spitalfield Soup Charity in 1797, which provided food and employment (in cooking) to unemployed Spitalfield weavers. 'Brick Lane', in *Survey of London: Volume 27: Spitalfields and Mile End New Town* (1957), 123-26, '<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=50163>' (10 August 2010); Ruth Paley, 'Colquhoun, Patrick (1745–1820)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5992>' (10 August 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Sir Richard Hill, MP and religious controversialist, later promoted the British and Foreign Bible Society (founded in 1804) with Wilberforce and others. W.C. Sydney and rev. S.J. Skedd, 'Hill, Sir Richard, Second Baronet (1733–1808)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008 '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13290>' (10 August 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Rowland Burdon, son of a wealthy Sunderland merchant banker and MP of the same name, resided at Castle Eden estate, County Durham. 'Castle Eden Village and Colliery', *Durham Records Online*, '[http://www.durhamrecordsonline.com/literature/castle\\_eden.php](http://www.durhamrecordsonline.com/literature/castle_eden.php)' (10 August 2010).

boys at Kingston-upon-the-Thames.<sup>57</sup> Lady Elizabeth Montagu, acting as vice-patroness, had been hosting May Day banquets.<sup>58</sup>

The SPICSA attracted twenty-eight other subscribers, including Bernard's wife and Barrington's wife and brother as well as his protégé the Reverend Thomas Burgess.<sup>59</sup> Compared with the 1773 and 1788 Committees, the SPICSA attracted considerable support from clergymen,<sup>60</sup> landed aristocrats<sup>61</sup> and prominent figures in artistic and literary circles.<sup>62</sup> The proportion of female subscribers increased to eighteen out of fifty-one, up from fifteen out of forty-six in 1773 and seven out of seventy-

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<sup>57</sup> Shute Barrington, 'Extract from an Account of a Provision for Chimney Sweepers' Boys, at Kingston Upon Thames, with Observations.', in *Reports of the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor* (6 vols, London, 1798-1814), vol. 2, 149-57.

<sup>58</sup> Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, 'Montagu, Elizabeth (1718–1800)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., May 2009, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19014>' (14 August 2010). Correspondence by Hannah More suggests that Lady Montagu had been hosting banquets for climbing boys at least since 1793. George L. Phillips, 'Mrs. Montagu and the Climbing-Boys', *The Review of English Studies*, 25 (1949), p. 237.

<sup>59</sup> Burgess was Bishop at St David's, London, and acted as examining chaplain for clerical education at Durham. D.T.W. Price, 'Burgess, Thomas (1756–1837)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., October 2009, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3985>' (10 August 2010).

<sup>60</sup> At least four Reverends and several lower clergy donated: the Reverend Lord Shute Barrington, the Reverend George Barrington, the Reverend Thomas Burgess, and the Reverend Dr. Robert Price. Others with connections to the church: Philip Pusey (1746–1828), Berkshire landowner and the father of Edward Bouverie Pusey, the prominent Anglican clergyman and theologian; Francis Drake (1766-1847), Rector of Langton-on-Swale, whose father and uncle were both Anglican churchmen – Francis Drake (bap. 1721, d. 1795) and William Drake (bap. 1723, d. 1801), respectively.

<sup>61</sup> The Queen, who acted as patroness, donated £31 10s, the Countess of Kingston £10 10s, and the Countess of Aylesbury £1 15s.

<sup>62</sup> These included sculptor and author Anne Seymour Damer, school master and book collector Dr. Charles Burney, and Lady Elizabeth Montagu, 'Queen of the Blue Stockings'. Lady Montagu donated £13 and 13s, the second largest donation received, and acted as vice-patroness. She also hosted the first climbing boy banquets at Montagu House on May Day, a tradition upheld by her nephew, Matthew, for many years following her death in 1801. Matthew Montagu was SPICSA vice-president (1800-01), SSNCB committee member (1816-31) and played prominent part in the 1818 House of Lords Committee enquiries.



seven in 1788. Most SPICSA directors continued to support the cause after the demise of their society.<sup>63</sup> For most subscribers it was a one-off contribution.<sup>64</sup>

The SPICSA ceased operating within twelve months of its founding, due to the small number of subscribers and the few sweeps who supported the initiative.<sup>65</sup> But in 1803 the London SSNCB was formed to end the use of climbing boys. Its directors were more numerous, but sweeps were not included – David Porter exempted. The Committee comprised one president, one treasurer, one secretary, several vice-presidents (between ten and twelve), a larger number of committee members (between eight and thirty-eight, usually at least thirty). All positions were unsalaried and appointments made for one year at the Annual Meeting of subscribers in May. The names of directors were printed in the Annual Report, which also from 1818 included lists of subscribers.

These lists suggest that the SSNCB attracted support from similar groups as the SPICSA. The 690 subscribers prior to 1818 included at least 146 women, seventy-five aristocrats, twenty-five reverends, twelve officers, and three doctors. (The latter group was strikingly small given the centrality of death, injury, illness and disturbed development in

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<sup>63</sup> Eleven SPISA directors served on the London SSNCB Committee and/or subscribed after 1803.

<sup>64</sup> Only four SPICSA subscribers also subscribed to the SSNCB. Of the directors, seven also became SSNCB directors, four donated to the later society.

<sup>65</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Porter's *Considerations*, which includes a list of subscribers up till early 1801, suggests that hardly any donations were received after April 1800. Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 58-60.

philanthropic literature and parliamentary debates regarding climbing boys – an issue examined in chapters 6 and 7.<sup>66</sup>) Other causes attracted support from similar groups.<sup>67</sup> Many SSNCB subscribers indeed supported other campaigns.<sup>68</sup> This might explain why many members only subscribed for a short time. Nearly three quarters of all donations were received during the first fifteen years of operations.<sup>69</sup> Most subscribers supported the Society for less than four years. This contrasts sharply with the commitment shown by the directors. It is to their backgrounds that we will turn.

### THE LONDON SSNCB COMMITTEE

London SSNCB directors were well-positioned to influence the conditions of climbing boys. Throughout this period, they included between nine and eighteen MPs and peers – up to one third of all directors.<sup>70</sup> Long-serving

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<sup>66</sup> Chapters 6 and 7 examine debates about the health of climbing boys in detail.

<sup>67</sup> Roberts has noted the increasing involvement of landed gentry in voluntary associations during the early nineteenth century, with an exemplary role played by Edward Harbord (third Lord Suffield) who also served the London SSNCB as committee member (1821-25) and vice-president (1825-34). Michael J.D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapter 3. For Roberts' discussion of the role of landed gentry, see: pp. 125-27. For his account of the increasing involvement of female activists in voluntary activism, see: pp. 129-32. For women's role in slavery abolitionism see: Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (Paperback edn., London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>68</sup> Subscribers included: the Quaker, William Allen, who played a key role in Prison Discipline Society; Charles Pieschell, who donated to eight charities including the Society for Promoting Religious among the Poor; and Thomas Coutts, who offered crucial support to campaigns for abolishing the slave trade and for promoting Sunday Schools.

<sup>69</sup> 690 individuals subscribed between 1803 and 1818; fewer than 300 new subscribers joined in the following twenty-two years. Because the *Annual Reports* prior to 1818 do not include subscriptions lists, it is unclear when these 690 donations were received. But from the desperate financial state of the Society in 1808 and 1811, it seems that the vast majority made their donations in the first two years of operations and then around parliamentary activity in the years 1817-19. The financial struggles of the London SSNCB are examined closely in 3.2.

<sup>70</sup> The background and motivation of SSNCB parliamentarians is examined further in 1.5.

members included prominent local administrators like Patrick Colquhoun (magistrate and police reformer), Matthew Wood and Sir Patrick Laurie (Mayors of London in 1815-16 and 1832). The Committee always included several directors of Fire Insurance Companies, whose judgements carried much weight in the eyes of the legislature.<sup>71</sup>

They used their political and/or professional credentials to mobilise support. Lord Mayor Wood chaired a public meeting in 1816, fire insurer Robert Steven convinced fellow insurers to promote mechanical sweeping, and other SSNCB officials presided over parliamentary inquiries in 1817, 1818, 1834 and 1840.<sup>72</sup> Its mixed composition thus allowed the SSNCB to advance reform through multiple channels – law-making, administration and community initiatives.

Most directors were committed. **Tables 1 and 2** show the age-at-joining and years-of-service of all 111 London SSNCB directors between 1803 and 1839. Some joined in their twenties, others at more advanced stages of life; but almost all served for a considerable time.<sup>73</sup> On average, directors served for thirteen years, but six the full thirty-six-year period, twenty-three (or 1 in 5) at least twenty years, and thirty-eight (or 1 in 3)

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<sup>71</sup> George Jeffery, director of Union Fire Office, was SSNCB committee member from 1803 to 1805. Peter Laurie, director of Beacon Fire Insurance Company of Edinburgh and of the North British Insurance Company, was SSNCB committee member from 1826 to 1836. Robert Steven, director of Hand-in-Hand Fire Office from 1833 to 1851, was SSNCB secretary between 1830 and 1839.

<sup>72</sup> These and other initiatives are examined further in chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>73</sup> At least four were over 70 years old when they joined.

fifteen years or more.<sup>74</sup> Some had supported earlier initiatives,<sup>75</sup> others returned to the cause *after* 1850 – extending their connections over four decades.<sup>76</sup> However, the Committee struggled to extend its numbers, with damaging consequences when the first generation of dedicated members retired.

**Tables 3 and 4** display the age-profile of directors and transitions in membership. The former shows an increasingly aged and experienced Committee – confirming the loyalty of early members *and* the struggle to attract new recruits. **Table 4** highlights the challenge this posed. Until 1830, the Committee sustained its numbers, with new members balancing out or surpassing those who retired. But the persistent exodus eventually took its toll: within six years the Committee lost half its members, including sharp drops in 1834 and 1838 – crucial years for the campaign.<sup>77</sup>

London SSNCB directors were thus well-placed and committed. But why did they attach themselves to this cause and how did their participation affect their lives? Three exemplary campaigners will be

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<sup>74</sup> Even those who joined the Committee aged 50 or over still served on average for more than ten years; at least fifteen stayed on till the year of their death.

<sup>75</sup> William Wilberforce's commitment to the cause spanned over five decades: he subscribed to the 1788 Committee, then served as vice-president both to SPICSA (1800-01) and the SSNCB (1803-33). Similarly, John Julius Angerstein had subscribed to the 1773 and 1788 Committees and served as London SSCNB vice-president between 1803 and 1823 (the year of his death).

<sup>76</sup> Lord Ashley (SSNCB CM 1839-40) and Robert Steven (SSNCB secretary 1830-39) led further legislative initiatives in 1852-53, 1864 and 1875 – campaigns that fall outside the current study.

<sup>77</sup> Chapters 3 and 4 examine the impact of this downscaling on the Society's operations in greater detail.

considered, with different backgrounds and different roles in the campaign. Two directors (Wilberforce who represents the 'parliamentarians', Tooke who represents the 'professionals') and one activist not on, but employed by the Committee (Joseph Glass, 'mechanical sweep').

Wilberforce, best known for his role in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, made vital contributions to climbing boy reform.<sup>78</sup> He subscribed to the 1788 Committee<sup>79</sup> and, as SSNCB vice-president (1803-33) and MP for Yorkshire (1784-1812) and Bramber (1812-25), he was a leading advocate of climbing boy legislation in 1804 and 1817-19.<sup>80</sup>

Social networks and personal views motivated his support.<sup>81</sup> Born to a merchant family active in the Baltic trade, Wilberforce was introduced early to the philanthropic traditions of the Russia Company. Two of his uncles, William Wilberforce and John Thornton, were prominent figures in the Company and in Hanway's web of merchant philanthropists.<sup>82</sup> Thornton served on the 1773 and 1788 Committees and probably

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<sup>78</sup> John Wolfe, 'Wilberforce, William (1759–1833)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., May 2009, 'http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29386' (3 July 2010).

<sup>79</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 11 April 1788.

<sup>80</sup> It is likely that he would have introduced the Committee's Bill in the Commons in April 1788, but stress-related illness kept him house-bound.

<sup>81</sup> Given Wilberforce's absence from public life at the time of his donation, it seems likely that one of his close friends on the Committee, probably John or Henry Thornton or the Reverend Samuel Glasse, approached him for a subscription.

<sup>82</sup> After his father's death in 1768, Wilberforce lived with the former for two years, aged 9-11. During those years his aunt Hannah introduced him to evangelicalism, although it was not until his University days that he became a dedicated evangelical himself. Wolfe, 'Wilberforce, William', *ODNB*.

acquainted Wilberforce with climbing boy relief. Sir Charles Middleton, whose encouragement had been vital for Wilberforce taking the lead in the anti slave-trade campaign, also donated to the 1788 Committee before Wilberforce.<sup>83</sup>

The evangelical conversion experience that he underwent in 1785 also played a part. Reconnected with God but tormented by doubts about the futility of his earlier life, Wilberforce considered retreating from public life. Encouraged by friends, including Prime Minister William Pitt, he resolved instead to dedicate his parliamentary exertions to the service of God. In 1787 he placed himself at the head of two campaigns: the abolition of the slave trade and the reform of manners. Climbing boy reform was an extension of both – extending relief to ‘slaves’ at home; providing a practical cause through which feelings of pity and humanity could be provoked and turned to good use.

Many other abolitionists supported climbing boy reform too.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Wilberforce used his activities in the one cause to recruit

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<sup>83</sup> Wolfe, 'Wilberforce, William', *ODNB*. Middleton donated to the Committee two weeks before Wilberforce did. *Public Advertiser*, 25 March and 11 April 1788.

<sup>84</sup> The first London SSNCB Committee included several leading abolitionists including John Julius Angerstein, Thomas Charles Bunbury, Stephen Lushington, Matthew Montagu, Henry Thornton, and five members of the Forster family who played a central role in the so-called Clapham Sect. But some directors objected to the abolition of the slave trade, including Thomas Everett and John Russell (sixth Duke of Bedford); the latter because 'it would be harmful to the interests of the slaves to exclude the humane British from the trade'. F. M. L. Thompson, 'Russell, John, Sixth Duke of Bedford (1766–1839)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24322>' (10 August 2010).

volunteers for the other.<sup>85</sup> But there were those who felt that improving conditions for British workers should take priority over ameliorating slaves abroad. They aimed their torments at Wilberforce, as the parliamentary figurehead of anti-slavery. During the 1820s, he disputed fiercely with fellow SSNCB activists who accused him of political misjudgement.<sup>86</sup> This suggests the benefits and challenges that arose from combining multiple causes.

If Wilberforce represents the 'administrators' among SSNCB directors, the legal practitioner, William Tooke, represents the 'professionals'. Tooke's case illustrates that drawing firm boundaries between the two is arbitrary – he became MP during the 1830s and even before that time played a crucial part in legislative procedures. However, like other lawyers, architects, fire insurers and medics, his contributions were firmly shaped by his professional credentials. He sought the prosecution of sweeps who broke the law by having their boys cry the streets for work and he advised the legislature about new regulations.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The Sheffield Anti-Slavery Society was the product of correspondence between Wilberforce and Sheffield climbing boy campaigners. Sheffield Archives, SR 40, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 23 August 1824. See chapter 3 for further details.

<sup>86</sup> He corresponded with Sheffield SSNCB director, Samuel Roberts, extensively about the latter's preferences for climbing boy relief over abolition of slavery in Britain's colonies. The issue is examined in detail in chapters 3 and 7.

<sup>87</sup> Advertising their services on the streets before 5am or after 12pm during the summer months, and before 7am or after 12pm in the winter, was illegal under the 1788 Act, clauses 7 and 9. In February 1825, Tooke brought five masters before magistrates at Hatton Garden for breaking these statutes. *The Times*, 2 February 1825. For Tooke representing abused climbing boys, see: *The Times*, 16 May 1818 and 31 January 1821.

Tooke's attention was first drawn to climbing boys through his involvement in the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce. In 1797, this Society promised a reward for 'the most simple, cheap and proper apparatus for cleansing Chimnies from soot, and obviating the necessity of children being employed in the manner now practiced'<sup>88</sup> – the competition was re-launched in 1803, in collaboration with the SSNCB. Tooke joined the London SSNCB at its founding and served it as treasurer (1803-1838) and vice-president (1839). His contributions highlight the variety of channels through which individual directors promoted reform. Apart from attending court cases, he spoke at SSNCB meetings, wrote its *Annual Reports*, testified to parliamentary committees, and corresponded with government departments, other voluntary associations and the press about mechanical sweeping. He put his existing connections and expertise to the service of this cause,<sup>89</sup> but also used the

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<sup>88</sup> Cullingford, *British Chimney Sweeps*, p. 161. Recited from: Henry Truemans Wood, *A History of the Royal Society of Arts* (London: J. Murray, 1913).

<sup>89</sup> Tooke played a key role in arranging trials in government offices and other public buildings in the metropolis. For Tooke's correspondence with the Home Office regarding these trials, see: '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 8-10. See Bibliography for full title. He also corresponded directly with businesses, charities and trade organisations regarding mechanical sweeping. For example, he convinced the 'Company of Iron Mongers' to have the flues in their hall swept by the SSNCB agents: *Practical Information Presented to the Public by the Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys; with a Description of Glass's Improved Machinery for Cleansing Chimneys, and a List of Subscribers* (London, 1828), p. 6. Apart from his involvement in the Society of Arts and the SSNCB, Tooke played prominent roles in other professional, intellectual and relief associations including: the Royal Law Institution, the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, the Royal Society of Literature, and the Royal Literary Fund Society. He was also a key figure in the founding of University College London. G. C. Boase and rev. Eric Metcalfe, 'Tooke, William (1777–1863)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27548>' (10 August 2010).



social capital created in his climbing boy agitation to promote his own ambitions.

In 1841 he put himself forward as parliamentary candidate for Finsbury. He dismissed his Whig rivals Thomas Duncombe and Thomas Wakley (founder-editor of the radical medical weekly, *The Lancet*) as 'unworthy agents', 'men of immoral and irreligious life and conversation', contrasting their aversion to philanthropy with his own contributions to 'great measures of mercy':<sup>90</sup>

the legislative abolition of slavery was commenced by a Wilberforce, and completed by a Buxton; the factory child owes his protection to the persevering humanity of Lord Ashley; while the hard fate of the chimney-climbing boy has been greatly ameliorated by an Act which I had the satisfaction of originating in the House of Commons

Tooke's claims were not readily accepted. In fact, the editor of the daily that reprinted his manifesto contested his acclaimed moral supremacy.<sup>91</sup> But Tooke clearly felt that his contributions to climbing boy relief had done his reputation good.<sup>92</sup> And the fierce tone of the editor's condemnation suggests his fear that readers might buy into Tooke's claims. He challenged Tooke to:<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *The Examiner*, 3 May 1840. On Wakley's views on medicine and politics, see: Ian A. Burney, 'Medicine in the Age of Reform', in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 163-81.

<sup>91</sup> *The Examiner*, 3 May 1840.

<sup>92</sup> Tooke could have chosen any of his accomplishments – as co-founder of UCL and the Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Editor of *Proceedings of the Society of Arts*, Fellow to the Royal Society, etc. – but he felt that his climbing boy accomplishments carried most weight.

<sup>93</sup> *The Examiner*, 3 May 1840.

ask himself where would have been his claims if another Tooke had anticipated his great chimney-sweeping agitation. What would he have been without climbing boys and the narrow, dirty way through which he has ascended to the very chimney-pots of the Temple of Fame? But for climbing boys he would have been even as the unrighteous, and no better than Mr Duncombe or Mr Wakley.

The editor's response also shows that associations of chimney sweeping with dishonesty and disorder – so visible in satirical depictions of sweeps' gatherings during the 1780s (see 2.3) – continued to torment the campaign. The point of the case is not that SSNCB officials were always successful. Tooke lost the case against the street criers and the editor's critique of his manifesto clearly unsettled him.<sup>94</sup> But it is clear that several 'professionals' brought unique expertise to the cause and tried to use the reputation gained through their participation in this campaign to further their careers. Some were indeed successful in furthering both. After climbing boy abolition was obstructed in parliament in 1819 and 1834 primarily over fears for fire safety, SSNCB secretary, Robert Steven convinced other fire insurers to support abolition in 1840.<sup>95</sup> His career did

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<sup>94</sup> The magistrate let the plaintiffs off. Tooke complained that they 'did not seem by any means to have taken a fair view of the case'. Mr Laing, one of the magistrates, was clearly not intimidated: he 'thought that the gentlemen who appeared for the complaints had suffered him to indulge in very disrespectful and improper language, and he for one could not sit on the bench to hear either his own or his brother magistrate's opinion insulted with impunity'. *The Times*, 2 February 1825. In the end, Tooke resolved not to stand as a candidate for the Finsbury. As he explained in his manifesto, addressed to Thomas Wilson, 'I am so little desirous of embarking in an election conflict, otherwise than as a willing sacrifice to the restoration of a better order of political relations in Finsbury, that I am prepared with the utmost cheerfulness to withdraw my pretensions, should you and some other equally valued friends, suggest the expediency of doing so.' *The Examiner*, 3 May 1840.

<sup>95</sup> Steven printed and distributed cards with signatures in support of mechanical sweeping, from the secretaries of the Alliance, Atlas, Guardian, Imperial, London, Norwich Union, Protector, Royal Exchange, Union, Globe, Phoenix and York & London assurances offices. *Testimony of London Fire Offices in Favour of Mechanical Chimney Sweeping* (London, 1836).

not suffer: he was appointed Director of the Hand-in-Hand Fire and Life Insurance Society in 1833, a position he held until 1851.

A final class of campaigners were the designers and manufacturers of chimney cleaning machines and the agents of mechanical sweeping services. In practice the two often coincided. Their most successful exponent was Joseph Glass. A bricklayer by trade, the London SSNCB hired Glass during the mid-1820s as one of its 'mechanical agents'. It benefited both parties. Glass improved the machine then in use, designed by George Smart, and demonstrated its superior efficiency in trials in 1828. In 1830 the Home Office recommended its use to all public offices in the metropolis.<sup>96</sup> By June 1834, Glass had sold over 600 machines to sweeps and SSNCB branches across the United Kingdom.<sup>97</sup>

Glass spoke openly of his financial gains from being associated with the SSNCB. Smart denied that profit had been on his mind when designing his machine and resumed his bricklaying business,<sup>98</sup> but Glass embraced his new trade and acknowledged the commercial prospects that lay ahead for him where climbing boys were prohibited. By 1840, he employed five men and a superintendent who swept 6,000 chimneys a year, a number still on the rise. He insisted on only employing men who had served an apprenticeship

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<sup>96</sup> 1830 [281] *Circular Letter by R. Peel in Favour of Society for Superseding Climbing Boys by Machinery* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 8 April 1830).

<sup>97</sup> '1834 Lords Expediency Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 13. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>98</sup> He told the 1818 Lords Committee: 'the honour of gaining these Medals induced me to take it up'. '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 79.

with a master sweep, 'I consider they have an undoubted right to it', but it was an issue he 'always contended' with the SSNCB.<sup>99</sup>

Since 1828, the London SSNCB had ceased employing 'regular sweeps', because of their unwillingness to stop using climbing boys. It recommended the policy to its provincial branches. This offered opportunities to hundreds of men, not trained as sweeps. Although Glass was exceptionally successful, many others secured a regular living in the trade. For example, the mechanical agents appointed by the Bristol and Derby SSNCB in the mid 1830s, despite fierce competition from regular sweeps, maintained their sweeping business through the 1850s.<sup>100</sup> But it was not only SSNCB agents who made a career in this way. Many others built machines and used this campaign to promote their mechanical services. Six designers put their machines forward for the 1818 Board of Works trials; others approached government departments to have their successful services certified.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> '1840 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 190. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>100</sup> George King was appointed by the local SSNCB as mechanical agent in 1834 and still ran a successful sweeping business by 1840. *Matthews's Annual Bristol Directory* (Bristol, 1834); '1840 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 83-91. William Fearn was appointed by the Derby SSCNB in 1838 and still practised as a mechanical sweep in the town by 1862. *Drake's Directory of Derby* (Derby, 1862).

<sup>101</sup> In 1830, mechanical sweep Henry Barwick approached the Home Office to arrange trial with his machine at Buckingham Palace. The National Archives, HO 44, No. 1447, Letter William Tooke to Lord Sidmouth, 7 May 1821. In 1840, Charles Pixell made a similar request for his devices 'having read in the newspapers some one or more years ago that legacies have been left to government to be given to any person who should invent or continue means to clean chimneys so as to prevent the necessity for employing climbing boys'. The National Archives, HO 44, No. 1447, Letter William Tooke to Lord Sidmouth, 7 May 1821. Between 1803 and 1840, the Patent Office issued six patents for chimney-cleaning apparatus; during the 1840s alone, thirteen further patents were granted. It is worth noting that Smart and Glass were *not* among the patentees. *Patents for Inventions*.

## SSNCBs OUTSIDE LONDON

As outlined in the Introduction, the number of SSNCB branches increased from thirty in 1827 to over 150 in 1831. Chapter 3 will examine the origins and impact of this expansion. Here we introduce the individuals and communities that took part. From correspondence in London SSNCB Annual Reports, a number of patterns appear. As in slavery abolitionism, most directors and subscribers to provincial SSNCBs belonged to the middle ranks of society (manufacturers, shopkeepers, skilled tradesmen, etc.) and, from the 1820s, women played prominent roles. Unlike anti-slavery societies, SSNCB auxiliaries sought to recruit local administrators – with considerable success. This highlights their desire to influence administrative procedures. Unlike in London, medical practitioners often played leading roles in provincial SSNCBs.

To explore these patterns and highlight variations four case studies are examined: Sheffield, Bristol, Liverpool and Derby. They were selected for their distinct contributions to the campaign, not for their peculiar composition. The Sheffield SSNCB, founded in 1807, was the first branch but acted relatively independently from the London Society. The Bristol and Liverpool SSNCBs stood out in their struggles with local sweeps. Derby entered the campaign late, in the 1838, but was active across the county. As their initiatives are studied in later chapters it is important to examine

who these activists were. At the same time, their backgrounds are compared with those of campaigners elsewhere.

## SHEFFIELD

During the early nineteenth century, Sheffield was a thriving manufacturing town, with 60,000 inhabitants and strong cutlery and silverware industries.<sup>102</sup> The Cutlers' Company, known for its charitable activities, played a central role in the local campaign.<sup>103</sup> Events for the relief of climbing boys were held at the Cutler's Hall and presided over by the Master Cutler. Petitions were made in name of the 'Company of Cutlers within Hallamshire'.<sup>104</sup> No lists of directors or subscribers to the Sheffield SSNCB survive. But a petition initiated by the Society was supported by twelve cutlers and others engaged in silver- and plated-manufacturing, six booksellers, printers and stationers (who also distributed pamphlets and collected subscriptions for the SSNCB), four clergymen (including one Methodist minister and a missionary), three grocers, three bankers, two linen and woollen drapers, one attorney, and one land surveyor – suggesting the cause had the approval of a broad section of middle society.<sup>105</sup> Notable is the absence of aristocrats and women (groups that

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<sup>102</sup> Geoffrey Tweedale, *Steel City: Entrepreneurship, Strategy, and Technology in Sheffield 1743-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>103</sup> John Roach, 'The Company and the Community: Charity, Education, and Technology, 1624-1914', in Clyde Binfield and David Hey (eds.), *Mesters to Masters: A History of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 241-58.

<sup>104</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 72, p. 317, 5 June 1817; *The Parliamentary Debates*, HC Deb, 5 June 1817, vol. 36, 889-90. Henceforth, 'Hansard'.

<sup>105</sup> *The Sheffield Mercury*, 12 April 1817. Occupations were taken from *The Sheffield Directory and Guide* (Sheffield, 1828).

supported the London SSNCB from the start) as well as the lack of medical practitioners (who featured prominently in other provincial SSNCBs).<sup>106</sup>

Two Evangelical Dissenters led the Sheffield SSNCB: James Montgomery and Samuel Roberts.<sup>107</sup> But, like the local Bettering and Anti-Slavery Societies that emerged from this Society,<sup>108</sup> its supporters included Anglicans and Unitarians.<sup>109</sup> Nor was support politically uniform. The proprietors of the main liberal and conservative dailies in the town, the *Iris* and the *Sheffield Mercury*, both supported the cause. Indeed, there is little evidence of organised opposition.<sup>110</sup> Unlike elsewhere, including Bristol and London where climbing boy relief and other causes created division, in Sheffield philanthropy stimulated unity.

The careers of Montgomery and Roberts support this impression.

Montgomery, poet, hymn writer and owner/publisher of the *Iris*, was at

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<sup>106</sup> Women took an active part in later outings of the Sheffield SSNCB. Barbara Hofland and other local authors contributed to: James Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing-Boy's Album* (Sheffield and London, 1824). On the 'marginal place' of medical practitioners in Sheffield, see: Ian Inkster, 'Marginal Men: Aspects of the Social Role of the Medical Community in Sheffield', in J. Woodward and D. Richards (eds.), *Health Care and Popular Medicine in Nineteenth-Century England: Essays in the Social History of Medicine* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1977), 128-63.

<sup>107</sup> Their publications for this cause, as well as extensive correspondence with climbing boy campaigners in other parts of the UK, are examined closely in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>108</sup> The Sheffield Anti-Slavery Society was the product of correspondence between Wilberforce and Roberts. Sheffield Archives, SR 40, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 23 August 1824. See chapter 3 for further details.

<sup>109</sup> Supporters included the Unitarian and moderate reformer Thomas Anslie Ward (the Master Cutler). For Sheffield's anti-slavery campaign: David Turley, 'British Antislavery Reassessed', in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 182-99. Particularly pp. 190-94.

<sup>110</sup> The Sheffield SSNCB did struggle to convince sweeps to adopt machines and housekeepers to hire mechanical sweeps only, but there is no evidence of organised resistance on the part of either. These topics are analysed in greater detail in chapter 3.

the centre of Sheffield's literary and philanthropic community. Founder of the Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society in 1822, director of the Sheffield Gas Company and chairman of the board of management of the local infirmary, Montgomery was also a key supporter of the local missionary movement, campaigns for the abolition of the slave trade, and the furthering of education for the labouring classes.<sup>111</sup> These two sets of activities were strongly intertwined. Montgomery recruited campaigners for his charity from the ranks of the Literary and Philosophical Society; his knowledge of furnaces, acquired through his work for the Gas Company, was vital for his climbing boy relief; and his governorship at the infirmary is clearly reflected in his detailed depictions of the injuries and illnesses sustained by sweeps' apprentices.<sup>112</sup>

Roberts was similarly well-connected and likewise involved in charity and local administration. Partner in a successful silver and plated business, he was appointed overseer of the poor in 1804 and wrote on a range of topics from poor relief to capital punishment, lotteries, and Chartism. He co-founded the Sheffield SSNCB, wrote the petition that initiated legislative procedures in 1817,<sup>113</sup> was involved in local initiatives

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<sup>111</sup> Montgomery 'tirelessly' promoted the establishment of new schools, including Sunday schools, and a working men's library. G. Tolley, 'Montgomery, James (1771–1854)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19070>' (23 July 2010).

<sup>112</sup> See chapter 7 for a detailed analysis of these depictions.

<sup>113</sup> *The Resolutions and Petition to Parliament, Respecting Children Employed by Chimney Sweepers as Climbing Boys, Agreed Upon at a Public Meeting of the Inhabitants of Sheffield* (Sheffield, 1817).



to develop a machine that could replace boys,<sup>114</sup> and continued campaigning for climbing boy prohibition as ‘an integral part of the total abolition of slavery throughout the world’ through the 1830s.<sup>115</sup> Although he joined the local society against colonial slavery, he believed that the welfare of the poor and the health of workers *at home* deserved priority. This is clear from his climbing boy communications, but also from his essays on grinder’s asthma and poor law reform.<sup>116</sup>

Climbing boy relief brought him into contact with William Wilberforce. Wilberforce consulted both Roberts and Montgomery about the climbing boy Bill pending in parliament in 1817 and offered to introduce the Sheffield ‘machine’ in Bath.<sup>117</sup> The following year, at Roberts’ suggestion, he proposed restrictions on the national lottery.<sup>118</sup> The contacts made through climbing boy campaign thus enabled Roberts to pursue reform at local and national levels. His pamphlets on poor laws and Chartism were published in Sheffield and London.<sup>119</sup> Yet, new contacts and multi-level activism posed challenges too. His insistence on the superior

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<sup>114</sup> Samuel Roberts, ‘Account of an Apparatus for Cleaning Chimneys’, *Transactions of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, Second Series, 28 (1810).

<sup>115</sup> Samuel Roberts, *A Cry from the Chimneys: Or, an Integral Part of the Total Abolition of Slavery Throughout the World* (London and Sheffield, 1837).

<sup>116</sup> Arnold Knight and Samuel Roberts, *Observations on the Grinder’s Asthma* (Sheffield, 1822); Samuel Roberts, *The Rev. Dr Pye Smith and the New Poor Law* (London, 1839).

<sup>117</sup> Sheffield Archives, SR 18, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 11 June 1817; Sheffield Archives, SR 40, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 23 August 1824.

<sup>118</sup> Sheffield Archives, SR 19, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 21 October 1817.

<sup>119</sup> Roberts, *The Rev. Dr Pye Smith*.

deservedness of British workers over African slaves sparked fierce disputes with Wilberforce and others who believed the two causes should go hand in hand. And, his success in recruiting local support for climbing boy petitions was not matched by a smooth adoption of mechanical sweeping in Sheffield and local magistrates proved insensitive to the toils of these boys – issues that will be further explored in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

## BRISTOL

During the 1780s, Bristol papers had paid considerable attention to the climbing boy campaigns of Hanway and his successors, in an attempt to direct attention away from campaigns to abolish the transatlantic slave trade (in which the city had major financial interests).<sup>120</sup> But this did not provoke tangible initiatives to relieve local apprentices. When practical steps were taken in 1807, it was in response to handbills sent by the London SSNCB. It is unclear who founded the Bristol SSNCB, but later communications suggest they played no part on either side of the anti-slavery debate.

The thirteen committee members listed in publications between 1817 and 1834 included five merchants, three stationers, two chemists and one manufacturer. None of the merchants was involved in the West India trade. Trade directories list all five as grocers and tea dealers.<sup>121</sup> At least

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<sup>120</sup> *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 22 and 29 March 1788; Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760-1807* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 124-27.

<sup>121</sup> Occupations were derived from: *Matthew's Annual Bristol Directory*.

one of the stationers published Sunday School books and was a repository for the Religious Tract Society. The manufacturer made 'brushes, mobs and sieves', but there is no evidence of his involvement in the engineering of chimney cleaning machines. None of the thirteen was prominent in anti-slavery circles.<sup>122</sup> It thus appears that climbing boy relief was a humanitarian issue separate from slavery abolitionism. Nor were there any direct links to medical charities in the city – unlike Liverpool, the other major port city examined here.<sup>123</sup>

Petitions by the Bristol SSNCB attracted considerable support – one as many as 1,375 signatures.<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately, none of the originals have survived, making it impossible to establish the further particulars of the signatories. The Society also attracted much criticism from local master sweeps and fire insurers – an issue that will be further examined in 1.4 and chapter 3.

## LIVERPOOL

The Liverpool SSNCB, founded in December 1828, consisted almost entirely of women – fifty-three female committee members were supported by four gentlemen who acted as a 'Committee of Reference'.<sup>125</sup> Women in the

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<sup>122</sup> My gratitude to Madge Dresser for comparing the SSCNB Committee lists against her database of Bristolians involved in slave trade and slavery abolition.

<sup>123</sup> On medical charity in Bristol: Mary E. Fissell, *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>124</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 89, p. 229, 29 April 1834.

<sup>125</sup> *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children, and Proving the Practicability and Advantage of Cleaning Them by Machines* (Liverpool, 1829), p. 12.

town had previously participated in associated charities. Their support for the (male-dominated) Liverpool Anti-Slavery Society from 1823 had sparked the founding of a separate Ladies' Committee in 1827.<sup>126</sup> The launch of the SSNCB, initiated and run by women, marked a further step towards independence from their male counterparts. They had already shown considerable independence in their anti-slavery exertions, by campaigning for immediate rather than gradual abolition and by adopting a novel method of publicizing the cause (through door-to-door canvassing).<sup>127</sup> They now had a cause of their own.

The decision to establish a climbing boy society was also inspired by developments outside Liverpool. In the pamphlet that marked the foundation of their Committee, the Ladies printed extracts from parliamentary evidence and London SSNCB Reports.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, their statutes were modelled on those of the first climbing boy Ladies Association, founded in Tottenham in 1825 and publicised by the London

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<sup>126</sup> Kenneth Charlton, 'James Cropper and Liverpool's Contribution to the Anti-Slavery Movement', *Historical Society of Lancashire & Cheshire Transactions*, 123 (1971), 57-80; Joshua Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National and Global Levels', *Online Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, 25-28 October 2001* (22 September 2009), '<http://www.yale.edu/glc/conference/civin.pdf>' (14 August 2010); Brian Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool', in David Richardson, Anthony Tibbles and Suzanne Schwarz (eds.), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 277-96.

<sup>127</sup> Immediate abolition was first propagated by the Birmingham anti-slavery campaigner, Elizabeth Heyrick, but it became the trademark of female abolitionists across the country. Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 47 and p. 127.

<sup>128</sup> *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children.*

SSNCB.<sup>129</sup> Several of the Liverpool ladies had introduced mechanical sweeping in their own homes as early as 1818.<sup>130</sup> But their positive experiences with anti-slavery agitation and work for the local infirmary combined with exemplary climbing boy initiatives elsewhere stimulated them to instigate concerted efforts.<sup>131</sup>

In the light of these joint efforts, the diverse backgrounds of the Liverpool ladies stand out. Socio-economically they were similarly placed. All were comfortably middle class (in so far as the occupation of their closest male relative is a fair indication of their station); none were related to gentry; nor were any associated with unskilled labour. For forty of the female committee members such information can be established from local trade directories: twenty-two were related to merchants, five to brokers, four to manufacturers, four to medical practitioners, one to a legal practitioner, one to a clergyman, one to a stationer, one to an illustrator,

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<sup>129</sup> Like their Tottenham counterparts, the Liverpool ladies appointed several men as a 'Committee of Reference' and divided themselves into sub-committees, each taking charge of promoting mechanical sweeping in a particular part of the city. *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children*, pp. 11-12; '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 38-40. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>130</sup> 'Several of these Ladies have constantly enforced the use of the Machine in their own houses during the last eight and ten years, before it was in its present improved state [referring to Joseph Glass's improved design, red].' *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children*, p. 12.

<sup>131</sup> Committee members with connections to the Liverpool Infirmary, founded in 1823: the wife of George Grant, auditor of the infirmary; the wife of John Allen McCartney, physician to the infirmary; and the wife of Robert Bickersteth, surgeon to the infirmary. The Liverpool Ladies reprinted 'testimonies' of the advancements of mechanical sweeping from other parts of the country (e.g. London and the Midlands) in their first report. *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children*, pp. 7-9.

and one to an architect.<sup>132</sup> But religiously and politically we find strong variations. Of the forty-seven committee members for whom religious association could be established, sixteen were Church of England, sixteen Quaker, eight Unitarian, four Presbyterian, and two Independent.<sup>133</sup> In other words, all religious communities were represented – except the Irish and Lancashire Roman Catholics, who made up a large share of the local population but were not really apparent in public life. Politically, reformers dominated the Committee, but conservatives made up a significant share. The spouse or brothers of twenty ladies gave both their votes to Reform candidates; eight gave both to Tories; and four divided their votes.<sup>134</sup> All four men who acted as Committee of Reference were Quaker or Unitarian and outspokenly pro-Reform;<sup>135</sup> but the Committee also included the female relations of the prominent Tory Evangelicals, Adam Hodgson and Adam Grant.<sup>136</sup>

Such cooperation between politico-religious factions in acts of charity contrasts sharply with the deep segregation that characterised

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<sup>132</sup> The Committee of Reference comprised men who fell within these categories. Occupations were derived from *Gore's Directory of Liverpool and Its Environs* (Liverpool, 1829).

<sup>133</sup> Religion was derived from the lady's own baptism or that of any children.

<sup>134</sup> Voting behaviour has been derived from the 1832 Poll books.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Brockhurst Barclay, Edward Cropper, William Wallace Currie, and Edward Roscoe.

<sup>136</sup> Grant was junior partner of Sir John Gladstone, the most entrenched of all reactionaries.

other aspects of social life in Liverpool.<sup>137</sup> Business partnerships and alliances for municipal and electoral reform closely followed Non-Conformist pro-reform vs. High-Church conservative lines. Yet, in climbing boy relief, as in slavery abolitionism and various intellectual and educational pursuits, such divisions were put to one side. Clearly, where self-interest was at stake or uncontroversial charities were involved, the various communities were willing and capable of joining hands. This did not facilitate political reconciliation. If anything, in the wake of the 1832 Reform Act, divisions deepened.

## DERBY

The death of a local climbing boy in May 1838 sparked the founding of the Derby SSNCB. Within three days 'a Committee of Ladies and Gentlemen' was established, a week later the first local sweeps were equipped with machines.<sup>138</sup> The composition of the Committee deserves our close attention. The surgeon who carried out the inquest convinced three colleagues and a physician to join the cause. The strong presence of clergymen is also notable: five Reverends supported the initiative. Other supporters included two fire insurers, two stationers, one bricklayer and several other skilled tradesmen. Many of the committee members had been involved in associated charity. Reverend William Hawkins and fire insurer John Steer were at the heart of anti-slavery agitation in the town

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<sup>137</sup> My sincere thanks to Nick Foggo for sharing this information with me. Foggo is currently writing a PhD thesis at the University of Liverpool on Liverpool's merchants in trade and politics between 1815 and 1848.

<sup>138</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, 23 May 1838.

since the 1820s; stationer John Williamson printed pamphlets for the same cause; and Samuel Evans, Richard Forester and Douglas Fox all served as governors to Derby's Lancastrian School.<sup>139</sup> Thus, although the potential for climbing boy relief had been there, an incident was required to provoke action.

Not all committee members were seasoned philanthropists. Secretary Edward Trafford corresponded extensively with his London SSCNB counterpart, Robert Steven, seeking advice about the most effective structure for his Committee and strategies to promote mechanical sweeping to greatest effect.<sup>140</sup> He passed on the knowledge gained when off-shoots of the Derby Society were launched in neighbouring villages and towns.<sup>141</sup> Like Samuel Roberts in Sheffield, Trafford used climbing boy relief to gain a place in philanthropic circles, locally and regionally. By 1840 Trafford was governor to the local Mechanic's Institute and superintendent of the Derby Missionary Society.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, 23 May 1838; Alasdair Kean, *Anti-Slavery in Derby and Its Region* (Derby: Derby City Council, 2007).

<sup>140</sup> Trafford referred to Steven as 'our pilot'. *A Series of Letters on the Subject of Chimney Sweeping; Published with a View to the Organization, on Safe Principles, of Societies for Superseding the Use of Climbing Boys* (Derby, 1838). Collaboration and disagreement between SSNCB branches are examined in chapter 3.

<sup>141</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, 10 October 1838.

<sup>142</sup> *Derby Town Mission. Established 1 February 1839* (Derby, 1839).



## 1.4 Respectable Master Sweeps, 1800-1840

Previous sections introduced *who* participated in climbing boy reform without discussing *how* they contributed. This section unavoidably takes a different approach. Because little is known about many of the sweeps apart from their activities in this campaign, we need to consider their contributions in order to learn more about their personalities, their reasons for participating and the impact it had on their lives.

On 9 July 1825, a handful of sweeps announced the foundation of a 'Committee of Master Chimney Sweepers' in London and Westminster (CMCS).<sup>143</sup> They denounced depictions of their trade as cruel and unwholesome, denied that machines offered a safe alternative to climbing boys, and criticised the SSNCB for hiring 'strangers' to work the machines and offering sweeping services below the market price. Their concerns are strikingly similar to those we have seen in sweeps' trade cards from the 1780s and 1790s: upholding the reputation of their trade, providing a safe and efficient service, and protecting their business against profiteers. The difference this time was that they now felt the need to act collectively.

The timing of their gathering is revealing. Two weeks earlier, the SSCNB had held its first public meeting for six years, announcing renewed efforts to promote mechanical sweeping and seek statutory prohibition of

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<sup>143</sup> *The Times*, 9 July 1825.

climbing boys.<sup>144</sup> The sweeps explained that this meeting had 'induced' them to unite. They expressed their commitment to humane treatment of apprentices and the use of machines where required and denied that any formal regulation was necessary:<sup>145</sup>

if housekeepers would resolve not to call chimney-sweepers from the streets, but send orders to their regular chimney-sweepers' homes, they would soon discover who are respectable as masters from persons who are not, which would reduce the number of apprentices to the trade; and it would likely be the means of making the apprentices more comfortable and respectable, when out of their time.

Although they saw no need for further legislation, they threatened the SSNCB that they would take collective counter-measures if the Society proceeded with its plans to seek new statutes:<sup>146</sup>

There could [...] be no necessity for applications to Parliament on either side; but if such applications are intended to be made, the master chimney-sweepers are prepared to assert what they consider to be their established rights, by resisting all infringements and innovations which may creep into and undermine their trade.

What this meant in practice would become clear when the SSNCB did indeed renew its legislative attempts in 1834. The CMCS petitioned parliament against abolition, proposed alternative measures to improve conditions in the trade, and negotiated a compromise that gained the consent of the legislature. External pressures incited them to take such actions. They were certainly not protagonists of reform. But as they saw their interests threatened by non-sweeps desirous of changing the trade,

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<sup>144</sup> The meeting was held on 27 May 1825. The London SSNCB included the minutes in its Annual Report for the following year: '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 7-8.

<sup>145</sup> *The Times*, 9 July 1825.

<sup>146</sup> *The Times*, 9 July 1825.

the sweeps responded and contributed significantly on their own behalf. This highlights that 'reform' and 'reformer' may be too blunt as terms of historical interpretation.<sup>147</sup> Not all those who contributed to policy making, whether in the formulation and implementation of statutes or in informal rules of behaviour, were driven by a desire to bring about change or acted with a clear programme in mind. Nevertheless, as we will see in chapters 3, 4 and 5, this did not make their actions insignificant. To understand *why* sweeps contributed to the campaigns in this way it is important to consider *who* was participating, *where* and *when*.

Fourteen sweeps joined SPICSA within weeks of its founding in March 1800. For most it was the start of a long-term involvement in the campaigns. Five participated in the earliest SSNCB experiments with mechanical sweeping, in 1804 and 1805; six petitioned parliament against climbing boy abolition and testified to the Lords Committee in 1818; three were among the founders of the CMCS, in 1825; and these same three repeated their objections to the Lords Committee in 1834. Who were they and how representative were they of their trade?<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> For a detailed analysis of contemporary use of 'reform' and associated terminology, see: Joanna Innes, "'Reform' in English Public Life: The Fortunes of a Word", in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71-97.

<sup>148</sup> John Bedford and Benjamin Watson both participated in the initial SSNCB trials, testified to the 1818 and 1834 Lords Committees, and were founding members of the CMCS. John Bentley practised mechanical sweeping under the commission of the SSNCB as late as 1816, but testified against abolition to the 1818 and 1834 Committees and was an active member of the SMCS, including as treasurer in 1834. His son, John, who carried forward his sweeping business, testified to the 1840 Lords Committee. David Porter and Robert Southby both testified against climbing boy abolition in the 1818 Lords Committee. William Kenny was one of forty-nine master sweeps who signed a petition against abolition but in favour of regulation, presented to the Commons in 1817. The petition,

From their testimonies, trade cards and other evidence it appears these sweeps were not a cross-section of the trade, but belonged to the ten percent that Porter described as 'comfortable'.<sup>149</sup> They found most of their business in London's West End, in public buildings and merchants' and gentlemen's houses, and combined chimney sweeping with other lucrative services, notably privy cleaning and trading in soot.<sup>150</sup> Some had started off as climbing boys and gradually worked their way to the top, but most were never apprenticed to the trade. They had purchased an existing business, inherited their father's venture, or married the widow of an established sweep. None employed their children in the trade. Indeed, there is a clear sense that becoming a master was a welcome prospect to them and their offspring, whereas being a climbing boy below their station.

When Thomas Beecher was returned from his placement with a cabinet maker upon his father's death, he decided to carry forward the family business, first as a climbing boy, then as a master, 'as it was a Profession a

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including the names of all signatories, was reprinted in: '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 50-51. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>149</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 33-35. Benjamin Watson's trade card, advertising his services as 'Chimney Sweeper and Night man', was as elaborately illustrated as David Porter's. British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.36, Benjamin Watson, c. 1792. John Andrews, son of SPICSA member, Thomas Andrews, proudly advertised his services during the 1820s as 'Mechanical Chimney Sweeper to Whitbread and Calvert's Brewery and to Apothecarie's Hall'. Guidhall Library, Trade Cards, J. Andrews & Son, c. 1828. Andrews' reference to the 'New Mechanical Machine' probably alluded to Joseph Glass's cane machine that was introduced in 1828.

<sup>150</sup> Robert Southby swept the chimneys of the House of Lords. '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 256-57. John Bedford swept at the Admiralty. '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 246-47. John Bentley swept at the residencies of the MPs Drummond Burrell and Sir John Burgess. '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 231. Benjamin Watson swept at several gentlemen's homes in the Westend including those of Sir William Langham, Sir James Graham and the Duke of Portland. '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 256-57.

decent Woman could not follow; and in order to bring [my siblings] up and support my Mother, I took it, though it is a degrading Situation.’<sup>151</sup> John Bedford succeeded to the successful business of his wife’s late husband, but found a ‘better’ vocation for his children. The 1818 Lords Committee interrogated him closely upon the issue:<sup>152</sup>

Are any of them employed in your Trade? – No; they are Men and Women grown and settled in the World. I never had a Son apprenticed to the Trade.

As you appear to be a very respectable Person, and the whole of your Evidence very creditable to you, would you on any account have brought up any of your Children to this Trade? – I certainly would, if I could not have provided better for them.

Would you have consented, upon any account, to your Children, at the Age at which Chimney Sweepers generally are apprenticed, being sent forth to the Dominion of others as Chimney Sweepers? – Situate as I was, I should not have done it.

Why did these respectable, financially comfortable masters join the SPICSA and maintain interest in the campaigns? Apparently, fear of seeing one’s personal fortunes turned predominated over the desire for contributing to wider improvements.

When fifteen masters, including at least five former SPICSA members, met the London Committee in the spring of 1804 to participate

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<sup>151</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 122.

<sup>152</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 254.

in mechanical experiments, they aired their anxiety that machines would make their services superfluous.<sup>153</sup>

every Gentleman who had got a left-off Coachman or Footman would be introducing him as a Chimney sweeper, and recommending him to his Friends [whereas those] who had served Seven Years to so dreadful a business might go and rake the Streets

The London SSNCB convinced them to give the machines a try, but when it appeared the devices were faulty and unpopular with customers the sweeps terminated the trials. They used the machines where they saw fit, and where householders agreed, but refused to abstain from employing boys as the SSNCB desired.<sup>154</sup>

A similar scenario occurred in 1816. In response to a well-attended public meeting, hosted by the London SSNCB, forty-nine master sweeps met in a tavern in Covent Garden. Anxious about the sudden enthusiasm surrounding the SSNCB campaign, they petitioned parliament for better *regulation* but *not* the abolition of climbing boys. To demonstrate their good intentions, they formed a Committee that would assist magistrates in prosecuting negligent sweeps – a scheme they wished to export to other parts of the country.<sup>155</sup> In the next three years, the masters played a crucial

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<sup>153</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 80. The former SPICSA masters who participated were Thomas Andrews, John Bedford, John Bentley, Robert Southby and Benjamin Watson.

<sup>154</sup> This was not only the case with the sweeps who participated in the initial experiments. In the decades that followed, over fifty different sweeps were recommended by the SSNCB due to their mechanical services, but in every case the partnership ended after some time because of the masters' refusal to let go of their boys. The search for an effective device and the production and distribution of machines are examined in detail in 3.3.

<sup>155</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', appendix 1.

role in obstructing the progress of prohibition plans advanced by the SSNCB.<sup>156</sup> Yet, when the threat of abolition vanished, the Committee fell apart and nothing came of their ambitious plans. It was only in response to renewed SSNCB agitation, in 1825, that the sweeps felt 'induced' to form a new Committee – and the story repeated itself.

A similar, responsive involvement of sweeps in the campaigns can be found elsewhere. In Liverpool, the founding of the SSNCB Ladies' Committee in 1829 led master sweep John Whitehead to form a fraternity and present alternative plans for bettering the conditions of climbing boys.<sup>157</sup> The SSNCB contested that his scheme constituted a genuine attempt to reform.<sup>158</sup> But Whitehead persisted in offering an alternative route to improvement, without killing the climbing boy system.<sup>159</sup> Bristol

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<sup>156</sup> Their contributions to legislative procedures are discussed in 4.3 and 4.4.

<sup>157</sup> Whitehead published manifesto with the lengthy, self-explanatory title: *A Letter Addressed to the Associations for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys, in Sweeping Chimneys; Showing the True Nature of the Sweeping Business, and How Far the Members of Those Associations Are Mistaken on the Subject; and Showing the Obstacles That Would Present Themselves in Bringint the Sweeping Machine into General Use; and That the Whole of the Climbing Boys Cannot Be Dispensed With. To Which Is Added, a Plan for the Better Regulation of the Master Sweeps, and in Particular for Bettering the Condition of the Climbing Boys: Together with a List of All the Master Sweeps, the Number of Climbing Boys, &C.* (Liverpool, 1829). *Liverpool Mercury*, 26 June 1829.

<sup>158</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 22 June 1832. A member of the Liverpool SSNCB wrote to the *Liverpool Mercury*: 'The rules proposed for the Permanent Regulation Society are many of them a mere repetition of the clauses in the act of Parliament [1788 Act, red], or in the apprentices' indentures, and, although good in themselves, have, for more than forty years, proved entirely unavailing.'

<sup>159</sup> For further exertions by Whitehead see: *Liverpool Mercury*, 4 May 1832, 22 June 1832 and 29 November 1839.

masters were similarly reactive but persistent in their resistance to the local SSNCB, both in the press and through parliamentary initiatives.<sup>160</sup>

A closer look at two of the Bristol sweeps, William Bulphin and Robert Taylor, suggests that these provincial activists were similarly placed to their London counterparts, and largely driven by the same ambitions. Both Bulphin and Taylor had been bred in the trade and were committed to defending their successful sweeping business. Taylor had employed his own son as a climbing boy for the past fourteen years, ready to carry forward the family venture; Bulphin had enjoyed similar training at the hands of his father, who had married into the trade.<sup>161</sup> They both used machines where practical, but relied on boys for a substantial share of flues.<sup>162</sup> However, a closer look at their subsequent careers shows that they benefited in different ways from participating in the campaigns.

For Taylor it was a way of defending his business. In a handbill from 1836, Taylor thanked 'his numerous friends for the favour he has received during the last 20 years' and promised 'that all Orders with which he may be favoured shall be promptly executed with cleanliness and dispatch' and

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<sup>160</sup> See e.g.: William Head and others, *An Appeal to the Public, by the Master Chimney-Sweepers Residing in the City of Bristol, against the Erroneous Application to Their Practice and Character, of the Matter Contained in a Pamphlet Entitled Facts Relative to the State of Children Employed as Climbing-Boys, &C. Published to Recommend the Exclusive Use of Machines. With a Plate, Descriptive of the Various Constructions of Chimneys in Which No Machine Can Operate* (Bristol, 1817). All five authors petitioned parliament against abolition in 1818 and 1834. Chapters 3 and 4 examine their activities and those of other Bristol masters in detail.

<sup>161</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 125-39. See Bibliography for full title; '1840 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 3-24 and pp. 24-31.

<sup>162</sup> Taylor testified that he not only used machines, but 'I get them made, and sell them to the trade.' '1840 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 24.



with 'Glass's improved machine', where practical [plate 8].<sup>163</sup> Five years later, he distributed almost identical Bills – attesting to his modest ambitions [plate 9].<sup>164</sup>

William Bulphin had greater aspirations. Following his testimony to the Lords Committee in 1834 he fashioned himself 'Doctor of Smokey Chimneys' to promote his sweeping business [plate 10]<sup>165</sup> but also to gain prominence in local society. Bulphin acted as broker of social harmony in his city, defended the liberties of local labourers in the face of patronising teetotallers,<sup>166</sup> and rose to considerable height in Bristol's Conservative Party.<sup>167</sup> Two things stand out in these activities: Bulphin drew upon his

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<sup>163</sup> Bristol Local Studies Library, Special Collections, Trade Card Robert Taylor, 1836.

<sup>164</sup> Bristol Local Studies Library, Special Collections, Trade Card Robert Taylor, 1841.

<sup>165</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 125-39. In May 1838, Bulphin thanked the governors and board of guardians of St. Peter's Hospital for 'doing me the honor of appointing me your Tradesman in my department for the ensuing year' and promised that not 'a single smoky or foul Flue be found within [the hospital's] walls while under superintendence of Your obedient and obliged humble Servant', signed, 'Doctor of Smoky Chimnies, &c., &c.' *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 5 May 1838. In an elaborately decorated trade card from the same period, depicting embracing angels in the Garden of Eden, Bulphin advertised his services as 'D.S.C.' – 'Doctor of Smoky Chimnies'. Bristol Local Studies Library, Special Collections, Trade Card William Bulphin, c. 1839.

<sup>166</sup> During teetotaler manifestations in Bristol, in the summer and autumn of 1837, Bulphin regularly climbed the stage to protest. Bulphin refused to leave the stage and was removed with force. Teetotaler John Whitby described the incident in the Temperance Society Report: 'Foremost and most daring of those whom the "trade" encouraged, was a low-minded, dissipated master-sweep, named William Bulphin. On the evening of October the 3rd, this occasional disturber of our meetings ascended the platform, in defiance (sic) City and County of Bristol.' Recited in: Thomas Hudson, *Temperance Pioneers of the West: Personal and Incidental Experiences* (2nd edn., London: The National Temperance Publication Depot, 1888), pp. 60-64, available online: '<http://www.archive.org/details/temperancepioneer00hudsrich>' (31 July 2010).

<sup>167</sup> Bulphin regularly spoke at Tory meetings in 1837 and 1838, addressing his 'fellow Labourers in the True Blue Cause'. It sparked the rumour that he was standing as parliamentary candidate for the Conservatives. Canvassing cards were distributed in the town for 'William Bulphin, Chimney Sweeper and Engineer to the Old Bristol Fire-Office', but Bulphin denied it had been done at his instruction. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 1 July 1837. For a report of Bulphin's lecture in the wake of the Tory's local election defeat: *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 3 March 1838.

parliamentary experience to justify a voice for himself; others played on the long-standing prejudices of his trade to pull him down. The examples are numerous, but one will suffice here.

In March 1838, he took issue with the 'contemptuous conduct' of William Herapath, magistrate, town councillor and county coroner. One of Bulphin's boys had been incarcerated for the night for trapping pigeons. When Bulphin appeared at Herapath's house to arrange a bail the magistrate shut the door on him. The incident was all the more painful as Bulphin and Herapath were both of humble backgrounds (Bulphin son of a master sweep; Herapath of an inn-keeper). They had been playmates and had similarly risen in society.<sup>168</sup>

You, by your talent, have arrived to be a great analyser of the stomachs of the dead and the living. I, by my talent, have arrived at the honour of being sent to the House of Lords as the representative of this City, for the better construction of chimnies, where I received my diploma as Doctor of Smoky Chimnies.

Bulphin used the incident to teach Herapath a lesson. As a man with humble roots, of all magistrates, Herapath should have been the one who knew how to treat those below him respectfully. Bulphin warned him that once he reached the pinnacle of his own ambition, and secured a place alongside Herapath on the magisterial town bench, he would 'counsel' him

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<sup>168</sup> *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 24 March 1838. William Herapath later became professor of chemistry and toxicology at the Bristol Medical School and in 1856 gave vital evidence at the high-profile case of William Palmer, executed for poisoning. Ian A. Burney, *Poison, Detection, and the Victorian Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). For Bulphin's parliamentary testimonies: '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 125-39; '1840 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 3-24 and pp. 24-31.

further on the matter.<sup>169</sup> Herapath responded in a public lecture later that spring. Cleverly playing on the lowly associations with Bulphin's trade, he declared that it was 'lamentable to see the men who, from their station in society, should have been the guardians of the morals of their fellow-citizens, now sunk below the lowest of the low – below any chimney sweeper in Bristol.'<sup>170</sup> In another letter to *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, Bulphin demanded an 'instant apology to our Trade for the gratuitous insult which you have thus passed upon them'. But Herapath surely drew laughter from his audience with his remarks.<sup>171</sup>

Most of the Bristol masters who contributed to the campaigns lacked Bulphin's wider ambitions. Like Robert Taylor they simply wished to preserve the business built up by themselves and their ancestors. Most succeeded in doing so. Of the twelve master sweeps who petitioned parliament against abolition in 1818, eleven kept their business in family hands at least until the late 1830s. Six of the ten sweeping ventures that petitioned in 1834 remained in the family through the 1860s.<sup>172</sup> Participating in the campaign, like running a sweeping business, was a family affair. The twelve petitioners in 1818 included eight father-son duos;

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<sup>169</sup> *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 24 March 1838.

<sup>170</sup> *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 5 May 1838.

<sup>171</sup> The editor of the *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* mocked the rumour that Bulphin was standing as parliamentary candidate; playing on existing prejudice about the trade, he wrote, 'A new candidate has just been put forward in the Tory interest, one whose eloquence has ever commanded respect, even at tip-top conservative meetings. Judging from his *bright* parts, he must succeed in *climbing* to the full height of his ambition, and it will soon be "all up" either with Mr. Miles or Sir Richard'. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 1 July 1837.

<sup>172</sup> Based on data extracted from *Matthew's Annual Bristol Directory*, for the years 1818, 1834, 1835, 1850, 1863 and 1868.

the ten petitioners in 1834 included four spouses or sons of those who had petitioned sixteen years earlier. This confirms that for most sweeps participating in the campaigns was primarily aimed at protecting the family business; not the realisation of individual ambitions.

This section has highlighted that, unlike the period before 1800, during the later campaigns a considerable number of master sweeps participated. They stemmed largely from the wealthier sections of the trade and were driven by the same ambitions as expressed by sweeps from similar positions in earlier trade cards. They wished to defend their reputations against dishonourable associations and protect their business from harmful infringements. Whereas their counterparts in earlier decades could realise these goals without engaging with humanitarian reform, these sweeps *were* forced to do so – due to the growing popularity of anti-abolition sentiments. Although they were not protagonists of reform, they were committed to ensuring that the initiatives of others did not undermine their interests. How successful they were in doing so will be examined in chapters 3 and 4.

## **1.5 The Parliamentarians, 1788-1840**

The SSNCB had a considerable representation in parliament throughout this period. On average, thirteen members of the London Committee served as MPs or in the House of Lords [table 5]. These parliamentarians were invaluable to the campaign. They presented petitions from SSNCBs

across the country, introduced climbing boy Bills, participated in public inquiries, and sat on select committees that made final amendments to legislation. But they also used their parliamentary position to promote non-legislative initiatives. William Williams, SSNCB committee member and MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, arranged for the Commons to press magistrates in London to keep detailed records of sweeps' apprentices.<sup>173</sup> And SSNCB vice-president and MP for Ludgershall, George Agar Ellis, secured a Home Office order for public offices in the metropolis to switch to mechanical sweeping.<sup>174</sup>

George Phillips has portrayed the campaigns as a struggle between 'a reactionary privileged class [keen] to maintain the *status quo*' and 'a liberal-minded, socially conscious group of persons striving to do away' with climbing boys.<sup>175</sup> Our data do not support this assertion. It was certainly not the case that a progressive Lower House saw its efforts frustrated by a conservative Upper House. The number of SSNCB representatives was more or less even for both Houses until the late 1820s; afterwards, it was in the Lords that the Society maintained its support. Nor was it the case that support for and opposition to regulation followed party lines. Table 6 shows the political preferences of all SSNCB parliamentarians. Although most were oriented towards the Whigs, a considerable number

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<sup>173</sup> 1825 [154] *Account of the Number of Boys Apprenticed to Chimney Sweepers in the Metropolis* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 25 March 1825); *Commons Journals*, vol. 80, p. 152, 2 March 1825.

<sup>174</sup> '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 3-4. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>175</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 6.

aligned with the Tories and many others refrained from joining either faction. This image of a heterogeneous coalition of campaigners appears clearly when looking closely at the individuals involved. The SSNCB attracted radical Whigs like Sir Francis Burdett, Henry Grey Bennet and Matthew Wood. But the majority consisted of moderate Whigs and Tories with affiliations to the other camp.<sup>176</sup> If privilege equals titles and wealth, then Phillips' claim again does not hold water.<sup>177</sup> SSNCB directors included prominent Bishops (Durham, Oxford and Winchester), large estate holders, and indeed some of the wealthiest men in the country (Richard Grosvenor, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Grosvenor; George Granville Leveson Gower, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Sutherland; and Sir Thomas Baring, whose family financial house made a fortune).<sup>178</sup>

How SSNCB parliamentarians contributed to reform will be studied closely in chapter 4. Here it is worth examining the profile of others who

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<sup>176</sup> Independents include William Wilberforce and William Williamson. Moderate Tories include Sir Ashley Cooper (later 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury), who stemmed from a Tory family but married the daughter of a Whig countess and befriended prominent Whig politicians, like George Howard (Viscount Morpeth). Moderate Whigs include John Parker Boringdon (Earl Morley), who initially associated himself with the Tory, George Canning, but later developed Whig sympathies and supported parliamentary reform.

<sup>177</sup> About the failure of legislation in 1804, Phillips wrote, 'The Lords, however, having emasculated the bill passed by the Commons in 1788, did not wish to restore its virility by approving the proposed amendments and, in a House consisting of one archbishop, five bishops, three dukes, five earls, one viscount, and ten barons, rejected it.' Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 16.

<sup>178</sup> Eric Richards, 'Gower, George Granville Leveson-, First Duke of Sutherland (1758–1833)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16539>' (31 July 2010). His father, the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Sutherland, left an estate worth over £1,000,000 and was said to have been 'the leviathan of wealth' and 'the richest man ever to die'. Eric Richards, *The Leviathan of Wealth: The Sutherland Fortune in the Industrial Revolution* (Studies in Social History (International Institute of Social History), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

spoke in the Commons and Lords in favour of or against climbing boy regulation. The sparse recording of proceedings in 1788 and 1804 does not allow for detailed assessment.<sup>179</sup> But later sessions confirm the impression that arose from the London SSNCB Committee: the cause attracted broad support and divided otherwise likeminded parliamentarians.

In the years 1817-19 there was a core of outspoken advocates and opponents of regulation in both Houses. In both cases we can discern a Whig-Tory divide. In the Commons, Henry Grey Bennet, SSNCB committee member and prominent member of the Whig opposition, spoke consistently in favour;<sup>180</sup> Francis Molyneux Ommaney and Joseph Sydney Yorke, who generally voted with the Tory government, spoke repeatedly against.<sup>181</sup> In the Lords, George Eden (Lord Auckland), another esteemed member of Whig society, was the primary advocate;<sup>182</sup> James Maitland (8<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> No recordings of climbing boy debates survive for either year. *Commons and Lords Journals* and SSNCB reports indicate that the MPs and Lords affiliated with the petitioners – in 1788, being the Committee of Hanway associates, in 1804, the SSNCB – played a leading part. This comes as no surprise, given the fact that these were Private Bill procedures. Further details are discussed in 4.1 and 4.2.

<sup>180</sup> 'Henry Grey Bennet', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 1, 178-81.

<sup>181</sup> 'Francis Molyneux Ommaney', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 2, 690-91; 'Joseph Sydney Yorke', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 3, 674-75.

<sup>182</sup> P. J. Marshall, 'Eden, George, Earl of Auckland (1784–1849)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, 'http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8451' (14 August 2010).

Earl of Lauderdale), once an associate of Whig leader Charles James Fox, but increasingly conservative in his policies, a vehement opponent.<sup>183</sup>

A closer look at their profiles, clarifies why they expressed interest in the cause. For Bennet, humane considerations were the guiding force. He continuously referred to the climbing boys as 'helpless infants' and accused their masters of lacking 'common feelings of humanity'.<sup>184</sup> This was in line with his other contributions in the House. Bennet initiated debate on various injustices, from fierce army discipline to deplorable conditions in prisons, mental asylums and hospitals, with consistent reference to sentiment. He argued that parliamentarians 'ought to feel some degree of tenderness and charity' and committed himself 'to attempt, so far as in the short life of man could be attempted to diminish the sum of human misery'.<sup>185</sup>

Ommaney and Yorke questioned the benefits of further regulation. They emphasised that existing legislation offered sufficient protection and that further restrictions would throw numerous boys out of work, making them a burden to poor relief and a threat to harmony in society. Rather than a principled objection against interference in the economy, these fears should be seen against the context of growing unemployment and

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<sup>183</sup> Roland Thorne, 'Maitland, James, Eighth Earl of Lauderdale (1759–1839)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17825>' (8 August 2010).

<sup>184</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 9 February 1818, vol. 37, 216-17.

<sup>185</sup> 'Henry Grey Bennet', p. 180.



the sentiments that led them to support restrictive measures in the wake of the Peterloo 'Massacre'.<sup>186</sup>

Laissez-faire principles *did* inform the main opponent of regulation in the Upper House, Lord Lauderdale. Lauderdale had written several treatises against government intervention in the economy: profits could be generated and market demand met *if* businesses were left in charge of the labour force.<sup>187</sup> Unsurprisingly, he fiercely contested climbing boy regulation, as he opposed proposals for regulating child labour in textile manufacturing that were discussed simultaneously in the House.<sup>188</sup>

Lord Auckland argued that an exception should be made to non-intervention principles in cases like this. When workers' health was knowingly at risk, particularly if it concerned children, the legislature had a duty to interfere. His claims invited a host of other peers and MPs (once the Commons picked up on his points) to reflect upon the duties of parliament in protecting worker well-being. Rather than a clear-cut dispute between Whigs vs. Tories, or 'liberals' vs. 'reactionaries' (in George Phillips' terms), the issue sparked a variety of opinions, and varied criteria for judging the matter. Differences in judgement were often so subtle that

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<sup>186</sup> Ommaney voted for 'Tierney's censure motion' and he 'probably supported most aspects of the repressive legislation of late 1819'. 'Francis Molyneux Ommaney', p. 691. Yorke generally voted with the government: 'on 14 Dec. 1819 he rose to say that, having voted for 29 years, on the ministerial side, he would join opposition, for once, on clauses in the seizure of arms bill he considered obnoxious'. 'Joseph Sydney Yorke', p. 675.

<sup>187</sup> His most influential work, critically reviewed by Henry Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review*: James Maitland, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth, and into the Means and Causes of Its Increase* (Edinburgh, 1804). A more extensive version was published in 1819.

<sup>188</sup> For Lauderdale's role in the factory debates: Joanna Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour in Britain, 1783-1819' (Forthcoming), pp. 9-10.

parliamentarians of similar fabric ended up on opposing sides of the debate. For example, Thomas Denman and Henry Peter Brougham, both MPs strongly aligned to the Whigs, both barristers, and would-be associates in the defence of Queen Caroline in 1820, took different stands on this issue.<sup>189</sup> These and other lines of argument will be examined closely in chapter 4. But the implication is clear: climbing boy reform provoked debate about major dilemmas that were judged differently by different speakers.

In 1834 and 1840 similar discussions arose about the practicality of forcing householders to adjust their chimneys to mechanical sweeping. Again, opinions did not form neatly along party, House or privilege lines. In the Commons, Mr. Williams 'wished to know what was to be done with old houses. He, for one, would not like to pull down his house'.<sup>190</sup> But Sir William Heathcote, known for his 'ultra-conservatism', declared that 'he should be a sufferer by this Bill, but he thought it so desirable the cruelties now practised should be abolished, that he felt it his duty to support it'.<sup>191</sup>

In the Lords, there were numerous peers who had no defined opinion on the issue and pleaded for further investigations. Others approached these inquiries with strong doubts about the safety of

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<sup>189</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 17 February 1819, vol. 39, 451-52.

<sup>190</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 25 June 1840, vol. 55, 108.

<sup>191</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, 'Heathcote, Sir William, Fifth Baronet (1801-1881)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45929>' (8 August 2010); 'Hansard', HC Deb, 25 June 1840, vol. 55, 109.

mechanical alternatives, but changed their minds upon seeing the evidence. The Earl of Wicklow declared that 'the evidence given before the committee had induced him to change the opinion he originally entertained upon this Bill, and he was now quite willing to give it his support'.<sup>192</sup> These examples show that climbing boy regulation continued to inspire a variety of judgments, in favour and against regulation, from a heterogeneous body of commentators – far removed from the partisan struggle of clearly defined factions depicted by Phillips.

## Conclusions

Climbing boy relief attracted very different participants before 1800 than after. Support for reform was initially restricted to a circle of merchant philanthropists around Jonas Hanway; organised resistance was non-existent. After 1800, a much broader pool of actors participated, and societies advocating the abolition of climbing boys were challenged by associations promoting ameliorative measures. By closely considering *who* got involved, *when* and *where*, we can now see the character and motivations of participants and the reasons for change.

The timing of Hanway's exertions and the backgrounds of those who came to his aid put doubt on Taylor's claim that Hanway was solely driven by sentiment and others by sympathy to him. The fact that his initiatives for climbing boys coincided with schemes to promote the health

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<sup>192</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 27 July 1840, vol. 55, 981.

of foundlings and the safety and prosperity of society (or 'police'), which Taylor admits *had* additional grounds, indicates the need to explore other motivations. Similarly, members and subscribers to the 1788 Committee founded new institutions based on different principles than those of the mid-eighteenth-century schemes. The fact that many continued to support climbing boy relief through the SPICSA and the SSNCB, strongly suggests that they saw a place for this cause within their new ventures.

A crucial characteristic of the period after 1800 was sweeps' active involvement. The timing of their contributions indicates that they were responsive rather than pro-active - called into action when they saw their business threatened by the proposals made by non-sweeps. Those who got involved were among the wealthier sections of the trade, reinforcing the impression that preserving the status-quo, rather than a grand vision to make chimney sweeping more humane, was their priority. Previously, their customers were not sensitive to calls for climbing boy relief and advertising one's credentials was sufficient; now collective responses were necessary.

But their role was not restricted to obstructing change, as Phillips asserted. In time, these sweeps sensed the opportunity, through collective action, to solve an issue that had troubled them individually for some time – the unfair competition presented by itinerant colleagues. Moreover, like Porter before 1800, some of the sweeps used this campaign to realise wider ambitions, with Bulphin and Whitehead being notable examples. Therefore, just as scholars of factory reform have revealed the multiple

positions and contributions by manufacturers,<sup>193</sup> we need to investigate the roles of these tradesmen.

For non-sweep activism after 1800, its geographic dispersion and heterogeneous support-base stand out. The founding of the London SSNCB was followed by the formation of a network of provincial branches. Most of these were formed during the late 1820s, coinciding with similar growth in the anti-slavery and missionary campaigns. In some places, as in Liverpool, initiatives for these causes preceded the forming of an SSNCB; in others, as in Sheffield, climbing boy relief was itself the instigator of other charitable activity; in still others, as in Derby, there was a considerable time-lapse between the two. This uneven expansion shows that, although philanthropy was now pursued through national networks, local factors continued to play a part.

In line with Phillips' emphasis on the commitment of individual campaigners, both the London and provincial SSNCBs could rely on core groups of dedicated supporters. For some, involvement in the cause spanned over four decades, as in the cases of Wilberforce and Angerstein. However, Phillips ill-described climbing boy reform as a struggle between bourgeoisie 'liberals' and 'privileged reactionaries'.<sup>194</sup> Both in parliament

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<sup>193</sup> Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Studies in Labour History, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 47-54; Joanna Innes, 'Origins of the Factory Acts: The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act 1802', in Norma Landau (ed.), *Law, Crime, and English Society, 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour'.

<sup>194</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 6.

and through the SSNCB, the cause attracted mixed support that neither followed party lines nor was restricted to specific religious or socio-economic groups. Moreover, it was not a 'popular' movement pressurising parliament to succumb to its demands.<sup>195</sup> London SSNCB directors included Lords, MPs, magistrates and parish governors whose presence only increased over time; provincial committees were jointly run by local administrators and non-office holders. Rather than an entity separate from the legislature and the administration as in Hanway's time, climbing boy societies brought together members from these two bodies with lay persons.

This finding also raises questions about other campaigns such as anti-slavery, where reform societies have similarly been described as 'extra-parliamentary' movements or as conveying 'public opinion'.<sup>196</sup> Instead of setting off "initiatives from within" the legislature against "pressures from outside", it seems more helpful to investigate reform as alliances of legislators, administrators and volunteers pursuing changes in policy and practice through multiple channels.

Whether the mixed composition of voluntary associations indeed resulted in greater intersection between legislative, administrative and voluntary initiatives will be examined in chapters 2-5. That members of a particular category did not necessarily focus on their natural habitat is clear

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<sup>195</sup> For example, Phillips wrote that 'in 1834 public opinion forced the Lords to approve a bill'. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 5.

<sup>196</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', *Parliamentary History*, 26 (2007), 42-65.

from the individual campaigners that we have considered here. Wilberforce has been portrayed as the parliamentary leader of the anti-slavery campaigns, but he clearly took a leading role in non-legislative activities of the SSNCB. Tooke used his credentials as a lawyer to prosecute abusive masters but also represented the SSNCB in parliamentary inquiries *before* he became an MP. Similarly, Bulphin promoted his sweeping business in the local press but also acted as the spokesman of Bristol's fire insurers in Lords' hearings.

Acting through different channels and combining different causes clearly benefited these individuals. Wilberforce's extra-parliamentary activities for climbing boys helped him to recruit volunteer supporters for the anti-slavery cause. Tooke's legislative experience helped him to secure a seat in parliament. And Bulphin's acting as defendant of Bristol's safety in parliament boosted his sweeping business in the city and helped him in climbing the ranks of Bristol's Conservative Party.

However, combining causes and avenues and trying to reap multiple fruits from reform posed challenges too. Wilberforce never escaped the suspicion that he favoured the 'distant' roars of slaves abroad over the sufferings of the exploited 'at home'. Tooke used his moral standing as climbing boy champion to justify his candidacy as MP for Finsbury; this might have gone down well in charitable circles, but in this case, was strongly dismissed. Bulphin was bullied in his dealings with local administrators. Interestingly, all three suffered from stigma attached to this trade. Whether pursuing reform collectively through multiple channels

produced similar opportunities and challenges, and how wider attitudes to chimney sweeping affected the direction of the campaigns, will be examined next.





## CHAPTER 2

### PHILANTHROPIC INITIATIVES TOWARDS CLIMBING

#### BOYS, c. 1770-1800:

#### CHILD LABOUR, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND THE PROMOTION OF MEDICAL POLICE

Having identified the protagonists of climbing boy relief, we now turn to the steps that they took to reform the trade. This chapter examines the initiatives prior to 1800, thus focusing on the activities of philanthropist Jonas Hanway, master sweep David Porter and a small circle of associates. George Phillips *has* studied their activities closely, but has done so in isolation – explaining shifts in tactics simply as a response to practical obstacles encountered in this campaign, without considering external factors.<sup>1</sup> This interpretation is problematic in three respects.

Firstly, as we saw in chapter 1, these activists were mostly employed in merchant and maritime trades and often combined climbing boy relief with other charitable activity. These activities mattered. Stephen Taylor has shown that Hanway recruited supporters for new charities from among colleagues and fellow-philanthropists in existing causes (something

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips wrote that Hanway was 'never without a cause to champion', but failed to examine how far exertions for other charities influenced his climbing boy activities and vice versa. George L. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys: A History of the Long Struggle to Abolish Child Labor in Chimney Sweeping* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1949), p. 7.

we also found in Chapter 1 for the 1773 Committee), and structured his charities around the model of merchant companies.<sup>2</sup> How far were climbing boy initiatives shaped by experience gained in other charitable and commercial enterprises?

Secondly, mid-eighteenth-century charity stood out in bringing together a multitude of causes under shared headings. Hanway's crusades against infant mortality and for promoting 'police' are notable examples. How did these broader intellectual pursuits influence relief towards climbing boys?<sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, climbing boy writings featured in pamphlets that discussed the overall purposes and optimal structures of reform. We therefore ought to explore how this campaign contributed to broader changes in philanthropic practice. Hanway's *Defects of the police, the cause of immorality* (1775), which includes an essay outlining past, present and future exertions on behalf of climbing boys, is a prime example. Patrick Carroll has described it as 'the most detailed plea for further widening the scope of police in eighteenth-century England'.<sup>4</sup> Joanna Innes has pointed to its importance, and that of other works by Hanway, in uniting religious,

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor argued that the Marine Society, co-founded by Hanway in 1756, was 'structured roughly along the lines of the Russia Company', in that it employed a small number of salaried staff (mostly clerks) and relied principally upon 'merchant volunteers willing to work cooperatively together on Company Committees'. James Stephen Taylor, *Jonas Hanway: Founder of the Marine Society: Charity and Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London and Berkeley CA: Scolar Press, 1985), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> The impact of these and other intellectual contexts on the representation of climbing boys will be examined in chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick E. Carroll, 'Medical Police and the History of Public Health', *Medical History*, 46 (2002), p. 474.

social and political interpretations of reform in novel ways - a synthesis that inspired William Wilberforce, the Reverends Samuel Glasse and Shute Barrington, and others to advance a broad programme of reform from the 1780s. According to Innes, 'Hanway, but for his death in 1786, would surely have played a prominent and active part in the reformation of manners movement, which highlighted so many of his own long-standing preoccupations.'<sup>5</sup> What role did initiatives on behalf of climbing boys play in advancing new styles of reform?

This chapter thus reappraises the structure and significance of climbing boy relief before 1800, by paying close attention to the influence of practical and intellectual contexts and by examining the impact of this campaign on philanthropic practice in general. To emphasise the changes that took place, the analysis is structured chronologically – considering five consecutive attempts to initiate reform between 1767 and 1800, and for each attempt establishing these three dimensions (practical *and* intellectual input, and practical output).

## **2.1 Preserving the Lives of Infants, 1767**

When Hanway first took up his pen on behalf of climbing boys, in 1767, he instantly identified the problems and solutions that were to dominate the

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<sup>5</sup> Joanna Innes, 'Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in Later Eighteenth-Century England', in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 71.

campaign until 1800. He argued that employing young children in this trade inevitably caused injury and distress; misery that would continue until alternative sweeping methods were developed and introduced.<sup>6</sup> Yet, masters deepened the children's sorrows by paying insufficient attention to their diet, dress, lodging, cleanliness, and religious instruction; hazards that could and should be addressed. 'It is our method in England to *force* these young persons up *chimneys*, in order to *sweep* them: it need not be done in this manner, but we may at least soften the severities of this practice, and not turn savages'.<sup>7</sup>

Hanway proposed three strategies to ensure masters paid diligent care to their boys' necessities: organise the sweeps in a fraternity to encourage self-monitoring, pressurise magistrates to attend the treatment of climbing boys closely, and introduce legislation 'whereby justice may be done' in cases of wilful neglect.<sup>8</sup> He did *not*, as yet, take steps to enforce these plans. But his diagnosis of hazards and remedies resurfaced in all his subsequent initiatives towards climbing boys.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In this letter, he merely noted that this method was peculiar to English sweeps, though not elaborating on alternative methods employed in other countries. His later communications included detailed discussions of such alternatives (ball and brush in Scotland, adult climbers in Germany, etc.) See e.g.: Jonas Hanway, *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers in London & Westminster* (London, 1785), pp. 101-102.

<sup>7</sup> Jonas Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor; and to the Governors and Overseers of the Parish Poor* (London, 1767), p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>9</sup> For similar proposals see: Hanway and co's letters to master sweeps in June and December 1773, as reprinted in Jonas Hanway, *The Defects of the Police the Cause of Immorality* (London, 1775), pp. 94-97; Hanway's proposals for legislative intervention, as outlined in Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 106-14; the statutes of another fraternity, founded in 1780, as reported in David Porter, *Considerations Upon the Present State of Chimney Sweepers* (2nd edn., London, 1801), p. 23.

From this, it is tempting to view the cause – as previous work has done – as one that Hanway came across and then pursued consistently for the same reasons, through the same means.<sup>10</sup> However, the fact that he did not act immediately, although aware of the problems and having solutions at hand, invites us to investigate his actions closely. Doing so reveals that Hanway changed his mind about the impact of these hazards on the climbing boys, the significance of their suffering for the well-being of society, and the urgency and order of steps with which to act. Looking closely at these transitions allows us to determine *why* Hanway and his associates adopted certain strategies at particular times and *how* their actions in this campaign contributed to broader changes in practices of reform.

Hanway's suggestion that attention to diet, dress, lodging, cleanliness and religious instruction of climbing boys could ameliorate their suffering was not based on a detailed study of chimney sweeping. In fact, his 1767 letter offers no particulars on the structure and size of the trade, sweeps' work practices, or the injuries, illnesses and mental distress sustained by climbing boys – topics that dominated his later writings for the cause.<sup>11</sup> It seems that he applied insights about dietetics gained

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<sup>10</sup> Both Phillips and Taylor emphasised the continuity in Hanway's exertions. Phillips stressed Hanway's consistent effort to organise sweeps into a fraternity. For Taylor, his constant reference to the 'inhumanity' of the practice stood out. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, pp. 7-10; Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, chapter 9.

<sup>11</sup> Hanway presented the climbing boys as exemplary of parochial mismanagement of apprentices without displaying deeper knowledge of the trade. The remainder of the letter comprised general observations on the appropriate age for apprenticing children in urban and rural areas, and the strategic use of apprenticeship fees to encourage masters

through his involvement in other charities (notably the Foundling Hospital and Marine Society) and work for the Navy, assuming that these general principles matched the situation of climbing boys. The same is true for the strategies that he proposed. Legislation and close collaboration with magistrates had worked in his campaign against infant mortality; why would it not succeed in the case of apprentices?

Hanway's diagnosis of problems and his proposed remedies make sense in light of his other activities. But why did he draw attention to this cause now? After all, he had been involved in experiments with dietetics in the Foundling Hospital and Marine Society since 1756 and worked for the Navy's victualling board since 1762;<sup>12</sup> and he had had some knowledge of the miserable state of climbing boys at least since 1760.<sup>13</sup> The success of his campaign for the preservation of infants was one factor; as more children survived infancy and returned to the Foundling Hospital from wet nurses, he refocused his attention on rearing them through the next stage of life, between infancy and apprenticeship.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, his climbing boy

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to pay diligent care to apprentices. Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor*, letter 12, pp. 94-104.

<sup>12</sup> As victualling officer, between 1762 and 1783, Hanway was responsible for equipping navy vessels with sufficient biscuit, wheat, peas, oatmeal, flour and other staple foods. It engaged him in various experiments with diet and storage of foodstuffs. It was not a full-time commitment, except in times of war, and allowed him to continue his various charitable pursuits. Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, chapter 7.

<sup>13</sup> Hanway's interest in the cause was sparked by an anonymous letter in the *Public Advertiser* in August 1760. The letter was reprinted in: Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. xix-xxi.

<sup>14</sup> When state-funded 'open admissions' to the Foundling Hospital ended in 1760, Hanway secured alternative policies for the protection of metropolitan infants. Statutes obliging vestries to keep detailed registers of pauper infants under 4 within the Bills of Mortality

letter appeared alongside another pamphlet that dealt specifically with children of this age-group, 5-12, cared for in parish or voluntary institutions.<sup>15</sup> As most climbing boys fell within this age-range it was only natural for Hanway to extend his survey to these children. Yet, a closer look at these letters suggests that more specific reasons incited him to act now.

Apart from conventional aspects of dietetics – food, drink, dress and rest – Hanway’s writings included detailed instructions on how to integrate work in a wholesome upbringing.<sup>16</sup> The idea that both children and society could benefit from labour schemes was not new: parishes had apprenticed pauper children since the mid-sixteenth century to reduce the burden on parents and rate payers and offer the children the prospect of a career; and authors before Hanway had stressed the value of such schemes for the economy.<sup>17</sup> But Hanway’s suggestions stood out because of the young age at which he proposed to induce children in labour (on previous occasions he had pleaded for apprenticing foundlings as young as five)<sup>18</sup>

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(1762), and to make provisions for their care *outside* the metropolis (1767) were known as ‘Hanway’s Acts’. Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, chapter 8.

<sup>15</sup> Jonas Hanway, *Letters on the Importance of the Rising Generation of the Laboring Part of Our Fellow-Subjects. In Two Volumes* (London, 1767).

<sup>16</sup> See, in particular: letter 37 on ‘Considerations of parliament in regards to the labor and earnings of children, and their different kinds of employment’ in Hanway, *Letters on the Importance of the Rising Generation*, pp. 140-45.

<sup>17</sup> Donna Andrew found similar ideas about the benefits of early labour both for children and society in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century works of political arithmetic. Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), chapter 1.

<sup>18</sup> For children in rural areas, Hanway asserted, ‘They cannot be placed out too early, in the country, provided they are apprenticed to people who have brought up their own children to industry and piety.’ Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor*, p. 96. In 1762, he had argued with fellow governors of the Foundling Hospital over his wish to



and the explicit connections he drew between work and children's physical and mental development. Work was not simply a means for children to acquire the skills and discipline needed for future employment; it was an essential part of their nurturing.

At the outset of a letter on 'the labor and earnings of children, and their different kinds of employment', Hanway emphasised that financial gain should never take precedent over children's health when putting them to work in institutions:<sup>19</sup>

The part of good governors is to see, in the *first* place, that the *lives* of children be preserved; next their *morals*; next their *health*, their *cleanliness*, their *food* and *raiment*, their habit of *industry*; and lastly their gain.

In the remainder, he wrote in detail about experiments at the Foundling Hospital to employ children indoors, to the benefit of their health:<sup>20</sup>

We have at this time an *order* subsisting, for the Foundlings to be provided with tools accommodated to the strengths of boys of 8, 9, or 10 years of age, that a part of their time may be employed in the garden; and a gardener directs their work.

Hanway showed equal sensitivity to the nurturing impact and potential hazards of the 'more sedentary part of useful occupation':<sup>21</sup>

as [to] darning, knitting, and weaving by *boys*; and darning, sewing, *spinning* and *knitting* by *girls*; there can be no doubt concerning the

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apprentice a 5-year-old boy, which Hanway hoped and the others feared would set a precedent. Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>19</sup> Hanway, *Letters on the Importance of the Rising Generation*, p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> Hanway, *Letters on the Importance of the Rising Generation*, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup> Hanway, *Letters on the Importance of the Rising Generation*, p. 143.

propriety of such employment, provided they do not sit so long at a time as to injure their health.

The potential benefits were physical *and* mental.<sup>22</sup>

With respect to girls, the making and mending *all their own cloaths* (sic), shoes excepted, tends very much to preserve a decent respect for their own persons, which has necessarily an influence on morals [...] The same holds in the degree for a boy [...] and the ability of making his own coat, is so portable, that he will never be encumbered with it

When taking appropriate care in ensuring that children were not overstretched in strength or ability, work could and should benefit health.<sup>23</sup>

the children learn to read, and the rudiments of religion and morality are taught, certain hours being appointed for labor, others for the book, and others for the more sedentary work abovementioned, so that without fatiguing the mind or injuring the health, they may be kept incessantly in action. It is the great secret of an able instructor to direct and vary tasks judiciously, so as to render them easy to a young person, and yet effectual to the end proposed.

These plans matter because they formed an important context for Hanway's attention to climbing boys. Although appearing in a separate pamphlet, covering a wider range of topics concerning 'the governors of the poor', his climbing boy letter resonated the sentiments discussed above – early employment ought to be encouraged, as long as the work respected the child's strength and skills and as long as the master was able to provide adequate care. Referring to apprenticeship in general, Hanway proclaimed:<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hanway, *Letters on the Importance of the Rising Generation*, p. 144.

<sup>23</sup> Hanway, *Letters on the Importance of the Rising Generation*, p. 145.

<sup>24</sup> Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor*, p. 100.

The age at which children are placed out, and the sum to be given with them, should depend on their stature, strength, and health, and their ability in netting, knitting, spinning, (weaving, where they are big and able enough) cattle keeping, plow (sic) driving, weeding, leasing, picking stones, sewing, or any such offices, which children, according to what is proper to the sex, are capable of at a very early age.

Hanway's detailed discussions of children's work are also significant because it was not a topic readily discussed at the time. Child labour was intrinsic to eighteenth-century British society and childhood the topic of a growing body of literature. Yet, children's economic activity was a relatively neglected area of investigation.<sup>25</sup> As the above extracts highlight, Hanway did not raise the topic to question the institution of child labour. Indeed he found it desirable that children should be employed from a young age,<sup>26</sup> for the benefit of their physical and mental development and practical skill.

A second novelty in Hanway's letter concerns his strategies – his insistence on engaging master sweeps in the reform of their own trade: 'If chimney-sweepers are not in any kind of body corporate or community, they ought to be so'.<sup>27</sup> Again this was part of broader ideas that he was formulating at the time, in this case about the optimal structure of

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<sup>25</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova has pointed to an explosion of 'literary treatments of children and childhood' in eighteenth-century Europe. Yet, whereas novels and poetry, advice manuals, and works of natural history, medicine, law and art dedicated sections to all sorts of matters relating to children, they remained relatively silent on child labour. 'This omission requires explanation, as does the notable exception, the debate about chimney sweeps.' Ludmilla J. Jordanova, 'Conceptualising Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: The Problem of Child Labour', *British Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies*, 10 (1987), pp. 189-90.

<sup>26</sup> 'In such a nation as this, one would imagine, that whilst a square yard of earth remained uncultivated, some kind of office should be furnished to every young person born to labor, by the age of 10 years, either by actual employment in fields or gardens, or by supplying the place of adults in several kinds of manufactory adapted to the strength of children.' Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor*, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor*, p. 98.

philanthropy: the labouring classes ought to play a major part in their own reformation. In his climbing boy letter, but alluding to apprenticeships more generally, Hanway explained:<sup>28</sup>

the working people who are sober, have preserved and brought up children of their own in a proper manner, rendered them useful to the community, and are themselves, humanly speaking, removed from the immediate danger of becoming *paupers*, are doubtless the most proper for instructing, educating, and breeding up young persons to labor in their own way.

He first applied this principle in 1773, in climbing boy relief, when he approached metropolitan master sweeps – an initiative to which we will turn now.

## 2.2 Promoting the Police, 1773-1775

In January 1773, Hanway and twelve other governors of the Marine Society met at John's Coffee House to discuss practical steps for improving the conditions of climbing boys. They used the months that followed to investigate the trade, establish contacts with 'respectable' sweeps, and compose an indenture form that offered guidelines for the treatment of apprentices. In June, they wrote to 185 sweeps in London and Westminster, 'as many of them as their habitations could be found', pleading for better care to the diet, dress, cleanliness and religious instruction of climbing boys and encouraging masters to offer proper

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<sup>28</sup> Hanway, *Letters to the Guardians of the Infant Poor*, p. 101.

indentures to those casually employed.<sup>29</sup> By December, only five masters (including David Porter) had responded, binding fifteen boys through the new form. The Committee sent out another letter, pleading for masters to join the fraternity and establish a 'regular economy' of the trade, or face legislative intervention:<sup>30</sup>

if such evils cannot be remedied by an association of your trade, we are to inform you, that it is intended to appeal to parliament, in hopes of restraining master chimney-sweepers from taking above a certain number of apprentices, as those of the weavers, agreeable to the regulation established by the authority of the legislature.

The Committee was confident that the legislature would respond to its calls:<sup>31</sup>

The same reasons which induced parliament to prevent disorders in Spital-fields, by restraining the Weavers in the number of their apprentices, holds in ten times stronger a degree in regard to these children.

Despite such confident statements, the Committee did not seek legislation for another twelve years. Why not before? The threat of legislation was partly rhetorical and was intended to pressurise sweeps to collaborate by, what Hanway called, 'the force of shame and persuasion'.<sup>32</sup> But the decision not to approach parliament was also informed by the belief that laws alone would not do the job; a true change of attitudes and

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<sup>29</sup> Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, pp. 94-96.

<sup>30</sup> This letter was delivered to 315 sweeps (up from 185 since June), indicating that the Committee continued its investigations in the trade through the summer and autumn. Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, pp. 96-98.

<sup>31</sup> Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 99.

<sup>32</sup> Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 94.

customs towards the employment of climbing boys was necessary. For this reason, the Committee appealed to the public. It printed 1,000 copies of the two letters, with explanatory notes, sold by local stationers; and another 1,000 abstracts of the same, 'on a sheet of fool's cap', 'for distributing among the trade, and to solicit subscriptions'.<sup>33</sup> These initiatives had some effect: in the next twelve months another thirty-six boys were bound and the Committee received just over £125 from forty-six donors.<sup>34</sup> But the lukewarm response from the trade and the wider public did not satisfy the Committee – it was not until 1780 that Hanway and associates renewed their attempts to reform the trade.

To understand their disappointment and insistence on pursuing relief only through self-help, legislation *and* public approbation we need to consider the wider plans as part of which they sought to reform this trade. Frustrated by the limited fruits of individual charities, Hanway proposed a more comprehensive scheme of reform. First outlined in a pamphlet in 1772,<sup>35</sup> but more extensively in his *Defects of the Police the Cause of Immorality* (1775), Hanway argued that the widespread misery among the labouring classes was the product of a threefold crisis – social, civic and

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<sup>33</sup> Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> Most of the revenues were spent on costs associated with binding apprentices (paper, printing and stamping of the indenture), some on outfits for boys, some on the hiring of a room for meetings, a clerk who took minutes and attended the binding of apprentices, and David Porter who distributed pamphlets and letters among the trade. The remainder, just under £50, was kept to one side, perhaps for the anticipated legislative initiatives. Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 98.

<sup>35</sup> Jonas Hanway, *Observations on the Causes of the Dissoluteness Which Reigns among the Lower Classes* (London, 1772).

religious: a lack of empathy towards fellow-humans, a lack of commitment to the well-being of the country, and a lack of sincerity in feelings to God. Although its effects hit the 'lower orders' disproportionately, its seeds were primarily sown by the 'superior classes'. It was to the latter to join hands, form 'energetic government' and introduce those regulations necessary to restore 'police' – a state of society characterised by safety, health, happiness and decency.<sup>36</sup>

Hanway saw a crucial role for climbing boy relief. Although the number of boys were small; their distress was great. Indeed, because their misery was so visible to all, there was not 'a more manifest violation of the duties of morality and religion, of civil and religious rights',<sup>37</sup> nor a better cause through which to awaken humane, civic and religious spirit and arrange reform coalitions, which could then pursue reform of other causes:<sup>38</sup>

It will give proof of one of the best things, necessary at this time. It will give a proof that energy in government is not unknown amongst us. If we begin at the lowest round of the ladder, we may amount to the top. We cannot reach it by any other possible means. The notion that our liberty will not admit of a police, is in effect saying, that liberty is productive of misery of every kind, and that it must terminate in anarchy and the dissolution of government. On the contrary, it is as demonstrable, that a great people cannot live without police, as that they cannot survive long on a plan of corruption.

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<sup>36</sup> Carroll, 'Medical Police', p. 474.

<sup>37</sup> 'If *police* means good regulations for the economy and preservation of the people, who are all entitled to one common freedom, so long as they act properly in their several stations, the neglect of these children is a reproach to us with respect to our humanity, and the exercise of the divine precepts of our religion.' Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 100.

Hanway's reflections on the compatibility of liberty and police should be seen in light of the widespread belief that they were *not*. Police was associated with despotic government, as practiced on the European continent, but incompatible with the liberal spirit of Britain's laws and people.<sup>39</sup> Hanway's suggestion that the clergy, legislators, magistrates, local administrators and all those 'interested to support [the police]' should work together to introduce a multitude of reforms did not go down well at the time. Nor did the concept of 'police' make much headway in public discourse in Britain, until its meaning was 'sufficiently' narrowed, during the early nineteenth century, close to 'crime stopping' with which it remains associated today.<sup>40</sup> Yet, in practice Britain did see a broadening of social policy and closer collaboration between state and voluntary agents of reform – developments that will be assessed more fully in chapters 3 and 4.<sup>41</sup>

Irrespective of this legacy, in the short term Hanway's attempt to associate climbing boy relief with 'police' did neither cause good. His

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<sup>39</sup> For a 'Whiggish' interpretation of public health history, which embraces this disparity between continental 'despotism' and British 'liberalism', see: George Rosen, 'Cameralism and the Concept of Medical Police', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 27 (1953), 21-42. For a recent critique of this interpretation, see: Carroll, 'Medical Police'.

<sup>40</sup> Carroll, 'Medical Police', esp. pp. 470-80. See also: John M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986); John M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> For the role of Hanway's charities in transitions in policy making in London, see: Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, particularly chapters 3 and 4. For an international perspective on the interplay and increasing collaboration between state, church and voluntary agents of policy making see: Joanna Innes, 'State, Church and Voluntarism in European Welfare, 1690-1850', in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: From the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), 15-65.



suggestion that child labour should be a source of sentiment *and* subjected to state regulation reinforced the impression that his proposals for the police were, as he feared, 'utopian and romantic'.<sup>42</sup> His suggestion that police should aim for security reinforced the sense that regulating climbing boys (whose work was deemed vital to fire safety) was impractical.

### 2.3 Promoting Solidarity within the Trade, 1780

If regulating child labour was unusual and incorporating it in comprehensive reform unpopular, there were additional obstacles more specific to this trade that made Hanway's exertions for climbing boys problematic. Chimney sweeps were associated with a variety of comical and fearsome conceptions; some going back to medieval times, others of more recent origin.<sup>43</sup> These prejudices might have enhanced the visibility of sweeps – evidenced in their frequent appearance in street cries and satirical prints – but they undermined Hanway's attempts to portray the

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<sup>42</sup> 'The word *police* is not universally intelligible, so little have we attended to it; and consequently we must expect that many *proposals* for it will be treated as *utopian* or *romantic*; tho' they may be salutary and necessary regulations. If the people are not kept in good order, and just apprehensions of what they owe to themselves, to God, and their country, no event ought to surprise us.' Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. xx. Further on, Hanway explained that he had deliberately appealed to a variety of reform agents and proposed a multitude of schemes, 'tho' [some] may not appear as immediately belonging to it' in the hope that 'you will consider well what belongs to your respective duties'. Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. xxv.

<sup>43</sup> Anton Blok, *Honour and Violence* (Cambridge MA: Polity Press, 2001), chapters 4 and 5.

trade as one in need of empathy and capable of self-regulation.<sup>44</sup> This is clearly visible in popular responses to the failing fraternities.

In January 1780, Hanway and associates launched yet another 'friendly society' for metropolitan sweeps. Master sweep David Porter wrote the statutes; Hanway acted as treasurer. The sweeps met several times, but without success. Porter later recalled, 'as might be expected of men uncultivated as they were, their meetings, in a few months, became irregular and disorderly, insomuch that I advised them to receive their subscriptions back, and break up the society.'<sup>45</sup> The rowing sweeps attracted the attention from the local press. Depictions of their meetings highlight the damage caused by such disputes to the campaign, but also suggest the many mental obstacles that the reformers faced in recruiting public support.

On 7 March 1780 the *General Evening Post* published the mock-minutes of a recent 'Meeting of Chimney Sweepers and other sable Gentry of the County of Essex'. The minutes are filled with references to popular perceptions of sweeps, far removed from the serious but emphatic sentiments that Hanway and associates wished to promote. The Committee welcomed four new members to its ranks, their names symptomatic of the characters attracted to the cause: 'George Chafindish,

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<sup>44</sup> Chimney sweeps feature prominently in an excellent study of street cries: Sean Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast: The Urban Poor in the Cries of London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, p. 23.

the Rev. Brother Blackcoat, Mr. Wrywill and John Blackman'.<sup>46</sup> They expressed their disillusion with their lowly status and hope for drastic change, declaring it, 'the undoubted right of this respectable Body to rule our Rulers, and, as we have hitherto swept their chimnies, to cause them in future to sweep our's (sic)'.<sup>47</sup>

The Committee hailed the blackness of their business and claimed a monopoly on the trade, at the expense of irregular, local rivals:<sup>48</sup>

no Scavengers be admitted into this Association; for though they deal in filth, they are not quite as black as our business [and] the other Committee for the County of Essex deserve the discipline of the Soot-bag, because they are taking all the black and dirty work out of our hands.

Blackness did not only allude to the sweeps' complexions, but also to their vicious intentions – to befoul the authorities and cause turmoil in society.

Thus they resolved:<sup>49</sup>

to blacken, besoot or bespatter, the measures and authority of their betters [and] to render chimnies smoky and so putting all the houses in confusion [...] to promote smoke, uproar and domestic enmity, throughout the kingdom.

To overhaul the current government they proposed to join hands with accomplices, at home and abroad:<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *General Evening Post*, 7 March 1780, Resolution 1.

<sup>47</sup> *General Evening Post*, 7 March 1780, Resolution 3.

<sup>48</sup> *General Evening Post*, 7 March 1780, Resolutions 4 and 6. On dustmen, see: Brian Maidment, *Dusty Bob: A Cultural History of Dustmen, 1780-1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> *General Evening Post*, 7 March 1780, Resolutions 7 and 8.

<sup>50</sup> *General Evening Post*, 7 March 1780, Resolutions 2 and 10.

the Chairmen of the several Committees of Chimney-Sweepers, belonging to the counties, cities, and town (sic) of this kingdom, be admitted honorary members of this Committee [and steps were taken to] adopt the plan of the most honourable the Congress of America [and] endeavour to open a door, or at least a chimney, for the French and Spaniards as soon as possible.

This 'jeu d'esprit' worked because it built upon existing associations with the trade. The sweeps' blackness was a constant source of satire, in contemporary literature and prints – from sooty sweeps picking fights with dusty bakers, to dirty boys befouling the spotless dress of a beau-femme passer-by.<sup>51</sup> Since medieval times, their darkness had also sparked associations with death and the devil – present here in references to the 'sable' gentry and John 'Blackman'.<sup>52</sup> The idea of authority turned up-side down predated connections with this trade, but since sweeps' entry in May Day processions around 1750 it was firmly embedded in their repertoire.<sup>53</sup> These processions also gave rise to the idea of the sweep as a figure of mischief and riot, scaring the crowds with 'rough music', claiming

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<sup>51</sup> For comical depictions of fights between bakers and sweeps: *Morning Chronicle*, 9 September 1829; *The Odd Fellow*, 6 July 1839. For a satirical account of the prosecution of a sweep accused of stealing another man's wife: *The Bristol Mercury*, 5 May 1832. The richness of popular associations with chimney sweeps is clearly visible in: Vic A.C. Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> Since the sixteenth century 'His sable Majesty, or excellency' applied to a dark-complexioned potentate, especially the Devil. 'Blackman' had similar connotations. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), consulted online: '<http://dictionary.oed.com>' (31 July 2010). In a late seventeenth-century Italian engraving, sweeps were compared to Charon, the figure who in Greek mythology carried the souls of the newly deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Blok, *Honour and Violence*, pp. 73-75.

<sup>53</sup> Two sweeps, usually a master and a boy, dressed as the Lord and the Lady of the town; others carried the keys to the gates or town hall. On sweeps' introduction and peculiar role in May Day: Roy Judge, *The Jack-in-the-Green: A May Day Custom* (2nd edn., London: FLS Books, 2000), pp. 12-18; Charles Phythian-Adams, 'Milk and Soot: The Changing Vocabulary of a Popular Ritual in Stuart and Hanoverian London', in Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp. 97-104.

compensation for taking their clatter away.<sup>54</sup> This idea of the riotous, even seditious sweeps – overtly present in the Committee’s minutes – was reinforced beyond May Day. When a ‘great mob’ marched through the City of London in April 1771, carrying five ‘figures’ representing convicted notables to their place of execution, a sweep tended the convicted, ‘praying for them’.<sup>55</sup> In December 1775, ‘a patriotic Chimney Sweeper’, allegedly shouted in a London alehouse for the instalment of a Republic. Asked if he knew what a Republic was, he allegedly replied: ‘A Republican Government is when every Man may keep a Public-house without a License.’<sup>56</sup> The elites shared in this comedy: at a masquerade at the King’s Theatre in London in February 1788, attended by the great and the good, the opposition turned out as ‘A groupe (sic) of May Day Chimney Sweepers’.<sup>57</sup>

Most of these associations outlived Hanway’s involvement in the campaign.<sup>58</sup> But unlike in later stages of the campaign, mischievous, riotous

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<sup>54</sup> Phythian-Adams, ‘Milk and Soot’, pp. 100-101.

<sup>55</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 2 April 1771.

<sup>56</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 28 December 1775.

<sup>57</sup> *The Times*, 5 February 1788. See also: Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1986).

<sup>58</sup> For associations of sweeps with the devil: *The Bristol Mercury*, 30 June 1832 (Frome sweep dressed as a devil leading an anti-corruption manifestation); *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 4 January 1830 (a ‘satanic sweep’ disturbing robbers in felony). For associations of sweeps with political opposition and sedition: *The Bristol Mercury*, 17 May 1831 (Luwlow Shropshire mob elected a chimney sweep to represent those without vote); *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 31 August 1840 (politician accused of slander is portrayed as ‘the chimney sweep of the nation’); *The Leeds Mercury*, 19 August 1837 (climbing boy instigating stone throwing at liberal voters in Huddersfield). For chimney sweep as symbol of low-life: *Caledonian Mercury*, 2 February 1837 (chimney sweep joining hunting party to amusement of gentlemen assembled).

conceptions were *not* complemented with emphatic images of the sufferings in the trade outside the reformers' pamphlets. The mock-minutes accused the masters of a spectrum of mischief – from not doing their jobs properly, to lacking solidarity towards their colleagues, to wishing to destabilise society – but not of abusing their apprentices. Clearly, the misery of climbing boys was not (yet) part of public sensitivities. This is crucial because it may go some way to explaining why Hanway struggled to attract voluntary and administrative support for his proposals. The 'obvious' evils that offended *his* humanity did not touch his audiences in the same way.

## 2.4 The Need for Comprehensive Policy, 1785-1788

Despite the disappointing outcome of earlier initiatives, Hanway, Porter and associates renewed their attempts to improve the conditions of climbing boys in 1785. They continued pursuing reform through the threefold strategy (self-help, community action *and* legislation) first outlined by Hanway in his manifesto on the police. And they reiterated their faith in the significance of this cause for awakening the moral spirits necessary for redeeming other social, civic and religious ills in society:<sup>59</sup>

The object before us offers itself providentially, as it were a trial what kind of sensibilities we retain; and whether our pretences to liberty, and unadulterated religion, are founded on a steady active principle, or the result of a habit of talking of them? [...] Attention to one duty leads us into the investigation of others of a similar kind; and we may owe to these

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<sup>59</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. xii-xiii.

poor children, the important obligation of learning to form our minds on a more perfect model of moral and Christian virtues.

But a closer look at their new exertions indicates that important transitions in their tactics occurred. Crucially, whereas legislation was previously treated as a last resort, it was now seen as a necessary first step: 'it [is not] to be conceived that any method less than a legislative regulation can control a people, of whom many are as unaccustomed to moral as to political discipline.'<sup>60</sup>

Hanway and his associates believed that both legislation and friendly societies should be part of a broader scheme of improvement that required the active support of various 'persons of authority', and others with 'feelings of humanity'.<sup>61</sup> Hanway's proposals reveal how he combined his principles of 'police' with observations specific to this trade to formulate an effective strategy for reform.<sup>62</sup>

Hanway argued that magistrates and their clerks, as 'guardians of the police', should initiate legislative procedures.<sup>63</sup> The details of law-making could be left to the legislature, but provisions should include the formation of 'companies' of 'the most respectable' master sweeps in London and Westminster, which 'would give the clue to the rest of the

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<sup>60</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>61</sup> Hanway addressed his letters to, the 'The Lord Mayor of London and the Magistrates of London and Westminster', but dedicated the book that arose from these letters, to 'Humanity'. Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, dedication, pp. i-vii.

<sup>62</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, letter 17, pp. 106-14.

<sup>63</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 57.

kingdom'. Hanway recommended that the fraternities be kept small, 'as the intelligent part of this class of men is small' and 'the greater number it consists of, the greater confusion there will be, and the greater the difficulty of reducing their business into order' – clearly resonating previous experiences.<sup>64</sup> These fraternities would monitor the local implementation of regulations, by imposing penalties on sweeps that broke the law, seeking the assistance of magistrates where necessary.<sup>65</sup> To assist the fraternities, Hanway proposed that all sweeps took out a license and registered their place of residence and the number of journeymen and apprentices with a local court – failure to inform the court of alterations to their situation would disqualify them from the trade. How Hanway envisioned ordinary householders to contribute is not entirely clear, but his constant calls for assistance of 'all those with feelings of humanity' suggests he expected them to notify the parties responsible in case of abuse, neglect or other irregularities.

What changes should this coalition of parties bring about? We can distinguish between proposals aimed at ensuring that those left in charge of climbing boys were capable of providing the necessary care and proposals aimed at guiding masters *and* boys in how they should conduct themselves towards one another. Regarding the former, Hanway proposed that only householders be allowed to work in the trade, that no master employ more than four climbing boys at a time, that no boy under eight be

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<sup>64</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 106, clause 1.

<sup>65</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 108, clause 6.



bound to the trade, and that no boy under fourteen be let out to others. These proposals stemmed from Hanway's belief that the 'inmate' sweeps were the ones that took on too many apprentices, lacked the resources (financially and mentally) to provide adequate care, and could not be monitored effectively due to 'the ease by which they change their residence'.<sup>66</sup> But they can also be interpreted as a gesture to the 'respectable' master sweeps. As we saw in chapter 1, these masters were concerned about this same underclass of sweeps, as expressed in their trade cards, for the irregular competition they posed and the damage they did to the trade's reputation.<sup>67</sup>

To improve the standards of treatment that masters bestowed upon apprentices, Hanway enclosed an indenture form with his letters.<sup>68</sup> It covered all the areas that could normally be found in apprenticeship contracts, for most trades, throughout the eighteenth century: the boy was to stay with his master, follow his orders and stay away from mischief; in return, the master taught him the skills of the trade and took care of his food, dress, shelter, cleanliness and religious instruction. But Hanway was very detailed in his prescriptions. For food: 'three wholesome meals every day, one of which to be of sweet sound meat, with small beer, and in sufficient quantity'. For dress: 'from the nature of the business [...] it is requisite for the boys employed in climbing, to have a dress particularly

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<sup>66</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 109.

<sup>67</sup> See section 1.2.

<sup>68</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, appendix: 'The indenture proposed', pp. 126-27.

suites to that purpose' and apart from this, 'two whole and complete suits of clothing, with suitable linen, stockings and shoes, one to be worn on the week days, at such times of the day as the said apprentice shall not be employed in his business; and the other on Sabbath-day'. For lodging: 'a bed and bedstead, with good whole blankets, and such other beddings as is necessary for rest and the preservation of health'. For personal hygiene: 'to be thoroughly washed and cleansed from soot and dirt upon his daily return from work'. For religious instruction: '[the master] shall attend at the public worship of God constantly, twice every Sabbath-day; and shall teach his said apprentice, or cause or procure him to be taught, the Lord's prayer, the Belief, the Ten Commandments, and such further knowledge as may enable him to understand and practice the duties of a Christian in his station'. Note the meticulous detail of Hanway's instructions, and note the explicit links he drew with the boy's health in several of these.

Neither should surprise us if we consider his diagnosis of the problems facing climbing boys. Unlike in earlier communications, Hanway's 1785 letters to the *Public Advertiser* included a detailed assessment of the structure of the trade and the impact of doing this work from a young age on the children's physical and mental development. One letter deals with the case of a 12-year old boy, stunted in growth, limbs deformed, his eyesight impaired.<sup>69</sup> At the end of his apprenticeship, the boy was too infirm for a second term, had no prospect of a career in this trade, or any other

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<sup>69</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, letter 14, 'Description of a particular boy, bcome (sic) a cripple by sweeping chimnies', pp. 77-81.

for that matter, and was handed over to the care of the parish. In other letters, Hanway wrote at length about the lung disorders, cancers and bladder infections that haunted apprentices and former apprentices in the trade.<sup>70</sup> These descriptions will be examined in detail in chapters 6 and 7. But here it is important to note the limited degree to which Hanway relied on the testimonies of medical practitioners. Occasionally, he did refer to the 'opinion of medical men'.<sup>71</sup> But compared with contemporary campaigns regarding child labour in textile factories, which Manchester medical practitioners initiated and dominated, the absence of medics in climbing boy relief before 1788 is notable.<sup>72</sup>

Hanway's preferences seem to have been a major factor. James Stephen Taylor has argued that one of the criteria for Hanway to get involved in a cause was that it 'required leaders with no special medical or pedagogical skills'.<sup>73</sup> For example, the Dispensary for the Infant Poor, founded in 1769 at Red Lion Square, was 'as close to Hanway's ideals as it was to his door'; but it was a 'medical charity' and manned by a capable physician, George Armstrong. Yet, it does not seem that Hanway deliberately avoided medical practitioners to get involved in climbing boy relief. When receiving a letter about cases of climbing boy abuse from a

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<sup>70</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, letter 14, pp. 77-81.

<sup>71</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, letter 4, pp. 27-29.

<sup>72</sup> Joanna Innes, 'Origins of the Factory Acts: The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act 1802', in Norma Landau (ed.), *Law, Crime, and English Society, 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 230-55; Joanna Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour in Britain, 1783-1819' (Forthcoming).

<sup>73</sup> Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, pp. 126-27.

certain Mr. Renwick in response to his letters in the *Public Advertiser*, Hanway wrote:<sup>74</sup>

I understand that you are in the medical line; your remark on the cruelty which you have seen, respecting a poor boy's wounds, carries with it the more force: it must shudder every being that wears in his breast the heart of a *man*; and I trust will have its weight in obtaining the public regulations we are now seeking for.

## 2.5 Sweeps and Non-Sweeps Joining Hands, 1792-1800

Although most of Hanway's proposals were included in legislation enacted in 1788, the Act failed to bring the desired improvement. David Porter wrote a damning report and made proposals for further reform, published in 1792 as *Considerations upon the Present State of Chimney Sweepers*. Three things stand out in his assessment: he blamed the lack of improvement firmly on the Act's failure to prohibit the work of itinerant sweeps; he based this judgment on a detailed study of the trade's financial performance; and he concluded that better conditions could only be accomplished when sweeps and non-sweeps joined hands. These characteristics deserve our close attention because they highlight that Porter moved beyond Hanway's approach to reform, that his approach was influenced by other members of the 1788 Committee, and that it led the way to broader transitions in the aims and structure of philanthropy.

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<sup>74</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 133-34.

Porter criticised the itinerant sweeps for failing to fulfil the 'very good clauses' of the Act (regarding dress, diet, bedding, cleanliness and instruction) and for forcing their boys to cry the street for work ('the root of all the misery the boy suffers').<sup>75</sup> But he blamed the legislature for enacting legislation unable to prosecute such neglect. Although the Act obliged masters to engrave their names in their apprentices' hats, it was a futile measure when dealing with those without a fixed abode.<sup>76</sup>

unfortunately it is often the name of a person who may be found one day at the west end of town, the next day at the east end, a third day in the country: the penalties of the act can very little affect a person who is seldom two days together in the same jurisdiction.

Foreseeing this problem, Porter and other members of the 1788 Committee had extended Hanway's proposals by suggesting that 'no person, not being a housekeeper, paying scot and lot, where he or she may live, shall take an apprentice'.<sup>77</sup> But the House of Lords removed the clause, fearing it would have allowed wealthy masters to monopolise the trade.<sup>78</sup> Porter denounced the decision and insisted that comparable measures should be introduced after all. His insistence that reform should not target sweeps indiscriminately but focus on the itinerant sections of the trade was crucial. It was this principle that would dominate the contributions of other masters when they finally joined the campaigns after 1800.

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<sup>75</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, p. 28.

<sup>76</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>77</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>78</sup> The particulars are examined in 4.1.

Even more significant than identifying the itinerant sweeps as targets for regulation was the evidence that Porter presented in support of his claims. He had provided rough estimates of the total revenues generated by chimney sweeping and the average earnings of London sweeps for Hanway's *Sentimental History* (1785). But he now provided a much more detailed breakdown of the financial structure of the trade. About ten percent of London sweeps (twenty out of a total of two hundred) carried out twenty percent of all work and took twenty-five percent of all revenues; the remaining ninety percent competed for the worst-paid jobs and struggled to find regular employment.<sup>79</sup> By banning itinerant sweeps and reserving the trade to those 'bred to it' (including the widows and children of former sweeps) a much more positive equilibrium could be reached.

Porter's detailed investigations attracted the interest of Thomas Bernard, Shute Barrington (the Bishop of Durham), William Wilberforce and others who had subscribed to the 1788 Committee. This mattered both for the future of climbing boy reform *and* for the direction of voluntary relief in general.

It mattered for the former because the campaign became closely associated with the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor, which these men founded in 1797. Between 1797 and 1799 the Bettering Society

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<sup>79</sup> He had provided rough estimates of the total revenues generated by chimney sweeping and the average earnings of London sweeps for Hanway's *Sentimental History*, but without providing any detail on how revenues were distributed within the trade. Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 88-90.

paid regular attention to climbing boy relief in its *Reports* – first to Porter’s *Considerations*, then to initiatives in other parts of the country to dress and instruct climbing boys. In April 1800, Porter, Bernard, Barrington and Wilberforce founded the Society for the Protection and Instruction of Chimney Sweepers Apprentices (SPICSA). In chapter 1 we saw that there was considerable overlap in membership to both societies. But the influence of the Bettering Society is also clearly visible in the structure of the SPICSA. It was run jointly by sweeps and non-sweeps, in line with the Bettering Society’s principle to facilitate self-help rather than to impose regulation or relief.

However, this principle itself was partly the result of Porter’s *Considerations*. Donna Andrew and Michael Roberts have characterised philanthropy in the 1790s by the increasing interest shown by philanthropists in the actual conditions of those targeted by their relief – desirous to identify deserving recipients and to shift the function of charity to facilitating self-help.<sup>80</sup> They pointed to the exemplary function of the Spitalfield Soup Society, set up by Barrington, Wilberforce and others for the relief of unemployed Spitalfield weavers in 1797. Andrew and Roberts suggested that this Soup charity served as a stepping stone for the Bettering Society. But it appears that Porter’s detailed investigation of the conditions of chimney sweeps was, in fact, an earlier precedent.

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<sup>80</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, chapter 6; Michael J.D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapter 1.

This highlights both the important impact on climbing boy reform of the changes in composition from the 1773 and 1788 Committees *and* the continued significance of climbing boy reform for broader transitions in philanthropic practice. The involvement of philanthropists at the heart of a new generation of reform societies – anti-slavery, Sunday School, Proclamation, Bettering – left its mark on relief undertaken for climbing boys. But their involvement also meant that this campaign was partly used as a model for new approaches to philanthropy, law making and administration. It is this interplay that will be at the core of chapters 3-5.

## Conclusions

Taylor argued that Hanway's initiatives for climbing boys failed because they were rooted solely in sentiment and were unconnected to other charity pursued by Hanway and other merchant philanthropists at the time. This chapter has shown that Hanway and others did pursue this cause as part of broader reforms. The lack of response was due to the novel issues addressed and unprecedented strategies adopted through this cause. Furthermore, despite the lack of immediate results, we should not ignore the long-term effects of this campaign, both on the conditions of climbing boys and on the structure of reform.

Hanway first drew attention to the hardships of climbing boys alongside initiatives to improve the nurturing of children of similar age in the Foundling Hospital. The popularity of medical treatises and instruction



manuals on preserving the health of infants and young children indicate that it was a topic that appealed to contemporaries. But Hanway's specific interest in the impact of work on children's health was novel and his emphasis on the harmfulness of chimney sweeping for apprentices thus employed was at odds with his overall message that employing children from a young age benefited their physical and mental development. Hanway's sentimental attitude to the toils of labouring children was not shared by contemporaries – a factor singled out by Taylor. But the lack of sensitivity stemmed partly from the fact that these children were sweeps. Satirical representations of bickering masters remind us that sweeps featured prominently in public imagination, as objects of laughter or symbols of public disruption, but were not associated with inhumanity or child exploitation.

The fact that the founding of the 1773 Committee coincided with shifts in Hanway's approach to charity did not help matters. His growing disillusion with the ability of philanthropy to fix specific abuses led him to draw attention to the underlying causes of ill-health, poverty, crime and immorality. From his *Defects of the Police* (1775), addressed to 'bishops, legislators, magistrates, overseers of the poor, governors of charities, particularly of Bridewell-Hospital, and other officers concerned in the police of England, and the people who are interested to support it', it is clear that he wished to bring together a variety of reform parties behind a shared agenda. However, instead of prioritising issues and setting out clear

strategies that should underpin all initiatives, his *Defects* outlined a variety of causes that required redress – branded loosely as ‘police’.

His subsequent climbing boy writings show that he continued to see for this cause a crucial role within this broad scheme, in awakening the necessary spirit in these ‘police’ parties. It also appears that he wished to come to a clearer division of labour between these parties. Magistrates should flag up issues and appeal to parliament where statutes were required; the legislature should be left to deal with the details of law-making; and voluntary associations should focus on arousing the necessary willpower in all parties *and* encourage those targeted by relief and regulation to participate in their own reform. His repeated attempts to organise master sweeps in friendly societies highlight this last desire.

Hanway’s exertions for the ‘police’, including towards the relief of climbing boys, had little immediate impact. But many of its underlying principles inspired a new generation of activists to initiate a broad programme of moral reform after Hanway’s death. Leading members of this movement, including Barrington, Bernard and Wilberforce, had worked with Hanway in climbing boy relief or rejuvenated the cause on his behalf in 1788. This shows the importance of this campaign for long-term shifts in the structure of charity. Clearly, Taylor’s assessment that climbing boy reform was Hanway’s ‘least successful effort’ was too short-sighted.



## CHAPTER 3

### PRACTICES OF PHILANTHROPY IN THE CLIMBING BOY CAMPAIGNS, c. 1803-40

The number of voluntary associations increased sharply in Britain around 1800.<sup>1</sup> Similarities in organisational structure and overlap in membership have led historians to investigate their expansion as somewhat coherent. They have focused on ideological (changing religious, class and gender solidarities) or structural factors (changing dynamics between voluntary, state and church agencies in welfare provision).<sup>2</sup> Geography has only been considered in the context of voluntary associations promoting national integration.<sup>3</sup> However, reform movements were often geographically dynamic. Joshua Civin has demonstrated the significance of Anglo-

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Roberts estimated that, by 1803, there were over 10,000 voluntary associations with over 700,000 members in England alone. Michael J.D. Roberts, 'Head Versus Heart? Voluntary Associations and Charity Organization in England, c. 1700-1850', in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: From the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> For the former: Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (Paperback edn., London and New York: Routledge, 1995). For the latter: Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: From the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998); Michael J.D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised edn., London and New York: Verso, 2006). First edition, 1983; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (Paperback edn., London: Pimlico, 2003). First edition, 1992.

American connections for abolitionism in both countries. American and British activists supported each other in local, national and international activities.<sup>4</sup> Transnational contacts were not restricted to causes with an obvious international dimension either. Abolitionists and radical advocates of democratic reform in Britain worked together, fostering contacts with sympathisers elsewhere and integrating both causes in a multiethnic struggle against oppression world-wide.<sup>5</sup> Yet alliances were fragile and geography caused dispute. British radicals soon redeemed abolitionist efforts, as relief for colonial slaves was seen to undermine the urgency of reform at home.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the failure to win transatlantic support by one abolitionist movement could undermine its reputation at home and abroad – particularly if support was gained by rival factions.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of human behaviour as the product of complex networks of exchange is well-established in other areas of historical research, notably in studies of science and technology.<sup>8</sup> Natasha Glaisyer argued for

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<sup>4</sup> Joshua Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National and Global Levels', *Online Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, 25-28 October 2001* (22 September 2009), '<http://www.yale.edu/glc/conference/civin.pdf>' (14 August 2010).

<sup>5</sup> David Featherstone, 'The Spatial Politics of the Past Unbound: Transnational Networks and the Making of Political Identities', *Global Networks*, 7 (2007), pp. 443-44.

<sup>6</sup> Abolitionists removed sympathetic radicals from their lists of subscribers to disassociate their 'moral' efforts from (what was increasingly viewed in Britain as) 'seditious' political reform. Featherstone, 'The Spatial Politics of the Past Unbound', p. 445.

<sup>7</sup> Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery', pp. 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

its introduction in the study of empire.<sup>9</sup> This chapter, like Civin's work, introduces the study of political activism into the approach. At first sight, multifaceted, transnational networks seem to have little bearing on climbing boy activism. Activities were partly national (legislation), but essentially aimed at household level (promoting mechanical sweeping among sweeps and householders). However, as noted in the introduction, the campaign grew and spread geographically after 1800, so that by 1809 exertions were made in six places, by 1828 in thirty, and by 1831 in over 150 places across Britain and Ireland [maps 1, 2 and 3]. Many campaigners realised that they were part of a wider network and contributed simultaneously to campaigns with scope beyond Britain (particularly anti-slavery and missionary societies). To understand why the movement grew and why relief evolved in certain directions, we must consider the interplay between places, levels of engagement, and this and other campaigns.

London was home to national climbing boy relief societies and was closest to centres of power. However, this chapter focuses on 'middle ground' activism – individuals and groups who switched between local agitation, inter-regional collaboration and national lobbying.<sup>10</sup> Bristol,

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<sup>9</sup> Glaisyer proposed that, rather than a bilateral interchange between centre and periphery, empires are better understood as multilateral webs of goods, trust and information. Natasha Glaisyer, 'Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire', *The Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), 451-76. See also: Maxine Berg, 'In Pursuit of Luxury: Global Origins of British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 182 (2004), 85-142; Harold Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> The concept was derived from: Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery', p. 2. It describes the multi-layered activities of climbing boy campaigners better than the more conventional 'grass roots activism'.

Derby, Liverpool and Sheffield were dynamical seedbeds of activism and will be used as case studies. 3.1 and 3.2 explore the founding of auxiliary societies and fund-raising strategies.<sup>11</sup> 3.3 and 3.4 examine the promotion of mechanical sweeping and the distribution of information by SSNCBs and master sweep societies. 3.5 considers how they used petitioning to advance non-parliamentary objectives.

### 3.1 Initiating Relief, 1803-1840

The SSNCB, founded in 1803, was a watershed in the campaign in terms of goals, means and geographical scale. Earlier initiatives had focused on improving conditions for metropolitan climbing boys by getting master sweeps to regulate themselves; now the emphasis shifted to imposing the use of mechanical alternatives across the country in partnership with observant householders. Non-spatial factors helped these transitions. The introduction of more effective 'machines' in 1805 and 1828 (with brush constructions that could be manoeuvred through twisting flues from bottom to top) furthered the prospect of working without boys.<sup>12</sup> Other humanitarian campaigns (notably for better treatment of child workers in

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout the chapter, 'auxiliary society' and 'branch' are used for referring to provincial SSNCBs. This highlights that, despite varying degrees of dependence on the London SSNCB, all recognised the special position of that society in coordinating activities.

<sup>12</sup> George Smart was awarded the golden medal for his design in 1805 by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. The SSNCB rewarded him another £50. '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4. See Bibliography for full title. In 1828, Joseph Glass produced a much improved design, based on Smart's machine. *Practical Information Presented to the Public by the Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys; with a Description of Glass's Improved Machinery for Cleansing Chimneys, and a List of Subscribers* (London, 1828), pp. 14-15.

textile mills in 1802 and 1816-1819) reinforced interest in the toils of children.<sup>13</sup> In addition, positive experiences in other causes encouraged new groups of activists to join the campaign (middle-class women had established female anti-slavery societies during the mid-1820s).<sup>14</sup> All of these episodes contributed to the drastic increases in the number of SSNCBs. To understand why new auxiliaries were founded in particular places at particular times and why tactics shifted over time, *spatial* factors need to be considered.

A first spatial factor was the conscious effort by the London SSNCB to expand activity beyond the capital. Having equipped local sweeps with suitable machines since 1803, the Committee sent several devices to Birmingham and Worcester in 1805.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in 1807 sympathisers in Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield agreed to distribute handbills received from London listing the penalties for 'neglect or ill-treatment of apprentices'.<sup>16</sup> These initiatives were part of a deliberate attempt to instigate a national campaign. The Committee was hopeful 'that their example will be followed in the other considerable cities throughout the

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<sup>13</sup> Joanna Innes, 'Origins of the Factory Acts: The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act 1802', in Norma Landau (ed.), *Law, Crime, and English Society, 1660-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 230-55; Joanna Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour in Britain, 1783-1819' (Forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Midgley, *Women against Slavery*.

<sup>15</sup> '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> '1808 Sixth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 4-5. See Bibliography for full title.



Kingdom', and set as its main objective 'the abolition of a cruel practice, the peculiar disgrace of England'.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, nationalisation was hampered by the Committee's struggle to attract *local* subscribers.<sup>18</sup> In 1811, the Committee could no longer afford to send machines to the provinces at half price, and this clearly affected the growth of the movement. The number of provincial branches stabilised at five, until 1817, when parliamentary initiatives generated new publicity for the cause.<sup>19</sup> In the meantime, the London SSNCB continued to act as the 'rallying point' by publicising cases of climbing boy suffering from across the country, reporting on initiatives for promoting mechanical sweeping in London *and* elsewhere, and printing template statutes for potential branches.<sup>20</sup> These initiatives generated valuable evidence for communications to parliament highlighting the need for national regulations,<sup>21</sup> but also inspired local initiatives in additional places.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> '1808 Sixth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> 3.2 examines this issue in greater depth.

<sup>19</sup> By 1811, SSNCB branches had been formed in Walthamstow, Birmingham, Bristol, Sheffield, and Worcester. Between June 1817 and July 1819, the Commons and Lords received petitions from forty-seven towns, boroughs and parishes.

<sup>20</sup> From 1805, the London SSNCB included regular updates of activities outside the metropolis in its Annual Reports.

<sup>21</sup> London SSNCB treasurer, William Tooke, presented twenty reports of accidents and abuse of climbing boys from across Britain to the 1817 Commons Committee. '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 34-41. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>22</sup> Between 1817 and 1819, SSNCBs were formed in Leeds, Newcastle and Stockton upon Tees. During the same years, the two houses of parliament combined received petitions from forty-seven towns, boroughs and parishes.

For the London Committee to fulfil such a coordinating role, it relied on the receptiveness of provincial activists to its initiatives – a second spatial factor. At its founding in May 1807, the Sheffield SSNCB resolved that the condition of climbing boys was ‘truly lamentable’ and should be improved by both ‘enforcing the Act of Parliament’<sup>23</sup> and promoting the use of machines in Sheffield. Their resolutions echoed messages in London pamphlets, in language and in its combination of local and national orientation.<sup>24</sup> The Sheffield campaigners were inspired by activities in the metropolis: they marked the launch of their campaign by publishing a poem, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’s Boy’, based on the case of an abused London apprentice (narrated in a previous London SSNCB pamphlet), and ‘humbly dedicated’ it to the London Committee.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, they ordered machines from the Committee and requested instructions regarding their use.<sup>26</sup>

As the first auxiliary society, it made sense for the Sheffield SSNCB to look to London. But even after the network had grown, and alternative assistance was closer at hand, new branches often turned to the London

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<sup>23</sup> 28th, George III, Chapter 48, *An Act for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers, and Their Apprentices*, 1788.

<sup>24</sup> For example, in 1805 the London Committee set as its aim, ‘abolishing a practice so distressing to every feeling of humanity’. ‘1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report’, p. 6. Both the 1804 and 1805 Annual Reports described in detail the Committee’s parliamentary exertions. ‘1804 Second London SSNCB Annual Report’, p. 8. See Bibliography for full title; ‘1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report’, pp. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> *The Iris, or The Sheffield Advertiser*, 11 August 1807. The London SSNCB reported that the poem was ‘founded on the interesting fact narrated in the appendix to our fourth report [1806], and is preceded by a well written preface, breathing the pure dictates of unaffected humanity’. ‘1808 Sixth London SSNCB Annual Report’, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *The Iris, or The Sheffield Advertiser*, 11 August 1807.

Committee for advice. Wishing to establish an SSNCB in Derby, Edward Trafford corresponded extensively with the London secretary, Robert Steven, seeking advice about the structure of his Committee and the best way to establish mechanical agents in the town.<sup>27</sup>

Other campaigns had similarly influential 'parent' societies. Although London was a convenient location, attracting visitors and temporary residents from across the kingdom and beyond, not all campaigns had their central hub in the capital. The Female Society for Birmingham coordinated the founding of ladies anti-slavery associations and the (male-dominated) London Anti-Slavery Society saw its mediating role matched by a powerful Liverpool counterpart.<sup>28</sup> Some provincial activists were similarly involved in the launch of new SSNCBs. They sensed they were part of a wider network and had duties to promote the cause beyond their immediate neighbourhood. Apart from lobbying parliament for national statutes, they advised sympathisers in other localities on how to initiate relief.

The Reverend John Hunter from Leamington wrote to the London secretary to report on how a limited, one-off subscription had generated sufficient funds to set up a mechanical sweep in his town. 'I mention these particulars, as they may be of use to any individual anxious to introduce Mechanical Chimney Sweeping in a place, where obstacle may exist to the

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<sup>27</sup> *A Series of Letters on the Subject of Chimney Sweeping; Published with a View to the Organization, on Safe Principles, of Societies for Superseding the Use of Climbing Boys* (Derby, 1838).

<sup>28</sup> Cavin, 'The Revival of Antislavery'; Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, pp. 44-47.

formation of an Association...'<sup>29</sup> The Liverpool Ladies' Society drew upon the experiences of existing auxiliaries, filling their first report with 'testimonies' of the advancement of mechanical sweeping elsewhere. But its own statutes, which were publicised by the London Committee, in turn served as a template for subsequent branches.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Edward Trafford structured the Derby SSNCB based on advice received from the London secretary, and later passed on the intelligence to sympathisers in neighbouring towns and villages.<sup>31</sup>

Derby is also an interesting case because it highlights that, whether the London Committee or an existing auxiliary offered a helping hand, new branches were seldom established without *local* incentive. In May 1838, the suffocation of a Derby boy spurred residents into action.<sup>32</sup>

[A] meeting was called in consequence of the sad death of a chimney sweep, a boy 11 years of age, by suffocation, which occurred on Friday last in the Siddals Lane, the particulars of which are briefly related [...] in this page of our paper.

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<sup>29</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 15. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>30</sup> From 1830 onwards, the London SSNCB printed the Liverpool Female Society statutes as 'Proposed rules for Local Associations'. See e.g.: '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 18. See Bibliography for full title; '1836 Twentieth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 11. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>31</sup> Within months of founding of his Committee, Trafford reported enthusiastically of the spread of machines to nearby Shardlow and 'proposed to establish other Agents in other parts of the county and to furnish them by subscription with the necessary apparatus for sweeping chimneys in the several districts around Chesterfield, Ashbourne, Wirksworth, Belper, Bakewell and Melbourne.' *The Derby Mercury*, 14 November 1838. Trafford mentored his Nottingham counterpart, Samuel Fox – advising him on how to select reliable agents, keep track of their progress, and win over housekeepers for mechanical sweeping. Correspondence between Edward Trafford and London SSNCB secretary, Robert Steven was simultaneously published for Derby and Nottingham, the latter edition with a Nottingham preface and postscript. *A Series of Letters on the Subject of Chimney Sweeping*. More on their correspondence in 3.3 and 3.4.

<sup>32</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, 23 May 1838.

They raised a subscription and established mechanical agents in the town within weeks of the accident. The determination and success of their appeal contrast sharply with earlier initiatives. When the editor of the *Derby Mercury* established a fund for the relief climbing boys in 1824, in response to promotional literature from Sheffield, only a few donations were made.<sup>33</sup> Three years later, an anonymous correspondent tried to re-launch the appeal, on the back of the founding of a local charity school, but had equally little success.<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere, local incidents similarly transformed latent concern into determined action. In Hereford residents had been 'warmly interested' in the activities of the London SSNCSB, but it was the death of a local boy that provided the moral imperative to act:<sup>35</sup>

A circumstance has just occurred in this city which has given an impetus to our exertions, and which would render it criminal in us to delay any longer making a vigorous effort to obtain the introduction of Machinery, and to abolish the cruel and dangerous means at present employed.

Unlike the anti-slavery movement, this campaign relied on distress *within* the community to spark activity.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, in spite of the London

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<sup>33</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, 25 August 1824. *The Derby Mercury* printed extracts from James Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing-Boy's Album* (Sheffield and London, 1824).

<sup>34</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, 28 February 1827.

<sup>35</sup> The Town Clerk, who conducted the proceedings for the coroner, used the inquest to call for the founding of an SSNCB – a suggestion that was taken up by several 'respectable gentlemen'. '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 16. Similar circumstances triggered the forming of SSNCBs in Southampton (*The Times*, 20 November 1817); and Aylsham ('1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 20).

<sup>36</sup> Although different localities arguably had varying economic interests in the continuation of slavery, the incentive to act originated in disgust over a practice in distant parts of the empire, equally far to all. The boycott of West-Indian sugar and other slave-produced goods could be seen as an attempt to literally bring the campaign 'home', to reduce it to the behaviour of individual households.

Committee's efforts to nationalise the campaign, auxiliaries struggled to draw together wide support unless there was a local impetus to action.

This was clearly the case for the Bristol SSNCB. Its initiators launched their campaign in 1817 through a series of handbills, with reports of climbing boy suffering extracted from a pamphlet printed in York.<sup>37</sup> Five master sweeps from Bristol published an angry reply.<sup>38</sup> They expressed their aversion to the contents of the York pamphlet, but explained that this:<sup>39</sup>

would scarcely have tempted [us] to assume the rank of authorship, but for the unwarranted application and unqualified application of those "Facts" to the character of Masters, and the condition of Boys, in this city.

Their primary concern was thus to demonstrate that the accusations did not apply in Bristol. Following the structure of the York piece, they countered each and every allegation with local evidence.<sup>40</sup> This highlights both the value attributed to local reputation as well as how initiatives in one place could inspire activism further afield. The York pamphlet was largely composed of documents by other SSNCBs, including a poem from

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<sup>37</sup> Anne Alexander, *Facts Relative to Climbing Boys* (York, 1817).

<sup>38</sup> William Head and others, *An Appeal to the Public, by the Master Chimney-Sweepers Residing in the City of Bristol, against the Erroneous Application to Their Practice and Character, of the Matter Contained in a Pamphlet Entitled Facts Relative to the State of Children Employed as Climbing-Boys, &c. Published to Recommend the Exclusive Use of Machines. With a Plate, Descriptive of the Various Constructions of Chimneys in Which No Machine Can Operate* (Bristol, 1817).

<sup>39</sup> The master sweeps announced their publication in the local press. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 28 June 1817.

<sup>40</sup> They faithfully addressed the subject headings of a letter by a London medic, reprinted in the York pamphlet: 'distortions of the spine, legs, arms &c.', 'sore eyes and eye-lids', 'sores', 'cancer', 'lodging', 'force', 'stunted growth', 'short life', 'crime/immorality', 'accidents', 'clothing', 'diet', 'hours of business'.

Sheffield and a letter by a surgeon from London.<sup>41</sup> It was this letter, depicting the 'diseases, accidents, &c. incidental to chimney-sweepers', that angered the Bristol masters most. Although the exact origins of the letter were of little concern to the sweeps (other than that it did *not* stem from Bristol), it is clear that without the preliminary initiative of the London Committee, the mediating role of the York Society and the receptiveness of the Bristol SSNCB, their attention would not have been drawn to the cause.

The response of the Bristol masters was typical of how sweeps in general entered the debate about the conditions of climbing boys and made proposals to improve their treatment. Not as spontaneous protagonists, but reacting to initiatives by the SSNCB. In the summer of 1816, around fifty metropolitan sweeps had gathered, alarmed by public meetings held by the London SSNCB. The masters established a rival society to campaign for the better treatment of climbing boys but not the prohibition of their work. They proposed to found similar committees in other parts of the country.<sup>42</sup> Yet, when legislative initiatives by the SSNCB failed, nothing came of their plans. It was only in 1825, in response to renewed exertions by the London SSNCB that the sweeps formed a new

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<sup>41</sup> The poem 'The Chimney Sweeper's Boy' had previously appeared in: Samuel Roberts, *Tales of the Poor, or, Infant Sufferings* (2nd edn., Sheffield and London, 1813). The surgeon's letter had appeared in '1816 Report of Public Meeting', pp. 7-9. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>42</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', appendix 1, pp. 50-51.

society, the USMCS. A similar responsive attitude can also be found among their colleagues elsewhere, notably in Derby and Liverpool.<sup>43</sup>

Not only was the timing of the sweeps' involvement responsive, the nature of their initiatives was too. All their fraternities, both in structure and in aims, closely followed the plans that had been set out by Hanway in 1785 and brought into practice by the SPICSA in 1800.<sup>44</sup> Membership was restricted to sweeps who were rate-paying householders; subscriptions were raised for prosecuting negligent colleagues and supporting former apprentices in setting-up as masters in this or another trade; and parliamentary lobbying was directed at restricting the number of apprentices and barring 'itinerant' sweeps from the trade. Even in the banquets that they hosted to draw attention to their initiatives, the sweeps built upon traditions introduced *before* the SSNCB.<sup>45</sup> This is not to say that

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<sup>43</sup> Liverpool master sweep John Whitehead published an angry reply to the first Annual Report of the local SSNCB. He accused the Ladies Association of exaggerating the suffering of climbing boys in his town, stressed that local masters used machines 'as far as it is practical', and proposed to establish a rival society 'for improving the condition of sweeps, bodily and mental'. *Liverpool Mercury*, 26 June 1829. Sweeps at Derby, although never formally organised in a fraternity, challenged the agent of the local SSNCB to a series of trials of climbing boy vs. mechanical sweeping. *The Experiment; a Tale of Truth, Designed to Promote the Emancipation of Climbing Boys* (Derby, 1838).

<sup>44</sup> For Hanway's proposals: Jonas Hanway, *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers in London & Westminster* (London, 1785), pp. 106-14. For SPICSA's resolutions see: *The Times*, 16 April 1800; David Porter, *Considerations Upon the Present State of Chimney Sweepers* (2nd edn., London, 1801), pp. 66-67.

<sup>45</sup> The master sweeps marked the first anniversary of the USMCS in 1826, with a banquet on May Day for over 200 metropolitan climbing boys – a recurrent practice in following years. The handbill announcing the first dinner was reprinted as 'No May Day Sweeps', in William Hone (ed.), *The Every-Day Book, or, the Guide to the Year* (2 vols, London, 1826), vol. 2, 617-20. See also: *The Times*, 3 May 1828. Elizabeth Montagu is credited with hosting the first banquet for climbing boys during the early 1790s. Her nephew (and adopted son) Matthew Montagu kept the tradition alive for many years after her death in 1800. Benita Cullingford, *British Chimney Sweepers: Five Centuries of Chimney Sweeping* (Lewes: Book Guild, 2000), pp. 136-38. The Sheffield SSNCB introduced the tradition in their town during the 1810s. *The Iris, or The Sheffield Advertiser*, 8 April 1817.



they were not committed to their cause (improving conditions in the trade, without doing away with climbing boys) or backwards in a negative sense. Indeed, as will be shown in chapters 4 and 5, to many contemporaries their 'dated' tactics appealed more than the groundbreaking plans of the SSNCB (banning child labour from the trade).

### 3.2 Seeking Funds, 1803-1840

Chapter 1 noted that the London SSNCB could rely on a small core of dedicated subscribers. It seems that most of them were Londoners. At least fifty-seven of its original members, and probably many more, also opened their homes for the earliest trials with mechanical sweeping in the metropolis.<sup>46</sup> Public meetings held in the capital were an important source of fundraising.<sup>47</sup> Yet such local sources did not generate sufficient support. The Committee repeatedly ran short of funds, resulting in a downscaling of activity and desperate appeals for financial assistance. In 1811 the London directors announced in their annual address:<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Mechanical Chimney Sweeping, by Robert Smart, No. 15 Bell-Alley, Coleman Street* (London, 1805), found in: BM, Department of Prints and Drawings, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.26. The handbill lists the 119 properties whose chimneys were swept mechanically between September 1805 and May 1806 by Robert Smart, brother of George Smart, the machine designer.

<sup>47</sup> For example, at the public meeting at Mansion House, on 12 June 1816, the London SSNCB called upon all present for donations: 'it is hoped, that those benevolent persons who have hitherto afforded the Society their support, will continue their benefactions; and that others to whom it has as yet been unknown, will contribute to an Institution, which has for its objective the abolition of a custom, that, to use the language of a respected character [Lord Byron, red], "is a disgrace to tolerate in a Christian and civilized country".' '1816 Report of Public Meeting', pp. 15-16.

<sup>48</sup> '1811 Ninth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 3. See Bibliography for full title.

having from having from time to time [...] alluded to a progressive decrease of the Funds of the Society, [your Committee] are at length reduced to the necessity of stating their being nearly exhausted, notwithstanding the scale of expenditure has been reduced within the narrowest compass, and the Institution is continued principally with a view of forming a rallying point, to which might be addressed, applications for information as to the mechanical method, and also complaints of misconduct of masters towards the climbing boys, or of accidents occurring to them, as long as that inhuman practice should be persisted in.

Similar statements can be found in later reports (1821, 1829 and 1839). The detailed records that are available for the later years (1827-1839) highlight that downturns were closely connected to drops in donations and subscriptions, which comprised around ninety percent of the Society's revenues.<sup>49</sup> Contributions fluctuated from around £220 in the years 1829, 1830 and 1835 to less than £100 in 1833, 1834, 1836 and 1839. As they constituted the lion's share of income, and because the Committee only kept a balance of around £30, the amounts received from donors and subscribers strongly determined its spending power.

Yet, apart from spells of exceptional spending at times of parliamentary activity,<sup>50</sup> the Committee's core activities required consistent and considerable funds to equip local masters with machines; pay manufacturers for building and distributing devices across the country; and cover the expenses of promotional literature. The London Committee hired a 'collector' to increase the number of regular subscribers, but with little effect. In its 1829 Address, it thanked 'a small but distinguished body

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<sup>49</sup> Earlier Annual Reports *did* include overviews of donations and subscriptions, but *no* breakdown of total revenues and expenses.

<sup>50</sup> To pay for the introduction of Private Bills in parliament and cover associated costs.

of subscribers', but regretted, 'that after the first spontaneous burst of feeling and liberality on the part of the Public in 1803, the number of Contributions has been very limited'.<sup>51</sup>

The following year, the Committee called upon auxiliaries across the country to donate £2 annually.<sup>52</sup> Only twelve societies responded, mostly through one-off contributions.<sup>53</sup> Fundraising thus remained primarily a local affair. This is in sharp contrast to anti-slavery activism, where many auxiliaries (particularly ladies societies) gave generously to national organisations<sup>54</sup> and others used funds tactically to exert influence over the parent society.<sup>55</sup> Two possible explanations for this discrepancy are apparent. Provincial SSNCBs might have lacked the funds to support the London Committee – this is supported by anecdotal evidence, but impossible to test systematically due to lack of financial accounts for auxiliaries. Provincial activists might also have felt that local initiatives were more beneficial to the cause – highlighted in the variety of initiatives through which they promoted mechanical sweeping in the local

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<sup>51</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> The twelve auxiliaries that donated to the parent society were Bristol, Brixton & Stockwell, Clapham, Evesham, Hackney, Hereford, Liverpool, Newport, Pentonville, Southampton, Tottenham, and Wareham.

<sup>54</sup> Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 52.

<sup>55</sup> On several occasions, the Liverpool Anti-Slavery Society withheld contributions to the national organisation until its views were heeded or paid for the execution of its own proposals – tactics that were mirrored by auxiliaries in the USA. Cavin, 'The Revival of Antislavery', p. 3.

community.<sup>56</sup> The London Committee's support to auxiliaries for purchasing machines and producing local promotional literature at times of greater affluence confirm *its* belief in micro-activism.<sup>57</sup>

However, a closer look at the fundraising strategies of provincial SSNCBs highlights how they switched between or combined different scales of activity. For example, the Sheffield SSNCB used meetings staged for compiling a petition to parliament to solicit funds for its local initiatives. Similarly, in 1825 the Tottenham Ladies Association introduced door-to-door canvassing to the campaign. This strategy saw local activists working at micro-level, with a number of ladies taking charge of a particular district within the parish. Whilst soliciting funds for local relief and promoting their mechanical agent, they also handed out leaflets describing cases of suffering from other parts of the country, highlighting the need for national regulations.<sup>58</sup>

The latter example also highlights the interplay with other campaigns and the role of the London Committee in spreading new strategies, initiated by provincial activists. The Tottenham Ladies explained that they first thought of micro-campaigning because 'of the great

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<sup>56</sup> Examined further in 3.3.

<sup>57</sup> The London SSNCB offered machines at half-price to auxiliaries and sometimes sponsored the printing of local pamphlets. Its accounts for 1827 show that it paid the York SSNCB for printing and distributing the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of James Montgomery's *Chimney Sweeper's Friend and Climbing Boy's Album*. '1827 Twelfth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>58</sup> The Tottenham Ladies reported that 'they have also printed, and the members of the Committee have personally distributed, an Extract from Montgomery's valuable work, "The Chimney Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing Boy's Album".' '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 38. See Bibliography for full title.

advantages derived by other benevolent institutions from local exertions'.<sup>59</sup> Canvassing had indeed been practiced by missionary movements for some time and was introduced by female abolitionists around the same time.<sup>60</sup> But with its targets set on changing household behaviour, the strategy was particularly apt to climbing boy relief. The London Committee felt that this was the case, and recommended the forming of Ladies Committees and canvassing to all auxiliaries, old and new.<sup>61</sup> The initiative was soon adopted elsewhere, and furthered from auxiliary to auxiliary.<sup>62</sup> For example, Derby SSCNB secretary, Edward Trafford told his Nottingham counterpart how:<sup>63</sup>

The town has been divided into districts, and the ladies of the committee and others have been industriously employed in canvassing, soliciting subscriptions and donations, (*but not from the poor*) distributing tracts, and recommending the machines of our Agents. This has been exceedingly successful.

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<sup>59</sup> '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 38.

<sup>60</sup> Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 59.

<sup>61</sup> The London Society reprinted the first annual report of the Tottenham Association, 'in the hope that similar auxiliary societies may be established in all the principal cities and towns of the kingdom'. '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 13 and pp. 38-40. It continued to advocate canvassing as an effective method to generate subscriptions and to support the local agent. See e.g. '1839 Twenty-Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 7. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>62</sup> Similar Ladies' committees were formed and similar canvassing practices adopted in Liverpool, Manchester and Pentonville (all 1829), Belfast (1834) and Derby (1838). For Liverpool: *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children, and Proving the Practicability and Advantage of Cleaning Them by Machines* (Liverpool, 1829). For Manchester and Pentonville: '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 12-13 and pp. 15-16. For Belfast: *The Bristol Mercury*, 1 March 1834. For Derby: *A Series of Letters on the Subject of Chimney Sweeping*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>63</sup> British Library, 8288.f.85, Letter Edward Trafford to Samuel Fox, 19 September 1838. Earlier that year the Derby SSNCB announced in local papers: 'Arrangements are being made for a general canvass of the town in behalf of the Society'. *The Derby Mercury*, 27 June 1838.

Other provincial activists introduced similarly innovative fundraising tactics. As pointed out in 3.1, in Leamington, a small fund was raised to equip sweeps with machines, without forming a formal association. The initiators appealed to the London SSCNB to advertise the strategy, for use in other places 'where obstacles may exist to the formation of an Association'.<sup>64</sup> The size of Leamington was clearly a factor – smaller communities only required a few machines and could thus manage without substantial funds. But, local attitudes could be a stimulus too. Several correspondents complained to the London secretary of fierce opposition from local housekeepers, anxious that 'outsiders' working as 'mechanical agents' threw regular local sweeps out of employment.<sup>65</sup> Keeping a low profile, by not forming an auxiliary, was one strategy to avoid such resistance.

These examples highlight the differences and diffusion of organisational and financial strategies between auxiliaries. It also suggests that such variations could reflect deeper demographic and cultural differences. Apparently, solidarity with members of the community, albeit of a 'low' walk of life, was stronger in some localities than in others. Finally,

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<sup>64</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> George Smith, of the Maidstone SSNCB, wrote how his Committee had been forced to abandon their initial plan to hire a non-sweep as 'agent', because a 'strong [...] feeling also arose of commiseration with the Master Sweeps, who seemed in danger of being thrown out of employ.' '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 14. Mrs. Tarn of the Pentonville SSNCB wrote of similar difficulties encountered in obtaining subscriptions because the machines were seen as a threat to the regular sweeps: 'We have some respectable Sweeps in this part of the town who treat their boys kindly, which induces many to object to transfer their work to other hands.' '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 13.

as in the case of canvassing, the London Committee used its pamphlets to act as mediator, promoting the dispersion of strategies throughout the network, but was by no means the instigator of innovation at all times.

### **3.3 Promoting Mechanical Sweeping, 1803-1840**

The success of attempts to abolish climbing boys depended on the availability of mechanical alternatives. At first sight, the development, distribution and marketing of these machines were geographically one-sided. The London SSNCB led the search for effective devices and coordinated their spread throughout the country. It also advised auxiliaries on the use of machines and arranged instruction for provincial agents in London. In addition, it staged high-profile experiments across the metropolis that generated much attention for mechanical sweeping. However, despite London's centrality for this part of the campaign, input from elsewhere was vital.

Firstly, the reputation of machinery relied on its adoption beyond the metropolis. The London Committee kept a careful record of places that had adopted its machines, presenting it as evidence of their universal applicability.<sup>66</sup> Secondly, the majority of SSNCB branches imported devices from London, but local activists and entrepreneurs in several places developed their own machines. These initiatives had significance beyond

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<sup>66</sup> From 1828, the London SSNCB Annual Reports included lists of places where machines had been introduced. See e.g.: '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 22; '1836 Twentieth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 7.

the locality. Thirdly, the London Committee publicised guidelines on mechanical sweeping, but these were partly based on experiences outside London and adjusted to local circumstances in their execution.

The search for a suitable machine predated the founding of the SSNCB. In 1796 the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (the Royal Society of Arts from 1908) launched a national competition for 'The most simple, cheap, and proper apparatus, superior to any hitherto known or in use for cleansing chimneys from soot.'<sup>67</sup> But it was not until 1805 that the Society, in conjunction with the SSNCB, granted its first awards – London carpenter, George Smart received a golden medal and £75 for his design and another £25 'for his indefatigable zeal and attention in promoting the use of such machine'.<sup>68</sup> Smart's 'Scandiscope' consisted of a single brush-head on a series of hollow tubes (made of ash or cane) [plate 1]. It could be worked up the flue through a long cord that ran from the head through the rods. The London SSNCB purchased in 'significant quantities' the necessary ingredients for its manufacture and offered the apparatus at a discounted price to metropolitan sweeps and enthusiasts elsewhere.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> As recited in: Cullingford, *British Chimney Sweeps*, p. 161. The RSA Archive contains a letter that suggests the Society's interest in mechanical sweeping dates back at least till 1790. Royal Society of Arts Archive, PR.MC/101/10/738, Letter from Simeon Offering a Reward for Discovering a Method of Cleaning Chimneys of Soot without Employing Boys, 21 Oct 1790. My sincere thanks go out to the Honorary President, Dr David G.C. Allan, for notifying me of the existence of this letter.

<sup>68</sup> '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> The London Committee reported to have purchased 'to facilitate their manufacture and general diffusion [...] a considerable quantity of whalebone'. '1804 Second London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4. In 1827, the Committee paid over £40 to 'Mr. Smart for machines



In 1807, Smart wrote how he had 'orders to send to different parts of the kingdom my machines ready-made'.<sup>70</sup> However, his enthusiasm was tempered when unflattering reports came back. After a hopeful start, the agent at Sheffield struggled to find employ, partly because of faults in Smart's device. Rather than waiting for a response from London, the Sheffield SSNCB made adjustments themselves, reporting in 1810:<sup>71</sup>

The brush procured from Mr. Smart being found rather difficult to work, and liable to be out of order, the Committee made, and caused to be made, many experiments for the purpose of improving it. Those of which they have sent drawings [...] seem to them the most simple, the most easy to work, the most durable, and the most efficacious of any which they have tried and seen.

Crucially, by presenting their improvements to the Society of Arts, the Sheffield campaigners aimed for a geographically dispersed audience, considering it 'the most likely method of drawing attention of the public to the subject'.<sup>72</sup> William Wilberforce approached the Sheffield Society to introduce their machine in Bath, where neither the 'Scandiscope' nor a local design had brought the desired change. Interestingly, the same design that failed to make an impact locally did attract attention of designers in London. The bricklayer Joseph Glass, whose apparatus was embraced by

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supplied for the Society and for machines sent to Hastings'. '1827 Twelfth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4. For reference to machines being offered at reduced rate, see: '1808 Sixth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> 'Mechanics', *Transactions of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, Second Series, 25 (1807), p. 100.

<sup>71</sup> Samuel Roberts, 'Account of an Apparatus for Cleaning Chimneys', *Transactions of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, Second Series, 28 (1810), p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> Roberts, 'Account of an Apparatus', p. 35.

the SSNCB as superior to Smart's in 1828, modelled his 'cane machine' on the design from Bath.<sup>73</sup>

These examples illustrate how geography shaped the activities of those involved in the campaign. On the one hand, designers actively promoted the dissemination of their machines beyond the locality, and activists recognised the value of unfamiliar designs from elsewhere. As Wilberforce explained to his Sheffield counterparts, their machine might not be objectively better than the ones that previously failed, but:<sup>74</sup>

a new instrument will sometimes obtain the acceptance which is denied to an old one; besides that it will furnish some excuse to those who may not wish to adopt a machine which they have been for some time neglecting, as this would be a virtual confession of a fault.

On the other hand, designers looked beyond their locality for creative inspiration, and activists were happy to adopt machines whose worth had been proven elsewhere. This latter point is particularly evident in the rapid dissemination of Glass's machine after 1828.

The London Committee played a vital part in its spread. It paid Glass advances to 'carry on the extensive manufacture of [his] machines' and presented evidence from across the country to demonstrate its superiority

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<sup>73</sup> 'A machine has been made at Bath, somewhat on the same principle: the joints or portions, made of several slight canes twisted together, are, however, fastened by a small iron screw, which has been found too weak'. By strengthening the joints and using lighter materials, Glass produced a machine even superior to Smart's, which gained the sanction of the London SSNCB. *Practical Information Presented to the Public by the SSNCB*.

<sup>74</sup> Sheffield Archives, SR 41, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 27 October 1824, p. 6.

to Smart's.<sup>75</sup> Yet, although the machine was soon adopted far and wide, it could not resolve a major dilemma facing campaigners everywhere – namely, who to hire to work the device.

The London SSNCB sought partnerships with established sweeps, and seemingly with success. Five of the twelve masters who had joined the SPICSA in 1800 agreed to give mechanical sweeping a try. Other soon followed. The number of people using machines 'under Sanction of the Society' increased from ten in 1804, to twenty-three in 1817, and to thirty-nine in 1821. Yet, these numbers disguise the true state of affairs.

From the outset, sweeps expressed great anxiety about the impact of the new method on their employment.<sup>76</sup> These fears were probably fuelled by SSCNB appeals to land owners and parish officials to purchase machines and let them be worked by domestic servants and workhouse inmates without additional cost.<sup>77</sup> Rather than a positive commitment to the new method, it seems that the sweeps agreed to help the SSSNCB to prevent outsiders from taking their place – typical of their attitude to

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<sup>75</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 24. The London Committee approached auxiliaries across Britain and Ireland for reports on the progress of mechanical sweeping. Positive testimonies on Smart's machine came in from Dublin, Norwich and Taunton, among other places. *Chimney Sweeping. Extracted from the Taunton Courier, of May 6th 1829* (Taunton, 1829); '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 13-14, p. 17 and p. 21.

<sup>76</sup> Regarding a meeting with 'fourteen or fifteen of the Principal Master Chimney-sweeper in London' to solicit their collaboration in mechanical trials the London Committee reported: 'The result of these meetings though of itself highly satisfactory to your Committee was rendered more pleasing by the circumstance of these interviews having fortunately tended to efface those disagreeable impressions which a great number of the trade had erroneously received of the objects of the Society and of the injurious tendency of its efforts, with regard to their occupation.' '1804 Second London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 5-6.

<sup>77</sup> '1816 Report of Public Meeting', p. 14.

reform. This would explain the reports that soon reached the Committee of sweeps misusing machines and employing boys wherever they could.<sup>78</sup> The persistency of such stories ultimately led the London Committee to turn its back on the trade and order Joseph Glass 'to make no more Machines for the Chimney Sweeps, unless under the superintendence of a Society, or some individual interested in the abolition of the Climbing Boy system'.<sup>79</sup>

The decision caused much controversy. It offered ammunition to claims by London sweeps that the SSNCB was oblivious to *their* interests and desirous to introduce 'strangers to the trade'.<sup>80</sup> Bristol masters fired similar accusations when the Bristol infirmary ceased its contract with an established sweep, the widow of James Short, in favour of the SSNCB agent: 'why should you interfere and recommend a Man who calls himself a Mason by Trade, and who has a Trade independent of Sweeping Chimneys, in prejudice to a poor distressed Widow?'<sup>81</sup>

Crucially, surveyors and householders were sensitive to such complaints. B.C. Stephenson, director of the Board of Works and adviser to Home Secretary, Robert Peel, sanctioned the London SSNCB request for

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<sup>78</sup> In 1805, the London Committee reported that 'negligence and inexperience of most of those who had so undertaken to use [the machines], and the prejudices of others of the trade against the system recommended by the Society, have hitherto much retarded the attainment of its main object, the general use of a mechanical method of sweeping Chimnies'. '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Practical Information Presented to the Public by the SSNCB*, p. 4. The number of mechanical agents supported by the London Committee instantly reduced from thirty-nine to two. '1827 Twelfth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> *The Times*, 9 July 1825.

<sup>81</sup> *The Bristol Mercury*, 7 June 1834.

trials with Glass's device in public offices, but criticised its decision to 'transfer the employment to Bricklayers'.<sup>82</sup> Auxiliary societies faced similar challenges: sweeps unwilling to give machines a genuine try and housekeepers unwilling to employ outsiders. This posed the dilemma of how to respect the rights of established traders, without leaving the cause in the hands of those who opposed it.

This dilemma manifested itself differently in different places. SSNCB auxiliaries encountered various degrees of cooperation from sweeps and housekeepers. Out of the twenty-five places where initiatives were taken to introduce machines between 1828 and 1829 (and for which sufficient information is included in London Reports) successful partnerships with sweeps were established in nine places; misuse led campaigners to transfer the machines from sweeps to outsiders in seven places; pressure by sweeps and housekeepers forced auxiliaries to take the machines from their agents and give them to regular sweeps instead in four places; and only in five places did agents with no connection to the trade establish a successful sweeping business.<sup>83</sup>

Spatial factors played a part in these variations in (at least) three respects. Firstly, the size of the community mattered. As Sheffield activist Samuel Roberts remarked: 'In so extensive and populous a place as London, one or two persons using the Machine with success would cause

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<sup>82</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> *Practical Information Presented to the Public by the SSNCB*, pp. 6-9; '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 11-21.

little competition, but here the case would be widely different'.<sup>84</sup> Yet, although machines were less likely to go unnoticed in smaller towns, this could work either way. Four of the nine towns with successful partnerships had only one or two sweeps,<sup>85</sup> but the Stratford-on-Avon auxiliary, in a parish with a single sweep, was hopelessly stuck.<sup>86</sup>

he serves his *own* purposes merely by obtaining the use of an *additional* boy [...] and yet such is the prejudice of the neighbourhood, that if we were to take [the machine] of him at present, he would retain all his customers.

This example also relates to a second spatial factor, the standing of sweeps within the local community. Mrs. Tarn of the Pentonville SSNCB wrote to the London secretary how benign feelings towards the sweeps obstructed her efforts: 'We have some respectable Sweeps in this part of the town who treat their boys kindly, which induces many to object to transfer their work to other hands.'<sup>87</sup> Similar feelings forced campaigners in Maidstone to abandon their plan to reserve the machines for non-sweeps. Encouraged by 'a strong feeling in the town in favour of the mechanical mode' but faced with 'as strong or stronger feeling of commiseration with the Master Sweeps' the Committee decided to hand the machines to

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<sup>84</sup> Roberts, *Tales of the Poor*, p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> Places with only one sweep whose collaboration was successfully sought: Banbury (*Practical Information Presented to the Public by the SSNCB*, pp. 7-8) and Gainsborough ('1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 19; '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 15). Places with only two sweeps who took up mechanical sweeping enthusiastically: Evesham ('1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 19) and Wareham ('1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 17).

<sup>86</sup> Reverend M. Fortescue Knottesford, Stratford-on-Avon to London SSNCB secretary Mr. S. Woods, '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 15.

<sup>87</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 12-13.

sweeps. However, it made a number of provisions to ensure their collaboration: they were superintended by a bricklayer, who trained them and offered assistance where necessary; they paid the Society a weekly fee for the hire of the machine, which could be withdrawn 'whenever misconduct or other sufficient cause shall render it necessary'; and they promised to work without climbing boys, against a heavy fine.<sup>88</sup>

The latter example also highlights the intersection between local circumstances and lessons learned elsewhere – a third spatial dimension. The Maidstone Secretary, George Smith expressed his support for London's refusal to give machines to sweeps, 'as a general principle', but explained that 'circumstances seemed to render our deviation safer to the cause than adherence to it'.<sup>89</sup> Similar adjustments to London principles were made elsewhere.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, correspondence indicates that local policies were partly based on developments in other localities. An activist at Leamington justified his decision not to give in to appeals of regular sweeps, who wished to employ boys alongside the machine, from the experience of the Stratford auxiliary. 'Had we adopted a different course of proceeding, our case would, I fear, have too closely resembled that of Stratford, as given by

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<sup>88</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 14-15.

<sup>89</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> The Liverpool Association explicitly followed London's advice to employ a man 'wholly unconnected with chimney sweepers' as agent and sent him for instruction to London in hands of Glass. *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children*, p. 13. The Blackheath Committee, by contrast, wrote to the London secretary that 'it was not deemed advisable, at Blackheath, to set up a man unconnected with the Chimney Sweeping Trade, until one of the regular Sweeps had been fairly tried'. '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 12.

Mr. Knottisford, in his letter immediately preceding mine in your last report.'<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, a campaigner at Chichester contrasted the cautious approach of his Committee (dividing four machines evenly between sweeps and bricklayers, in acknowledgment of local concern for 'depriving existing workmen of their work'), with the 'despotism' of his colleagues on the Isle of Wight (who threatened to 'make the island too hot' for the sweeps if they refused to cooperate). 'I am not fond of despotism, but if I were, Chichester does not afford an opportunity for its display, equal to what the Isle of Wight, from its localities, affords.'<sup>92</sup>

These examples illustrate that effective machines and people willing to work them was not enough – support from housekeepers, servants and surveyors was vital too.<sup>93</sup> The London Committee believed that only a legal ban on the use of boys could bring an end to the practice, a sentiment reiterated by auxiliary societies.<sup>94</sup> But until that date, housekeepers and

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<sup>91</sup> '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 16.

<sup>92</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> At a public meeting in 1816, a committee member emphasised: 'it cannot be too often repeated that the ultimate success of the Cause rests altogether with the Public. If the Public will insist upon the use, and attend to the application of the mechanical means [...] the object of the Society will be fully attended'. '1816 Report of Public Meeting', p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> The London Committee was convinced of 'the calamitous consequences of the existing system, and which no legislative regulation can avert, short of a total prohibition of a process so revolting.' '1811 Ninth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4. At a public meeting five years later, one of the London directors proclaimed: 'Any enactments [...] compromising the continuance of the use of climbing boys will prove altogether illusory, the unhappy objects of it being wholly incapable of availing themselves of any provisions made for their protection.' '1816 Report of Public Meeting', p. 5. Along similar lines, the Sheffield SSNCB explained to have 'cautioned such correspondents as consulted [us], to be exceedingly temperate, but inflexibly persevering, in their proceedings [with mechanical sweeping], till a favourable opportunity should occur of appealing to Parliament for a



surveyors should be encouraged to hire machine-only sweeps, and sweeps pressurised to adopt the new method 'voluntarily'. To promote these objectives, the London SSNCB and auxiliaries collected local evidence of the progress made with mechanical sweeping – publicising the number of flues swept as a testimony to the practicality of the new method. They also challenged sweeps, and were sometimes provoked by sweeps, to participate in 'trials' where the two methods were measured up against one another.

From the outset, the London Committee encouraged its agents to collect evidence of their progress. In 1804 it offered financial rewards to the first persons who presented certificates of 300 properties swept mechanically. This was primarily to assess the efficiency of different devices and the commitment of agents. In addition, it was also a test of the practicality of mechanical sweeping in general. From 1805, the Committee presented regular updates of the total number of flues swept by its agents, with special reference to custom at royal properties, public offices and fire insurance companies. If so many respectable householders and surveyors trusted mechanical sweeping, how could anyone question its safety? From 1829, the London agents carried certificates for housekeepers to sign, specifying that they wished 'to have Machines only used in cleansing their chimneys' – a policy recommended to all auxiliaries.<sup>95</sup>

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peremptory abolition of this infant-slave trade'. *The Iris, or The Sheffield Advertiser*, 22 April 1817.

<sup>95</sup> '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 18.

Similar policies were adopted in Derby. The Derby SSNCB instructed its agents to 'keep a faithful record of all chimneys swept by the machine, where situated, and of difficulties found where'; proudly publicised the number of flues swept mechanically 'in Derby and its environs'; and encouraged householders to embrace mechanical sweeping unconditionally.<sup>96</sup> The agents kept detailed books of all their jobs and recorded customers' comments.<sup>97</sup> This allowed the Society to track their progress and assess their commitment; but it was also a record of ability and sincerity – crucial for convincing potential customers. The measures were so successful that the Derby secretary, Edward Trafford recommended them to colleagues in Nottingham.<sup>98</sup>

A second means to convince the public *and* legislators of the feasibility of mechanical sweeping was through 'experiments'. These were initially ad-hoc, but became increasingly formal. In 1804 the London SSNCB reported how various devices had been tried at York Hospital, in Westminster and at the Jennerian Society, in the City:<sup>99</sup>

To ascertain the full success of the experiment, a boy has in some instances been sent up by a Machine, and he has brought down no more

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<sup>96</sup> British Library, 8288.f.85, Letter Edward Trafford to Samuel Fox, 19 September 1838; Leeds City Museum, Ernestine Henry Collection, Class. 363, Acc. 1782, Trade Card Michael Parkins, 1838. See plate 11 for the trade card of one Derby agent.

<sup>97</sup> A transcription of the trade book of Derby SSNCB mechanical agent John Jepson can be found in: British Library, 8288.f.85, Letter Edward Trafford to Samuel Fox, 19 September 1838.

<sup>98</sup> The Derby secretary transcribed the recordings of the twenty-three jobs carried out by his agent, John Jepson, between 19 June and 31 August, and forwarded them to his Nottingham counterpart. *The Derby Mercury*; British Library, 8288.f.85, Letter Edward Trafford to Samuel Fox, 19 September 1838.

<sup>99</sup> '1804 Second London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 6.

soot than he would most probably have done had he been sent up after a boy had swept it in the usual manner.

Subsequent years saw many similar trials, but now master sweeps *were* given opportunities to refute the superiority of machines. Taking place at a large public office or private property, the first flue was swept first by the SSNCB agent with machine, then by a master with boys; for the second flue the order was reversed and so forth until all flues had been swept. It was a test of speed, cleanliness and efficiency. The party that brought down most soot the second time round (when re-sweeping the flues already swept by the opposition) won the challenge – often resulting in the surveyor or owner of the property sticking with their service. In this way the London SSNCB gradually gained territory over the regular sweeps – triumphantly listing in its Annual Reports the properties won over for the new methods, with special reference to fire insurers among its clientele.<sup>100</sup> For the latter, the presence of Robert Steven, director of the Hand in Hand Fire Office, was clearly of great help.<sup>101</sup>

However, expansion progressed too slowly. In February 1829, the London SSCNB successfully appealed to Home Secretary, Robert Peel for experiments with Glass's machine in government offices and police stations in the metropolis – which gave the movement a real boost. Again,

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<sup>100</sup> 'List of the principal new places where agents of the society have been employed during the last year', '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 17.

<sup>101</sup> Steven, who joined the London SSCNB Committee in 1830, printed and distributed cards with signatures in support of mechanical sweeping by the secretaries of the Alliance, Atlas, Guardian, Imperial, London, Norwich Union, Protector, Royal Exchange, Union, Globe, Phoenix and York & London assurances offices. *Testimony of London Fire Offices in Favour of Mechanical Chimney Sweeping* (London, 1836).

the composition of the London Committee was important. George Agar Ellis MP played a crucial role in the discussions with the Home Office.<sup>102</sup>

Parliamentary Committees showed much interest in these experiments. For example, the 1834 Lords Committee interrogated the participants in informal trials and consulted the outcomes of experiments overseen by the Board of Works (1819) and the Home Office (1830).<sup>103</sup> But neither could take away the ambiguity that surrounded the safety and practicality of machine sweeping. Master sweep John Bentley challenged the outcome of experiments at St George's Hospital, accusing the mechanical agents of foul play. The director of the Board of Works, Colonel Stephenson concluded that ninety-nine out of 100 flues could be swept safely with machines, but also that 'the total abolition of Climbing Boys [...] is at present impracticable, and could not be attempted without incurring much risk of danger to the general safety of the Metropolis' – which both sides interpreted as confirmation of their positions.<sup>104</sup> In the end, the Lords Committee carried out its own experiments, inside the Houses of Parliament, so that all parties could witness the trials.

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<sup>102</sup> Correspondence regarding the London Committee's appeal to Robert Peel was reprinted: '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 8-10. See also: 1830 [281] *Circular Letter by R. Peel in Favour of Society for Superseding Climbing Boys by Machinery* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 8 April 1830).

<sup>103</sup> 1830 [281] *Circular Letter by R. Peel*; 1819 [9] *Report of Surveyor General of Board of Works on Experiments to Replace Climbing Boys in Sweeping of Chimnies by Employment of Machinery* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 1 February 1819).

<sup>104</sup> 1819 [9] *Board of Works Report*, p. 2 (cover letter by the Surveyor General, dated 14 January 1819).

It was not only parliamentarians that challenged the outcomes of the London trials. Master sweeps in the provinces similarly questioned whether the efficiency of machines in London could guarantee their practicality elsewhere. It has already been noted that sweeps in Bristol, in 1817, challenged the decision by the local SSNCB to apply evidence from York to their town. Their critique included the alleged practicality of machines – discussing in detail the flues and chimney pots that could be found in Bristol and why a considerable number of them required the service of boys.<sup>105</sup> In Derby, local masters similarly challenged the SSNCB agent to prove his worth in local flues. The resulting trials turned into a true spectacle:<sup>106</sup>

The person who sent for Jepson, gave notice to his neighbours that the experiment was about to be tried; and great numbers flocked to see the result. Amongst the crowd were four sweeps, still confident that the machine would not do. Jepson found, however, no difficulty at all. He was then desired to go to another chimney, confessedly a difficult one. The sweeps were now quite positive that he would be baffled. [...] With a degree of patience, however, highly commendable, he persevered, and at last sent the brush through the pot amidst the shouts of the spectators.

Weeks later, the Derby Committee published a poem, reliving ‘The Experiment’ through the voice of Jepson. It was clearly aimed to draw the attention of those local housekeepers who had missed the spectacle on the day:<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The pamphlet included drawings of eight flues and eight chimney pots that were common in Bristol, with elaborate explanation of why the majority of these could not be swept without the assistance of boys. Head and others, *An Appeal to the Public by the Master Chimney-Sweepers of Bristol*, plate on title page and pp. 8-12.

<sup>106</sup> *A Series of Letters on the Subject of Chimney Sweeping*, p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> *The Experiment; a Tale of Truth, Designed to Promote the Emancipation of Climbing Boys*.

I tried with the large brush and then with the small,  
 But seem'd to be making no progress at all;  
 I tried with the thick rods and then with the thin,  
 But still was unable to force the brush in.

"We told you 'twould be so," the Chimney Sweeps cried,  
 "You might just as well have the Agent ne'er tried.  
 Hurra! For the Chimney Sweeps! – Down with the brush!  
 "We quickly John Jepson, the Agent, will crush."

But just as their ecstasy got to its height,  
 The lookers on shouted "The brush is in sight!"  
 Through the pot it was sent, by one fortunate push  
 And then the folks shouted, "Hurra! For the Brush!"

The Committee also narrated the incident in another pamphlet, drawing readers' attention to the poem, 'which it might be desirable to re-print elsewhere, devoting the 4<sup>th</sup> page to *local information*'.<sup>108</sup> This example highlights the interplay between tiers of activity. Whilst 'The Experiment' was printed with a local audience in mind, the Derby Committee was keen to make it count beyond the locality. Yet, interested parties were advised to combine it with local evidence. Apparently, experiments in a particular locality could serve as general evidence for the practicality of machines and the prejudice of sweeps. But, it would make the greatest impression when combined with local evidence.

### 3.4 Informing the Public, 1803-1840

Sections 3.1-3.3 have shown that climbing boy relief cannot be placed in a single geographic level. The London SSNCB played a crucial role in establishing auxiliaries and distributing machines across the country, but its

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<sup>108</sup> *A Series of Letters on the Subject of Chimney Sweeping*, p. 7.

orientation was primarily local financially and in practical relief. Moreover, it was able to orchestrate a national campaign because provincial activists felt inclined to promote the cause beyond their locality. This exchange between localities and intersection of local, regional and national activities was most profound in the distribution of intelligence – the topic of this section.

Apart from clarifying the spatial dynamics of philanthropy, informing is also an interesting topic because it highlights how activists juxtaposed oral and written communication and combined different genres of writing to report on the campaign's progress. The following example illuminates all three aspects of the analysis. In April 1817, *The Iris or Sheffield Advertiser* and *The Sheffield Mercury* called upon readers to support a petition from their town in favour of climbing boy abolition. Samuel Roberts, director of the local SSNCB, emphasised why national regulation was requisite and why Sheffield should take the lead:<sup>109</sup>

nothing short of Parliamentary interference, prohibiting entirely the employment of Climbing Boys, could produce any permanent good effect [and] this town appears to be, in a particular manner, called upon to afford information and support on the occasion. In no other provincial town, I believe, have such great attention and exertion been, for so long a period applied to the subject.

The need for a Sheffield petition was reiterated later that week, at the annual banquet for climbing boys. Although staged as a treat for local apprentices and their masters, forty-one 'friends of the climbing boys'

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<sup>109</sup> *The Iris, or The Sheffield Advertiser*, 1 April 1817. Four days later, an anonymous correspondent, probably a fellow member of the Sheffield SSCNB, reiterated his views in the *Mercury*. *The Sheffield Mercury*, 5 April 1817.

called upon all present to assist in composing an appeal to parliament.<sup>110</sup> *The Iris* and *The Mercury* printed the petition and notified readers of signing sessions in the Cutler's Hall. The former set it alongside an elaborate explanation of why 'Inhabitants of this Neighbourhood' should express their support – echoing Roberts's emphasis on Sheffield's experience and accomplishments in the cause.<sup>111</sup> This example highlights how the Sheffield SSNCB combined meetings and reporting in the local press to maximise support from their townsmen. (The presence on the Committee of the proprietors of two local dailies certainly helped.) Yet, the Society was determined to make the initiative count beyond Sheffield.

They published their petition with an address by Samuel Roberts, 'for the instruction of the people of England'<sup>112</sup> and resolved to disseminate it 'as widely as may be deemed expedient, especially to Members of Parliament, and in large Towns'.<sup>113</sup> Later Sheffield gatherings were similarly publicised to local and national readerships. Roberts's 1834 lecture to the ladies of his town, included overt appeals to women in other parts of the country:<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> *The Iris, or The Sheffield Advertiser*, 22 April 1817; *The Sheffield Mercury*, 12 April 1817.

<sup>111</sup> *The Iris, or The Sheffield Advertiser*, 22 April 1817.

<sup>112</sup> *The Iris, or The Sheffield Advertiser*, 22 April 1817.

<sup>113</sup> *The Sheffield Mercury*, 26 April 1817; *The Resolutions and Petition to Parliament, Respecting Children Employed by Chimney Sweepers as Climbing Boys, Agreed Upon at a Public Meeting of the Inhabitants of Sheffield* (Sheffield, 1817). The pamphlet was clearly intended for mass-distribution – it was sold per dozen or per hundred.

<sup>114</sup> Midgley, *Women against Slavery*; Samuel Roberts, *An Address to British Females of Every Rank and Station, on the Employment of Climbing Boys in Sweeping Chimnies* (Sheffield, 1834), p. 18. Roberts was clearly inspired by women's vital contributions to



*Female petitions* are now received in Parliament. Let the *females*, then, from every town, petition Parliament immediately. It is a cause that more especially belongs to them. This is no political subject.

In addition, his 1837 appeal to make climbing boy abolition 'an integral part of the total abolition of slavery throughout the world' was dedicated to London SSCNB secretary, William Tooke and published simultaneously in Sheffield and London.<sup>115</sup>

However, SSNCBs did not have a monopoly on making local gatherings count beyond the locality. On 3 May 1828, *The Times* reported on the third anniversary dinner of the USMCS. As an alternative to 'vulgar' and increasingly unpopular May Day celebrations,<sup>116</sup> the master sweeps staged an elaborate banquet on the outskirts of London, where their apprentices enjoyed themselves, 'without the risk of accidents, to which they were formerly subjected'.<sup>117</sup> Yet, besides offering the boys a pleasant break and sparing Londoners a great 'annoyance', the event had a deeper significance: it was a collective display of the sweeps' respectability.

On the way to the venue, the masters marched their apprentices past the Mayor's house, who, 'on witnessing the healthy and cleanly

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anti-slavery lobbying, including a mass petition 'from all the females of the United Kingdom', signed by over 180,000 signatories.

<sup>115</sup> Samuel Roberts, *A Cry from the Chimneys: Or, an Integral Part of the Total Abolition of Slavery Throughout the World* (London and Sheffield, 1837).

<sup>116</sup> May Day processions were increasingly associated with drunk and disorderly sweeps. Leigh Hunt described it in 1834 as a 'horrible mixture of tinsel, dirty skins, dance and disease.' Leigh Hunt, 'Tomorrow the First of May', *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, 30 April 1834, pp. 33-34. On the decline in public regards for May Day: Roy Judge, *The Jack-in-the-Green: A May Day Custom* (2nd edn., London: FLS Books, 2000), pp. 60-74.

<sup>117</sup> *The Times*, 3 May 1828.

appearance of the boys, expressed much pleasure, and as a token of his approbation, subscribed a handsome sum of money towards defraying the expenses of the day'.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, the roast beef and plum pudding were not only served to the enjoyment of the climbing boys; 'the sight of the apprentices partaking of a good substantial dinner [...] was extremely gratifying to a large concourse of people, who had assembled on the occasion'.<sup>119</sup> After dinner, the display of respectability continued: Non Nobis Domini was sung 'by professional vocalists' and the 'usual loyal and patriotic toasts' were made. Then, chairman William Duck addressed the crowd, and the tone became more overtly political. He contested claims that the masters' reluctance to embrace 'machines' was due to prejudice; government reports clearly showed that the current devices could not be adopted universally without causing inconvenience and hazard to householders.<sup>120</sup> Secretary Benjamin Watson attested this view. He had recently attended the launch of a new device by the SSNCB, Glass's 'Cane Machine', which was the most effective to date but still unable to overcome the major obstacles to mechanical sweeping:<sup>121</sup>

It was true that the machine [...] would answer in cleansing perpendicular chimnies, but where there were impediments from various causes, no machine, however pliable, would overcome them.

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<sup>118</sup> *The Times*, 3 May 1828.

<sup>119</sup> *The Times*, 3 May 1828.

<sup>120</sup> Duck referred to the 1819 [9] *Board of Works Report*.

<sup>121</sup> *The Times*, 3 May 1828.

Through such banquets, the sweeps reached a variety of audiences. The Mayor, clearly pleased by the boys' appearance, may have softened his judgement of the trade – as might other town councillors and magistrates, who were constantly pressed by the SSNCB to stop binding to sweeps.<sup>122</sup> Others who witnessed the spectacle, including the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, were equally impressed:<sup>123</sup>

Oh, shall I ever forget the sight of the only City dinner I ever attended in my life! At the hall of the Right Worshipful Company of Chimney-sweepers – it was in May, and a remarkably late pea-season. The hall was decorated with banners and escutcheons of deceased *chummies* – martial music resounded from the balconies as the Master of the Company and the great ones marched in.

By lecturing on the fruits and challenges of mechanical sweeping in general and by reporting to newspapers with readerships across the country, they reached out to audiences beyond those present on the day. As the masters had assured readers of *The Times* three years earlier, they were willing to act locally *and* nationally to better the conditions of climbing boys, but determined to resist 'all infringements and innovations which may creep into and undermine their trade'.<sup>124</sup> These were not empty

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<sup>122</sup> At the request of the London SSNCB, Home Secretary Robert Peel approached metropolitan magistrates in May 1823, pleading them to pay close attention to children apprenticed to sweeps. Similar pleas were made in 1825 and 1834, again at the initiative of the SSNCB: 1834 [114] *An Account of the Number of Boys Apprenticed to Chimney-Sweepers, at the Several Police Offices within the Bills of Mortality, During the Last Nine Years* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 11 March 1834); 1825 [154] *Account of the Number of Boys Apprenticed to Chimney Sweepers in the Metropolis* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 25 March 1825).

<sup>123</sup> Thus, Thackeray later recalled the hospitality he had enjoyed at the hand of the London sweeps, sometime during the early 1830s. William Makepeace Thackeray, 'Greenwich-Whitebait', in William Makepeace Thackeray (ed.), *Miscellaneous Essays, Sketches, and Reviews* (2008), pp. 420-21, '<http://books.google.co.uk>' (02 August 10).

<sup>124</sup> *The Times*, 9 July 1825.

threats. When the SSNCB renewed its exertions for statutory abolition of climbing boys in 1834, the masters secured a prominent role in parliamentary procedures – a topic that will be examined in greater depth in chapter 4. The point here is that, through careful juxtaposition of oral and written communications, and of local, regional and national intelligence, they were able to win the confidence of colleagues, householders, administrators and legislators – vital for shaping the direction of reform.

Newspapers were an important vehicle of information, not just for sweeps in London but also for colleagues in Liverpool and Bristol. The sweeps embraced other forms of communication too, often combining different sources to have maximum exposure. The 1817 General Meeting of Master Chimney Sweepers in London (predecessor to the USMCS) distributed 500 handbills to colleagues in the metropolis and beyond, presenting their resolutions for climbing boy relief as a template but also including extracts from parliamentary evidence of the impracticality of mechanical sweeping.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, in 1834 the USMCS included extracts from the 1819 Board of Works report on mechanical sweeping in its petition to the House of Lords.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', appendix 1, pp. 50-51. A handbill from the London master sweeps was indeed found in Bristol archives, which might explain why Bristol sweeps were so alert when a local SSNCB set up mechanical agents in their town. For the Bristol SSNCB initiative: *The Machine for Sweeping Chimneys* (Bristol, 1817). For Bristol sweeps' reply: Head and others, *An Appeal to the Public by the Master Chimney-Sweepers of Bristol*. More on their disputes in 3.5.

<sup>126</sup> *Petition by London Master Sweeps to the Right Hon. The House of Lords, against the Chimney Sweepers' Regulation Bill: With the Opinion of the Surveyor-General and Other*

The masters of mixed-genre communications, however, were the SSNCB. As well as outlining practical initiatives, Hanway's climbing boy pamphlets (as most of his philanthropic writings) consisted of personal reflections on unspecified cases. SSNCB publications, in contrast, were an anthology of official and public recordings of real-life examples. Rather than a preconceived strategy masterminded by the London Committee, it was a tactic that grew over time with important additions by provincial auxiliaries, both in compilation and delivery. The campaigns for abolishing the slave trade (notably the high-profile prosecution of Captain John Kimber)<sup>127</sup> and publications by the Bettering Society (publicising cases of practical relief drawn from across the country) offered exemplary precedents.<sup>128</sup> But the inclusion of coroners' inquests and magistrates' hearings in London SSNCB pamphlets from 1806 onwards was partly born of necessity.

Few metropolitan sweeps were willing to provide the SSNCB with information, and in the absence of provincial auxiliaries, the Committee relied on printed reports for evidence of conditions in the trade outside London. Yet, the Committee took various initiatives to create new data

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*Officers of the Board of Works Annexed. Hayward, J.R. Parliamentary Agent, Brick Court, Temple (Crown Court, London, 1834).*

<sup>127</sup> Kimber was tried in 1792, for murdering a young female slave on board his vessel. Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760-1807* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 183-85.

<sup>128</sup> The resolutions of the SPICSA were among the initiatives publicised by the Bettering Society. Thomas Bernard, 'Extract from an Account of a Chimney-Sweeper's Boy, with Observations and a Proposal for the Relief of Chimney Sweepers', in *Reports of the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor* (6 vols, London, 1798-1814), vol. 1.

sources, particularly in London. In 1808, it wrote to all district surveyors in London for information about chimney construction and approached the 'principal Hospitals' in the capital for information about the injuries and diseases peculiar to this trade.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, in 1825 and 1834, the Committee obtained returns from all metropolitan magistrates' courts regarding the binding of sweep's apprentices, through an order by the House of Commons.<sup>130</sup> In addition, during the 1830s London SSNCB directors visited injured and distressed sweeps in hospitals.<sup>131</sup>

From 1828, treasurer William Tooke and secretary Robert Steven maintained extensive correspondence with their counterparts in provincial branches. However, the role of auxiliaries in networks of intelligence was not restricted to providing local information. Provincial SSNCBs composed and published their own anthologies of reform documents, partly drawn from local sources but also including parliamentary testimonies and documents extracted from the pamphlets of the London SSNCB or from fellow auxiliaries.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, they introduced new types of documents and new methods of delivery.

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<sup>129</sup> '1808 Sixth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4 and p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> 1825 [154] *Account of the Number of Boys*. The account was initiated by William Williams, London SSNCB committee member and MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis. 1834 [114] *An Account of the Number of Boys*. The account was initiated by William Tooke, London SSNCB treasurer and MP for Truro.

<sup>131</sup> For example, in 1839, committee members visited climbing boys with head, leg and arm injuries, and adult sweeps with scrotal cancer, at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. '1839 Twenty-Third London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 15-17.

<sup>132</sup> *The Bristol Mercury*, 11 January 1834. The article, probably compiled by the Bristol SSNCB, included extracts from publications by London-based master sweep and early campaigner David Porter (Porter, *Considerations*.) and by the Sheffield SSNCB

As noted in 3.1, the Sheffield SSNCB marked its founding with publication of poetry, 'The Chimney Sweeper's Boy' – introducing a new genre to the campaign. It extended the experiment in 1824 with publication of *The Climbing Boy's Album*, an anthology of poems, stories and one short play, written for the occasion. The initiatives provoked much controversy. Only eight of the twenty people approached for contributions 'appealing to the compassion of all classes of people in behalf of these poor creatures' fulfilled the request. Many of those who refused doubted whether poetry would truly serve the cause; one feared that the genre itself might suffer as 'ludicrous associations have unfortunately got connected with these poor boys'.<sup>133</sup> Even within SSNCB ranks there was resistance against fictionalised accounts. William Wilberforce warned his Sheffield 'friend', Samuel Roberts, that poetry alone would not suffice:<sup>134</sup>

I will use the freedom of a friend by frankly confessing to you that I rather doubt the expediency of Mr. [Montgomery's] Plan which even your courtly introduction [...] cannot render palatable. At least I am assured that it would be desirable that any Poems on the subject should be accompanied with an appendix of Facts such as it has been the fashion lately...

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(Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*). The author added fascinating detail about the number of flues swept in London during the past four years – over 100,000 – and the total in Britain during the same period – 200,000. This piece highlights the incredible exchange of information and documentation between the different localities involved in the campaign.

<sup>133</sup> William Smythe, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, proclaimed: 'Ludicrous associations have unfortunately got connected with these poor boys; and I conceive, with others, that the Muse and the Fine Arts are more likely to suffer from this sort of connection with them than to do them any service.' Recited in: George L. Phillips, 'The Chimney Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing-Boy's Album', *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, VI (c. 1944-50), p. 7. The full correspondence can be found in: J. Holland and J. Everett (eds.), *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of James Montgomery* (London, 1855), vol. IV.

<sup>134</sup> Sheffield Archives, SR 37, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 27 January 1824.

Roberts and Montgomery followed his advice and complemented the *Album* with a compilation of reforming documents – including parliamentary evidence and reports of accidents and abuse extracted from Sheffield and other papers.

Aside from discussing disputes about the style in which to present evidence, a topic that will be examined further in chapters 6 and 7, this publication also highlights the interplay of local and national exertions and the collaboration between auxiliaries in composing intelligence for the cause. Roberts and Montgomery initially approached poets and writers across the country, but in the end relied primarily on ‘friends [...] resident in this neighbourhood’.<sup>135</sup> It is not clear how many copies of *The Chimney Sweeper’s Friend and Climbing Boy’s Album* were sold, but activists at Sheffield and elsewhere were clearly convinced of its significant impact. Roberts and Montgomery published a similar volume for the local Anti-Slavery Society in 1826,<sup>136</sup> and William Alexander, York printer and SSNCB director, reprinted the volume the following year as a series of brochures, with new cases of suffering.<sup>137</sup> The London SSNCB, revived by interest in the *Album*,<sup>138</sup> sponsored Alexander’s initiative.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper’s Friend*, p. viii.

<sup>136</sup> Samuel Roberts, James Montgomery and John Holland (eds.), *The Negro’s Friend; or, the Sheffield Anti-Slavery Album* (Sheffield, 1826).

<sup>137</sup> *The Chimney-Sweeper’s Friend and Climbing-Boy’s Album. Second Edition with Alterations and Additions* (London and York, 1825).

<sup>138</sup> No public meeting had been held in London since the House of Lords rejected the climbing boy Bill upon its third reading in 1819.



Montgomery's *Album* continued to inspire activists across the country. When the Tottenham Ladies Association canvassed the neighbourhood to promote mechanical sweeping in 1826, they handed out extracts of Montgomery's work.<sup>140</sup> The Derby decision to portray mechanical trials in the town in verse was partly inspired by this exemplary work.<sup>141</sup> London and Derby papers reprinted extracts in their columns as late as 1839.<sup>142</sup>

Montgomery's *Album* and the canvassing initiative at Tottenham demonstrate the dynamic geography of the campaign in three respects. They highlight how information from different places was brought together for maximum impact on the local community. They show how innovative ways of presenting information were initiated in particular localities and copied and cherished elsewhere. And, the canvassing case also suggest that it mattered *where* information was supplied, in this case literally at people's doorstep.

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<sup>139</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*. The London SSNCB accounts for 1826-27 included £10 16s 0d "Paid, Messrs. Alexander Son of York, booksellers for their monthly publication of the Climbing Boys' Album".

<sup>140</sup> '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 38-40.

<sup>141</sup> *The Experiment; a Tale of Truth, Designed to Promote the Emancipation of Climbing Boys*.

<sup>142</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, 30 May 1838; *The Odd Fellow*, 2 November 1839.

One further example will illustrate the last of these points. When William Wilberforce visited Bath to drink the waters, he approached Samuel Roberts, asking him:<sup>143</sup>

for a copy of any of the little Publications which state the cruel and unjust sufferings of the poor sweeping boys. I will endeavour to get them into circulation here [in Bath], where People having less to do, may have their minds more open to the claims of humanity.

Some places were deemed more suited to moral reform. As a place of leisure and healing Bath was one such. But Wilberforce's presence in Bath, and with him many other visitors, reminds us of people's mobility.

### 3.5 Petitioning Parliament, 1803-1840

Between 1788 and 1840 the Houses of Commons and Lords combined received over 380 petitions concerning climbing boys. How these appeals affected the business of parliament (instigating legislative procedures, securing opportunities to testify to Select Committees, inspiring Bills to be amended, etc.) will be scrutinised in Chapter 4. This section draws attention to a second function of petitioning – mobilising support for *non-legislative* reform. In 3.4, it was noted that the Sheffield SSNCB juxtaposed relief and petitioning, local and national lobbying. This section looks at other examples to determine how petitioning helped to mobilise support for *local* philanthropy and to solidify *regional* and *national* networks of relief.

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<sup>143</sup> Sheffield Archives, SR 41, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 27 October 1824, pp. vi-vii.

Bristol offers a fascinating case study for examining the role of petitioning in struggles for local support, because the local SSNCB faced fierce opposition from master sweeps. In June 1817 the Bristol SSNCB circulated a handbill outlining the progress of mechanical sweeping in the town. They pleaded Bristolians to embrace the new method and join its 'efforts directed to the utter abolition of a practice so pregnant with oppression and misery'.<sup>144</sup> Although the handbill acknowledged that 'the humanity of many of the Bristol Chimney Sweepers is honourable to their characters', five local masters published an angry reply. Apart from denying that Bristol's climbing boys were treated harshly and that machines suited the architecture of the town, they emphasised their own long-standing service to the community and the threat posed by machine sweeping to their livelihoods. Each of the masters had 'followed the art of chimney-sweeping in Bristol' for at least twenty-two years; collectively, as 'Tradesmen and Citizens', they returned their 'sincere and grateful acknowledgments to our numerous Customers, for the very liberal encouragement we have severally experienced, and humbly solicit their favours for the continued support of our numerous families'.<sup>145</sup>

The Bristol SSNCB used their petition to the Lords, the following week, in part to counter these claims. Despite the expediency of the new methods, based on 'the Experience of a Committee of Gentlemen who

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<sup>144</sup> *The Machine for Sweeping Chimneys*, p. 2. The SSNCB reported that 'several hundred chimneys have now been swept by the Machine, and in almost every case to the entire satisfaction of those who have employed it'. *The Machine for Sweeping Chimneys*, p. 1.

<sup>145</sup> *An Appeal to the Public, by the Master Chimney-Sweepers Residing in the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1817), pp. 21-23.

have superintended the use of Mechanical Means in this City', they claimed that climbing boy prohibition *would* favour the interests of the local community *and* of the trade. Climbing from a young age denied children 'the Opportunities of acquiring such a degree of Moral and Religious Instruction as is essential to their becoming useful and respectable Members of the Community'; mechanical sweeping in contrast promised 'a regular, reputable and profitable Employment, both for Master Chimney Sweepers and their Apprentices'.<sup>146</sup> The sweeps sent their own petition, but to the other House and without reference to their local struggles.<sup>147</sup>

Yet, when parliamentary proceedings resumed the following spring, they reiterated their opposition to climbing boy abolition, this time with reference to local evidence and local expertise. Since their last appeal, they had experimented extensively with mechanical sweeping, which had strengthened them in the opinion that mechanical sweeping was unsuited to the architecture of Bristol. They supported their claim with the signatures of over eighty architects, builders and surveyors from their city.<sup>148</sup> The appeal was as much aimed at the legislature as at their townsmen. The petitioners presented themselves as defenders of local liberties. They proposed that it should be left to the judgment of

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<sup>146</sup> *Lords Journals*, vol. 51, p. 351, 30 June 1817.

<sup>147</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 72, p. 453, 4 July 1817.

<sup>148</sup> Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/8/415, 98k, Petition of Master Chimney Sweepers and Householdors of the Ancient City of Bristol Whose Names Are Hereunto Subscribed against the Chimney Sweepers Regulation Bill. 13th Aprilis 1818 Presented and Read, and Ordered to Be Referred to the Committee to Whom the Bill Stands Committed (Signed in Bristol on 7 April 1818), 13 April 1818.

householders to decide *who* was capable of supervising children in this line of work and *what* method of sweeping was best equipped to provide safety and comfort. Thus,<sup>149</sup>

no Master should be allowed to take an apprentice, without a recommendation from several housekeepers, who considered him a fit Person to be entrusted with the care of apprentice [and] your Lordships [should] not sanction any Bill that may tend to restrain the liberty of Housekeepers, in making their Election as to the best means of securing their Domestic Comforts by cleanliness, and, preserving themselves and Families from so tremendous a calamity as destruction of their persons and property by Fire.

The Bristol SSNCB was clearly alarmed by this line of rhetoric and, fearing that local favour might go out to the sweeps, tried to make it their own. In a letter to the *Bristol Mercury*, in January 1834, the Society urged readers:<sup>150</sup>

not [to] wait for legislative interference, but promptly step forward and earnestly urge their neighbours to enter into engagements, *by signature*, not to employ these poor sufferers any more, but to use the machine *only*.

That they solicited signatures for another pro-abolition petition in the process only highlights the overlap between philanthropic and parliamentary lobbying. However, their opponents denied that the 1,378 signatories represented the 'informed opinion' of their town. The sweeps pleaded the House of Lords to disregard the SSNCB appeal, 'signed by a number of boys and other persons not capable of judging the question', and to consider their own petition instead, based on 'long experience in

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<sup>149</sup> Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/8/415, 98k, Petition of Master Chimney Sweepers of Bristol against the Bill, 13 April 1818. The petition was reprinted in: *Lords Journals*, vol. 51, p. 558, 13 April 1818.

<sup>150</sup> *The Bristol Mercury*, 25 January 1834.

the trade' and supported by 'the different Fire Insurance Offices, and [...] the most eminent architects here, who are decidedly of opinion that the machine will not answer general purposes'.<sup>151</sup> They enclosed a certificate from the Fire Offices.

Apart from the intriguing battle for recognition as *the* legitimate representative of Bristol in the eyes of the legislature, what stands out in these examples is that both parties used parliamentary lobbying to mobilise local support for non-legislative initiatives. This is particularly obvious on the part of the sweeps. Upon the passing of the 1834 Act, which allowed continuation of the climbing boy system but only under supervision of sweeps who were rate-paying householders, twelve Bristol master sweeps bestowed 'grateful and heartfelt thanks' to the 'nobility, gentry and inhabitants of Bristol, Clifton, and their vicinities' for the 'very liberal patronage and support we have respectively received from your hands', not least through the masters' parliamentary toils. Also, they 'humbly solicited' their assistance in implementing the restrictions imposed upon the work of itinerant sweeps, secured by the masters in parliament, with the 'very kind and efficient exertions in our behalf' by the 'respective Fire Offices'.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, master sweep William Bulphin used the patronage he had gained from the fire insurers as a result of his

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<sup>151</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 89, p. 289, 14 May 1834.

<sup>152</sup> *The Bristol Mercury*, 16 August 1834.

parliamentary exertions in order to promote his trade in the city as a respectable, reliable sweep.<sup>153</sup>

That petitioners in different parts of the country exchanged petitions and/or read each others' appeals in the *Commons and Lords Journals* is clear from the fact that petitions became increasingly uniform over time. Petitions increasingly covered a standard set of topics; and increasingly relied on evidence drawn from parliamentary inquiries to support their arguments. This can be interpreted as evidence of the growing integration of regional and national philanthropic/ lobbying networks. But, it was certainly also related to changes in parliamentary procedures. From 1832, petitions ceased to be read out in the Commons, but instead detailed records were kept and printed of all appeals received. The appendixes to the 1834 Report included fifteen climbing boy petitions (from a total of thirty-one), but the increasing similarity of appeals meant that the 1840 Committee could do with printing just eight (from a total of 117).<sup>154</sup> Obviously by circulating these reports the Committee set templates for other petitioners, reinforcing a trend towards uniformity.<sup>155</sup>

## Conclusions

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<sup>153</sup> See 1.4 for Bulphin's exertions.

<sup>154</sup> The 1834 petitions are listed in: '1834 Commons Reports on Public Petitions', report no. 3, 10-13, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24-26, 30, 34. See Bibliography for full title. Those included in the appendixes: '1834 Appendix to Commons Reports on Public Petitions', appx. 64, 479, 480, 481, 567, 568, 618, 693, 984-986, 1235, 1307, 1506, 1557. See Bibliography for full title. The 1840 petitions are listed in: '1840 Commons Reports on Public Petitions', report no. 26-28, 32-34, 36-41. See Bibliography for full title. Those included in the appendixes: '1840 Appendix to Commons Reports on Public Petitions', appx. 596-600, 776, 828, 869. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>155</sup> These transitions are examined further in chapter 4.

The dramatic growth of climbing boy relief *after* 1800 was not a straightforward dispersion from London to the provinces. Despite a consistent policy of nationalisation by the London SSNCB, expansion was slow to develop and came in waves of varied intensity. The timing of change suggests that momentum was partly generated by external factors. Campaigns for improving the conditions of factory children in 1802 and in the years 1815-19 also intensified interest for children in this trade, and female activists who joined missionary and anti-slavery movements during the mid 1820s extended their interest to this cause. Even factors in which the London SSNCB *had* a strong hand - particularly the development and distribution of chimney cleaning machines - benefited from the support and original input of activists elsewhere.

A spatially dynamic and heterogeneous web of activism emerged in which the London Society played a coordinating role but to which auxiliaries made vital contributions. Like in the missionary and anti-slavery movements, activists outside the 'parent society' founded new associations (first in their own locality, then assisting others elsewhere), developed new strategies to promote the cause, and shared their experiences with abolitionists elsewhere. Like these other campaigns, climbing boy societies combined community initiatives with the lobbying of parliament, with the two activities reinforcing one another. What this campaign lacked in international cross-fertilisation, activists compensated by collaborating closely with sympathisers in the Kingdom, whether in nearby towns and villages (as in Derby) or others parts of the country (as in Sheffield). Clearly,



activists recognised that they were part of broader networks and defined their aims and strategies in relation to those adopted elsewhere. This highlights the need to consider spatial dynamics when assessing the evolution of reform – as asserted by Civin and Featherstone for anti-slavery campaigns.<sup>156</sup>

Yet, more than these other campaigns, the fortunes of climbing boy reform depended on local factors. Apart from communities with heavy financial stakes in the transatlantic trade or closely involved in overseas missions, abolishing slavery and spreading the gospel in the Empire were distant ideals unconnected with the daily lives of the majority of Britons. By contrast, the abolition of climbing boys demanded adjustments to be made in the local community. In cities like Bristol, where the architecture was unsuited to mechanical sweeping and the conditions of local boys did not cry out for reform, SSNCBs struggled to mobilise support. Elsewhere, the scarcity of jobs made parish governors resist and householders question the 'humanity' of abolition – were unemployed boys truly better off than those toiling in chimneys? In many places, sweeps refused to work without boys altogether and SSNCBs' attempts to hire outsiders was undermined by householders' solidarity to established traders. In Derby and Sheffield, abolitionists portrayed sweeps as vicious or ignorant obstructers of humane reform, playing on clownesque and seditious associations with the trade, but their rhetoric was at odds with the respectable station of

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<sup>156</sup> Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery'; Featherstone, 'The Spatial Politics of the Past Unbound'.

sweeps. Sweeps in Bristol used their reputation to question the humanity of the SSNCB – a society that deprived hard-working members of the local community of their livelihood.

Such local variations and local solidarity are crucial because work by Benedict Anderson, Linda Colley and Michael Roberts emphasised that activism stimulated ‘national’ loyalties and a ‘national’ public sphere.<sup>157</sup> They pose the question of how far this and other campaigns also led to ‘local’ styles of activism and reinforced a ‘local’ sense of community. But instead of treating ‘local’ and ‘national’ as mutually exclusive, it seems more helpful to explore how far individuals managed to synchronise their activities at multiple geographic scales and how much they imagined themselves as members of multiple communities - some defined by the physical environment or geographic points of reference, others by biological attributes, professional associations, political affiliations, and so forth. The multifaceted character of climbing boy activism, with reformers promoting the cause simultaneously at different scales, through a variety of channels confirm the value of such an approach.

Sweeps’ activism, whether ad-hoc or through their own societies, challenges Phillips’ portrayal of them as obstructers of change. The timing of their initiatives confirms they were seldom protagonists of reform or innovative in aims and strategies (essentially propagating reforms that had

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<sup>157</sup> Anderson and Colley emphasised national identity and Roberts, the rise of a public sphere. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Colley, *Britons*, in particular chapter 8; Roberts, *Making English Morals*.

first been outlined by Hanway and Porter). But, once provoked, they were committed not only to fend off harmful interference, but also to reform the trade in constructive ways. That protecting their business was a primary motivation did not stop all from developing genuine concern for the well-being of apprentices and the financial state of the trade in general. In the cases of Bristol, Liverpool and London (but not in Derby and Sheffield), the sweeps combined community initiatives with activities aimed at administrative practices and new legislation – suggesting they influenced all facets of reform. A detailed analysis of sweeps in other localities needs to be performed to establish how representative these masters were.

The activism of the sweeps holds important lessons for studies of reform. Scholars of voluntary activism have paid little attention to the influence of activities by those targeted by relief.<sup>158</sup> By contrast, historians of pauper administration and crime<sup>159</sup> and scholars of law-making<sup>160</sup> have

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<sup>158</sup> Michael Roberts' study of voluntary associations in Georgian and Victorian Britain focused on the 'opinion-forming classes', which he equated with the 'propertied classes'. His treatment of the agency of those targeted by relief and reform are exemplified in his discussion of voluntary policing: 'From time to time – in society reports and police court proceedings – the voices of the "objects" of volunteer policing attention could be heard in echo of the charge that their custom-sanctioned immunities were being removed by interfering fanatics.' Note the reference to "echo" – even when they spoke, they merely reiterated the opinions formulated by those directing voluntary societies. Roberts, *Making English Morals*, pp. 100-101 and p. 136. Historians of slavery have studied the contributions of slaves and former-slaves to the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. A discussion of this literature is included in: David Richardson, 'Agency, Ideology, and Violence in the History of Transatlantic Slavery', *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), 971-89.

<sup>159</sup> Peter King, *Crime and Law in England 1750-1850. Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Peter King, Pamela Sharpe and Tim Hitchcock (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds.), *The Poor in England, 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

done much more in this respect. Yet, the fact that these sweeps acted through all three channels suggests the need to integrate all three areas in a single analysis. Similarly, some historians of medicine have examined patients' use of care provided both by medical charities and by the poor-law authorities.<sup>161</sup> But the interplay between these two practices and the formation of new legislation needs further exposition, particularly through an analysis that considers spatial factors.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> For example, Joanna Innes has investigated the role of manufacturers and labourers in the formation of factory legislation: Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour'.

<sup>161</sup> For a rich analysis of patients' use of health provision in Bristol: Mary E. Fissell, *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>162</sup> The Paupers' Lives Project, directed by Jeremy Bolton and Leonard Schwarz, has investigated the varied health experiences of inhabitants of the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, through spatial analysis. For the project's website: <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/pauperlives/>.



## CHAPTER 4

### LEGISLATING THE WORK AND HEALTH OF CHIMNEY

#### SWEEPS, 1788-1840

George Phillips portrayed legislation towards climbing boys as a continuous struggle between liberal and conservative forces in parliament, with the former having their eyes firmly set on statutory prohibition and the latter equally committed to preserving status quo.<sup>1</sup> He argued that reactionary and socially-conscious MPs and peers each found allies out-of-doors to pressurise rivals within the legislature, but that legislation was essentially determined by parliamentarians and that law-making was separated from attempts by voluntary associations to promote mechanical sweeping on the ground. Drawing on additional sources,<sup>2</sup> this chapter shows that the parliamentary history of reform was not an unchanging struggle between two camps and that the political and the institutional history of parliament were crucial for the evolution of climbing boy reform.

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<sup>1</sup> George L. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys: A History of the Long Struggle to Abolish Child Labor in Chimney Sweeping* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1949), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips relied on a selection of printed records: Hansard's reports of parliamentary debates; the published reports of Commons (1817) and Lords Select Committees (1818, 1834 and 1840); and the printed versions of Bills and Acts. The analysis presented here draws upon additional sources, including: the published journals of both Houses of Parliament; manuscript versions of the reports and minutes of evidence of parliamentary inquiries; annotated copies of Bills; and a large number of printed and unprinted petitions.

Firstly, as indicated in chapter 1, there was a large middle ground of parliamentarians who felt that some public regulation was desirable but questioned whether legislation was the most effective means and what criteria should determine the steps to be taken. Their contributions to the outcome of legislative procedures will be scrutinised here. Secondly, this chapter explores how changes in the practical arrangement of law-making and the political preoccupations of parliament influenced the fortunes of climbing boy legislation as well as how this campaign contributed to such change. This is important because it helps us to connect these campaigns with broader transitions that took place at the time – instead of treating them as an isolated struggle between different interest groups, as Phillips did. It matters also because historians of social policy have highlighted that crucial shifts in parliamentary procedures coincided with parliament considering new areas of policy during the early nineteenth century, but without scrutinising connections between the two.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, by showing that the formation of this public health reform was strongly influenced by the structure of legislative procedures, this chapter encourages medical historians – who tend to focus on social rather than political aspects – to pay closer attention to the details of parliamentary affairs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On transitions in public involvement in law-making, see: Joanna Innes, 'Legislation and Public Participation 1760-1830', in David Lemmings (ed.), *The British and Their Laws in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 102-32.

<sup>4</sup> Recent medical histories have highlighted that other political procedures were crucial for doctors' professional identities and the formation of new areas of medical expertise. Michael Brown, 'Medicine, Reform and the "End" of Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *English Historical Review*, 124 (2009), 1353-88; Ian A. Burney, *Bodies of Evidence:*

The analysis does not treat legislative procedures as the exclusive pursuit of parliament. As shown in chapters 1-3, voluntary associations included parliamentarians, administrators and non-office holders and combined community initiatives with activities aimed at the legislature and local administration. We need to establish how these different actors pursued legislation and how far changes in law-making originated in or affected other channels of reform. This overcomes Phillips' portrayal of the three as separate pursuits. It also addresses the implicit divides in studies of reform between scholars who equate reform with legislation and those who adopt a more multifaceted definition<sup>5</sup> and between those who explain law-making as parliament imposing its will on society and those who focus on public pressures on the legislature.<sup>6</sup>

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*Medicine and the Politics of the English Inquest, 1830-1926* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000); Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). This chapter highlights the importance of extending this 'political turn' to parliamentary procedures. For medical histories that *have* considered parliamentary affairs: Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); C. Kelly, "'Not Surgeons Alone, but Medical Officers': The Effects of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars on British Military Medicine" (unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2008). For medical MPs during a later period: Roger Cooter, 'The Rise and Decline of the Medical Member: Doctors in Parliament in Edwardian and Interwar Britain', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 78 (2004), 59-107.

<sup>5</sup> This tension is clearly visible in contributions to a recent volume on the 'age of reform', with contributions on the reform of church, state, law and slavery adopting a narrow definition and those on the reform of medicine, lifestyle and culture adopting a broader conception. Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Phillips' work is an example of the former, portraying law-making as the activity of MPs and peers, with 'public opinion' only playing a part when parliamentarians deployed it to exert pressure on fellow legislators. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*. Studies of slave-trade and slavery reform, by contrast, tend to emphasise public pressures on the legislature. Seymour Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', *Parliamentary History*, 26 (2007), 42-65; Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (Paperback edn., London and New York: Routledge, 1995); John R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics in British Anti-Slavery: The*



This chapter traces the fortunes of climbing boy legislation from the successful attempt to make formal apprenticeship obligatory and raising the minimum age to 8 (1788), to failed efforts to facilitate stricter implementation (1804), and to introduce a time scale for abolition (1817-1824), to new restrictions that reserved the supervision of boys under 14 to rate-paying householders (1834), and finally to a bar on employment for those under 16 and a prohibition of climbing for anyone under 21 (1840). To allow for a focused analysis of the points outlined above, the actual initiatives will be painted selectively and, at times, with a broad brush. Each section deals with one cycle of legislative initiatives (1788, 1804, 1817-25, 1834-1840), exploring four aspects of law-making: lobbying, debates, inquiries and formulating an Act. To assist the reader in navigating their way through the analysis, the structure of legislative procedures is outlined here, and the Bills and Acts regarding climbing boys and parliamentary activity for this cause are summarised in **Appendices 2 and 3**.

Procedures could be initiated in either the Commons or the Lords. Private or local laws were initiated by petitions of interested parties; legislation concerning public matters or matters of the state was initiated by MPs, peers or government officials. Generally, a short debate was held to determine whether a Bill should be ordered – sometimes petitions were first examined by a Select Committee of inquiry. After a Bill had been ordered, a first reading was delivered to the House. The second reading

often gave rise to a more lengthy debate and sometimes led to further inquiry, either by another Select Committee or a Committee of the Whole House. The third reading was followed by a final vote; a simple majority determined whether a Bill was passed or not. Once passed in the Commons, it was forwarded to the Lords, where it went through similar stages. In case amendments were made in the process, the Bill was returned to the Commons for consent. Once accepted there, the Bill was forwarded to the monarch for Royal Assent.

#### **4.1 Initial Regulation of the Trade, 1788**

On 8 May 1786, Jonas Hanway approached the Commissioners of the Treasury with proposals for better regulation of sweeps' apprentices. He pleaded for the Commissioners to initiate Public Bill procedures.<sup>7</sup> His request was partly motivated by practical concerns. Private Bill procedures were initiated and paid for by petitioners, who had to demonstrate that their plans redeemed the pertinent evil without damaging the interests of others. These were challenging tasks given the lukewarm responses to earlier calls for donations and the known objections of master sweeps.<sup>8</sup>

The Commissioners did not consent to Hanway's request – a decision that had vital implications for the structure of procedures when

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<sup>7</sup> Hanway's letter was reprinted in: E.H. Fairbanks, 'The Chimney Sweeper's Climbing Boys', *Notes and Queries*, 12th Series (1917), p. 348.

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 2 for analysis of previous attempts by Hanway and his fellow campaigners to raise funds and recruit metropolitan master sweeps for self-regulation.

the cause was finally taken up in parliament eighteen months after Hanway's death. On 22 April 1788, the House of Commons received petitions from master sweep David Porter and from a 'Committee of Gentlemen'. Although Porter and the gentlemen prepared their appeals together,<sup>9</sup> they resolved to petition separately. In this way, Porter could claim to represent the voice of sweeps, while the gentlemen offered their services to parliament as independent advisors. This is clearly visible in the formulation of their appeals. Whereas Porter outlined the 'Inadequacies of the current Laws [...] not only in his own Judgment, but in the Opinion of the Trade in general',<sup>10</sup> his associates promised 'such Evidence [...] as has come to their Knowledge in the Course of their Inquiries upon this Subject [...] as [...] will be sufficient to satisfy the House of [...] the [...] Necessity of providing some Remedy for curing the Abuses complained of'.<sup>11</sup>

Porter in fact sent two petitions: one to request the ordering of a Bill, another to ask permission to make such a request in the first place, 'as, by the Rules and Orders of the House, a Petition for Leave to bring in such Bill cannot now be regularly received without a special Order for that Purpose'.<sup>12</sup> He was probably keen to avoid seeing his efforts fail over a

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<sup>9</sup> On 10 April, Porter and the 1788 Committee met at the Marine Society's Office, where, assisted by MP Robert Burton, they framed, read and approved the Bill and Indenture Form. *Public Advertiser*, 11 April 1788. Porter confirmed that he was indeed present at this and other meetings in preparation for a formal appeal to the legislature. David Porter, *Considerations Upon the Present State of Chimney Sweepers* (2nd edn., London, 1801), pp. 23-24.

<sup>10</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 43, p. 405, 22 April 1788.

<sup>11</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 43, pp. 405-406, 22 April 1788.

<sup>12</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 43, p. 405, 22 April 1788.

technicality, but proceeding with such care also demonstrated his reliability as a partner in law-making. Attention to procedure was not restricted to his petition; before approaching parliament, Porter and his associates met at the Marine Society office to redraft Hanway's plans into a workable Bill. Despite the presence of several MPs, they hired a solicitor to ensure the Bill and indenture form fulfilled all requirements.<sup>13</sup>

These efforts paid off; the petitions were forwarded to a Select Committee that, upon hearing testimonies by Porter and another sweep, ordered for a Bill to be introduced.<sup>14</sup> Although none of Porter's associates were among the MPs appointed to frame it, the Bill that was read to the Commons on 14 May indeed strongly resembled their proposals. It aimed to restrict employment in the trade to those of 8 years and above, limited the number of apprentices per masters to six, reserved the supervision of climbing boys to rate-paying householders, and provided detailed guidelines for the treatment of apprentices in terms of clothes, diet, cleanliness, and religious instruction. It passed two further readings without amendments and was carried forward to the Lords on 2 June.<sup>15</sup>

Porter and his associates were much less successful in exerting influence there. For reasons that remain unclear, they had lobbied peers

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<sup>13</sup> The 'Committee of Gentlemen' included at least four MPs: Isaac James Brown, James Martin, and the brothers Henry and Samuel Thornton. See chapter 1 for close examination of directors and subscribers to the 1788 Climbing Boy Committee.

<sup>14</sup> The Committee reported its findings on 1 May 1788: *Commons Journals*, vol. 43, p. 436.

<sup>15</sup> For reference to the second and third readings, see: *Morning Chronicle*, 20 and 29 May 1788. For a synopsis of the Bill at the first reading in the Lords, see: *Morning Chronicle*, 5 June 1788.

informally before introduction of the Bill but did not petition the House when proceedings got under way. The Bill was committed to a Committee of the Whole House on 11 June, which made drastic amendments without seeking their advice. Clauses removed included: 'That no person, not being a housekeeper, paying scot and lot, where he or she may live, shall take an apprentice' and 'That no apprentice shall hawk or call the streets for employment, but in company with his master'.<sup>16</sup> These were vital losses for Porter and associates. The first clause was intended to bar 'lodgers' or 'itinerants' from the trade – sweeps who were often too destitute to care for their apprentices, yet hard to police as they lacked a fixed residency.<sup>17</sup> The second was designed to ensure that masters always supervised their boys in person and could thus be held accountable in case of neglect.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these setbacks, Porter's Committee welcomed the ratification of the Act on 25 June. It thanked Robert Burton for his assistance in framing the Bill and introducing it in the Commons, Lord Hawke for carrying it through the Upper House, and all subscribers 'without whose humane, pecuniary aid, the helpless beings now relieved must have been doomed to spend their days in filth, disease, and

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<sup>16</sup> The first was removed out of fear that well-to-do master sweeps would monopolise the trade; the second for fear that it would throw journeymen out of employ. Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>17</sup> Porter: 'unfortunately it is often the name of a person [referring to name label of master on boys' hat] who may be found one day at the west end of town, the next day at the east end, a third day in the country: the penalties of the act can very little affect a person who is seldom two days together in the same jurisdiction'. Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>18</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, pp. 24-26.

wretchedness'.<sup>19</sup> In practice, the Act was hard to implement. London sweeps successfully challenged prosecutions for letting their boys cry the street at 'unseasonable hours'.<sup>20</sup> And colleagues in Manchester paid diligent care to their boys' diet and cleanliness, but claimed ignorance of the requirement to employ them through proper indentures – for which they were not penalised.<sup>21</sup>

Four things stand out in these proceedings. The first is the degree to which extra-parliamentary actors, in Private Bill procedures, could shape the character of legislation, but only when paying meticulous care to procedural custom and by establishing friendly contacts inside the House. Porter and his associates clearly went to considerable lengths to ensure that they did both. They framed their appeals and draft legislation so that it would not stumble over technical details and lobbied MPs and Lords before making a formal appeal.<sup>22</sup>

The address to the Humane in behalf of the poor Chimney Sweeping Boys has succeeded so well as not only to gain already nearly the sum wanted, but also to conciliate towards their relief the minds of so many Members

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<sup>19</sup> *Whitehall Evening Post*, 8 July 1788.

<sup>20</sup> William Gowers and Thomas Smith were convicted in the spring of 1799 for letting their apprentices cry for work on the streets before 7am. They successfully appealed to the Quarter Session Court and their convictions were 'quashed by order'. London Metropolitan Archives, MJ/SP/1799/JUNE/052/1-2, Petition by Thomas Smith of Great Windmill Street, St James Westminster, Chimney Sweeper, Petitions against a Conviction for Causing His Apprentice to Call the Streets before 7 o'clock in the Morning Sometime between Michaelmas Day and Lady Day, 17 June 1799; London Metropolitan Archives, MJ/SP/1799/APR/051/1-2, Petition by William Gowers of Fanconberg Court, St Anne Westminster, Chimney Sweeper, against a Conviction for Causing Thomas Brofey, His Apprentice, to Work before 7 O'clock in the Morning between Michaelmas and Lady Day, 2 April 1799.

<sup>21</sup> *Sun*, 6 September 1799.

<sup>22</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 4 April 1788.

of both Houses of Parliament, that there appears little doubt as to the success of the bill which is soon to be brought forward in their favour.

Secondly, even in Private Bill procedures, there were limitations to petitioners' influence. Despite extensive informal lobbying, Porter and his fellow campaigners were not consulted during procedures in the Upper House. Why they made no formal appeal is unclear. Porter proclaimed in hindsight:<sup>23</sup>

I wish I could have had access to the then Lord Chancellor; I am persuaded I could have satisfied his Lordship that the bill, as it passed the Commons, could have done no hurt, and that, in its present state, it could do but little good.

These first two points highlight the limitations of Phillips' depiction of law-making as driven either by parliamentary initiative or by public pressure.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, collaboration between campaigners outside of parliament and parliamentarians was crucial for the outcome of procedures.

Thirdly, there was limited opposition in parliament to the Bill. Unfortunately, no detailed records survive of these debates. But the fact that the Bill passed through the Commons without amendments and was dealt with in the Lords through one sitting of the Whole House suggests there were no objections based on principle. This is significant in light of the major disputes that arose during later procedures. It refutes Phillips' portrayal of reform as a consistent struggle between liberal abolitionists

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<sup>23</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Phillips proclaims that in 1834, 'public opinion forced the Lords to approve a bill' and that master sweeps petitioned parliament against abolition 'worried over the possibility that Parliament, by heeding public opinion, might prohibit the use of small boys'. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 5 and p. 18.

and their reactionary opponents – clearly at this stage of the campaign, neither camp was strongly defined.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it confirms that the entry of new issues on the parliamentary agenda initially provoked little reflection about the duties of the legislature – also established by Honeyman and Innes for procedures in 1802 for the regulation of child labour in textile mills.<sup>26</sup>

Fourthly, private procedures, based on the appeals by one master sweep and several gentlemen from London and Westminster, could generate public legislation that applied to the whole trade across England, Scotland and Wales. This Act was not alone. According to Julian Hoppit, procedures that originated in local or sectional initiatives often resulted in legislation that was applied nationally, although was not equally suited to all parts of the country.<sup>27</sup> This might explain why the Manchester sweeps were surprised to hear about the statutes once passed, as the campaign had largely bypassed their town, and that of many other tradesmen affected.

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<sup>25</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Studies in Labour History, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 47-49; Joanna Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour in Britain, 1783-1819' (Forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> Julian Hoppit, 'Introduction', in Julian Hoppit (ed.), *Parliaments, Nations and Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1660-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 10.



## 4.2 Failed Attempts to Secure Better Implementation, 1804

Several of the 1788 petitioners, including Porter, were at the core of appeals in 1804 to transform the failing Act. They petitioned parliament to extend apprenticeships in the trade to 21, make additional provisions for their care and instruction, and appoint commissioners to see to its implementation in the metropolis.<sup>28</sup> To avoid falling into the same trap (losing vital clauses in an advanced stage of law-making), the London SSNCB worked closely with parliamentarians throughout the legislative attempt. If one based one's arguments only on the printed records of parliament, this co-operation would appear to have been restricted to one MP presenting the SSNCB petition in a favourable light and to the Commons Select Committee giving SSNCB secretary, William Tooke a platform to provide further evidence.<sup>29</sup> But SSNCB reports suggest a more extensive collaboration.<sup>30</sup>

Leave has been given by the House of Commons to bring in the Bill. Your Committee have bestowed infinite pains in framing the various clauses of it, and it is now before a Sub-committee finally to settle, previous to its introduction into the House of Commons, where your Committee can scarcely anticipate an objection, from the pains they have taken to render it conformable to precedent, and useful as a measure of internal regulation and police, and from the circumstance of its having been submitted to the speaker, and modelled according to the plan which he had the goodness to suggest.

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<sup>28</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 59, p. 113, 24 February 1804.

<sup>29</sup> For the SSNCB petition, see: *Commons Journals*, vol. 59, p. 113, 24 February 1804. For a brief report of the Commons Select Committee including Tooke's testimony, see: *Commons Journals*, vol. 59, p. 150, 14 March 1804.

<sup>30</sup> '1804 Second London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 8. See Bibliography for full title.

The Bill shows the need to combine analysis of legislation formation with that of local implementation. Apart from additional clauses for the protection of climbing boys across Britain, the Bill proposed the licensing of sweeps residing within a 10-mile range of London's Royal Exchange, to be overseen by a committee of guardians and trustees.<sup>31</sup> The Bill listed the names of thirty-one persons who were to act on this committee, granting that others might be added later. Crucially, most of these men were active in the SSNCB, including several MPs and peers, but also master sweep David Porter and lawyer William Tooke. Thus, the SSNCB not only saw a prominent role for itself in designing the Act, but also anticipated a strong hand in its execution.

Yet, this was certainly not a case of a public lobby imposing its will on a defenceless legislature. For a start, the Bill never made it through the House of Lords. More significantly, the London SSNCB was not a strictly extra-parliamentary organisation. As demonstrated in chapters 1 and 3, its leaders and subscribers included numerous parliamentarians and administrators and its objectives were threefold: transforming attitudes and behaviour directly in society, influencing administrative practices *and* promoting legal reform. Most remarkable about this episode, then, is the fact that the SSNCB, despite its excellent connections to seats of power,

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<sup>31</sup> Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/2/73, Act to Amend an Act of 28 George III for the Regulation of Chimney Sweeps, 9 July 1804. For more on the history of parliamentary speakers, though without contributions dealing specifically with the Commons speaker in this period, see: Paul Seaward (ed.), 'Special Issue: Speakers and the Speakership – Presiding Officers and the Management of Business from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century', *Parliamentary History*, 29 (2010).

and close attention to procedural detail, failed to get the Act it had envisioned onto the statute books.

Unfortunately, no records of the climbing boy debates survive from this year. But evidence in parliamentary *Journals* and reflections in SSNCB *Annual Reports* suggest why the initiative failed. The former reveals that the Bill, as in 1788, passed quickly and without major amendments through the Commons.<sup>32</sup> This time it also made it unscathed through a Select Committee in the Lords<sup>33</sup> – perhaps highlighting the influence of the SSNCB – but it was rejected at the third reading in the Upper House.<sup>34</sup>

SSNCB reports suggest that the Bill's loss was due to some peers' objections to interfering in trade. The London Committee emphasised that it did not wish to 'arraign the propriety of that decision', but justified its own pains to see the Bill passed.<sup>35</sup> It acknowledged the 'inconvenience attending such interference, in most cases relating to trade', but argued that intervention was justified here in light of 'the glaring misconduct of a great proportion of the persons carrying on the business of Chimney-sweepers in London and its environs'.<sup>36</sup> The legislature had admitted as

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<sup>32</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 59, p. 150, 14 March 1804 (Commons Select Committee reporting), vol. 59, p. 305, 31 May 1804 (first reading), vol. 59, p. 316, 5 June 1804 (second reading), vol. 59, p. 390, 6 July 1804 (Commons Select Committee minor amendments), vol. 59, p. 396, 9 July 1804 (third reading).

<sup>33</sup> *Lords Journals*, vol. 44, p. 666, 13 July 1804.

<sup>34</sup> *Lords Journals*, vol. 44, p. 683, 18 July 1804. The Bill was due to be considered by a Committee of the Whole House, but the third reading was put off for three months – the conventional way of terminating procedures.

<sup>35</sup> '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 3. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>36</sup> '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 3.

much by regulating the trade in 1788 – it was merely to facilitate effective implementation of these laws that the SSNCB solicited for parliament's assistance.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, similar regulations to the ones rejected now had been introduced to good effect for other trades – 'hackney coachmen, Smithfield drovers and others of the same class, who might otherwise in a still greater degree impose on and insult their superiors, and cruelly oppress and inflict wanton pain on the unfortunate victims subjected to their care'.<sup>38</sup>

Four points stand out. Firstly, laissez-faire sentiments caused the Bill to fail – sentiments that had not featured in the 1788 procedures. That such sentiments occurred now makes sense because the procedures coincided with the publication of James Maitland's *Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth*, which sparked major disputes in the periodical press about state regulation of labour.<sup>39</sup> But the fact that different criteria were used in 1804 than in 1788 to judge climbing boy legislation indicates the need to consider the influence of a shift in political preoccupations. It

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<sup>37</sup> '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> James Maitland, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth, and into the Means and Causes of Its Increase* (Edinburgh, 1804). James Maitland/the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Lauderdale argued that profits could be generated and market demand met if businesses were left in charge of the labour force. His essay was critically reviewed by Henry Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review* (July 1804). Lauderdale, in turn, published *Observations* (1805), which sparked further *Thoughts* (1805) from Brougham. Lauderdale returned to the Lords in 1806 where he was a consistent spokesman against the regulation of child labour in chimneys and factories, particularly in debates during the late 1810s. See 4.3 for these debates. Roland Thorne, 'Maitland, James, Eighth Earl of Lauderdale (1759–1839)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17825>' (8 August 2010).

also refutes Phillips' assertion that reform was a consistent battle of social-conscious and reactionary forces without ideological underpinnings.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, the SSNCB did not merely exert pressure on the legislature through petitions – as noted by Phillips – but also acted as a partner in law-making and used legislative procedures to seek a role in the implementation of statutes. This juxtaposition of public lobbying with legislative and administrative activities is fitting, considering its leaders included parliamentarians, administrators *and* non-office holders. But it challenges the use of terms like 'extra-parliamentary' and 'public opinion' to describe the activities of voluntary associations.<sup>41</sup> It highlights the need to study the interplay between the formation of legislation, local implementation and voluntary relief and how far individuals pursued reform through different platforms – something that will be examined for later legislative cycles in later sections, where more information is available about individual activists. This approach carries valuable lessons for health reforms more generally because such reform tends to be studied through a single platform.<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, despite its close involvement in legislative procedures, the SSNCB was careful not to address the legislature as an equal or appear to

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<sup>40</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup>Eugene Charlton Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organisation, 1769-93* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

<sup>42</sup> Michael Brown focused specifically on appointments to medical charities. Brown, 'Medicine, Reform and the "End" of Charity'. Katherine Kelly focused on the resolving of disputes between 'military' and 'civilian' doctors in parliamentary inquiries. Kelly, "'Not Surgeons Alone'".

criticise its policies. It thus avoided giving the impression of challenging the legislature's final say in the formation of laws. It will be interesting to see whether this custom persisted through the early nineteenth century because studies of parliamentary politics have shown that petitioning expanded tremendously during these decades and opportunities for non-parliamentarians to participate in law-making increased.<sup>43</sup> How far did this 'public participation' in parliamentary affairs, or (more fitting to the approach adopted in this thesis) the growing intersection between legislative, administrative and voluntary actors and activities, undermine the legislature's autonomy?

Finally, the London SSNCB used the situation in 'London and its environs' to justify regulations that partly applied to the whole country. The failure of this attempt inspired the Committee to extend its non-legislative initiatives beyond the metropolis. In response to the rejection of the Bill, the Committee resolved to pursue 'more sedulously than ever [...] to encourage and promote the cleansing of Chimnies by mechanical means only' and appointed 'a Sub-Committee [...] for the purpose of introducing [machines] into the several cities and provincial towns throughout the kingdom'.<sup>44</sup> During the 1810s, the London Committee used the country-wide evidence that was created in the process to renew its lobby for statutory regulations. This confirms the need to examine not only how legislative procedures took shape through the interplay of different actors,

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<sup>43</sup> Innes, 'Legislation and Public Participation'.

<sup>44</sup> '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4.

but also how such procedures influenced, and were influenced by, other reform activities.

### 4.3 First Attempts to Prohibit Climbing, 1817-1824

#### LOBBYING

As might be expected from previous chapters, the volume of petitions regarding climbing boys reflected the increasing national interest for the cause. Petitions increased from less than five in 1788 and 1804 combined, to more than forty in 1818 and 1834, and more than 200 in 1840, often from places where pro-abolition or pro-reform societies had (recently) been formed.<sup>45</sup> It is tempting to see this growth as evidence of growing popular pressure on the legislature. But evidence from the years 1817-1824 suggests more complex changes took place. Parliamentarians had a strong hand in the contents and timing of petitions, and appeals could only have impact if the conditions inside parliament were suitable. This indicates that petitioning not only offered increasing opportunities for the public to pressurise parliament, but that lobbying also became more

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<sup>45</sup> Innes associated the growth of petitioning with the flourishing of national networks of reform societies – a hypothesis partly validated by evidence from this campaign. Innes, 'Legislation and Public Participation', p. 114 and pp. 120-21. By 1819, exertions to introduce mechanical sweeping were being made in fourteen places – from eleven of these, parliament received petitions in favour of abolishing climbing boys. In 1834, the House of Commons received pro-abolition petitions from twenty-nine places – in all but three was mechanical sweeping also promoted. However, at odds with this, in 1840, in over one-third of the places from which the Commons received abolition appeals (forty-two out of 110), no voluntary exertions were seemingly taking place. Information about voluntary activism has been extracted from London SSNCB Reports. Information about the origin of petitions has been derived from Commons and Lords Journals and, for 1834 and 1840, from the Reports of the Commons Select Committee on Public Petitions.

integrated in intra-parliamentary processes. This implies that an approach of petitions as 'outside parliament' and MPs as 'inside the legislature', as adopted by Phillips, is misleading.<sup>46</sup> It also puts the findings of chapter 3 in a different light. It was noted there that petitioners used their appeals partly to mobilise support for voluntary relief. But it seems that the character of their appeals was influenced by the preoccupations and procedures of parliament – suggesting parliament, through petitions, influenced voluntary relief too.

The changing timing of petitioning confirms its increasing integration into the business of parliament. In 1788 and 1804, petitions were only used to initiate legislative procedures, but between 1817 and 1819, parliament received appeals at other stages of the cycle. Moreover, petitioners often responded explicitly to the precise stage of the Bill's progress and their appeals were presented at strategic moments – the reading of Bills, the final day of Select Committee inquiries or when the Committee presented its report. Petitions by master sweeps from London coincided with the first reading of abolition Bills in the Commons (June 1817), the third Commons reading (February 1818), the first Lords reading (February 1818), and the second Commons reading (February 1819) – including requests to be heard against the Bill where appropriate to the

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<sup>46</sup> Phillips repeatedly refers to petitions as 'public opinion' pressurising, and at times forcing, parliament to take certain measures. See e.g.: Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 5 and p. 24.



state of proceedings.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, petitioners in Bath expressed their support for abolition in anticipation of the issue being taken up by the Lords: 'having understood that the practice of sweeping Chimnies by Climbing Boys is about to engage the attention of this House'.<sup>48</sup>

These transitions suggest that petitioners were increasingly aware of what proceeded in parliament and desired to participate throughout the legislative trajectory. However, a closer look undermines the impression of an increasingly assertive 'public' extending its grip over the legislature. Petitioners were knowledgeable because parliamentarians assisted them in formulating their appeals. In June 1817, William Wilberforce, Sir Francis Burdett and other MPs addressed a crowd in London 'for the purpose of adopting a Petition to Parliament'.<sup>49</sup> The petition was 'agreed upon unanimously, and ordered to be presented to the House of Commons by Mr. Bennet' – another SSNCB director present at the meeting.<sup>50</sup> Bennet delayed reading the petition for two weeks, letting it coincide with the presentation of his findings as chairman of the Commons Select Committee.<sup>51</sup> There are ample examples of parliamentarians assisting petitioners in this way. Several petitions in the Parliamentary Archives

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<sup>47</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 72, p. 404, 25 June 1817 (first Commons reading); *Commons Journals*, vol. 73, p. 86, 20 February 1818 (third Commons reading); *Commons Journals*, vol. 74, p. 137, 17 February 1819 (second Commons reading); *Lords Journals*, vol. 51, p. 473, 25 February 1818 (day after first Lords reading, including request to be heard).

<sup>48</sup> *Lords Journals*, vol. 51, p. 472, 24 February 1818.

<sup>49</sup> *The Times*, 9 June 1817.

<sup>50</sup> *The Times*, 9 June 1817.

<sup>51</sup> The petition meeting was held on 7 June but Bennet presented the appeal to the House on 23 June. *Commons Journals*, vol. 72, p. 389, 23 June 1817.

feature two dates: one for the day it was presented to the House, the other (seemingly) for the day it had first been received – clearly showing the hand of the MP or peer in choosing an apt moment for their delivery.<sup>52</sup> Often, the person presenting the petitions also expressed his support, sometimes explicitly drawing upon the contents of the appeal. In these cases, collaboration benefited both parties – petitioners benefited from well-timed readings; parliamentarians advanced their position in the momentum generated by petitions.<sup>53</sup>

However, not all petitions could count on a favourable presenter, and associating too closely with petitioners could undermine the persuasiveness of peers and MPs. Delivering a pro-abolition petition to the Commons in February 1818, Lord Milton supported the contents of the appeal but expressed reservations about the pace of proceedings. Bennet dismissed the suggestion that he was proceeding ‘too hastily’, stressing that: ‘the number of petitions which had been presented to the House was a proof that the present practice was very generally admitted to be an evil,

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<sup>52</sup> For example, the petition from St George Hanover Square features 10 March 1818 (the day the petition was received) *and* 24 Feb 1818. The latter date does not match the date of the Bill under discussion. It was seemingly added by a clerk of the House on the day it was received. Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/8/415, 98d, Petition of the Vestrymen and Other Inhabitants of the Parish of St George, Hanover Square against the Bill, 10 March 1818.

<sup>53</sup> In June 1817, Lord Milton presented a pro-abolition petition from Sheffield to the Commons, pleading the House to initiate legislative procedures. Milton feared there was not enough time to take up the issue in the present session, but supportive statements by Henry Grey Bennet and others resulted in the appeal being acted upon. Bennet explained ‘he had repeatedly intended to bring the case of this wretched class of boys before the House, and to originate a measure for suppressing the practice complained of. He belonged to a society which had for its object the superseding the necessity of employing boys in this way.’ *The Parliamentary Debates*, HC Deb, 05 June 1817, vol. 36, 890. Henceforth, ‘Hansard’.

which ought to be got rid of as soon as possible'.<sup>54</sup> In this case, his reference to popular opinion saved the day, but his constant referral to 'petitions from all parts of the country' and 'public meetings in all the great towns' ultimately provoked Sir Joseph Yorke to mock his proposals as 'virtuous out of doors' but in need of firm dismissal by parliament to demonstrate that 'every humane gentleman could not compel the House to the adoption of whatever plans he pleased'.<sup>55</sup> Along similar lines, in 1819 in the Lords, Lord Lauderdale dismissed abolition as a populist move, harmful to society and undermining parliament's credibility.<sup>56</sup>

he could only account for its introduction on the score that every man who got into parliament thought himself bound to propose some novel measure, in order to become popular—a notion or persuasion, or whatever else it might be called, than which none had ever been conceived more mischievous to the interests of the people, nor more degrading to the dignity of the legislature.

This brings us to a vital point. Petitioners depended on a loyal partner inside the House to present their appeals faithfully, but the space for these partners to manoeuvre was limited. Contemporaries were aware of this limitation. In 1823, the Sheffield SSNCB tried to rejuvenate legislative procedures through an appeal in name of local sweep, William Sampson. The petition was presented to the Commons by Lord Milton, but this time it was Bennet who obstructed further proceedings, exclaiming that:<sup>57</sup>

he entertained little hope [for its success]; for so long as certain persons in another place systematically opposed everything tending to a reform in

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<sup>54</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 18 February 1818, vol. 37, 506.

<sup>55</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 22 February 1819, vol. 39, 548-49.

<sup>56</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 08 March 1819, vol. 39, 901.

<sup>57</sup> *The Times*, 1 July 1823.

the law, there could be little expectation of any advantageous change until Providence was pleased to remove them from their situations.

These examples highlight that the mood inside parliament was crucial for how petitions were received and that even outspoken abolitionists were unwilling to throw their weight behind pro-abolition appeals when they sensed the time was not right. This remained a common feature throughout the period covered in this chapter.<sup>58</sup> This refutes Phillips' assertion that 'public opinion' forced parliament to act. The middle ground chosen by Milton and Bennet's unwillingness to pursue procedures in the current climate also disproves his portrayal of reform as a consistent battle between two antagonistic camps. To explore these issues further, we need to examine the debates that raged in parliament at the time.

## DEBATES

Phillips presented the climbing boy controversy as a dispute between liberals and reactionaries, with the latter's strong position in the Lords

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<sup>58</sup> Petitioners continued to rely on supportive parliamentarians. On 2 June 1834, a petition was presented to the Commons from London master sweeps wishing to be heard in opposition to the abolition Bill. Four days later, the Bill's expediency was investigated by a Committee in the other House. The masters were not invited. It is possible that the petition slipped the Committee's attention, but it was certainly not due to short notice. One of the three witnesses who *were* heard received his invitation hours before he was due to testify. The Committee confirmed the Bill's expediency, and it was taken up again by the whole house. The sweeps used the occasion to repeat their appeal, this time with the blessing of several peers. The Duke of Richmond supported the second reading of the Bill, after which 'it might go to a Committee up stairs, and before that Committee the evidence of the master chimney-sweepers might be heard'. Several of the sweeps were indeed summoned to the Select Committee and provided vital evidence, resulting in significant amendments to the Bill. For the sweeps' first appeal: *Commons Journals*, vol. 89, p. 343, 2 June 1834. For the sweeps' second appeal: *Lords Journals*, vol. 66, p. 561, 6 June 1834. For Richmond's support: 'Hansard', HL Deb, 13 June 1834, vol. 24, 419.

during the late 1810s putting abolitionist efforts in vain.<sup>59</sup> However, a more attentive reading of debates in this period shows that opposition emerged gradually and that opposition to abolition on the grounds of free trade was slower to emerge than in factory-act debates. Furthermore, there was a large middle ground, with many debaters favouring reform but unsure whether legislation was the most effective intervention. Besides uncertainty over whether the situation of climbing boys deserved to be exempted from *laissez-faire*, the cause provoked a spectrum of opinions about the place of sentiment versus practical considerations in policy-making. The evolution of these disputes highlights that attitudes in parliament towards the regulation of climbing boys were multifaceted and that decisions must be viewed with reference to broader preoccupations of MPs and peers.

Throughout these years, the protagonists of climbing boy abolition justified their position through the damage caused by this work to the boys' health and the offense this constituted to those with feelings of humanity. Responses to these claims changed considerably over time. When introducing Bills in the Commons in June 1817 and February 1818, Bennet and Wilberforce stressed the 'inhuman' treatment bestowed upon climbing boys and the inevitable hazards of the job. They claimed that only a ban on climbing would offer adequate protection and that boys could be replaced by the machines that had been developed since parliament last

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<sup>59</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 6.

considered the issue in 1804.<sup>60</sup> Some MPs desired further inquiries into the latter assertion, but no one challenged that further regulations were necessary or that work-related hazards and inhumane treatment were legitimate grounds. Lord Milton cautioned Bennet not to act 'too hastily' but assured him that it was 'not his intention to offer any remarks on the nature of the bill'.<sup>61</sup>

That no one challenged the principle of intervention or the rhetoric deployed, was partly the consequence of the tactics adopted by abolitionists and partly reflective of the mood in the House. By stressing that parliament had already recognised the need to protect climbing boys in 1788 and that this Bill merely extended these principles to the most hazardous part of their job, facilitated by technological progress, Bennet and Wilberforce avoided debates about the implications of their proposals for the duties of parliament. But when debates about regulating child labour in factories resumed after an eighteen-month interlude (due to illness of the parliamentary spokesman Sir Robert Peel), climbing boy

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<sup>60</sup> On 5 June 1817, William Lyttelton supported the Sheffield petition that pleaded the House to investigate the state of climbing boys as 'All men of common feeling and humanity must be anxious to remove a practice, which entailed so much misery, and for which no necessity whatever existed'. 'Hansard', HC Deb, 05 June 1817, vol. 36, 890. On 23 June, Bennet presented the findings of the Select Committee, stressing that he 'should not trouble them with a detail of the accidents, distortions of the human body, and cruelties which were the frequent consequence of this practice' as it 'required no arguments in this age to prove that the practice was barbarous and inhuman, and unfit to be practiced in a Christian country'. Wilberforce supported the need for abolition with reference to fatal accidents, in 'Hansard', HC Deb, 25 June 1817, vol. 36, 1156. Bennet restarted procedures in February 1818, by drawing attention to the accidents since the summer ('no less than five fatal instances had occurred to show its character') and to the heartlessness of master sweeps ('rarely susceptible of the common feelings of humanity'). 'Hansard', HC Deb, 9 February 1818, vol. 37, 216-17.

<sup>61</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 18 February 1818, vol. 37, 506.

legislation acquired broader significance. In 1816, speakers *had* questioned whether factory work was harmful to health; whether restrictions would benefit the children and the wider economy; and whether intervention was justified at all.<sup>62</sup> These issues were now again addressed for factory children *and* climbing boys. One day after supporting Bennet's proposals for climbing boys, Lord Lascelles opposed a similar scheme for factories – using the two to determine the boundaries of social policy.<sup>63</sup>

not all evils [...] were fit subjects for legislative interference; for instance, he highly applauded the bill of an hon. friend of his, respecting chimney-sweepers. But in the present case it should be recollected, that the individuals who were the objects of the hon. gentleman's proposition were free labourers. This excited his jealousy; for, were the principle of interference with free labourers once admitted, it was difficult to say how far it might not be carried

Lascelles' observations set the tone for subsequent climbing boy debates. From now on, in both Houses, the fate of this legislation was connected with that of the textile children, and references to health and sentiment were judged as part of broader questions of governance.

The propriety of regulating work-related health was the first issue to underpin debates about climbing boys. Addressing the Lords in March 1818, David Pollock responded to Stephen Lushington's portrayal of calamities 'absolutely inherent in the nature of the trade', by questioning

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<sup>62</sup> '1816 [397] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence'. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>63</sup> 'Hansard', 19 February 1818, vol. 37, 560.

whether such hazards, innate to laborious processes, should be regulated by parliament:<sup>64</sup>

if the inconveniences, if the disorders, if the sufferings connected with a trade were taken into account, and your Lordships were to legislate upon all such cases, *you would find many much more grievous than this*, and the occupation of Parliament would never have an end.

Lord Auckland, vice-president of the SSNCB and chairman of the Select Committee to which Pollock addressed his appeal, strongly disagreed with this judgment:

the principle which should guide their lordships in a case of this kind was, that no persons should be permitted to impose on others, and especially children, any labour calculated to injure their health and impair their bodily strength.

However, not all peers were as decided, and many used different criteria.

Lord Sutherland disagreed that unhealthy work required legislation, but felt that 'positive cruelty' did. He therefore opposed regulation of factories, but supported initiatives for chimney sweeping:<sup>65</sup>

the cases were essentially different. In that of the climbing boys, actual inhumanity was practised, but in that of the cotton-spinners, no objection of that nature was made, and their employment, however injurious it might eventually prove to health, was not accompanied by positive cruelty.

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<sup>64</sup> *The Speech of David Pollock, Esq. Delivered before the Committee of the House of Lords on Wednesday, the Eight of April, 1818, in Support of the Petition of the Master Chimney Sweepers against the Bill for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices and for Preventing the Employment of Boys in Climbing of Chimneys* (London, 1818), p. 9. Pollock was the counsel for petitioners opposing abolition in the Lords Select Committee; his speech signalled the start of the hearings of the witnesses called by him. Lushington represented petitioners supporting the measure. For Lushington's initial speech, see: *The Speech of Dr. Lushington, in Support of the Bill for the Better Regulation of Chimney-Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for Preventing the Employment of Boys in Climbing Chimnies, before the Committee in the House of Lords, on Friday, the 13th March, 1818* (London, 1818).

<sup>65</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 8 March 1819, vol. 39, 902.



Subtle variations of opinion also occurred in the Commons. The MPs Henry Peter Brougham and Thomas Denman, prominent legal practitioners with similar outlooks on questions of law, took differing positions on this matter.<sup>66</sup> Neither judged health hazard as sufficient grounds for interfering in labour. But whereas Brougham found the climbing boys' young age a reason to act, Denman preferred to leave their protection to their parents and feared that the alternative, 'in idleness, in the workhouse', was worse than employment in this trade.<sup>67</sup>

Similar debates arose about factory labour. Ultimately, the issue was resolved in favour of regulation if the worker was 'unfree' (from his young age or in apprenticeship) and if the work carried out was too detrimental. Protective measures were thus introduced in 1819 for all factory children, setting the minimum age to 9 and restricting working hours for those under 16.<sup>68</sup> That no equivalent measures were passed for climbing boys was not the result of the stubbornness of abolitionists. In May 1819, the continued uncertainty about the safety of mechanical sweep forced those who had advocated abolition to seek a compromise

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<sup>66</sup> Brougham and Denman were both strongly aligned to the Whigs and together represented Queen Caroline in her 1820 trial. Gareth H. Jones and Vivienne Jones, 'Denman, Thomas, First Baron Denman (1779–1854)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., May 2009, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7495>' (16 September 2010); Michael Lobban, 'Brougham, Henry Peter, First Baron Brougham and Vaux (1778–1868)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3581>' (16 September 2010).

<sup>67</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 17 February 1819, vol. 39, 451-52.

<sup>68</sup> Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour'.

that allowed the continued use of climbing boys.<sup>69</sup> That this Bill was also rejected was due to a second issue that overshadowed debates in 1819: the place of sentiment versus practical concerns in policy-making.

Humane sentiments had been deployed to justify regulation of climbing boys ever since Hanway initiated relief. Bennet and Wilberforce used it in 1817 and 1818 to justify abolition, without challenge. Indeed, Pollock insisted to the Lords that opponents of abolition were 'as eager in the cause of humanity' as their opponents.<sup>70</sup> Procedures resumed in the Commons in January 1819 in familiar terms. Colonel Wood exclaimed, 'Whoever had children of his own, and had read the report, could not but feel an anxiety to have the unfortunate, oppressed climbing boys relieved'.<sup>71</sup> Henry Brougham desired 'that a bill so humane and useful would be unanimously agreed to'.<sup>72</sup> But their pleas no longer received universal approval; Francis Ommaney remarked that 'the picture which had been drawn of the unhappy state of these creatures was far from correct' and Sir Joseph Sydney Yorke suspected that cases of children being forced up flues with pins and lighted straw, as recited in parliamentary reports,

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<sup>69</sup> Bennet conceded that 'After what had passed it was not his intention to propose any measure for the abolition altogether of the use of climbing boys. Whatever might be his own private opinion on the matter, the result of his former endeavours had been such, that he could not think such a proposition admissible. His object therefore, now was to regulate the trade, and to put the parties under a better charge, and in a better situation, than they had heretofore been.' 'Hansard', HC Deb, 31 March 1819, vol. 39, 1269.

<sup>70</sup> *The Speech of David Pollock on 8 April 1818*, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 17 February 1819, vol. 39, 450.

<sup>72</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 17 February 1819, vol. 39, 451.

were 'excessively exaggerated'.<sup>73</sup> When Bennet presented yet another 'humane' scheme, Yorke responded with 'practical' objections.<sup>74</sup>

These challenges reflected a growing preoccupation in parliament with respect to feelings versus practical concerns in policy-making. In April 1819, Bennet pleaded the Commons to assist pauper families in Ilchester, but Lord Castlereagh responded: 'The case was one which excited a strong degree of commiseration for the sufferers; but the House as a body, could not act on a principle of humanity alone.'<sup>75</sup> This suspicion of sentiment undermined the regulation of climbing boys because the cause had so long been propagated on 'humane' grounds. Lord Auckland introduced Bennet's Bill in the Lords in March 1819, resorting 'naturally' to emphatic language: '[it was] impossible to see the unfortunate children to whom the bill applied, hourly in the streets, without experiencing the most painful emotions'.<sup>76</sup> But Lord Lauderdale, who favoured *laissez-faire*, pressed the House to keep a calm mind:<sup>77</sup>

although no stranger to emotions of humanity, he could not suffer his humanity to run headlong with him, and thereby risk the incurring of those accidents which the metropolis and populous towns might suffer from fires.

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<sup>73</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 17 February 1819, vol. 39, 449 and 454.

<sup>74</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 22 February 1819, vol. 39, 549-50.

<sup>75</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 2 April 1819, vol. 39, 1355.

<sup>76</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 8 March 1819, vol. 39, 899.

<sup>77</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 8 March 1819, vol. 39, 902.

He accused supporters of the Bill of seeking to impose a 'moral code'. The Earl of Harrowby came to Auckland's defence, claiming that feelings should have a place in the House, if they informed practical remedies for genuine distress.<sup>78</sup>

What relation had this principle of action to the introduction of a moral code? It was not proposed to pass a law with reference to moral conduct generally, but to apply a practical remedy to an existing evil.

However, the association between excessive sentiment and abolition had been made - a harmful connection that would haunt the promoters of the Bill for the remainder of the session.

Auckland tried to redirect the focus of debate, claiming that experience was guiding his campaign. He referred to petitioners from Christ Church, in London, who had intended to appeal *against* abolition, but changed their minds after witnessing the efficiency of machines. It proved a general point:<sup>79</sup>

whatever prejudices existed against the use of machinery, was generally among persons unacquainted with its use; and that as appeal to experiment was always sure to overcome that prejudice.

But Lauderdale cunningly refocused the discussion to feelings; policy should be based on rational consideration of collective interests, not on sympathy for the distressed few. He compared the abolitionists with the

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<sup>78</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 8 March 1819, vol. 39, 903.

<sup>79</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 15 March 1819, vol. 39, 981-82.

'humane' Irishman who had pleaded his neighbours to use ducks instead of geese to sweep their flues:<sup>80</sup>

The zealots for this bill had, in their blind eagerness to relieve a partial suffering, as completely forgotten the general interests of society, as the poor Irishman had disregarded the ducks in his anxiety to save the goose.

The anecdote drew the laughter of the House, and dealt abolitionist efforts a vital blow. The vote was lost, and promoters of the Bill were forced back to the drawing board. They gave up the idea of abolition and turned directly to the master sweeps to negotiate an agreeable compromise. Eight weeks later, the Lords voted on a compromise. But Lauderdale and others successfully dismissed the proposal as yet again a policy based on 'mistaken spirit of humanity'.<sup>81</sup>

This evidence shows that there were indeed ardent advocates *and* opponents of abolition in parliament. But a majority of parliamentarians had no decided opinion about whether and how to regulate climbing boys. Although debate was essentially adversarial, expecting statements in favour or against a policy, their contributions directed discussions towards a moderation of the Bill rather than straightforward support or rejection. Their judgments were partly based on what was known about the state of climbing boys or the safety of mechanical alternatives but also on how these issues were connected with broader questions of governance.

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<sup>80</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 15 March 1819, vol. 39, 983-84.

<sup>81</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 24 May 1819, vol. 40, 669-70.

Parliamentary inquiries were crucial for winning over this large middle ground.

## INQUIRIES

Phillips argued that opponents of abolition treated the evidence generated by parliamentary inquiries carelessly. He denounced reactionary peers for obstructing abolition Bills, 'despite the harrowing reports of the mental and physical tortures of the sweep-boys, sworn to by reliable witnesses before the Lords Committees [in 1818] and before the committee appointed by the Commons in 1817', which he blamed on their fear of 'the bother and expense resulting from the necessary alterations in many of their chimneys'.<sup>82</sup> Time and time again, they 'put property ahead of humanity'.<sup>83</sup> This interpretation overlooks the considerable dispute inside and outside parliament about the sloppy proceedings of the Commons inquiry in 1817 and the ambiguous evidence generated by the Lords inquiry and Board of Works trials in 1818. These disputes were crucial for the outcome of climbing boy legislation and remind us of the need to consider the structure of legislative procedures when assessing the fortunes of reform. Too often historians have drawn evidence from committee proceedings – whether the Health of Town Committees or other labour inquiries – without paying sufficient attention to how they were put

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<sup>82</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>83</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 30.

together and made credible (or not) within parliament and outside.<sup>84</sup> This section focuses on these procedural aspects to clarify both the 'failure' of climbing boy Bills and the significance of these investigations for changes in the procedures and conventions of the parliamentary inquiry.

The Commons inquiry in June 1817 was a one-sided affair. Dominated by MPs affiliated to the SSNCB,<sup>85</sup> the Committee selected witnesses favourable to abolition. Seven of the fourteen witnesses were associated to the SSNCB; four others were clearly sympathetic to its cause.<sup>86</sup> Only one of the eight sweeps interviewed defended the climbing boy system. This is striking because forty-nine others - members of a

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<sup>84</sup> Studies that used evidence from the Health of Towns reports and other public health inquiries without examining their practical arrangement sufficiently: Michael Brown, 'From Foetid Air to Filth: The Cultural Transformation of British Epidemiological Thought, Ca. 1780-1848', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82 (2008), 515-44; Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Methuen, 1984). For sanitary reform, Christopher Hamlin has demonstrated the importance of considering the 'making of' parliamentary reports and their communication to local authorities. Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice*. Peter Kirby examined the 'social context' of public decency concerns in reports on child labour in British mines by the 1842 Children's Employment Commission, without considering the influence of political practices on the gathering and presentation of evidence. Peter Kirby, 'Child Labour, Public Decency and the Iconography of the Children's Employment Commission of 1842', *Manchester Papers in Economic and Social History*, 62 (2007), 1-23. Others have similarly drawn evidence from these reports without taking account of procedures. Jane Humphries, 'Protective Legislation, the Capitalist State, and Working Class Men: The Case of the 1842 Mines Regulation Act', *Feminist Review*, 7 (1981), 1-33; Angela V. John, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines* (London: Croom Helm, 1980). But see Joanna Innes's careful dissection of inquiry procedures in earlier factory reforms: Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour'.

<sup>85</sup> Henry Grey Bennet served as the Committee's chairman. At least nine of the other twenty-one MPs on the Committee had connections with the SSNCB: Robert Barclay, Peter Burrell and William Wilberforce were London SSCNB officials; Charles Edmondstone, Charles Grant, William Lyttelton, Henry Martin, John Martin, and Mr. Waldegrave were SSNCB subscribers.

<sup>86</sup> Among the former were three SSNCB officials, three machine designers/mechanical sweeps who worked under commission of the SSNCB and one surgeon who had previously contributed to SSNCB promotion. Among the latter were three sweeps who had largely switched to mechanical sweeping and one architect who had petitioned parliament in favour of abolition.

Committee of Master Sweeps in London and Westminster - had appealed to be heard. Their petition was reprinted in the Minutes of Evidence, but only one of the signatories, John Cook, was called, who had worked for the SSNCB as mechanical agent.<sup>87</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Committee's Report confirmed the intrinsic hazards in the current method and the practicality of mechanical alternatives. In the issues addressed and language adopted, the Report was strikingly similar to SSNCB reports. Indeed, the London SSNCB paid for its printing.<sup>88</sup> Yet, its findings were contested in parliament and out of doors. Two days after Bennet had presented his findings, the Commons received a petition from a furious sweep.<sup>89</sup> He questioned the reliability of witnesses and accused the SSNCB of manipulating evidence – both of which seem to contain some truth:<sup>90</sup>

the Society for superseding the necessity of Climbing Boys have promised money to those Sweeps who have used the machine; therefore the

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<sup>87</sup> The House also received a petition from twelve Bristol sweeps to be heard against abolition, but the appeal arrived days after the Committee had concluded its proceedings. *Lords Journals*, vol. 72, p. 453, 4 July 1817.

<sup>88</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence'. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Brononville was secretary of the Committee of Master Sweeps that had petitioned the House to be heard against abolition. '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', appendix 1.

<sup>90</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 72, p. 427, 30 June 1817. A pamphlet in the Banks Collection of Trade Cards in the British Museum lists the flues swept between September 1805 and May 1806 by mechanical sweep Robert Smart, brother of the machine designer, George Smart, both of whom worked under the commission of the SSNCB. Several addresses are listed multiple times, indicating that Smart swept the same flues periodically during those nine months. Yet, it is likely that the totals listed in London SSNCB Annual Reports took these numbers at face-value, without omitting duplicates. British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, Vol. 2, 36.26, Mechanical Chimney Sweeping by Robert Smart, c. 1806.



Petitioner humbly submits to the House, that the veracity of their statements may be doubted.

And:

The number of chimnies said to be cleansed by the machine are not so many single chimnies, but most of them have had the machine several times up the identical flues, and each time calculated for the purpose of augmentation

He pressed the House for an opportunity 'to be heard against the Bill for prohibiting the use of Climbing Boys'. Although his request was not met, it had the desired effect. The abolition Bill did not pass a second reading, awaiting further investigations into the safety of mechanical sweeping. The Lords ordered a new inquiry, which followed different procedures and in which several sweeps with objections against abolition were heard.

The Commons Committee was also fiercely criticised in the press, because of its biased selection of witnesses and the fact that hearings had not taken place under oath. Notably, the SSNCB responded – highlighting its close association with the inquiry:<sup>91</sup>

Much has been said in some highly respectable periodical publications of the crude nature of Parliamentary investigation of abuses as existing in this and other trades; and particular animadversion has been bestowed on the various examinations and discussion which have taken place in the House of Commons, and before its Committees, with reference to measures proposed for promoting a substitution of mechanical means for those now in use in cleansing chimneys.

In answer to these objections, it may be observed, that every tittle (sic) of evidence, as taken before the Commons' Committee, upon mere allegations of unsworn voluntary witnesses, and in the diffuse method which such examinations imply, has been corroborated and confirmed by evidence on oath, as well of adverse witnesses as of others, who were subjected to the strictest cross-examination of counsel before a numerous

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<sup>91</sup> '1821 Tenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 6. See Bibliography for full title.

Committee of the House of Lords [in 1818], many of the individuals of which took part in the examination.

Despite conceding that the 1817 inquiry had not been as 'strict' as it ought to have been, the witness statements produced *were* used by the London SSCNB and auxiliaries societies to promote mechanical sweeping.<sup>92</sup>

The ambiguous status of the Commons inquiry left a strong mark on procedures when the Lords ordered its own investigation the following year.<sup>93</sup> To ensure a balanced inquiry, petitioners in favour of abolition and those against were each represented by a counsel. Both counsels made opening statements to the Whole House before ordering their set of witnesses before the Committee. First the witnesses of the pro-abolition counsel, Stephen Lushington (London SSNCB director), were heard by both counsels, then those of the opposing camp, selected by David Pollock. Lords on the Committee could step in to ask for clarifications or raise their own questions.

Although the hearings thus had an adversarial structure, both counsels were eager to stress their impartiality. Pollock emphasised the

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<sup>92</sup> Extracts from the 1817 Report and Minutes of Evidence were reprinted in e.g.: *Observations on the Cruelty of Employing Climbing-Boys in Sweeping Chimneys, and on the Practicability of Effectually Cleansing Flues by Mechanical Means; with Extracts from the Evidence before the House of Commons* (London, 1828), pp. 16-21; *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children, and Proving the Practicability and Advantage of Cleaning Them by Machines* (Liverpool, 1829), pp. 3-5.

<sup>93</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence'. See Bibliography for full title.

care he had bestowed on selecting reliable witnesses<sup>94</sup> and his commitment to open questioning:<sup>95</sup>

I am directed to put the questions to the different Witnesses as broadly, liberally, and undisguisedly as possible, in order that your Lordships may not have first one side of the question, and then the other; but that, on my part, you may have the whole Case without reserve laid open to your view.

He accused Lushington of partiality worse than that demonstrated by the Commons Committee:<sup>96</sup>

There was, indeed, a Chimney Sweeper examined before the other House; and my learned friend, Dr. Lushington, might have called him before your Lordships; but he very well knew, that the proportion of Chimneys capable of being swept by Machinery would not have been stated by him at 98 or 99 in 100. [...] [John Cooke] was not called because, I have a right to say, he would not answer the purpose.

At the close of proceedings, Lushington similarly reflected as much on the nature of evidence as on the actual statements made. He contrasted Pollock's 'theoretical evidence' with his own 'practical proof':<sup>97</sup>

I am not about to refer to the *opinions* of architects, builders, and other professional persons, but I have the satisfaction of being able to direct your attention to evidence, from which, it appears, that many thousand chimnies have actually been swept by machinery

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<sup>94</sup> Pollock assured the House: 'I consider [my petitioners'] interests best served and promoted by the fullest and most ample investigation of this subject. For this purpose, my Lords, I mean to call persons who have been all their lives in the trade; who have made property in the trade, and have retired to other employments. [...] I will produce Directors, Surveyors, Secretaries, and Firemen, who will concur in opinion, that the danger of using Machinery in general will be such, that the offices must raise the rates of insurance, in order to indemnify themselves against the additional risks.' *The Speech of David Pollock on 8 April 1818*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>95</sup> *The Speech of David Pollock on 8 April 1818*, p.21.

<sup>96</sup> *The Speech of David Pollock on 8 April 1818*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>97</sup> *The Reply of Dr. Lushington, in Support of the Bill for the Better Regulation of Chimney-Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for Preventing the Employment of Boys in Climbing Chimnies: Before the Committee in the House of Lords, on Monday, the 20th April, 1818* (London, 1818), p. 3.

He stressed the sincerity of his witnesses and the dishonesty of Pollock's:<sup>98</sup>

Those of your Lordships who were present when [mechanical sweep John Johnson] gave his evidence, must, I am sure, recollect the great clearness and precision with which he detailed the facts, and that he conducted himself in a manner to entitle him to the fullest credit.

By contrast, 'The whole of the testimony of [master sweep James Ludford] is so entirely undeserving of credit, that it requires but little comment'.<sup>99</sup>

The Committee was careful to avoid partiality towards either counsel. Both were allowed to address the house in response to the other counsel's presentation of evidence.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the changes made by the Committee to the first draft of its report, possibly in consultation with the counsels, suggest its desire for a balanced statement of findings. For example, to the conclusion that 'upon the actual situation of the boys and upon the evils necessarily intrinsic in the trade much contradictory evidence has been submitted to the Committee', was added the observation that these were 'contradictions which can only be reconciled by the great difference which exists between the poorer and more respectable classes of the trade'.<sup>101</sup> However, because of all efforts to produce a balanced investigation, the outcome did not produce a clear

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<sup>98</sup> *The Reply of Dr Lushington on 20 April 1818*, p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> *The Reply of Dr Lushington on 20 April 1818*, p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> Because Pollock was presenting second, he had the advantage of being able to reflect upon Lushington's set of witnesses. To avoid bias, Lushington was given the opportunity to address the House again during the second round of proceedings. *The Reply of Dr Lushington on 20 April 1818*.

<sup>101</sup> Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/8/415, 98n, Report from Committee on the Chimney Sweepers Regulation Bill, 14 May 1818; Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/8/415, 98o, Report from Committee on the Chimney Sweepers Regulation Bill, 15 May 1818.

judgment in favour or against the abolition Bill. Lord Auckland, the Committee's chairman and London SSNCB vice-president, acknowledged that the hearings had generated much 'contradictory evidence'.<sup>102</sup> The Committee returned the Bill 'without any amendment' but stressed that:<sup>103</sup>

how far the use of boys for the purpose of cleansing flues may with safety, and without permanent inconvenience, be entirely prohibited, is a point upon which the Committee feel it yet desirable to have further information, though, in the evidence now before them, they see strong reason to hope that so beneficial an object may ultimately be attained.

Unfortunately, the trials conducted by the Board of Works to resolve this question produced similarly mixed results. The Surveyor General concluded that 990 out of 1,000 flues could be safely swept with mechanical means, but also expressed:<sup>104</sup>

as my most decided opinion, that the total abolition of Climbing Boys in the sweeping of Chimnies, is at present impracticable, and could not be attempted without incurring much risk of danger to the general safety of the metropolis.

The ambiguous outcomes of the three inquiries encouraged a stalemate in parliamentary debate when proceedings resumed in January 1819. Advocates of abolition extracted evidence that confirmed the practicality of machine-sweeping; opponents singled out testimonies that suggested the risks attached to the new method – with neither side able to dismiss the evidence of the other. Consequently, debate moved away from the

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<sup>102</sup> Lord Auckland presenting the findings of the Lord's Select Committee. 'Hansard', HL Deb, 14 May 1818, vol. 38, 649-51.

<sup>103</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Report', p. 29. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>104</sup> 1819 [9] *Report of Surveyor General of Board of Works on Experiments to Replace Climbing Boys in Sweeping of Chimnies by Employment of Machinery* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 1 February 1819), p. 2.

safety of mechanical sweeping and the actual conditions in the trade towards the principles that climbing boy regulation came to embody – a harmful impingement on, or necessary exemption from *laissez-faire*; a practical redemption of genuine suffering, or a sentimental scheme that harmed the safety and prosperity of society. As we saw, these debates blew reformist hopes. Instead of reactionary zealots ignoring obvious evidence in favour of regulation, as Phillips suggested, their efforts suffered from the mixed outcomes of inquiries and the association of this cause with ‘humane sentiment’. One additional factor must be considered: the contents of climbing boy Bills and the negotiations these sparked in parliament and out of doors.

### **COMPOSING AN ACT**

Phillips treated law-making as the exclusive business of legislators. He argued that parliamentarians pressurised one another to accept measures with reference to ‘public opinion’, but that statutes were designed and modified without external interference. There is much to favour this interpretation. Even in Private Bill procedures, which were initiated and paid for by petitioners, Porter and his associates in 1788 and the SSNCB in 1804 stressed their respect for the legislature’s decisions. In Public Bill procedures, during the late 1810s, 1834 and 1840, petitioners stated their desired end but trusted the legislature with designing appropriate statutes. Exemplary of this; petitioners from London pleaded the Commons in June 1817 ‘to adopt such measures as in their wisdom may appear most proper, for speedily and effectually preventing any Children from being so

employed in the future'.<sup>105</sup> The procedures of parliament reinforced its autonomy in law-making. Generally, a Select Committee of MPs or peers was appointed to draft the Bill inside parliament but outside the main debating chamber (outside the view of the public stands) and amendments were made in a Committee of the Whole House (sessions not open to the public). However, close reading of proceedings and other documents for the years 1817-1824 suggests that non-parliamentarians *were* involved in the details of law-making. SSNCB directors with seats in parliament consulted activists without such affiliation about draft legislation. Master sweeps used Committee hearings to present alternative regulations. And, MPs and peers appointed to introduce Bills negotiated informally with sweeps about their schemes before presenting it in parliament.

These activities are significant because law-making is not an aspect of politics normally associated with public participation. Much attention has gone out to the gradual extension of the ballot. Some studies have considered more direct means of engaging with legislative procedures – through parliamentary proceedings, petitioning or inquiries.<sup>106</sup> But the involvement of non-legislators in the actual composition of legislation has so far escaped attention.

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<sup>105</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 72, p. 389, 23 June 1817. Similarly, petitioners from Sheffield requested the House of Lords on 30 June 1817 to 'take such Means for remedying the Evils above stated, as, in their Wisdom, may be deemed necessary'. *Lords Journals*, vol. 53, p. 351, 30 June 1817. In April 1834, petitioners from Norwich pleaded the Commons 'to pass such an Act for prohibiting the use of children in climbing chimnies, as your honourable House in its wisdom may deem fit'. '1834 Commons Reports on Public Petitions', appendix 618, p. 439. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>106</sup> Innes, 'Legislation and Public Participation'.

Apart from public participation in law-making, the strategic formulation of Bills deserves our attention. Abolitionists involved in the framing of legislation took care to formulate their schemes in ways that avoided harmful debates and inquiries taking place. Ultimately, this harmed the case for reform when abolitionists were forced to seek a compromise.

For the Bill introduced in the Commons on 25 June 1817, Bennet and Wilberforce did not rely solely on evidence gathered by their Select Committee, but also on suggestions made by reformers outside parliament. Before, during and after the inquiry, Wilberforce corresponded extensively with activists in Sheffield. In 1809, James Montgomery had written detailed comments on the failing 1788 Act,<sup>107</sup> which reached Wilberforce via fellow Sheffield SSNCB director Samuel Roberts.<sup>108</sup> In the years that followed, Wilberforce wrote to Roberts repeatedly for further information about the operation of the Act in Sheffield and other apprenticeship legislation. During the Commons inquiry, he kept Roberts informed of the progress made.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Montgomery suggested Roberts to get in touch with the London SSNCB for information about the operation of the 1788 Act there, and proposed that the Sheffield Society should 'try to get an amended Act passed during the present session'. Sheffield Archives, SR 64, Letter James Montgomery to Samuel Roberts, 21 March 1809. For Montgomery's detailed annotations on the 1788 Act: Sheffield Archives, SR 65, Extracts in James Montgomery's Hand of an Act of Parliament of 28 George III Regulation Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices, 21 March 1809.

<sup>108</sup> Sheffield Archives, SR, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 5 December 1811.

<sup>109</sup> For Wilberforce asking Roberts for his views on the 'act passed a few years ago for protection of chimney sweeps': Sheffield Archives, SR, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 5 December 1811. For Wilberforce requesting from Roberts information



It does not seem that Bennet and Wilberforce incorporated the Sheffield suggestions in their Bill. They wished to avoid the impression that their proposals were a break from existing policies, fearing it would spark debates about the propriety of interfering in trade, which had undermined similar proposals in 1804.<sup>110</sup> Instead of revoking the 1788 Act and introducing altogether new statutes, their Bill provided for the existing statutes to stay in force with some additional clauses.<sup>111</sup> That the new clauses were a major break with existing policies – introducing a time-frame for prohibiting climbing, thus transforming the way the trade was carried out – was besides the point. They reinforced the impression of continuity by suggesting that all existing apprenticeship indentures would stay in force.<sup>112</sup>

The Bill was rejected over uncertainty about the safety of mechanical alternatives, but when Bennet introduced a new schedule in

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about 'the state of things in Sheffield and what he thinks of the apprentice laws in Sheffield': Sheffield Archives, SR, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 5 May 1814. For Wilberforce's report of progress of Commons Committee: Sheffield Archives, SR 18, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 11 June 1817.

<sup>110</sup> '1805 Third London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 3-4.

<sup>111</sup> 1817 [432] *A Bill to Explain and Amend an Act of the Twenty Eight Year of His Present Majesty, for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices; and for Making Further and More Effectual Provisions for That Purpose* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 25 June 1817).

<sup>112</sup> 'nothing in this Act contained shall extend [...] to vacate or cancel any Indenture of Apprenticeship that shall have been actually made and executed previous to the [passing of this Act]'. 1817 [432] *Bill to Amend Act for Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices*, clause iii.

February 1818, he stressed that this single objection had been addressed, proposing a scheduled rather than immediate prohibition of climbing:<sup>113</sup>

The bill was indeed a transcript of that which he had brought forward last year, with the exception only of that provision which related to the total and prompt abolition of the use of climbing boys, and which provision, perhaps, prevented the bill from being carried.

By stressing continuity with the 1788 Act and singling out climbing as the one area that needed reform, Bennet and other SSNCB MPs involved in the framing of legislation did cause problems for the abolition cause. Addressing the Lords as counsel for pro-abolition petitioners, Lushington described the whole array of misery to which climbing boys were exposed: hazards associated with climbing, irregularities in their recruitment and sufferings stemming from masters' ill-treatment and limited career prospects. The counsel for the other side, Pollock, questioned how the schedule aimed at climbing could redeem these other calamities:<sup>114</sup>

The other evils which my learned friend, Dr. Lushington, touched upon [...] are those of clothing, and washing, and instruction, and the payment for, or reward of, their labour. My Lords, the Bill before your Lordships provides for none of these. [...] The Bill strikes only at climbing, without providing for any of those greater evils to which a Chimney Sweeper is subject.

Despite such challenges, Bennet and associates did not make additional provisions when introducing another Bill in the Commons in February 1819. Bennet emphasised that his proposals differed from the scheme approved

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<sup>113</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 9 February 1818, vol. 37, 216.

<sup>114</sup> *The Speech of David Pollock on 8 April 1818*, p. 6.

by this House in the previous session, in allowing more time for adjustments to mechanical sweeping:<sup>115</sup>

he begged leave to bring in the present bill, which had been approved of by the last committee. The only alteration which he had made in it since that time was, to allow two years instead of one, before he called for the total abolition of the present practice of sweeping chimnies.

Focusing legislation so narrowly on climbing ultimately undermined the cause of regulation. Because the abolition Bills failed to acquire majority support in the Lords, abolitionists faced an additional obstacle when the main protagonists of regulation watered down their proposals from abolition to better protection of climbing boys in March 1819. Having proclaimed for so long that only prohibition of climbing would bring solace, the sudden switch to a compromise with the master sweeps for stricter regulation of the trade – including a ban on street crying – faced much scepticism.

With the abolition Bill rejected by the Lords, Bennet set his eyes on a compromise with the sweeps. The Bill introduced in the Commons dropped the idea of scheduled abolition, but brought in the regulations that the sweeps had presented to the Lords Committee a year earlier: no more street crying (which would stop itinerant sweeps from neglecting their boys and overstocking the trade) and new flues to be adjusted to mechanical sweeping.<sup>116</sup> Bennet negotiated the deal with the sweeps out

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<sup>115</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 11 February 1819, vol. 39, 427.

<sup>116</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 250-51. On 15 April 1818, master sweep John Bedford presented an alternative Bill, formulated by the Committee of Master Chimney Sweepers (the predecessor to the USMCS). It allowed for the continued employment of boys from age 10 but their masters should be 'Chimney Sweepers,

of doors, hoping to avoid further inquiries or obstructive debates in parliament. He cherished the agreement reached. When Sheffield SSNCB campaigners made further recommendations, Wilberforce wrote to them that Bennet was not able to integrate them out of fear these amendments might undermine the deal that had been struck:<sup>117</sup>

Mr Bennet read over the Hints for new Regulations, in my presence, but he thought on the whole, that it was better to leave the Bill as it was. One consideration, was certainly of great weight, that he had got the Master Chimney Sweepers, to agree to the Regulations of his Bill, & where we have so many Enemies, it is no small matter to neutralise, or even to render friendly, those who would otherwise have been the most active opponents. [...] though I must frankly own, that had your suggestions, been originally before the framer of the Bill, I am by no means clear that they would not have considerably improved it.

The Bill passed the Commons but did not make it through the House of Lords. Reform efforts were blemished by associations with sentiment but the sudden desire to introduce protection rather than abolition also seemed superfluous – if sweeps agreed with such improvements, why was the assistance of the legislature required?

#### **4.4 Further Regulation and Prohibition, 1834-1840**

##### **LOBBYING**

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Householders, paying Scot and Lot, until they are Sixteen Years of Age'. It included further regulations for the washing instruction of boys. It also made provisions for the assistance of the boy in finding employment at the end of his apprenticeship. And, it also proposed that all newly built and renovated flues should be suited to mechanical sweeping. All of these clauses were indeed included by Bennet in his compromise bill.

<sup>117</sup> Sheffield Archives, SR 26, Letter William Wilberforce to Samuel Roberts, 19 April 1819.

Phillips portrayed petitions as pressure from outsiders ('public opinion') on insiders (MPs and peers). This interpretation overlooks important transitions in the formulation of petitions and how petitions were used in parliament and the impact of these changes on the function of petitioning as a mediator between voluntary activism, legislative procedures and administrative practices. In earlier stages of the campaigns, petitioners indeed presented themselves as outsiders. Even where parliamentarians had been involved in their formulation, appeals referred to the progress of voluntary initiatives to justify pleas for certain policies. By contrast, during the 1830s, petitioners commonly referred to the findings of parliamentary inquiries and government surveys. Thus petitions became increasingly uniform and pressurised the legislature with its own evidence. Paradoxically, during the 1810s, parliamentarians like Bennet and Wilberforce openly discussed their involvement in voluntary activism and petition meetings.<sup>118</sup> During the 1830s, by contrast, MPs and peers affiliated to the SSNCB referred to petitioners in more distant terms, as 'the public' or 'the country'.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> When expressing his initial support regulation in the House, Bennet proclaimed: 'he had repeatedly intended to bring the case [...] before the House. [...] He belonged to a society which had for its object the superseding the necessity of employing boys in this way.' *Hansard*, HC Deb, 5 June 1817, vol. 36, 890.

<sup>119</sup> In April 1840, reflecting on the large number of petitions received in favour of abolition, Fox Maule, liberal MP for Elgin Burghs (1838-1841), remarked in the Commons: 'If they did not effect (sic) some alteration in this respect, they would deserve the reprobation of the country.' *Hansard*, HC Deb, 14 April 1840, vol. 53, 1092; John Sweetman, 'Maule, Fox, Second Baron Panmure and Eleventh Earl of Dalhousie (1801-1874)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18365>' (19 September 2010). Along similar lines, when introducing the abolition bill in the Lords, The Marquess of Normanby, asserted: 'It was not a favourite measure merely with some one particular class, but the general feeling of the mass of the people was in favour of the

These shifts were partly the product of changing procedures and conventions of parliament. Parliamentary proceedings were publicised increasingly widely, which enabled petitioners to keep track of the progress of Bills and issues that dominated parliamentary debates. To deal with the increasing volume of petitioning, appeals ceased to be read out in the Commons after 1832. Petitions could no longer instigate debate, which might have encouraged petitioners to focus on parliament's existing preoccupations. Furthermore, throughout the 1830s, a Commons Select Committee monitored lobbying and printed exemplary petitions in its Reports, reinforcing the trend towards uniformity. The fact that parliamentarians referred to petitions as the will of the public, similarly reflected changing conventions of parliament. During the late 1810s, particularly in the wake of the 'Peterloo Massacre', such references would have been denounced as populism or even sedition. Affiliating oneself with activism out of doors to highlight its moderate character, although not without challenges, was more effective.<sup>120</sup>

However, petitioners contributed to the changes that took place. Climbing boy petitioners did not simply rely on official evidence; they created such data by initiating trials and surveys through parliament and the government. The London SSNCB, because of its mixed membership,

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measure. So strong was the feeling, that he was convinced, if their Lordships passed this bill, they would give more public satisfaction than by almost any other measure.' 'Hansard', HL Deb, 6 July 1840, vol. 55, 433.

<sup>120</sup> As noted in 4.3, Yorke accused Bennet of mixing up his parliamentary activities with voluntary activism, arguing that his rhetoric might be inspirational to reformers outside parliament but not an appropriate foundation for parliamentary policy. 'Hansard', HC Deb, 22 February 1819, vol. 39, 548-49.

was well-placed to mediate between voluntary activism and parliamentary affairs, but provincial SSNCBs and UCSMSs followed its lead. The remainder of this section examines a number of these initiatives and shows how the changing character of lobbying transformed relations between different reform activities.

In chapter 3, we saw that, during the 1820s and 1830s, the London SSNCB and the Bristol and Liverpool USMCS aligned with fire insurers to convince local householders of the practicality or impracticality of the universal adoption of mechanical sweeping and to encourage parliament to adopt or reject legislation for the abolition of climbing boys. This search for 'professional' support coincided with attempts by the London SSNCB to generate 'official' records of the poor situation of climbing boys and the safety of mechanical alternatives that were similarly used to target multiple audiences.

On 2 March 1825, William Williams, MP for Weymouth and London SSNCB committee member, appealed in the House of Commons for:<sup>121</sup>

an Account of the number of Boys apprenticed to Chimney-sweepers, under the provisions of the Act of the 28<sup>th</sup> Geo. 3, c. 40, at the several Police Offices within the bills of mortality, during the last twenty years; distinguishing the number of Boys so apprenticed in each year, the Police Office at which bound, the parish from whence taken, the name and residence of the master, the name and age of each boy, and the evidence of such age.

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<sup>121</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 80, p. 152, 2 March 1825. That Williams was the MP who made the motion is clear from SSNCB reports: '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 10. See Bibliography for full title.

The request followed a circular sent by Home Secretary Robert Peel on 23 May 1823 at the initiative of the London SSCNB, pressing metropolitan police offices to keep detailed records of apprentices in the trade. The accounts received by House of Commons in response to Williams' plea were alarming. Of the ten police stations approached, only two could return records that came near the specifications required by the Act – three kept no register of apprentices whatsoever; two kept registers, but without indication of the child's trade; three had only started recording since Peel's circular.<sup>122</sup>

As evidence of the failings of the 1788 Act, the London SSNCB considered using the accounts to initiate legislative procedures. At a public meeting on 27 May 1825 – the first since 1819 – the Earl of Morley and John Smith proposed 'to introduce a bill in next parliamentary session for abolishment, as far as is practical, and better protection of climbing boys'. In the end, the Meeting determined not to take such steps, as 'it was deemed prudent, under the circumstances of the uncertain duration of it, and the feverish state of the public mind, to postpone the adoption of it until a future session'.<sup>123</sup> The SSNCB *did* use the accounts to rejuvenate its non-legislative activities. It reprinted the returns in its Annual Report, impressing upon householders the unprotected status of climbing boys: '[it] affords a singular instance of the effect of a multiplicity of statutes in defeating their own objects, by bewildering or eluding the observation of

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<sup>122</sup> 1825 [154] *Account of the Number of Boys Apprenticed to Chimney Sweepers in the Metropolis* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 25 March 1825).

<sup>123</sup> '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 7-8.



the magistrate'.<sup>124</sup> London SSNCB directors referred to the investigation to make magistrates more aware of existing statutes. Tooke warned magistrates at Hatton Garden, unwilling to prosecute masters who forced their boys to cry the streets at 'unseasonable hours': 'this business is already before the Secretary of State of the Home Department'.<sup>125</sup> The magistrates were unimpressed; Mr. Laing.<sup>126</sup>

thought that the gentleman who appeared for the complaints had suffered him to indulge in very disrespectful and improper language, and he for one could not sit on the bench to hear either his own or his brother magistrate's opinion insulted with impunity.

But other magistrates did change their practices because of the circulars. Those at Marylebone, apart from collecting the required data, were 'so anxious to ameliorate the condition of these boys' that they also resolved to 'take care that at times, of which [the masters] would have not intimation, an inquiry should be made into the conditions of their apprentices'.<sup>127</sup> The impact of the circulars appeared clearly when the House of Commons repeated the survey in 1834. All but two magistracy offices produced full accounts of boys apprenticed to sweeps.<sup>128</sup> This time,

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<sup>124</sup> '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 11 and pp. 19-25.

<sup>125</sup> *The Times*, 2 February 1825.

<sup>126</sup> *The Times*, 2 February 1825.

<sup>127</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 13 January 1825.

<sup>128</sup> 1834 [114] *An Account of the Number of Boys Apprenticed to Chimney-Sweepers, at the Several Police Offices within the Bills of Mortality, During the Last Nine Years* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 11 March 1834).

MPs affiliated to the SSNCB did use the attention sparked by these accounts to initiate legislative procedures.<sup>129</sup>

Another survey underpinned their initiative, which relied similarly on collaboration between voluntary associations, government departments and parliament and was likewise used to promote reform in multiple channels. In December 1828, the London SSNCB approached Home Secretary Peel to arrange trials with mechanical sweeping in public offices 'under his control', with the express desire to collect evidence before seeking further legislation.<sup>130</sup>

Previous to an application to Parliament, which is contemplated in the ensuing Session, it is the earnest desire of the Committee to prove, by the introduction of their agents into the offices of Government, and other public buildings, the superiority of Mechanical Chimney Sweeping. And the immediate object of this application is to solicit that you will condescend to render them your assistance, by allowing the agents of the Society to make a fair trial of the Machinery in any buildings over which you may have influence or control.

Like the 1825 accounts, the trials were no instant success. By March 1830, only ten of the thirty Public Offices approached by Peel had switched to machine-only sweeps and the SSNCB did not judge the time ripe for legislative procedures.<sup>131</sup> However, in time, the trials proved invaluable for promoting the new method and for convincing parliament to take the cause up again. Referring to those offices that had switched to mechanical

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<sup>129</sup> Within weeks of receiving the survey responses, William Tooke introduced an abolition Bill in the Commons. *Commons Journals*, vol. 89, p. 161, 25 March 1834.

<sup>130</sup> '1829 Fourteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 8. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>131</sup> Eleven had stuck with masters who used climbing boys, nine continued to rely partly on boys. Five had been hiring machine-only sweeps, five others did so as a result of these trials. 1830 [281] *Circular Letter by R. Peel in Favour of Society for Superseding Climbing Boys by Machinery* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 8 April 1830).

sweeping as a result of the trials, the London SSNCB convinced other public officials to embrace the new method. Its 1830 Annual Report proudly declared that the number of 'principal public buildings' whose chimneys were swept by its agents had increased from thirty-six to 122 in the past twelve months. And, there was ample evidence that ordinary householders followed suit.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, petitioners from other parts of the country used the progress made in London, sanctioned by government trials, to demonstrate the practicality of mechanical sweeping. Apart from evidence in the Reports of the 1817 Commons and 1818 Lords Committees, 'founded on extensive examination of evidence', petitioners from Hackney drew attention of the Commons to the progress that had since been made: 'improved machines are used and invariably resorted to at many public buildings and offices of Government, and of public companies throughout the metropolis, and in various parts of the County'.<sup>133</sup> Such appeals helped to restart legislative procedures.

These examples highlight the increasing intersection between official investigations and extra-parliamentary initiatives, and between law-making and changing practices in public offices and ordinary homes. But adopting evidence in multiple channels was not without challenges. Tooke's attempt to pressurise magistrates with government evidence had

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<sup>132</sup> The three agents of the London SSNCB combined had overseen the sweeping of 6,332 flues in the past twelve months. The Society's principal machine-manufacturer, Joseph Glass, had sold 154 machines across the country in the past twelve months and 318 in total since his association with the SSNCB. '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 7. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>133</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 89, p. 48, 20 February 1834. The petition was reprinted in: '1834 Commons Reports on Public Petitions', appendix 64.

little effect. As we will see in the next section, evidence about the 'official' trials with machine sweeping was not wholeheartedly embraced in parliament.

## DEBATES AND INQUIRIES

According to Phillips, opinions in parliament were divided between privileged reactionaries and liberals in favour of intervention. This view is not supported by the debates that arose in 1834 and 1840. By 1834, parliamentarians agreed that further protection for climbing boys was requisite. Considerable dispute did arise about whether householders could be compelled to adjust their flues to the new method. Because the measure primarily affected large properties, Phillips presented it as vital evidence for his argument about privilege. In earlier debates, Bennet had indeed portrayed the decision as one of class: delaying abolition 'would have the effect of sacrificing the children of the poor in order to preserve the chimneys of the rich'.<sup>134</sup> But neither then, nor in 1834 and 1840, did opinions form neatly along party, House or privilege lines.

Some MPs and peers indeed opposed the measure as intermingling in domestic affairs,<sup>135</sup> sometimes with reference to their own flues. In the Commons, Mr. Williams 'wished to know what was to be done with old

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<sup>134</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 18 February 1818, vol. 37, 507.

<sup>135</sup> In 1834, the Duke of Hamilton opposed the measure in the Commons as 'this Bill was calculated to alter the whole system of building in the city of London. According to it, individuals must erect their chimnies after a particular fashion. This he thought was carrying legislation a little further than was necessary.' 'Hansard', HL Deb, 13 June 1834, vol. 24, 419.

houses. He, for one, would not like to pull down his house'.<sup>136</sup> But Sir William Heathcote, known for his 'ultra-conservatism', declared that 'he should be a sufferer by this bill, but he thought it so desirable the cruelties now practised should be abolished, that he felt it his duty to support it'.<sup>137</sup> In the Lords, peers affected by the measure similarly offered their support. As noted in chapter 1, London SSNCB directors included some of the wealthiest peers in the country. They drew upon experience with adjusting flues in their stately homes to demonstrate that mechanical sweeping could be done safely and that opposing it for reason of expense would be selfish.<sup>138</sup> Nor were such statements restricted to peers associated with the SSNCB. Earl Grey 'had a good deal of experience in the alteration of old, and the erection of new chimnies, and he was sure that there were not any chimnies which might not be so altered'.<sup>139</sup>

Similar debates arose in the Lords over whether new inquiries were necessary to confirm the safety of mechanical sweeping. Rather than determined advocates or opponents of abolition, many peers had no defined opinion about abolition and changed their minds upon further evidence. In 1818, Lord Kenyon had joined the Select Committee 'with a

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<sup>136</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 25 June 1840, vol. 55, 108.

<sup>137</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, 'Heathcote, Sir William, Fifth Baronet (1801–1881)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: University Press, 2004), online edn., 'http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45929' (8 August 2010); 'Hansard', HC Deb, 25 June 1840, vol. 55, 109.

<sup>138</sup> SSNCB vice-president, the Duke of Sutherland, declared that: 'Having heard that many houses, of which he was the owner, could not be swept by machinery, he had had them all altered, and without much difficulty, so as to admit the machinery.' 'Hansard', HL Deb, 6 July 1840, vol. 55, 437.

<sup>139</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 6 July 1840, vol. 55, 436.

strong impression on his mind in favour of some such measure as the present, yet he left it fully impressed with the feeling that the welfare and safety of the metropolis required the assistance of climbing-boys'.<sup>140</sup> By contrast, in 1840, Earl of Wicklow insisted upon an inquiry because he doubted the practicality of machine-sweeping, but declared that 'the evidence given before the committee had induced him to change the opinion he originally entertained upon this bill, and he was now quite willing to give it his support'.<sup>141</sup>

Such changes of heart refute Phillips' portrayal of those advocating inquiries as foot-draggers – but this *is* how abolitionists treated their calls. For Lord Suffield (Edward Vernon Harbord), whose father had served on SSNCB Committee for fifteen years, such pleas showed 'that when a case was fully made out for any measure, which its opponents could not overturn by fair reasoning and just argument, they immediately appointed a Committee, as the best way of getting rid of it. That appeared to be the course now proposed'.<sup>142</sup> His opposition also reflects the uncertainty in parliament about how to put inquiries to good effect. Since 1815, inquiries had become a standard feature of Public Bill procedures.<sup>143</sup> But parliament was clearly still searching for an effective format. To avoid long, but unproductive investigations, the Lords introduced preliminary inquiries to

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<sup>140</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 13 June 1834, vol. 24, 419.

<sup>141</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 27 July 1840, vol. 55, 981.

<sup>142</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 13 June 1834, vol. 24, 419.

<sup>143</sup> Innes, 'Legislation and Public Participation', pp. 121-30.

establish the 'expediency or inexpediency' of a Bill, before full inquiries were ordered. When full inquiries were ordered, peers gave clear instructions to ensure focused and productive investigations. In 1840, the Bishop of Exeter, clearly desirous to avoid deadlock as had occurred in 1818 and 1834, set clear tasks to the Lords Committee.<sup>144</sup>

there was not much difference of opinion, if any, on the subject of this bill, and he thought, therefore, that if a committee were agreed to, it need not take up much time in inquiry. He presumed that their Lordships would go into committee with their minds made up upon the misery engendered by the present system and the wickedness which it occasioned, which was greater than the amount of the misery. If these two points were taken to be admitted, the questions into which a committee of their Lordships would inquire would resolve themselves into this—whether the system of sweeping by machinery might be adopted with safety to life and property?

These examples highlight that climbing boy regulation continued to inspire a variety of judgments from a heterogeneous body of commentators, far removed from the partisan struggle of clearly defined factions depicted by Phillips. Moreover, debate raged about the measures to improve conditions in the trade and about the appropriate steps to formulate policy. This suggests that legislation towards climbing boys was not an automated product of opinions in parliament. The structure of proceedings influenced the outcome of legislative initiatives and activities for this cause influenced how policy was made. Moreover, opinions generated through other reform activities – voluntary activism and administrative procedures – influenced the direction of law-making. To demonstrate this point we will turn to the Bills and Acts of 1834 and 1840.

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<sup>144</sup> 'Hansard', HL Deb, 6 July 1840, vol. 55, 433.

## COMPOSING AN ACT

The Lords inquiries in 1834 and 1840 produced crucial amendments to the abolition Bills. In 1834, abolition was put off for six years because of doubts about the universal applicability of mechanical alternatives. Apart from building specifications to enable a complete switch to mechanical sweeping in due course, clauses were added for the protection of climbing boys at the insistence of master sweeps.<sup>145</sup> In both years, amendments were made that gave climbing boys a greater say over their own indentures. The origins of these changes refute Phillips' portrayal of master sweeps as obstructers of regulation and highlight the need to consider the influence of non-legislative channels of reform for the formation of legislation.

In the 1834 inquiry, master sweeps from Bristol and London testified against abolition but also in favour of further regulation.<sup>146</sup> They might have sensed that the majority of Lords favoured protective measures, but they certainly also saw opportunities to turn such measures to their advantage. They emphasised the division within the trade between masters who cared for their boys and prepared them for a secure future

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<sup>145</sup> To facilitate mechanical sweeping, the House of Commons added detailed regulations about the design and building materials for newly built or renovated flues to the original Bill. 1834 [277] *A Bill for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices (as Amended by Committee)* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 7 May 1834). But the evidence presented to the Lords Committee, including trials with the mechanical method staged in the flues of the Houses of Parliament raised doubts over the safety of immediate abolition of climbing boys. The Lords amended the Bill allowing the continued employment of children under 14 – the age at which most children outgrew the common size of flues – setting 1840 as the year when the practicality of a ban on climbing would be reconsidered. *Lords Journals*, vol. 66, pp. 817-20, 15 July 1834.

<sup>146</sup> See, for example, testimonies by master sweeps John Bentley (London USMCS) and William Bulphin (Bristol USMCS): '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 76-80 and 125-39. See Bibliography for full title.



and those who neglected their duties from ignorance or destitution. They used their activities for the USMCS – which funded the schooling of apprentices and assisted former climbers in setting-up in this or another trade – to highlight that boys could and should be employed in this trade under the guidance of capable masters. To protect boys from the harmful supervision of itinerant colleagues, they stated that only rate-paying householders should be allowed to take on apprentices under 14 and street cries should be banned altogether.<sup>147</sup> Both suggestions were indeed incorporated in the 1834 Act.<sup>148</sup> A third amendment had more complex origins.

After the 1834 inquiry, clauses were introduced that entitled prospective climbing boys to try the trade. Magistrates were told that ‘Before any Boy shall be bound by Indenture to learn the Business of a Chimney Sweeper, a previous Trial of such Business should take place on the Part of the Boy, under Proper Regulations’ after which they would ‘ascertain from such Boy whether he is willing and desirous to follow the Business of a Chimney Sweeper, and to be bound to such Master or Mistress; and in case such Boy is unwilling to be bound, [...] to refuse sanction or approve of such binding’.<sup>149</sup> The testimonies of the masters

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<sup>147</sup> See, for example, the evidence of John Bedford and of Daniel Bosworth: ‘1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence’, pp. 3-17 and p. 33.

<sup>148</sup> 4th & 5th, William IV, Chapter 35, *An Act for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for the Safer Construction of Chimneys and Flues*, 25 July 1834, clauses 3 and 15.

<sup>149</sup> 4th & 5th, William IV, Chapter 35, *An Act for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for the Safer Construction of Chimneys and Flues*, 25 July 1834, clauses 12 and 13.

may have played a part. To set themselves apart from colleagues who purchased boys from destitute parents and forced their apprentices up hazardous flues, the USMCS members insisted on giving boys 'a fair trial' and never requiring them to climb against their will. It was part of their assault on itinerant traders.<sup>150</sup>

But the fact that the legislature indeed gave climbing boys greater powers over their indenture requires further examination. It is particularly striking because the boys continued to be excluded from legislative procedures. Unlike the 1833 factory inquiries, no children were heard by the 1834 or 1840 climbing boy Committees. Nevertheless, the 1840 inquiry resulted in another amendment in the boys' favour. The 1840 Act cancelled all existing indentures of those under 16 as per July 1842, but entitled children to end the binding instantly, at their discretion: 'upon the application of any Child [...] and upon proof made upon oath [...] that such apprentice is desirous of being discharged from his or her apprenticeship, it shall be lawful for such justices forthwith to discharge such apprentice.'<sup>151</sup> In earlier Bills, this decision had been left to the master.<sup>152</sup> To understand these amendments, we need to consider shifts that took place in the

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<sup>150</sup> The masters' testimonies will be examined in greater depth in chapter 6, reconstructing in particular how they used the varied standards of health among sweeps to demonstrate their argument that the supervision of climbing boys should be reserved for respectable, rate-paying householders like themselves.

<sup>151</sup> 4th & 5th, William IV, Chapter 35, An Act for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for the Safer Construction of Chimneys and Flues, 25 July 1834, clause 4.

<sup>152</sup> 1840 [235] A Bill for the Regulation of Chimney-Sweepers and Chimneys (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 14 April 1840), clause 4.

operation of the trade. The next chapter will therefore examine the management of apprenticeships by parishes and magistrates' court.

## Conclusions

Opinion in parliament towards the protection of climbing boys was not neatly divided between 'liberal' champions and 'reactionary' obstructers. Throughout this period, and particularly after 1800, there *were* dedicated advocates and committed opponents of further regulation; but their mixed backgrounds and varied motivations are ill-described in Phillips' terminology.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, during each of the legislative cycles investigated here, many parliamentarians took intermediate positions, either supporting reform of the trade but questioning whether statutes were the most effective means, or advocating further legislation but questioning the practicality and necessity of prohibiting the work of climbing boys. And, many adjusted their views in the course of proceedings.

The fact that opinion in parliament was more multifaceted and flexible than Phillips suggested, also challenges his assertion that the success or failure of legislative initiatives depended merely on the ability of either party to mobilise public opinion to force the other to give in. Careful reconstruction of legislative procedures suggests that the relationship

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<sup>153</sup> See 1.5 for closer examination of the backgrounds of MPs and peers affiliated to the SSNCB and of those outspokenly against further regulation.

between activities inside and outside parliament was more complex, and that the fortunes of legislation were also influenced by the structure of procedures through which legislation was attempted, other policy issues considered at the time, and the broader significance that parliamentarians attributed to this legislation.

The rejection of abolition Bills in the years 1817 to 1819 resulted partly from the failure to find a format for legislative inquiries that produced unbiased evidence and yet still gave a clear indication of steps to be taken. Similarly, because abolitionists had framed their Bills narrowly on the issue of climbing, they struggled to justify ameliorative measures when they were forced to seek a compromise (because the safety of mechanical sweeping remained obscure). The fact that this Bill was rejected despite the support of master sweeps – the principle opponents of abolition outside parliament – indicates that parliamentary opinion had its own dynamic. The strong association with humane sentiment that had initially fostered the cause as one that deserved the attention of parliament ultimately turned against those seeking regulation when the place of feeling in policy-making was fiercely debated in parliament in the course of 1819. The combination of these three factors – ambiguous evidence, narrow approach of legislation and close association with humane sentiment – must be taken into account for understanding why climbing

boy Bills failed to win a majority in the House of Lords whilst similar regulations for factories *were* accepted.<sup>154</sup>

Petitions were indeed important for stimulating momentum in parliament and Phillips is correct in suggesting that MPs and peers often had a strong hand in mobilising public interest. But the evidence presented in this chapter suggests that collaboration between parliamentarians and non-parliamentarians extended to other facets of law-making. This is in line with the findings of previous work on legislative procedures during this period, which indicated that opportunities for public participation increased but that access required sympathetic contacts inside parliament.<sup>155</sup> However, the evidence presented here reveals other striking developments in petitioners' strategies, both to attract the attention of the legislature and to use the resulting parliamentary activity to boost reform through other channels.

Petitioners increasingly combined in their appeals information about the local conditions of boys and progress of mechanical sweeping with evidence extracted from parliamentary and government reports. Voluntary associations – notably the London SSNCB and its provincial auxiliaries – played a crucial role in disseminating such evidence *and* in

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<sup>154</sup> As discussed in 4.3, many peers who took intermediary positions towards laissez-faire had initially favoured climbing boy regulation over the regulation of factories.

<sup>155</sup> Innes, 'Legislation and Public Participation'. SSNCB treasurer, William Tooke, attended the 1817 Commons and 1818 Lords inquiries, 'as Solicitor and Agent for the Bill, during the examination of witnesses'. '1818 Lords Committee Report', p. 14. It appears that the Manchester manufacturer and merchant, Nathaniel Gould, fulfilled a similar role in the factory inquiries during the late 1810s. Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour', pp. 8-9 and p. 12.

initiating the surveys that underpinned these reports. Furthermore, through these surveys, they not only created opportunities to lobby the legislature with its 'own' evidence but also to encourage magistrates to change their practices towards sweeps' apprentices and to stimulate householders to embrace mechanical sweeping. None of these attempts was without challenge – some magistrates refused to be dictated by 'official' circulars and not all public offices switched to the new method despite instructions by the Home Office to do so – but they do express the growing desire and (to some degree) success of synchronising different reform activities. Because of their mixed compositions, SSNCBs were well-placed to integrate voluntary, legislative and administrative procedures. But master sweeps similarly combined activities to good effect. For example, the Bristol sweeps affiliated themselves with local fire insurers to convince parliament to consult their views and then referred to their contributions to new legislation to secure the assistance of magistrates and householders in seeing to the implementation of new statutes.

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that most MPs and peers were reluctant to make work-related hazards the business of parliament. In principle, it was up to workers to secure appropriate pay for the hazards to which they were exposed and employers should naturally be inclined to preserve the health of their employees, as it was in their own best interest. However, many also felt that for workers who were not in a position to carry out such negotiations – apprentices or 'free' workers of young age – and in trades where masters were negligent, the legislature

had a duty to offer appropriate protection. As a result, concerns about health took centre stage in parliamentary debates and inquiries regarding the regulation of climbing boys and factory children. This is an important finding because these reforms have not been investigated by historians as occupational health policies.

Two aspects require further exposition. Firstly, we need to investigate how abolitionists and reformers used injury, illness and other forms of ill-health associated with chimney sweeping to demonstrate the need for particular interventions. Clearly, the inquiries of the 1810s did not produce the desired evidence-base to justify the desired measures. We therefore need to establish what rhetorical strategies and procedural changes were deployed during the later inquiries to avoid such a deadlock and how these adjustments influenced the way in which work-related health was discussed in parliament and outside. Furthermore, the role of medical practitioners in these debates needs to be scrutinised. Historians of occupational health have lamented the neglect of the field in Britain at the time.<sup>156</sup> How far do these labour reforms, including those towards climbing boys, confirm this impression of neglect? These issues will be investigated in chapters 6 and 7.

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<sup>156</sup> Peter W.J. Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), p. 18.

## CHAPTER 5

### **AGENCY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF LONDON'S CHIMNEY SWEEP APPRENTICES, c. 1780-1840**

Chapter 4 has identified a major paradox in legislation towards climbing boys. Climbing boys played no part in legislative procedures and their helplessness was used to justify ameliorative measures. Abolitionists used it to show that nothing but prohibition would suffice; master sweeps used it to justify restrictions on itinerant colleagues who could not be trusted with the children's protection. However, the resulting statutes promised prospective and existing apprentices an active part in the management of their indentures. The 1834 Act entitled them to a trial and instructed magistrates not to approve bindings unless boys were 'willing' and 'desirous'.<sup>1</sup> The 1840 Act enabled those whose indentures would be voided by age restrictions from July 1842 to end their placement instantly, at their discretion.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the emphasis placed in the statutes on the children's 'will' and 'desire', and the fact they were to be consulted 'under oath', reveals a wish on the part of the legislature to see their views heard and acted upon.

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<sup>1</sup> 4th & 5th, William IV, Chapter 35, *An Act for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for the Safer Construction of Chimneys and Flues*, 25 July 1834, clauses 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> 3rd & 4th, Victoria, Chapter 85, *An Act for the Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Chimneys*, 7 August 1840, clause 4.



This chapter examines the origins and significance of these statutes by studying the operation of apprenticeships in the trade. It focuses on two administrative settings: parishes deciding whether to bring paupers before magistrates to be bound to sweeps, and magistrates acting on complaints about the circumstances of binding or the behaviour of master or apprentice once a deal had been struck. How far did the administrators involved in such procedures between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seek children's consent? Did masters come into conflict with their policies, and if so, why? Under what circumstances were the boys' opinions acted upon? Did parents or members of the SSNCB and USMCS who attended magistrates' hearings play on the growing sensitivity towards children's consent to obstruct or cancel bindings? And, crucially, what does the timing of change reveal about the origins of these sentiments and the interplay between administrative practice and legislation?

These questions allow us to reappraise broader themes in the history of contractual arrangements for child labour. The dominant view in the historiography of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is that children had little say over the destination of their labour. Children under seven commonly signed indentures,<sup>3</sup> but although parents and masters challenged bindings that lacked their approval, the wish of the child played

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<sup>3</sup> Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 271-72.

little part.<sup>4</sup> Holly Brewer has argued that the weight given to children's views further decreased during the eighteenth century when contracts were based on 'informed consent' and consent was redefined around the 'ability to judge'. Childhood was reframed as the 'age before reason' and age became a barrier for entering into contracts, including those for labour. Apprentices could no longer sign their own indentures; parents or parishes signed on their behalf.<sup>5</sup>

Other studies show that, once bound, patriarchal values tended to keep children in place. Parishes were keen to see indentures served out, as it offered the prospect of stable employment and settlement, often in a different parish;<sup>6</sup> charitable institutions rewarded apprentices for completing their indenture with honesty, sobriety and diligence;<sup>7</sup> and even if children ran away, or successfully challenged abuse, courts focused on reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, Jane Humphries has called indentures 'self-

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of parents' and masters' resistance against forced bindings, see: Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c. 1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), pp. 191-212.

<sup>5</sup> For an examination of the gradual shift from children's (coerced) consent to parental custody in contracts for land, goods and labour in England and New England, see: Brewer, *By Birth or Consent*, chapter 7.

<sup>6</sup> Alysa Levene, 'Pauper Apprenticeship and the Old Poor Law in London: Feeding the Industrial Economy?', *Economic History Review* (Forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Alysa Levene, "'Honesty, Sobriety and Diligence": Master-Apprentice Relations in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England', *Social History*, 33 (2008), 183-200.

<sup>8</sup> No fewer than 20% of apprentices who won their case were ordered to stay with the same master. Peter Rushton, "'Matter in Variance": Adolescents and Domestic Conflict in the Pre-Industrial Economy of North-East England 1600-1800', *Journal of Social History*, 25 (1991), 89-117.

enforcing'.<sup>9</sup> Work by Douglas Hay on the Chamberlain's Court in London suggests that this tendency continued into the nineteenth century. Indeed he identified the 1830s as particularly repressive for servants and apprentices – disputing apprentices and masters were reprimanded, or given 'a short sharp shock in Bridewell,' but reunited with one another where possible.<sup>10</sup>

These dominant views in the historiography make it all the more important to investigate the very different sentiments expressed in the statutes towards climbing boys. What was the purpose of these measures? Were climbing boys given exceptional treatment because of the poor reputation of their masters and the intrinsic hazards of the trade? Or was there indeed a revaluation of childhood as a state that required a voice?

## 5.1 The Binding of Parish Apprentices

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the four London parishes used as case studies, St Pancras, the United Parishes of St Andrew Holborn & St George the Martyr in Middlesex, and St Clement Danes and St George Hanover Square in Westminster, all questioned whether chimney sweeping was an appropriate trade for apprentices. The first two indeed

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Humphries, 'English Apprenticeship: A Neglected Factor in the First Industrial Revolution', in Paul A. David and Mark Thomas (eds.), *The Economic Future in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 73-102.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Hay, 'England, 1562-1875: The Law and Its Uses', in Douglas Hay and Paul Craven (eds.), *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562-1955* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 59-116, esp. pp. 93-94.

stopped binding to sweeps during the 1800s and 1810s as they found climbing too hazardous for their paupers and too burdensome for parish relief. And, both sets of governors pleaded parliament to ban the use of climbing boys altogether. Their cases are significant because they show that some parishes changed their policies without legislative incentives and lobbied to change the law.<sup>11</sup>

The case of St Andrew Holborn & St George the Martyr is particularly suggestive because its governors worked together with the SSNCB and the vestry clerk testified to the 1818 Lords Committee – thus contributing to legislative procedures and voluntary activism in order to influence the conditions of labouring children in the parish.<sup>12</sup> In petitions to the Commons and Lords, the governors justified their support for abolition with reference to the burden that fell upon parishes like their own, of boys who, having served their time with sweeps, had ‘out-grown the size of climbing, and [were] so far wounded in their limbs, or impaired in health,

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<sup>11</sup> For the St Pancras petition, signed at the vestry meeting: *Lords Journals*, vol. 51, p. 592, 28 April 1818; Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, P/PN1/M, Minutes of the Vestry of St Pancras, 16 April 1818. For the St Andrew Holborn and St George the Martyr petitions: *Commons Journals*, vol. 73, p. 13, 29 January 1818; *Commons Journals*, vol. 73, p. 13, 29 January 1818; *Lords Journals*, vol. 51, p. 479, 27 February 1818. Other parishes whose churchwardens and overseers petitioned parliament in favour of climbing boy abolition, during the years 1817-19: St Mary Islington, Middlesex; Clerkenwell, Middlesex; Walthamstow and Leyton, Essex; Woolwich, Kent; and Manchester – information that has been derived from the Lords and Commons Journals.

<sup>12</sup> The governors of St Andrew Holborn & St George the Martyr first started promoting mechanical sweeping among sweeps residing in the parish at the application of the London SSNCB. Their meeting, held on 27 November 1817, was reprinted in the ‘Address’ that accompanied the SSNCB’s publication of the 1818 Lords Report: ‘1818 Lords Committee Report’. See Bibliography for full title. John Singleton Taylor, Vestry Clerk of the United Parishes of St Andrew’s Holborn and St George the Martyr testified to the Lords Committee about experiments to equip paupers with chimney cleaning machines, after local master sweeps had refused to adopt such devices. ‘1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence’, pp. 49-50. See Bibliography for full title.

from the accidents and diseases so peculiarly incident to this trade, as to be rendered incapable of obtaining a maintenance for themselves'.<sup>13</sup> They also seized the opportunity to outline the practical measures that they had taken to promote mechanical sweeping in their locality. As local master sweeps had been unwilling to try the new method, the governors had equipped paupers with machines, first to sweep the flues of the workhouse, then also to sweep the houses of parishioners. Outlining the initiative in the petition was partly a means to convince the legislature that nothing but statutory prohibition would stop masters from using boys, but it also encouraged parishioners to embrace the new method and stimulated magistrates to stop binding boys privately – thus protecting local boys against misery and saving local rate-payers from expense, even if legislation would *not* materialise.<sup>14</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that children's wishes played a part. Like their St Pancras counterparts, the governors justified their boycott by the long-term costs of binding children to the trade, not through complaints made by individuals thus bound in the past.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in parishes

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<sup>13</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 73, p. 13, 29 January 1818.

<sup>14</sup> The case of St Andrew Holborn and St George the Martyr was not unique. Robert Mercer, from the vestry of Christ Church in Surrey, also testified to the Lords Committee. He presented resolutions agreed to by the vestry in favour of use of machines, signed by the vestry clerk J.G. Meymott, which encouraged housekeepers in the parish to hire mechanical sweeps rather than those using boys. Machine inventor and SSNCB mechanical agent, George Smart, had attended the meeting. The vestry also resolved to have the resolutions printed in *The Times*, *Chronicle*, *Morning Advertiser* and *Courier* – clearly hoping to inspire similar initiatives by vestries in other parts of the country. '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> Between February 1791 and July 1806, St Pancras had placed fifteen pauper children to sweeps, but determined no longer to bind to the trade, a policy that was consistently upheld at least until 1843 according to the apprentice registers. This did not end the use of

that continued supplying to sweeps, children's consent did become a crucial precondition. The governors of St George Hanover Square, Westminster resolved that paupers 'may be [...] apprenticed to Masters of good Character provided it be with the Approbation of their Parents if any and with their own free Will and Consent & after they have been on Trial for six Weeks'.<sup>16</sup> Yet, shunning the trade was no option. The governors considered the continued use of boys vital to parishioners' safety. Fires would rage were masters forced to work without climbers – a view they repeatedly pressed upon parliament.<sup>17</sup> Such strong convictions lead us to doubt their commitment to children's 'free Will', if a sweep approached the Board and no boy volunteered.

The policies of St Clement Danes were even more ambivalent. Its governors twice suspended bindings to sweeps, but put their objections aside when alternatives dried up. As they resumed the practice, they placed increasing emphasis on children's consent, balancing it with their commitment to find placements for all children at all times.

For children to go 'on liking' before being bound had been common practice in St Clement Danes during earlier parts of the eighteenth century, but then seems to have fallen out of fashion. The apprenticeship register

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climbing boys in the parish, however, as St Pancras masters recruited boys from other parishes, notably from St Clement Danes: Westminster City Archives, B1150-57, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 5 May 1819, 31 August 1820, 22 June 1822, 29 January & 30 April 1833 and 4 August 1834.

<sup>16</sup> Westminster City Archives, C931, St George Hanover Square Minutes of Directors and Governors of the Poor, 28 November 1809.

<sup>17</sup> *Lords Journals*, vol. 51, pp. 508-10, 10 March 1818; *Lords Journals*, vol. 52, pp. 107-108, 8 March 1819.

for the 1780s and 90s included a column, 'When sent on liking', which was generally left blank and omitted altogether in later registers. Moreover, the governors' Minutes for 1779-1808 only record eleven children sent on 'tryal' or 'likeing'.<sup>18</sup> This trend continued when the parish, after 1813, started apprenticing to sweeps. Between 1816 and 1822, it placed twenty-four paupers in this trade, seemingly without consulting the children's wishes. In only one of these cases was the boy 'interrogated and wishing to be apprenticed the proposition was approved'.<sup>19</sup> Yet, by the early 1830s, children *were* regularly sent 'on liking' and asked about their willingness to be bound.<sup>20</sup>

The timing of the change suggests it was partly driven by humanitarian concerns. Routine recordings of 'liking' and 'consent' coincided with careful investigations into masters' 'character'. When Ann Matthews applied for a boy to join her sweeping business, on 18 January 1831, the governors ordered for 'Inquiries to be made preparatory to the Boy going on liking'.<sup>21</sup> This happened after a lengthy spell, during which the parish refrained from binding to sweeps 'on Account of the nature of the

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<sup>18</sup> In only five of these cases was the master's character checked; in only one, parents' approval sought.

<sup>19</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1151, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 22 June 1822.

<sup>20</sup> Even masters who had previously hired from the parish were told 'that the Boy should go on liking' before a decision could be made. See e.g. Westminster City Archives, B1155, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 30 April 1833.

<sup>21</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1153, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 18 January 1831.

business' (December 1829-January 1831).<sup>22</sup> Apparently, if children were bound to a trade that lacked the governors' blessing, it ought to be to a master *they* trusted and with the boy's consent.

More pragmatic considerations also seem to have underpinned the parish's policies. It was in the interest of rate payers that paupers completed their apprenticeships and were set up for a fruitful career. Yet, children absconding had long been a common problem,<sup>23</sup> and also affected bindings to sweeps. On 30 June 1820, the governors approved the placement of pauper boy, William Smith, with master sweep, Edward Evered, seemingly without trial.<sup>24</sup> Five weeks later Evered 'complained that [...] his apprentice had deserted him' and 'was informed that if Smith returned he should be sent home'.<sup>25</sup> Incidents like these may have encouraged the parish to start sending boys 'on liking'.

In this case, the boys' objections were respected – he was ordered to be sent 'home'. But the introduction of trials gave children only limited opportunities to avoid placements. Despite meticulous recording of 'liking' and 'consent', not in a single instance did bindings to sweeps fall through

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<sup>22</sup> The parish had once before shunned binding to the trade on principle grounds, between December 1817 and January 1819.

<sup>23</sup> The 1815 Commons Committee on Apprenticeships found that at least 8% of the 2,000-odd children apprenticed to textile manufacturers by metropolitan parishes between 1802 and 1811 had quit their service prematurely, classed as 'chiefly run away'. *The Parliamentary Debates*, HC Deb, 11 April 1815, vol. 30, 533-41. Henceforth, 'Hansard'.

<sup>24</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1353, St Clement Danes Papers Relating Parish Apprenticeship, 1802-1835, 30 June 1820.

<sup>25</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1150, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 1 August 1820.



on account of children's objections. However, in numerous cases, boys agreed to go 'on liking' or consented to be bound, but parents or the governors obstructed a deal. On 8 December 1829, two sweeps presented a list of boys in the workhouse who had 'volunteered' to join them on trial. But the governors declined their request on the grounds of principle.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in February 1834, the stepmother and sister of Nicholas Burke prevented a deal at the last moment, 'objecting to the business and stating that they had a prospect of providing the boy with a Master of another Business'.<sup>27</sup>

Burke's case shows how the parish used children's consent to pressurise reluctant relatives to give in. Burke had been on liking and seemingly approved of the binding. But his sister and stepmother took him away and the master was forced to return his clothes to the parish. Yet, their hope of finding an alternative placement fell through, and within six months the boy appeared again before the governors, set to be bound to another sweep.<sup>28</sup> This was not an isolated case. When Margaret Woodford opposed the binding of her nephew to a sweep, in August 1836, 'she was advised to find a Master in another business for him in Order to prevent his

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<sup>26</sup> Having considered the request for two weeks, the governors informed the masters that 'the Officers of this Parish had determined not to bind children to that Business'. The refusal must have surprised Thomas Kernot, in particular, as he *had* hired boys from the parish on previous accounts. Pauper boy Henry Nye had been bound to him on 15 November 1822. Westminster City Archives, B1268, St Clement Danes Apprenticeship Register, 1803-22; Westminster City Archives, B1153, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 8 and 22 December 1829.

<sup>27</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1156, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 11 February 1834.

<sup>28</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1156, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 11 February, 18 February and 4 August 1834.

being sent again to the same business *should it be his desire*'.<sup>29</sup> The previous example shows that this was no empty threat.

Thus, the five parishes had very different policies. In St Pancras, St Andrew Holborn and St George the Martyr, children's consent was *no* issue, at least not for bindings to sweeps. Their governors judged the long-term costs of placing paupers with sweeps too great for the bound children and for rate-payers. In St George Hanover Square and St Clement Danes, on the other hand, children's willingness *was* of increasing importance, if it could be reconciled with other priorities, such as fire safety and the need to find placements for all paupers. For the former, this meant continuing a regular supply of boys to local masters, and pressurising unwilling boys where necessary. For the latter, it meant avoiding the trade where possible, even when children volunteered, but using their consent to pressurise reluctant parents, if placements got sparse.

Interestingly, in all five parishes policy changes preceded new legislation, but four of the five participated in legislative procedures to spread their policies to other parishes. Whether the increasing emphasis on children's agency in two of these parishes gave prospective apprentices genuine opportunities to make an informed choice, was not in the hands of the governors alone. Master sweeps' collaboration was required for children to receive a fair trial.

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<sup>29</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1157, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 4 August 1835 and 19 January 1836.

In previous chapters we have seen that 'respectable' sweeps avoided drastic regulations by displaying their commitment to fair trials. In 1818, David Porter told the Lords Committee that force and cruelty were preventable, emphasising that he regularly took boys from the workhouse, but always 'volunteers', 'never against [their] Will'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Thomas Wingod insisted to the 1834 Committee that he always gave his boys 'a fair trial' and never 'forced a boy up a Chimney by my wishes'.<sup>31</sup> Through such pleas, the masters convinced the legislature to postpone abolition and aim their restrictions at 'careless', 'itinerant' colleagues.<sup>32</sup>

How far are these claims supported by masters' actual dealings with parishes? The St Clement Danes evidence suggests that this may well have been the case. We have already come across two masters who recruited volunteers in the parish workhouse, before approaching the governors.<sup>33</sup> It seems that this practice became increasingly common in following years. Of the fifteen St Clement Danes boys that went 'on liking' with sweeps between 1831 and 1836, at least ten were approached in advance by the

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<sup>30</sup> He contrasted his own 'respectable' conduct with the reckless behaviour of 'itinerant' colleagues, who bought boys on the streets for a guinea or two, 'from a Barrow-woman, or a woman of such description'. '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 242. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>32</sup> Legislation passed in 1834 restricted the employment of children under 14 to rate-paying householders and prohibited sweeps from crying the streets, clearly targeting the 'itinerant' sweeps that were the target of blame by 'respectable' masters who appeared before the 1834 Lords Committee. Earlier Bills had proposed to ban the work of under 14-year olds altogether, which would have effectively ended the practice of climbing as most flues were too narrow for older adolescents and adults. 4th & 5th, William IV, Chapter 35, *An Act for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for the Safer Construction of Chimneys and Flues*, 25 July 1834, clauses 3 and 4.

<sup>33</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1153, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 8 December 1829.

master.<sup>34</sup> Masters clearly felt that their requests stood a better chance if they cooperated with the trials and presented the governors with boys willing to join the trade. However, does this mean that children had genuine opportunities to choose a trade?

It is important to consider the position children were in before agreeing to go on liking with sweeps. The St Clement Danes records indicate that many had spent considerable time in the workhouse.<sup>35</sup> During the early nineteenth century, conditions in London workhouses were kept to the lowest standards, encouraging paupers to move on. This may have incensed them to try a trade when opportunities came up. However, some of the boys only joined sweeps weeks after entering the house.<sup>36</sup> Work by Alysa Levene for an earlier period suggests that this may reflect a deliberate strategy on their or their parents' part – with children of apprentice-age entering the house seemingly with the purpose of securing a placement.<sup>37</sup> But in all cases, governors and masters' conduct also played a part.

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<sup>34</sup> Westminster City Archives, B1153, St Clement Danes Minutes of Churchwardens, Overseers and Assistants, 18 January 1831.

<sup>35</sup> For example, the seven children who were apprenticed to sweeps in the years 1816 and 1817 had spent, on average, thirty-two weeks in the workhouse before being bound. Westminster City Archives, B1268, St Clement Danes Apprenticeship Register.

<sup>36</sup> The nine St Clement Danes boys who had entered the workhouse at apprentice-age, and were subsequently bound to sweeps between 1820 and 1822, had spent on average seventeen weeks in the house before binding. But among these nine were four boys who were bound within six weeks, suggesting they had been sent on trials within days of entering the house.

<sup>37</sup> Alysa Levene, 'Children, Childhood and the Workhouse: St Marylebone, 1769-1781', *The London Journal*, 33 (2008), p. 56.

The sense of anticipation of a better fate is clear in Sam Sharpe's account of his binding to a sweep. Sam describes how the workhouse master of St Giles introduced him to a seemingly 'kind' sweep, told him about the pleasant life that awaited him, and asked him whether he wished to join the master 'on liking'. He accepted the offer 'with gratitude' and, during his trial, was indeed treated with utmost care:<sup>38</sup>

Under these favourable circumstances, I was asked if I would go before a magistrate, and be bound apprentice. Yes, was my eager answer. I was then cleansed, and taken to the police office, when I was asked by magistrates if I was willing to be a Climbing Boy, if I could climb chimneys well, and if it was my own choice; to all of which questions I readily answered Yes, and the indentures were then signed.

Once bound, his happy experiences quickly turned into agony. He was forced to climb crooked flues, whipped by his master when slipping up, and his wounds tormented by wintry blasts.<sup>39</sup>

At that time the offer of being restored to the workhouse to be treated the same as when I left it; would have been received by me with ecstasy; but no! this could not be; I was bound, and I was a slave.

He pleaded to adults never to ask a climbing boy whether he enjoyed his trade, 'you will prevent his telling a falsehood', and to other boys, never to fall for the false pretences that *had* lured him into the trade:<sup>40</sup>

It is my sincere wish that all boys who may hear my sad story will take my advice and never become Climbing Boys; let them be never ensnared with the promise of liberty, comfort, plenty of halfpence and good living.

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<sup>38</sup> *The Adventures of Sam Sharp, a Climbing Boy, as Related by Himself* (London, 1834), pp. 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> *The Adventures of Sam Sharp*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *The Adventures of Sam Sharp*, p. 2.

Sam's account is highly politicised, and should certainly not be taken at face value. It appeared shortly after the passing of the 1834 Act, which included the requirement for apprentices to consent to their binding, among other regulations. Yet, the fact that he singled out this statute, complaining of having been 'lured' into the trade and denied a 'voice' once bound, suggests that he – or the adults behind the publication – anticipated that his readers would share his concern for children's entitlement to a say, before *and* after the binding. This brings us to the next section, exploring children's agency once apprenticed.

## 5.2 Managing Existing Contracts and Prosecuting Abuse

Katrina Honeyman has found that complaints by factory apprentices were treated in a selective fashion. Those about food, lodgement and education were generally taken seriously and acted upon. But homesickness and other emotional grievances were not recognised as complaints and criticisms of work practices (including physical correction) were suppressed or not recorded.<sup>41</sup>

Magistrates' hearings of climbing boys' complaints do not follow such neat distinctions. Climbing boys had increasing opportunities to raise complaints, and, once magistrates were notified, a better chance to be heard. 'Respectable' master sweeps and 'benevolent' housekeepers

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<sup>41</sup> Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Studies in Labour History, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), chapter 10.

pressed parish officers and magistrates to keep a closer eye on apprentices in this trade and attended trials to support boys seeking release. Shortly after the passing of the 1834 Act, three sweeps were called before the magistrates at Queens Square, for crying the streets. Master sweep Charles Millard attended as the informer, 'appointed by a society of master sweeps to prevent the boys from crying sweep in the streets'.<sup>42</sup> This is not to say, however, that complaints were always acted upon in a timely fashion.

Examples of climbing boys' consistent vulnerability are common, but one will suffice here. In May 1836, James Batty appealed to magistrates at Hull to reclaim the £6 and 6 shillings that he claimed his master still owed him. He was clearly in a state of distress. According to the newspaper report of the hearing, 'His legs were dreadfully deformed, and one of his arms was severely injured from some hurt he had received'. Apparently, 'the Mayor and Magistrates evinced much sympathy and commiseration for his wretched conditions, but were unable to serve him in the present application'.<sup>43</sup> Such cases undermine any impression that children in this trade were suddenly empowered through philanthropy and reform.

Yet, as we saw in chapter 4, circulars sent to metropolitan police stations by the House of Commons (at the initiative of the SSNCB) ensured

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<sup>42</sup> Although reported in *The Bristol Mercury*, the hearing took place at Queen Square magistrates' court, London. Two months earlier a similar case had occurred in Bristol. See: *The Bristol Mercury*, 16 August 1834 and 25 October 1834.

<sup>43</sup> *The Hull Packet*, 20 May 1836.

that more detailed records were kept of children sweeps' apprentices.<sup>44</sup> The Home Office encouraged the police stations (and other public offices) to hire sweeps that used brush constructions instead of boys.<sup>45</sup> And, benevolent masters and concerned citizens assisted boys to combat abuse. These initiatives seem to have had the desired effect.

In May 1818, SSNCB-treasurer William Tooke and surgeon Mr. Skinner attended the case of climbing boy William Bluman, at Hatton Garden. Bluman's master was accused of hiring him whilst not yet eight years old and letting him out to another sweep (illegal under the 1788 Act). The magistrates encouraged Bluman to tell his side of the story, but he would only speak positively of his master. In light of the injuries found by Skinner on his body, the magistrates concluded that, 'The poor boy, who could hardly support himself during the examination, was evidently intimidated by his master into a statement of unqualified good usage'.<sup>46</sup> At Tooke's suggestion, Bluman was cared for in the workhouse, until full details of the case were uncovered.

Sometimes, children were deemed incapable of testifying altogether. In a dispute between his parents and his master, at Marlborough Magistracy Court, Henry Gardiner was a passive object. His

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<sup>44</sup> 1825 [154] *Account of the Number of Boys Apprenticed to Chimney Sweepers in the Metropolis* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 25 March 1825); 1834 [114] *An Account of the Number of Boys Apprenticed to Chimney-Sweepers, at the Several Police Offices within the Bills of Mortality, During the Last Nine Years* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 11 March 1834).

<sup>45</sup> 1830 [281] *Circular Letter by R. Peel in Favour of Society for Superseding Climbing Boys by Machinery* (Ordered to be printed by The House of Commons 8 April 1830).

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 16 May 1818.



body was examined, showing no signs of abuse, but he 'was not allowed to give evidence on account of his total ignorance of everything connected with the nature of an oath'. Yet, to prevent such a situation occurring again the magistrate resolved, 'that in the future he would never sanction the apprenticeship of a boy to the chimney-sweepers' trade, unless the boy was first instructed in his religious duty'.<sup>47</sup>

These cases suggest that children's testimonies were often partially or fully disregarded. But they also highlight some magistrates' eagerness to enable them to speak. It was certainly not the case that children were disregarded simply because of their age. Even young children could leave a compelling impression, as the case of 11-year old Londoner James Osborne illustrates.<sup>48</sup>

When a police officer found the then 8-year old Osborne wandering the streets of Pimlico, Westminster, in the summer of 1831, the boy told him he had just come up from Bath where both his parents were dead. The officer believed his account, 'from the apparent artlessness with which he told it', and brought him to the workhouse of St George, Hanover Square. The following year, he was sent 'on liking' with master sweep Thomas Wingod, to whom he was eventually apprenticed, 'having expressed his willingness to follow the calling of chimney-sweep'. After serving his master faithfully for two years, he absconded in early October 1834,

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<sup>47</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 28 January 1825.

<sup>48</sup> For detailed reports of the magistrates' hearings of this case, see: *Morning Chronicle*, 23 and 30 October 1834.

following accusations of stealing. When Wingod finally traced him, he found him, to 'his extreme astonishment', in the company of his stepfather and other relatives, who turned out to be residing in London after all. As an officer from St George Hanover Square testified, no 'steps had been taken on the part of the parish, to discover if the boy had any friends in London; as his story was told with so much plausibility, that it was readily believed'. Wingod appealed to the magistrates at Marlborough Street to order the return of his boy, as 'he had taught the boy his trade, and as the boy had expressed a great liking to it'.<sup>49</sup> Yet, Osborne refused to go back, and his stepfather requested that his indenture be cancelled, 'as the boy had been bound apprentice without the consent of his relations'.

The magistrates clearly found it a difficult dilemma. 'Mr. Chambers said he should always be glad to cancel the indentures of chimney-sweeps, provided there was legal ground for doing so, and that it appeared some better occupation was to be substituted'.<sup>50</sup> He adjourned the sitting till the following week, to consider the case. The boy's consent was clearly not in question. He had fled his parents freely and was bound to a sweep upon his own desire. Yet, his parents had not approved the binding, and the

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<sup>49</sup> Only months before, Wingod had pleaded to the House of Lords Committee that he never forced his apprentices to climb a flue against their wishes and always returned reluctant children to the workhouse. This case would prove a test of his commitment to children's consent. For his testimony regarding 'liking' and 'consent', see: '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 242.

<sup>50</sup> Mr. Chambers was not the only magistrate to express a disliking against the trade. Indeed, magistrates from at least six localities petitioned parliament to ban the use of climbing boys altogether, in the years 1818 and 1834 alone.

parish had acted upon the assumption that they were dead. In the end, Mr. Chambers pronounced the binding illegal, as:<sup>51</sup>

he must treat the case exactly in the same way as he would if it were proved that the boy was the son of a nobleman or gentleman, who had chosen to run away from his parents and allow himself to be bound to a sweep. It would be absurd in that case to oblige the boy to serve out his time as a sweep, merely because he had been bound to the trade under the supposition that he had not parents living

But he ruled that the master was entitled to 'some remuneration' for the two years maintenance provided to the boy, to be paid for by Osborne's 'friends'.

Apart from the boy's remarkable acting skills, the case is revealing in several respects. Firstly, adults believed an eight-year old on his word, as long as he spoke with conviction and sketched an account that suited their own interests. They based their policies on his testimony, without further investigating his claims. Yet, when it came to legal decisions, his consent was deemed inferior to that of his guardians. He had initially concurred with the binding, which encouraged the parish to sign the indenture on his behalf. But, his parents could later overrule the decision, as his rightful guardians, and go against the child's consent. Secondly, the language adopted in newspaper reports of the case, in *The Morning Chronicle*, are drenched in a discourse of child consent. All witnesses cited express in one way or another interest in the boy's wishes and judgements. Despite all the emphasis on children's helplessness in other cases, and in other contexts, young children were clearly deemed capable of forming an opinion and

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<sup>51</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 30 October 1834.

entitled to have a say. However, their agency was not unconditional. For the children to speak out freely, they needed protection from the intimidation of their masters, parents and sometimes parish governors. The cases of William Bluman, who was cared for in the workhouse until fit to testify, and Henry Gardiner, who was removed from his bickering master and parents, show that some magistrates were keen to provide such protection.

## Conclusions

The evidence presented in this chapter clearly points to a growing desire to give sweeps' apprentices a greater say in the operation of their indenture *before* statutes made their consent a formal part of procedures. Several parishes reinstated trials to ensure the child agreed with both the trade and master, and magistrates went at increasing lengths to ensure abused apprentices could testify under oath. The widespread use of children's consent in negotiations between adults shows that it carried considerable influence. Governors compelled reluctant parents to approve a binding with reference to children's 'willingness'. Masters pressurised hesitant governors and magistrates to uphold indentures by pointing to apprentices' liking. And members of the SSNCB and USMCS convinced magistrates to delay rulings when masters intimidated boys to give a statement of positive treatment. Whether climbing boys really became

sweeps out of choice and whether their opinions (free or forced) determined the outcome of disputes are different matters.

Adults sensed and took opportunities to influence children's 'wishes' and the child's consent was only followed when in line with the views of the officials judging the matters. Governors ignored children's desires and objections if these clashed with their own priorities, and magistrates were hesitant to cancel indentures unless there was the prospect of the boys finding a better placement elsewhere. Furthermore, children often needed assistance to challenge their guardians' or masters' neglect convincingly. Such assistance was offered by philanthropists (including master sweeps keen to improve the reputation of their trade) and magistrates, whilst negative publicity about the trade in philanthropic literature and parliamentary inquiries clearly made some magistrates less hesitant to cancel indentures.

These findings carry important implications for studies of childhood, medicine and reform. Parish governors showed increasing interest in parents' approval and magistrates returned children apprenticed by the parish against their parents' wish – in line with Holly Brewer's finding that 'parental custody' mattered increasingly.<sup>52</sup> But this did not stop them from consulting the children themselves. Magistrates checked whether children could testify under oath, irrespective of their age, and governors described

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<sup>52</sup> On the 'emergence of parental custody', see: Brewer, *By Birth or Consent*, chapter 7.

their views as 'free will' and 'desire'. This refutes Brewer's assertion that age became a barrier for 'informed consent'.

With respect to medicine, the mediating role of surgeons stands out. In cases where the child was deemed incapable of testifying, surgeons accompanied SSNCB directors to magistrates' hearings to examine the boy's body and reveal the true nature of his experiences. This is interesting because it coincided with fierce disputes about the need for 'medical expertise' in health-related charities and in coroners' inquests – disputes that went to the heart of the professional identity of medical practitioners.<sup>53</sup> Medical practitioners indeed often played pivotal roles in inquests into the deaths of climbing boys. They were asked to interpret the evidence with regards to masters' and journeymen's responsibility, the boys' own share and the degree to which climbing 'naturally' carried the risk of death.<sup>54</sup>

The timing of changes in administrative practice highlights its complex interplay with legislation. Governors and magistrates showed greater interest in children's consent *before* statutes obliged them to; several parishes stopped binding to sweeps at the time of parliamentary inquiries during the 1800s and 1810s and petitioned parliament to end the practice; and magistrates referred in hearings to circulars sent out by the

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Brown, 'Medicine, Reform and the "End" of Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *English Historical Review*, 124 (2009), 1353-88; Ian A. Burney, *Bodies of Evidence: Medicine and the Politics of the English Inquest, 1830-1926* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> For a report of the inquest into the death of William Cook, apprentice to Thomas Wingod, including surgeons' testimonies: *The Times*, 30 March 1830.

House of Commons and the Home Office (at the discretion of the SSNCB) in 1825 and 1830. This shows that legislative procedures influenced how the climbing boys were managed, but also that changes took place alongside but not following parliament. Furthermore, it highlights how the inclusive approach adopted in this thesis for the study of reform could be extended to illuminate the practical operation of the trade.

In order for us to understand how apprenticeships in chimney sweeping were managed, we need to consider sweeps' philanthropic initiatives and testimonies in parliament and how these activities influenced their conduct in front of parishes, magistrates and coroners. Similarly, governors' and magistrates' responses to requests for apprentices and complaints of abuse need to be studied in light of their involvement in philanthropy and legislative procedures. And, finally, the discrepancy in children's involvement in legislative and administrative procedures should encourage us to revisit the received wisdom of child labour regulation as a force that protected children but diminished their agency. Such an analytical framework and multi-source approach provides a useful model of analysis which can then be applied for the study of apprentices in other trades, as well as reform of other dimensions of the 'social condition' in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad & Dangerous People? England 1783-1846, the New Oxford History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), esp. chapter 9, 'The Condition and Reconditioning of England', pp. 573-627.

## CHAPTER 6

### **CHIMNEY SWEEPS' CANCER IN THE CLIMBING BOY CAMPAIGNS, c. 1770-1840**

The Introduction indicated that developments in the medical treatment of sweeps' cancer have been well described, but that the political contexts in which these responses took shape have not been sufficiently considered. This chapter examines how the disease was used rhetorically to influence the direction of climbing boy reform and how this affected medical understandings of its aetiology. Just as Christopher Hamlin showed that 'dirt' was constructed in sanitary reform as the principal hazard to public health to justify the need for sewers and drains, sweeps' cancer was used to 'prove' the unhealthiness of climbing. But the analysis also suggests important differences in the role of medical evidence in the two campaigns: doctors in climbing boy reform were *not* as easily manipulated into making politically desirable statements as in sanitary reform, and the uncertain aetiology of the disease did not lend itself to promoting medicine as a vehicle for social progress, as 'dirt' did.

The variety of rhetorical strategies adopted by reformers in dealing with these obstacles stands out. The cultural specificity of their strategies confirms the importance of considering ideological factors when studying occupational disease. But the connections drawn with other aspects of



sweeps' physical and mental health and the differences in rhetoric between settings also point to the need to look beyond disease and to consider how the structure of reform influenced the character of evidence that was presented – aspects not normally investigated by scholars of occupational health.

The chapter starts by sketching dominant medical ideas about sweeps' cancer at the outset of the climbing boy campaigns. It then traces how cancer was investigated and discussed in different stages of philanthropy and legislation towards sweeps' apprentices. It concludes by suggesting that these discussions influenced both the outcome of the campaigns and medical understandings of the aetiology of scrotal cancer.

### **6.1 Percivall Pott on Chimney Sweeps' Cancer, 1775**

As the primary point of reference for all medics who contributed to philanthropic pamphlets and parliamentary hearings regarding sweeps' cancer during this period, it is worth considering Percivall Pott's essay more closely. His observations were threefold: it was a cancerous irritation caused by soot, not a venereal disease, as had long been assumed because of its onset after puberty; sweeps' liability was solely due to their exposure to soot, not to their habits or work practices; it was a local irritation that could be effectively removed by operation, if surgery was conducted early.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Percivall Pott, *Chirurgical Observations Relative to the Cataract, the Polypus of the Nose, the Cancer of the Scrotum, the Different Kinds of Ruptures, and the Mortification of the Toes and Feet* (3 vols, London, 1775), vol. 3, pp. 177-83.

Other authors vindicated Pott's assessment, but his findings could not explain two issues that long continued to puzzle medics: why the disease did *not* occur in climbing boys, who were exposed to soot most; and why it only affected a small proportion of adult sweeps, although all came in contact with soot to a similar degree. Pott did not write on the disease again,<sup>2</sup> but in the decades following his *Chirurgical Observations* at least nine medical treatises tried to resolve these issues.<sup>3</sup> In 1808, Pott's son in law, James Earle, proposed that the small numbers affected pointed to some form of predisposition – a view endorsed by other authors.<sup>4</sup> This explained why only some sweeps developed the cancer, but posed the new problem of explaining the nature of their predisposition and why the cancer only appeared after puberty. Did their experiences as climbing boys play a part in turning latent disposition into active liability? Earle diagnosed one 8-year old climbing boy with the cancer – which fuelled such speculation.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, medical uncertainty about this issue allowed advocates and opponents of climbing boy abolition to advance

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<sup>2</sup> Waldron found no additional references to the cancer in Pott's lecture notes. Henry A. Waldron, 'A Brief History of Scrotal Cancer', *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 40 (1983), p. 391.

<sup>3</sup> See **table 7** for an overview of key medical treatises on sweeps' cancer, 1775-1946.

<sup>4</sup> James Earle (ed.), *The Chirurgical Works of Percivall Pott* (3 vols, London, 1808), vol. 3, p. 181. James Earle's son, Henry, later proposed it was a genetic disposition, from the fact that he had found the disease in three generations of sweeps from the same family. Sir Astley Cooper regarded it more likely to be a local predisposition, related to the thickness and texture of the scrotal skin making some individuals more liable to the cancer than others. Astley Cooper, *Observations on the Structure and Diseases of the Testis* (London, 1830), pp. 325-30; Henry Earle, 'On Chimney Sweepers' Cancer', *Medico-Chirurgical Transactions*, 12 (1823), p. 300.

<sup>5</sup> Pott confirmed that it was indeed scrotal cancer. Earle (ed.), *The Chirurgical Works of Percivall Pott*, p. 178.

explanations that were medically speculative but politically attractive. To show how discussions of the cancer were shaped by reform procedures we will consider its treatment in philanthropic literature and in parliament, and compare its treatment with that of other forms of ill-health.

## **6.2 Sweeps' Cancer in Climbing Boy Relief, 1770-1800**

Concern for the health of climbing boys was central to relief attempts pre-1800. Three things stand out in these early communications. Firstly, a wide range of health issues were discussed: from deformities, to injuries, diseases, anxiety and immorality. Secondly, conditions were always attributed to a combination of factors, in line with the holistic notions of health that predominated at the time.<sup>6</sup> Finally, disorders were rarely discussed with reference to authentic cases or through testimonies by medical practitioners. Hanway, Porter and Joseph Andrews, the main authors on climbing boys before 1800, referred to 'medical opinion' to explain fractures, urinary disorders and respiratory problems, without providing further details of their sources.

The same applies to their discussions of sweeps' cancer. All three wrote about the general reasons for sweeps' susceptibility to the cancer, but took considerable liberty with the medical literature of the period. Moreover, they included no details of particular cancer victims, although they had access to such information. In 1818, Porter testified at length to

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Hamlin, 'Predisposing Causes and Public Health in Early Nineteenth-Century Medical Thought', *Social History of Medicine*, 5 (1992), 43-70.

the Lords Committee about his father's death from the cancer during the 1760s.<sup>7</sup> He had seen no need to include such details in his 1792 pamphlet – typical of the way medical evidence was communicated in philanthropic literature at the time.<sup>8</sup> Their discussions of the cancer show how they explained sweeps' propensity to the disease and their subtle references to expert opinion. Hanway wrote:<sup>9</sup>

If I am rightly informed, the climbing frequently occasions great heat in the *scrotum*, which if irritated by friction brings on cancerous disorders. I have heard of four such, who were attended in one workhouse at one time. This disorder might probably be prevented by proper precautions. Constant lavations when they return home from their work, must be of great moment to them.

According to Joseph Andrews:<sup>10</sup>

from the constant and straining exertions which these ill-treated infants are forced to employ in climbing chimneys, at an age too when their joints are by no means endued with firmness enough to support the incessant fatigue, a cancerous disorder frequently attacks the most tender and delicate parts. [...] Should I be suspected of exaggerating this odious story, let any medical attendant on the great hospitals of London be asked, and he will confirm every thing I have asserted.

And Porter told his readers:<sup>11</sup>

it affects the scrotum first by small pimples with violent itching, which is increased by rubbing, and soon becomes an ulcer, and grows into an incurable cancer: it drains the patient of his juices, and commonly terminates in his death. Medical gentlemen think the cause is obstructed perspiration, from being too seldom washed, and too thinly clad. I am

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<sup>7</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 108. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>8</sup> David Porter, *Considerations Upon the Present State of Chimney Sweepers* (2nd edn., London, 1801).

<sup>9</sup> Jonas Hanway, *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers in London & Westminster* (London, 1785), pp. 27-28.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph P. Andrews, *An Appeal to the Humane, on Behalf of the Most Deplorable Class of Society, the Climbing Boys, Employed by the Chimney-Sweepers* (London, 1788), pp. 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Porter, *Considerations*, p. 35.

inclined to their opinion from none of my apprentices having ever had any symptoms of it.

Note how all three authors refer to medical opinion, but without presenting specific evidence. This is very different from later treatment of the cancer by the SSNCB. Also note that they present it as a disease of childhood, ignoring Pott's insistence that he 'never saw it under the age of puberty'.<sup>12</sup> Finally, note how they attributed sweeps' susceptibility to a combination of factors, not restricted to soot – contrary to Pott's assertion that soot was the sole cause.<sup>13</sup>

### **6.3 Sweeps' Cancer in Climbing Boy Relief, 1800-1834**

After the founding of the SSNCB, depictions of ill-health remained at the heart of philanthropic literature. But the SSNCB sought to present authentic evidence. In 1807, its London Committee approached the apothecaries of 'principal hospitals' of the metropolis, 'requesting an account of the cases of climbing boys sent to their institutions for cure of cancers or other complaints or accidents incident to their calling during the last four or five years.'<sup>14</sup> Responses came, but only regarding the cancer. The apothecary of St George's Hospital explained:<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Pott, *Chirurgical Observations*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>13</sup> Pott, *Chirurgical Observations*, pp. 182-83.

<sup>14</sup> '1808 Sixth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>15</sup> '1808 Sixth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4.

No particular account can be given of accidents to Chimney-Sweepers, as the manner by which an individual receives an injury is not specifically registered; but respecting the cancer of Chimney-Sweepers, six or eight melancholy cases have occurred at this hospital within the last six years, all of which have proved fatal. These unfortunate patients did not apply for relief before their diseases had gone too far to admit of an operation or any other mode of care.

Although more comprehensive reporting was thus impossible such correspondence eventually paid off. In June 1816, the SSNCB received a letter from Richard Wright, surgeon at Guy's and St Bart's hospitals, detailing the disorders to which sweeps were prone, including cancer, but also deformity, eye inflammations, sores, coughs and asthma, burns, stunted growth, accidents, and other discomforts arising from poor diet, clothing and lodging. The SSNCB proudly reprinted the letter in its next *Report*:<sup>16</sup>

If any additional evidence were required of the injurious consequences of their trade to the poor Climbing Boys, the Committee are enabled from the professional experience and information of Mr. Wright, of Rotherhithe, a very able medical practitioner, to confirm by his scientific and detailed statement the fact of the complicated miseries incident to the trade, the general injurious consequences of which have been too long known.

The SSNCB's display of Wright's expertise contrasts sharply with the indistinct references to 'medical opinion' in the earlier campaigns.<sup>17</sup> It is also at odds with Wright's modest introduction, 'I beg you will make every

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<sup>16</sup> '1816 Report of Public Meeting', pp. 6-7. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>17</sup> The Sheffield SSNCB included similar medical evidence in its pamphlets. For example, extracts about the health hazards of chimney sweeping from Dr. William Buchan's *Advice to Mothers* were reprinted in: James Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing-Boy's Album* (Sheffield and London, 1824), pp. 70-74; Samuel Roberts, *Tales of the Poor, or, Infant Sufferings* (2nd edn., Sheffield and London, 1813), pp. 16-20.

allowance for any inaccuracy you should observe, and which I shall be obliged by your pointing out to me at any future opportunity.<sup>18</sup>

Corresponding with surgeons and apothecaries was only one way in which the SSNCB collected medical evidence. Its London directors also visited sweeps in hospital. In 1833, one director attended on a broken-legged boy in St George's. The injury was attributed by the hospital books at the master's insistence to 'a fall in play' but, upon further inquiry, was found out to have been caused by a fall down the flue.<sup>19</sup> In 1839, another official came across four young sweeps on a single ward, with injuries to arms, ankles, hands and head.<sup>20</sup> Some of these cases were brought before magistrates. In May 1818, SSNCB treasurer William Tooke, assisted by a local surgeon, secured the release of a boy at Hatton Garden. First the magistrates inspected the boy's ankles and knees, then surgeon Skinner was heard under oath:<sup>21</sup>

as to the state of the wounds, and said he considered them as very highly inflamed, but with proper washing, poulticing, and rest, though the limbs might be restored; he also did not think the boy could be 10 years of age

It was one of many cases where Tooke and Skinner came to children's rescue.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> '1816 Report of Public Meeting', p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> '1833 Eighteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 12. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>20</sup> '1839 Twenty-Third London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 14-15. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 16 May 1818.

<sup>22</sup> For similar cases involving Tooke and Skinner: *Morning Chronicle*, 18 July 1818; '1821 Tenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 20-21. See Bibliography for full title. For other cases of metropolitan boys released upon third-party evidence: *The Bristol Mercury*, 4 August 1821; *Morning Chronicle*, 13 January 1825 and 1 April 1826.

Apart from rescuing individual boys, the SSNCB used such cases to promote its campaign. It reprinted surgeons' letters and reports of magistrates' hearings and coroners' inquests, encouraging readers to switch to mechanical sweeping and to petition parliament to end the use of boys.<sup>23</sup> Such evidence also affected legislative procedures more directly: reports like these were forwarded to parliamentary committees and appeared in *Minutes of Evidence*.<sup>24</sup>

These examples indicate the SSNCB's persistent interest in health beyond cancer and show the willingness of medical practitioners to comment on a variety of disorders to which sweeps were prone. Furthermore, SSNCB directors created medical evidence by going out into the community and by initiating administrative procedures and they used specific evidence to promote reform in a variety of channels. Master sweeps adopted similar tactics to oppose abolition but advance ameliorative measures. Bristol masters reproduced extracts from mortality records in local circulars to refute SSNCB allegations that chimney sweeping caused early deaths and revealed details of the single case of sweeps' cancer in their city in pamphlets and parliamentary testimonies to

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<sup>23</sup> The letter to the London hospitals was part of a wider strategy to gather authentic evidence. From the next *Annual Report* (1811) onwards all its pamphlets included reprints of magistracy hearings and coroners' inquests. In 1828, the London SSNCB printed a tract comprised entirely of such documents. *Observations on the Cruelty of Employing Climbing-Boys in Sweeping Chimneys, and on the Practicability of Effectually Cleansing Flues by Mechanical Means; with Extracts from the Evidence before the House of Commons* (London, 1828). SSNCBs elsewhere followed the example. *Facts and Statements, Shewing the Evils of Sweeping Chimneys by Children, and Proving the Practicability and Advantage of Cleaning Them by Machines* (Liverpool, 1829).

<sup>24</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 34-41. See Bibliography for full title.



demonstrate that the disease was not an inevitable product of their working practices.<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that the increasing intersection that we found in previous chapters for legislative, administrative and voluntary *activities* also applied to the *evidence* presented. But it was not always practical or desirable to present the same evidence in different settings. The procedures and conventions of the parliamentary debate, the parliamentary inquiry, the petition, the philanthropic pamphlet, the magistracy hearing, and so forth influenced how the problem of climbing boys could be framed, what remedies could be proposed *and* which evidence made most impact. These conventions were themselves not fixed. To clarify these points it is helpful to look more closely at how the medical evidence collected and constructed by the SSNCB and the USMCS was adopted and adjusted in parliament and thereby contributed to procedural change.

#### **6.4 Chimney Sweeps' Cancer in Parliament, 1817-1819**

Health was at the heart of the 1817 Commons Select Committee inquiry. At times, sweeps were simply asked whether they believed that their trade

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<sup>25</sup> For the mortality data: William Head and others, *An Appeal to the Public, by the Master Chimney-Sweepers Residing in the City of Bristol, against the Erroneous Application to Their Practice and Character, of the Matter Contained in a Pamphlet Entitled Facts Relative to the State of Children Employed as Climbing-Boys, &C. Published to Recommend the Exclusive Use of Machines. With a Plate, Descriptive of the Various Constructions of Chimneys in Which No Machine Can Operate* (Bristol, 1817), pp. 16-17. For the cancer case: Head and others, *An Appeal to the Public by the Master Chimney-Sweepers of Bristol*, pp. 13-14.

was unhealthy. This led to remarkable claims. London sweep John Cook spoke of the beneficial qualities of soot:<sup>26</sup>

I had a lad apprenticed to me out of St. James's parish, and when he came to me he had a bad head, and bad knees, and bad breath; now that boy was not at work more than six or seven months before three or four worms came away, which the soot drove from him and cleared his inside.

More commonly, sweeps were asked about specific hazards, similar in range and kind to those discussed by Wright in his letter to the SSNCB. This is not surprising. As the chairman of the Commons Committee, Henry Grey Bennet, was director to the London SSNCB, Wright's letter lay on the Committee's table and was reprinted in the *Minutes*, and Wright himself was heard.<sup>27</sup> Although most of his hearing focused on sweeps' cancer, Wright was also asked whether he wished to add anything regarding the other conditions outlined in his letter.<sup>28</sup>

A similar scenario unfolded in the Lords Committee the following year. The counsels representing petitioners proposing and opposing abolition interrogated sweeps and surgeons closely on health, covering a similar array of conditions. But they made a more conscious effort to frame their questions in ways that would generate evidence in favour or against climbing. This is clear from their interrogation of medical witnesses.

Early on in the hearings, two surgeons were called before the Committee: Sir William Blizzard, who had practiced at the London Hospital for thirty eight years; and John Painter Vincent, who, having trained under

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<sup>26</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 24-27.

<sup>28</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 25.

James Earle (Pott's son-in-law) at St Bart's, had been employed at the same hospital for the past eleven years. Neatly following the headings of Wright's letter, Stephen Lushington (London SSNCB committee member and counsel for those advocating abolition), interrogated both witnesses about the miseries to which climbing boys were exposed. He clearly tried to single out climbing as the main cause of ill-health. He asked Blizzard:<sup>29</sup>

Supposing Boys of the Age of from Six to Ten Years of Age, whose Bones have not acquired a Consistence, to be set to climbing Chimneys, in your Opinion it necessarily tends to produce Distortion more or less?

and

Have you [...] observed any instances of Boys brought in with Burns, which you understood to be occasioned from the Heat of the Chimneys which they have been up?

His opponent, David Pollock, adopted similar strategies to extract evidence that downplayed the hazards of climbing. For example, he tried to lead Blizzard to confirm that climbing was harmless to older children and that cleanliness could effectively prevent scrotal cancer and other skin irritations.<sup>30</sup> Their exchanges on the former issue show how Pollock tried to advance politically desirable explanations and how the surgeon resisted this line:<sup>31</sup>

You have stated that Boys from Six to Ten, if employed, would be very likely to have their limbs subject to Distortion? – I have.

Do you think Ten is an Age after which they might be safely employed for climbing Chimneys? – With less Danger; but it must be relative to the State of the Boys.

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<sup>29</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 24-25.

<sup>31</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 26.

Do I understand you, that if a Boy is past the Age of Ten, and is a healthy Boy, he may be safely employed in climbing Chimnies without the Danger of Distortion? – I do not say that; but I say with less Danger than at an earlier Period.

May he with little Danger? – It must depend upon Circumstances, according to the Degree of Rigidity of the Bones.

I put the Case of a Stout healthy Boy; do you think it would be attended with little Danger? – I can scarcely say that; for it is wonderful how the Bones will yield by slow Degrees at any Period; they will incline in the Direction in which they are constantly used, Power being employed in adding and taking away Particles in such a Manner as to accommodate the Boys to the new State of Things.

Even after Maturity? – Yes, even after Maturity.

Blizzard and Vincent addressed other questions with similar sophistication; confirming or rejecting the theories put to them where possible, but more often adding further nuance in line with their own observations and with medical literature.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the hearings did not generate the clear-cut answers that the counsel had hoped for. What other interviewees lacked in balance (witnesses called forward by Lushington confirmed the inevitable hazards of climbing and the practicality of mechanical alternatives; those of Pollock claimed the opposite) they overcompensated with clinical nuance. The inquiry did not produce the straightforward condemnation or approval of the Bill that effective law-

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<sup>32</sup> From the exchange between Lushington and Vincent: 'May not the Seeds of the Disorder have been sown very early, and have put on the cancerous Appearance a long Time afterwards? – I think the Manifestation of Disease would be very much coeval with the original diseased Action itself; the Disease would not exist before there was some Mark of Disease.' From the exchange between Pollock and Blizzard: 'We know that the Scrotum is seated in a very delicate Part, where the knife may go to a vital Part without going to a great Depth, and therefore the Operation, unless well conducted, is attended with Danger? – I must beg to differ from that. The Testes we do not consider a vital Part: the Testes may both be removed with very little Danger to Life.' 'And there are not other Parts in the Neighbourhood which may occasion Danger in the Operation? – I must as an Anatomist differ from you.' '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 25 and p. 31.

making required. The Committee acknowledged that 'much contradictory evidence' had been submitted regarding 'the actual situation of the boys, and upon the evils necessarily inherent in the trade'<sup>33</sup> and, although hopeful that climbing might eventually be prohibited altogether, thought it 'desirable to have further information'.<sup>34</sup>

The modesty with which Blizzard and Vincent discussed their credentials is also striking. Although firm in their answers where they considered themselves knowledgeable enough, they openly discussed the limitations of their expertise. Asked about the patients that he had treated for scrotal cancer in the course of his practice, Blizzard pleaded:<sup>35</sup>

I must here take the Liberty of observing, that if I could have foreseen that at any Period of my Life I should be examined upon this Subject, I should have recorded Instances, so as to be enabled to speak with more Precision from my own Observation than I can now do.

In response to Pollock's suggestion that friction caused by walking played a part in the onset of the cancer, the same surgeon responded:<sup>36</sup>

I can hardly conceive that the Friction in walking has much Effect, nor do I know any thing of the Character of the Complaint at so early a Period; all I know is, that it is termed the Sooty Wart; but what are the Characters of it, I do not know.

Asked by a Lord about the age at which the disorder generally made its first appearance, Blizzard explained:<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Report', p. 23. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>34</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Report', p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p.25.

<sup>37</sup> '1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 27.

I believe Mr. Pott had more experience in this disorder than any Man, and therefore he was well qualified to write upon it: he said he had not observed it before the Age of Puberty; and I have no Recollection of any Case before that Period: so that as far as my Observations go, they are in Confirmation of Mr. Pott's Remark.

The two surgeons who testified before the 1834 Lords inquiry displayed similar attitudes. Sir Astley Cooper, consultant at St Guy's, spoke with more confidence about his own observations, having treated over one hundred cases of scrotal cancer. But like his colleague from Greenwich hospital, James Domville, who also appeared before the Committee, Cooper stated what he had seen and read without speculating about its possible implications for human physiology or constructing new areas of expertise. If anything, those interviewing the surgeons were the ones speculating about the cancer's aetiology and proposing new ways of approaching medicine. The surgeons responded to the questions and theories put before them but made no specific recommendations as to the policies that should emerge from their evidence.

This consistent modesty is interesting because the 1830s are generally viewed as a decade of 'professionalisation' during which medical practitioners advanced their authority over questions of public well-being. Work by Ian Burney on coroners' inquests and Michael Brown on charitable dispensaries has shown that appointments to these institutions sparked major disputes about the nature and role of the medical professional.<sup>38</sup> Why did these debates not show through in the chimney sweep inquiries?

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Brown, 'Medicine, Reform and the "End" of Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *English Historical Review*, 124 (2009), 1353-88; Ian A. Burney, *Bodies of*

Four factors need to be considered. Firstly, parliamentary inquiries might not have been an appropriate platform for settling such disputes. Innes for factory reform and Hamlin for sanitary reform have suggested that medics adopted the role of advisors without dictating the direction of inquiries or displaying particular expertise.<sup>39</sup> The former case is particularly interesting because Manchester physicians initiated the investigations in textile mills during the 1780s with a view on their role in the spread of fever epidemics, but parliamentary preoccupations with working hours and education during the 1810s refocused medical testimonies to the impact of physical labour and fatigue on children's development. Moreover, those testifying did not profess special expertise on child health or occupational health, although these were fields of medicine that did receive increasing attention in their own right.<sup>40</sup> These inquiries might have set a precedent for the role of the medical witnesses in the climbing boy hearings, certainly for Sir Astley Cooper who testified on both trades.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, the fact that these practitioners were surgeons may have played a part. Work by Katherine Kelly suggests that army surgeons interviewed in parliament about the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic

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*Evidence: Medicine and the Politics of the English Inquest, 1830-1926* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 50-51; Joanna Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour in Britain, 1783-1819' (Forthcoming).

<sup>40</sup> Innes, 'Parliament and the Regulation of Child Factory-Labour', pp. 10-11.

<sup>41</sup> '1816 [397] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 32-34. See Bibliography for full title.

Wars did set their expertise apart from general surgery. But civilian colleagues may have been less ambitious to place surgery on new footing.<sup>42</sup> Thirdly, the personal backgrounds of the surgeons must be considered. Of the four who testified to the 1818 and 1834 Lords inquiries, three should be counted among the metropolitan medical elite that were adverse to drastic reform of the profession. Blizzard and Painter were on the council of the Royal College of Surgeons; Cooper was former president of the College, founder-member of the Medico-Chirurgical Society and sergent-surgeon to the King.<sup>43</sup> James Domeville was significantly less senior in medical circles. But as assistant-surgeon in Greenwich hospital his clientele consisted largely of sailors, meaning scrotal cancer was clearly not the obvious choice to promote his standing within the naval medicine community. Fourthly, the cancer's uncertain aetiology might have influenced the surgeons' attitudes. The late onset of the disease (sometimes appearing many years after the patient had ceased to be exposed to soot) and its discriminatory nature (only affecting some who had been in touch with the poison) intrigued surgeons but did not lend itself for deriving definite lessons about human physiology or prescribing general rules of hygiene. As such, it was unsuited for advancing medical authority in cases of public health.

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<sup>42</sup> C. Kelly, "'Not Surgeons Alone, but Medical Officers': The Effects of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars on British Military Medicine' (unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2008), chapter 6.

<sup>43</sup> W. F. Bynum, 'Cooper, Sir Astley Paston, First Baronet (1768–1841)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., Jan 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6211>' (16 August 2010).



## 6.5 Chimney Sweeps' Cancer in Parliament, 1834

The attitudes of surgeons before the 1834 Lords inquiry were not very different from their counterparts in 1818, but the attitudes of their interviewers certainly were. In March 1834 the Upper House received another abolition Bill from the Commons. As in 1818, the House was bombarded with petitions in favour and against. But unlike in 1818, those opposing abolition *did* support further restrictions. As a result, both camps were determined to see procedures come to a successful close. Cancer proved a powerful tool to resolve the dispute.

As we saw in chapter 4, the anti-abolitionists were led by master sweeps from London, Bristol and Liverpool. They contested that all flues could be swept safely with the machines currently in use and disputed that injury, illness and distress were inevitable to the trade. Climbing could be continued without hazard if appropriate care was paid and restrictions should target the itinerant sweeps who neglected their apprentices. The cancer's aetiology was vital evidence for the latter two steps in their reasoning. The fact that the disease did *not* appear before puberty demonstrated that it had no relation to climbing itself. Instead it occurred among those adults who neglected their personal hygiene. As these could mostly be found among the itinerant sweeps who often mistreated their apprentices, reserving the hiring of climbing boys to rate-paying householders would solve two problems at once. Boys would be cared for by capable masters; 'filthy' vagrants forced to find employ in a different

trade. As in 1818, David Pollock, special pleader on the Home Circuit, acted as their counsel.<sup>44</sup>

Petitioners in favour of abolition argued that nothing short of complete prohibition could end the suffering of climbing boys. Regulation had brought little improvement in masters' behaviour. Exposure to disease and premature death *were* innate to the climbing system. Therefore, only by banning climbing would boys be protected from misery, masters forced to adopt mechanical alternatives, and householders encouraged to adjust their flues to the new method. Again, the cancer's aetiology was crucial evidence. Medical authors were agreed that soot was the primary cause of cancer. Therefore its roots must lie in the practice that exposed sweeps to soot most: climbing. Only by banning this practice, the additional hazards of which were too well known, could children be spared. Although not represented by a formal counsel, the voice of these petitioners was well represented in the Committee itself. Ten of the nineteen Lords who carried out the investigation were directors of the London SSNCB, including the Committee's chairman, Lord Sutherland **[table 8]**.

Pollock and the Lords on the Committee were determined to avoid another deadlock. In chapter 4 we saw the lengths to which they went to establish safety of mechanical sweeping – up to the point where they staged trials inside the Houses of Parliament. Here we will see the measures they took to determine the true conditions of climbing boys and

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<sup>44</sup> J. M. Rigg and rev. Hugh Mooney, 'Pollock, Sir David (1780–1847)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22477>' (12 August 2010).

whether the hazards of climbing were such that prohibition was necessary. Interviewing sweeps from across the different sections of the trade was one procedural adjustment. In 1818 only the wealthier masters had been heard; the so-called 'lodgers' or 'itinerants' were much spoken off but not called. Now, the Committee and Pollock traced representatives of the latter group to get a better sense of their numbers and the way they treated their boys. Another change was more subtle but equally crucial: for each health issue on which the sweeps and surgeons were interrogated, Pollock and the Committee insisted on establishing the part played by climbing.

To unpack these issues we will closely consider four interviews: two with master sweeps, two with surgeons. The first of the former was with 82-year old Benjamin Watson, master sweep in London's West End. On the SPICSA Committee in 1800 and participant in the earliest SSNCB trials with mechanical sweeping in 1804, Watson had become as a fierce opponent of climbing boy abolition and co-founded the USMCS in 1825 to campaign for better conditions for climbing boys, but against the abolition of climbing. He had clearly prepared his interview with the counsel, David Pollock. Pollock was well-informed of the aims and activities of the USMCS and gave Watson every opportunity to demonstrate the impracticality of sweeping machines and blame the underclass of 'itinerant' sweeps for the problems in his trade. Their exchange regarding sweeps' cancer fitted this line of reasoning.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 51. See Bibliography for full title.

Have you ever met with any Instance of what is called the Chimney Sweeper's Cancer? – Not with any I have had to do with.

Is it a Complaint frequently occurring? – The old have died with it from Neglect; from Want of cleansing themselves from the Soot and Filth.

Then the Soot corrodes itself into the Skin? – Yes.

Did you ever know an Instance of it in a Child? – No, I never have; it always attacks them when Men, but I never knew it in Children; the man I served my Time to died a Martyr to it, but he was a filthy dirty Man.

Other members of Watson's Society similarly stressed that the cancer never occurred in boys and described the disease as something reserved for filthy, vagrant sweeps. Daniel Bosworth maintained that:<sup>46</sup>

The only Disorders I have ever heard of are brought on by [the sweeps] themselves. There is a Disorder called the Cancer, where they have not thoroughly cleansed themselves; I never had one, nor never knew one that had, where I am.

John Bedford confirmed that 'It arises entirely from the Dirt and Neglect of the Men who are disordered in that Way'.<sup>47</sup>

The Committee had ample opportunity to test these claims. Several witnesses had been raised in conditions resembling those detested by the USMCS and subsequently fallen victim to the cancer. As the testimony of John Ross suggests, Pollock and the Committee were keen to establish

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<sup>46</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 33. Master sweeps adopted similar rhetorical strategies outside parliament. In response to Richard Wright's discussion of sweeps' proneness to cancer, five Bristol masters wrote in a pamphlet distributed in their city: 'Only one Chimney-Sweeper has been afflicted with Cancer in this city, for at least the last thirty years. His name was John Cook; and no symptom of it appeared during his apprenticeship. He died at the age of 40 years, in the Bristol Infirmary; the disease having been contracted by lying about Glass-Houses, under Hay-mows, and otherwise exposing himself without care or cleanliness.' Head and others, *An Appeal to the Public by the Master Chimney-Sweepers of Bristol*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>47</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 19.

whether climbing had played any part in the onset of his disease. Trained by an impoverished, itinerant master, 34-year old Ross now had his own sweeping business at Greenwich. He employed one climbing boy, with whom he called the streets. But he insisted on using mechanical alternatives where possible. He had suffered from scrotal cancer on which he had been operated two years before. The Committee interrogated him first:<sup>48</sup>

How long is it since you yourself have not been up a Chimney a Sweeping Boy; how many Years? – I am not sure I cannot exactly say how many Year; I did not take particular Notice.

Twenty years? – Oh no.

Ten Years? – I climbed, I suppose 'till I was nearly Seventeen Years of Age.

When you left off climbing you had not this Complaint? – No.

When did the Cancer first make its Appearance? – Just after last May Twelvemonth.

How do you account for that Cancer; was it in consequence of your having climbed so many Years before? – I do not know; I will not decide anything about what caused it – how it came; it came, and I was obligated to go through the Operation, and they called it a Sooty Cancer; even Surgeon Green at St. Thomas's Hospital called it a Sooty Cancer. I know no more than you do; perhaps you may know more, but I go by what the Surgeons say.

Pollock sensed the opportunity to prove that cancer and climbing were unrelated. He first questioned Ross's cleanliness, then emphasised the gap between Ross's last climb and the appearance of the cancer, and

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<sup>48</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 154.

finally stressed that this part of the body was surely not 'worked upon' in the process of climbing.<sup>49</sup>

Have you in the Pursuit of the Trade of a Chimney Sweeper become very Black daily as Chimney Sweepers do? – Yes, I am always Black when I am at Work.

Do you wash only once a Week? – I wash once a Week, and every Night sometimes; occasionally I wash all over.

Do you mean that you wash this Place where the Cancer was occasionally? – Yes.

Do you mean every Night? – Not every Night.

Am I to understand you did not neglect the Cleanliness of this Part when this took place?

Regarding the interval between when Ross ceased climbing and the onset of the cancer.<sup>50</sup>

How many Years before you perceived that Pimple was it since you had gone up a Chimney yourself? – I cannot say; I climbed 'till I was the Age of Seventeen Years.

Was it Ten Years? – I should think it was not quite so much as Ten Years.

You are now Thirty-four? – Yes.

You would have been Thirty-two when this came on; carrying it back Two Years, that would be Fifteen Years since you was Seventeen Years of Age? – Very good; then it must have been more than Ten Years since I climbed Chimneys.

Regarding the process of climbing he asked:<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 161.

<sup>50</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 161.

<sup>51</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 162.

It does not appear to me that that Part of the Body is very much acted on in climbing a Chimney? – No.

That Part can never come in contact with the Chimney in going up and down? – No.

But you are quite sure you do not recollect any Accident or Blow there? – None at all.

Pollock used the remainder of the interview to question Ross' limited enthusiasm for the USMCS. He asked Ross why he had not joined the Society and whether he did not share its commitment to Sunday education and assisting boys with finding suitable employment outside the trade after their apprenticeship.<sup>52</sup> He dismissed Ross's claims that he could not afford the Society's fees: how could he be married twice over, yet lack the funds to protect the health and comforts of his apprentices?

It is no coincidence that the interviews with the surgeons were left for final day of hearings. Their interrogation was the culmination of one crucial line of questioning: did climbing produce cancer or not. Unlike the surgeons in earlier inquiries, these practitioners were solely interrogated about this disease. And Pollock and the Committee made it clear that they wanted a conclusive judgment as to its aetiology.

James Domville, who had treated John Ross for his 'soot wart' at Greenwich Hospital, was interviewed first. Among the questions posed to him by the Committee:<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 164.

<sup>53</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 228-29.

Have you formed any Opinion from what that arises; is it from Want of Cleanliness, or more particularly from the Soot? – I believe it is from some Peculiarity in the Soot itself; and that is the Opinion of those who have written on it.

Want of Cleanliness is one of the Causes? – No Doubt it is.

It appears that the Youths go through the Business, and to an advanced Time of Life, without showing generally any Indication of the Disorder? – As far as comes within my Knowledge that is stated to be the Case.

Mr. Heyward, who stood in for Pollock in the morning session, wanted more explicit confirmation that the experiences of sweeps in childhood played no part in bringing about the cancer at a later stage in life. But Domville hesitated to make definite claims were he saw his expertise insufficient:<sup>54</sup>

Do you suppose the Age at which a Boy is apprenticed to a Chimney Sweeper would have the slightest Effect upon his having the Chimney Sweepers Cancer; for instance, if one Boy were apprenticed at ten, and another at Fourteen, would one be more or less liable to take the Cancer than the other? – I do not think I can give a correct Opinion upon that Subject; but I believe the Soot under any Circumstances is scarcely ever eradicated out of the Skin. I have seen Chimney Sweepers who have been many Years at Sea and in hot Climates, and still the Soot has appeared to be grimed into the Skin.

Do you not think if a Man began as a Chimney Sweeper at Twenty Years of Age, he would be equally liable to Cancer as if he began at an earlier Period of Life? – I think not; though Man coming into Contact with it at any Age would be liable to it; but the Persons at a more mature Age would be more careful to keep themselves clean. The poor Boys lying on the Soot Bags get their Skin grimed with it.

Three things stand out in these exchanges. Firstly, the explicit questioning about the potential impact of age-restrictions indicates that the Committee desired to make the cancer's aetiology a key factor in its decisions. Secondly, Domville's response that 'a man at any age' would be

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<sup>54</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', p. 229.



liable to the impact of soot and that variations in the occurrence of cancer should be sought in varying levels of cleanliness, shows his disinclination to step aside from general rules of physiology: all human bodies, irrespective of age, are essentially the same and respond similarly to external influences.<sup>55</sup> Thirdly, Domville relied heavily on Pott's work and other treatises and diverged from their opinions only where he saw his own observations adequate. This was clearly not a practitioner wishing to make a name for himself or construct new areas of medical expertise.

All three points also characterise the interrogation of Sir Astley Cooper, the other surgeon who testified to the Lords Committee.<sup>56</sup> Drawing on over thirty years experience at St Thomas's and Guy's hospitals and having treated nearly 100 patients for sweep's cancer, Cooper maintained that soot was its sole cause and that it appeared exclusively in adults because the deeper wrinkles in their scrotum allowed the soot enough time to impregnate the skin. Despite this clear statement, the Committee was keen get to the bottom of the issue, thoroughly examining whether there was indeed no relation to exposure to soot in childhood.<sup>57</sup>

Do you conceive that the Disease originates in Boys, and that then it is creeping on 'till an advanced Age, when it shows itself?

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Brown, 'From Foetid Air to Filth: The Cultural Transformation of British Epidemiological Thought, Ca. 1780-1848', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82 (2008), 515-44; Hamlin, 'Predisposing Causes'.

<sup>56</sup> Bynum, 'Cooper, Sir Astley Paston', *ODNB*.

<sup>57</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 247-48. Only the questions are cited here to give the reader the clearest possible impression of the questions fired at him.

You do not conceive that the Seeds of Cancer are generated at an early age, and brought to Maturity when the Person becomes an Adult?

If the seeds of the Disorder are not laid in Boyhood, and appear chiefly in more adult Age, it should seem that it is not generally the Contact with the Soot which the small Boys experience, but it is the subsequent Contact with Soot of more grown and advanced Men?

Then you think it is not contracted in Boyhood?

The Cause of it is not laid in the Period of their being Sweeping Boys, but after they attain the age of Puberty?

It is not then owing to the sweeping, but after the Period they have left off sweeping?

Note the Committee's insistence on excluding any possibility of the cancer having connections with the experiences of climbing boys. The Committee suggested that the character of the child's skin – not simply the lighter wrinkles – made it less vulnerable to the soot, but Cooper was unwilling to follow this line, despite increasing interest in children's pathology from the late eighteenth century.<sup>58</sup>

Based on these testimonies, the Committee amended the existing Bill, lowering the minimum age for apprentices from 14 to 10, yet reserving the right to hire under-14-year-olds to sweeps who were housekeepers and paid towards poor relief.<sup>59</sup> By denying that the cancer had any relation to climbing and maintaining that it was produced by 'unclean habits',

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<sup>58</sup> William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine: Or, a Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases by Regimen and Simple Medicines* (Dublin, 1769); Michael Underwood, *A Treatise on the Diseases of Children, with General Directions for the Management of Infants from the Birth* (2 vols, London, 1789).

<sup>59</sup> 4th & 5th, William IV, Chapter 35, *An Act for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for the Safer Construction of Chimneys and Flues*, 25 July 1834, clause 3.

masters and medics located all misery in one section of the trade – sweeps without a fixed residency. Excluding them from hiring young assistants, whose small frames were allegedly vital for cleaning narrow, crooked flues beyond the reach of machines, effectively excluded them from the market.<sup>60</sup> Subsequent legislation (Acts in 1840, 1864 and 1875) would enforce further restrictions, for all sweeps – but without further evidence on the cancer. The matter had been settled: cancer was *not* a disease of childhood and was solely the result of a local irritation produced by soot.

## 6.6 Sweeps' Cancer in Climbing Boy Relief, post-1834

Although sweeps' cancer never took centre stage again in legislative procedures, it remained a central feature in the SSNCB's extra-parliamentary activities. By avoiding detailed consideration of the disease's aetiology they could maintain the impression that cancer and climbing *were* related. To do so the London Committee focused on previously overlooked aspects of the disease. Its *Annual Reports* from the mid- and late-1830s included detailed descriptions of the suffering experienced by individual victims of the disease with pleas to readers to sympathise and act upon such pity by embracing mechanical sweeping.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For prosecution of itinerant sweeps in London and Bristol after the passage of the 1834 Act: *The Bristol Mercury*, 16 August and 25 October 1834.

<sup>61</sup> '1839 Twenty-Third London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 16-17; '1838 Twenty-Second London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 12-16. See Bibliography for full title.

The emotive portrayal of cancer victims by London SSNCB reports marked a broader shift in the Society's rhetoric. In earlier works the London Committee had consciously steered clear from sentimental agitation. In 1805 it ensured readers:<sup>62</sup>

It would be an injustice to the Subscribers and Public in general, were the language of declamation to be adopted in favour of these unhappy beings whose situation must daily wound the feelings of the humane inhabitants of the city.

It avoided 'declamation' by only reprinting 'authentic' reports of magistrates' hearings and coroners' inquests.<sup>63</sup> Its correspondents, including those reporting on the cancer, were aware of this policy. They omitted disturbing details in order not to distract readers from the purpose of their accounts – explaining why sweeps suffered from this disease. As Thomas Forster, medical practitioner at Sussex and Kent, assured the treasurer of the London SSNCB in 1821:<sup>64</sup>

I will not trouble the Society with a disgusting statement of cases, nor with the revolting detail of the first appearance and progress of the disease, farther than to add such facts relative to the mode of preventing it, as have occurred to me in practice.

By contrast, later reports on the cancer *were* designed to disturb. In the *Annual Reports* of 1838 and 1839 alone thirteen cases were discussed.<sup>65</sup> All were genuine cases (based on surgeons' letters or first-hand observation

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<sup>62</sup> '1804 Second London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 7. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>63</sup> These 'authentic' reports were themselves not undisputed. For example, in 1821 a master took the editor of *The Morning Chronicle* to court for libel for misrepresenting the master's prosecution at Hatton Garden police station. *The Times*, 28 June 1821.

<sup>64</sup> '1821 Tenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 29-30.

<sup>65</sup> '1838 Twenty-Second London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 9-12; '1839 Twenty-Third London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 16-17.

by London directors); all had ended fatally. All reported with meticulous detail the suffering that had preceded death, explicit invitations for readers to pity the victim, and clear suggestions that further suffering could be prevented by switching to mechanical sweeping.

The wording of the reports and why their formulation appealed to contemporaries will be examined in Chapter 6. Here it is important to note that the SSNCB rhetorically deployed the disease in a new way with positive impact on its attempts to further abolition. The continued association between climbing and cancer had unforeseen effects too. It fed an impression in medical circles after 1840 that sweeps' cancer had declined and that this was the result of the ban on climbing.

### **6.7 Sweeps' Cancer in Medical Treatises**

Medical authors on the cancer before 1840 were clearly aware of the reform campaigns. But this did not lead them to change their minds on the dynamics of the disease. It was a disorder that principally affected adults and preventive measures should focus on their behaviour. Writing in 1823, Henry Earle, though sympathetic towards the fate of climbing boys, was very astute on the matter:<sup>66</sup>

As the liability to this peculiar disease formed one principal ground for the application to Parliament, it may be satisfactory to know that the children who form the principal part of those engaged in the trade, are not liable to this affection. Unfortunately, even if it were possible to substitute machinery in every instance, although the first stage of degradation and

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<sup>66</sup> Earle, 'On Chimney Sweepers' Cancer'.

misery might be got rid of, yet the master sweeps, and those who were engaged in the removal of the soot, would still be liable to this destructive malady.

Aware of the reformers' interest in the disease, Earle reiterated that it was not a disease that affected climbing boys. Restrictions on climbing and other protective measures might spare the children all sorts of other distress, but the adults would remain equally liable to this disease.

Sir Astley Cooper was equally sympathetic to the hardships of climbing boys. In a chapter dealing with sweeps' cancer, in his treatise on *The Structure and Diseases of the Testis*, he wrote:<sup>67</sup>

I once saw in Guy's Hospital a chimney-sweeper of the age of twelve years, whose knees were extensively ulcerated from climbing; yet his master used to flog him up chimneys, in spite of the pain and bleeding which he suffered.

Yet, cancer was *not* among the hazards to which climbing boys were exposed. Cooper wrote that he had 'known this disease to occur at various ages' but only in those 'from twenty-six to eighty years'.<sup>68</sup> The deeper wrinkles in the scrotum of adult sweeps allowed the soot to do its damage; earlier exposure to the substance played no part. It was a position that he reiterated to the Lords Committee four years later.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cooper, *Observations*, p. 325.

<sup>68</sup> Cooper, *Observations*, p. 330.

<sup>69</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 247-48.

However, when Thomas Curlings, surgeon at the London Hospital, discussed the disease in 1843 he *did* propose that childhood exposure to soot might play a part.<sup>70</sup>

It appears that the seeds of this malady are sown in early life, but in general do not germinate until they have remained for some time dormant in the system. It is known that persons who have been sweeps when young, but have abandoned the occupation, have afterwards been attacked with chimney-sweeper's cancer, although they have long been removed from all contact with soot.

He recalled the case of a sailor, raised as a sweep but afterwards employed for over twenty years unexposed to 'soot in any way whatever', who had recently been admitted into his hospital. Unsurprisingly, the SSNCB singled out cases like these in its publications.<sup>71</sup> By focusing on such exceptional cases they kept the impression alive that climbing and cancer were connected, an impression that was eventually taken up by medical authors. In 1864, Dr. Humphrey wrote, 'It is much more common in this country than in others; but it appears to be on the decrease here, perhaps owing to the more generally use of machines.'<sup>72</sup> Along similar lines, another London surgeon, proclaimed in 1876, 'Cancer of the scrotum is a rare affection

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas B. Curling, *A Practical Treatise on the Diseases of the Testis and of the Spermatic Cord and Scrotum* (London, 1843), pp. 519-36.

<sup>71</sup> In 1830 the London Committee reported the case of an East India cadet who had once worked as a climbing boy and now suffered from the 'inevitable' consequences. From the dialogue between the cadet and his physician in Madras: 'Were you ever a Climbing Boy? – I was stolen from my parents in England; I was too young to find them out, and they could not discover me, and I worked four years as a Chimney Sweeper! – I knew that you must.' '1830 Fifteenth London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 9-10. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted from Timothy Holmes, *A System of Surgery* (London, 1864) in: Henry T. Butlin, *On Cancer of the Scrotum in Chimney-Sweeps and Others. Three Lectures Delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons of England* (London: The British Medical Association, 1892), p. 3.

compared with what it was some years ago when sweeps ascended flues.<sup>73</sup>

This myth was only successfully exposed when Henry Butlin, surgeon at St Bart's, thoroughly investigated the disease between 1889 and 1892. He found that the disease was still as common as before the restrictions on climbing. He also found that it was peculiar to *English* sweeps, which he related to the coal used in this country and the poor hygienic standards compared with the European continent.<sup>74</sup> His study did not come with policy recommendations, nor did it spark much response outside medical circles. In 1907 sweeps' cancer was included in compensation legislation and during the 1920s the disease re-appeared in epidemic proportions among cotton mule spinners – topics that deserve further research.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusions

Previous studies of climbing boy reform interpreted the campaigns as a necessary ending of exploitation or a sentimental response to suffering.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted from Thomas Bryant, *The Practice of Surgery*, (London, 1876) in: Butlin, *On Cancer of the Scrotum*, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Butlin, *On Cancer of the Scrotum*, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> For an excellent overview of the latter, focusing on the role of spinners' and manufacturers' unions: Terry Wyke, 'Mule Spinners' Cancer', in Alan Fowler and Terry Wyke (eds.), *The Barefoot Aristocrats: A History of the Amalgamation Association of Operative Cotton Spinners* (Littleborough: George Kelsall, 1987), 184-96.

<sup>76</sup> For the former: George L. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys: A History of the Long Struggle to Abolish Child Labor in Chimney Sweeping* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1949). For the latter: Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*:



This chapter has shown that reformers engaged more specifically with sweeps' health and that not all discussions were aimed at arousing sentiment. By focusing on one condition, we have seen that discussions differed considerably between reform channels and changed considerably over time. Apart from reformers' preoccupations and the attitudes of those whose advice they sought, the conventions and procedures for considering evidence in specific settings influenced how scrotal cancer was discussed.

This finding implies that historians of occupational health, who tend to focus on actors and ideologies, should pay closer attention to the procedures of reform. The relatively modest attitude of the practitioners who testified about the cancer also stands out. Authentic cases and doctors' statements carried increasing weight in philanthropy and legislative initiatives towards climbing boys, but the practitioners consulted did little to project their 'authority' over public welfare or to promote new areas of medical expertise. This challenges the image of the early nineteenth century, and the 1830s in particular, as an era of medicalisation of policy and of professionalisation in medical practice in Britain.<sup>77</sup> If such shifts occurred, change was uneven and multifaceted. Apart from the ambitions of individual practitioners, the type of practitioner, the kind of health issue and the settings in which it was discussed all need to be considered. For example, the uncertain aetiology of sweeps' cancer

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*Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1991), chapter 4.

<sup>77</sup> Brown, 'Medicine, Reform and the "End" of Charity'; Burney, *Bodies of Evidence*.

allowed reformers to use it rhetorically in multiple ways but made it unsuited to serve as a model for other public health interventions.

With regards to reform, this chapter highlights that the increasing collaboration between different actors (legislators, administrators and non-office holders) and the growing intersection between legislative, administrative and voluntary initiatives, discussed in previous chapters, did not result in a straightforward homogenisation of issues and evidence. For example, after 1834, health disappeared as a topic of investigation in parliament's dealing with the trade (attention focused on the safety of mechanical sweeping), but sweeps' cancer and other health problems associated with the trade retained a central place in the SSNCB's extra-parliamentary activities.



## CHAPTER 7

### BODILY RHETORIC IN THE CLIMBING BOY

#### CAMPAIGNS, c. 1770-1840

This chapter shows that discussions of sweeps' bodies featured prominently in strands of rhetoric not readily associated with medicine. The analysis builds upon Thomas Laqueur's study of 'humanitarian narrative': new ways of speaking about human suffering, characterised by depictions of the body of an individual sufferer to identify a social evil, provoke sympathy, and instigate ameliorative action, which took shape in a variety of genres during the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> It helped to transform the latent social compassion of Christian theology into explicit evangelical relief for causes like that of climbing boys. Laqueur argued:<sup>2</sup>

a common historical ground appears if we juxtapose humanitarian narratives of the sort I have been discussing with a science of the heart, as John Wesley called it. The production of the personal conversion account on the one hand and Howard's prison inquiries on the other, of a medical case history and a narrative of slave suffering, become part of a single cultural propensity to use detailed descriptions of the body as a common locus of understanding and sensibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative', in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 176-204. Laqueur discussed in particular the novel, the medical case note, the parliamentary inquiry and the coroner's inquest.

<sup>2</sup> Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details and the Human Narrative', p. 201.

Laqueur admitted that such rhetoric was not 'the only means of arousing compassion or action' and that 'careful analysis of both its production and its reception' were requisite.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter takes up these invitations by investigating how far sweeps' bodies were used to communicate prominent strands of rhetoric that presented the situation of climbing boys as adverse to childhood (at odds with what a child should experience or undermining 'natural' development), the worst form of slavery, and an offense to sentiment. Previous scholars have studied these strands, but not with reference to physical representations.<sup>4</sup> The evidence presented suggests that bodily depictions were often juxtaposed with other idioms depending on *who* communicated these images, with *what* audience(s) in mind and in *which* context. At times, reformers avoided bodily rhetoric because it undermined the message conveyed.

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<sup>3</sup> Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details and the Human Narrative', p. 179 and p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> Jordanova focused on the sentimental language adopted by Hanway to refer to climbing boys as workers and to describe the relationship with their kin. Ludmilla J. Jordanova, 'Conceptualising Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: The Problem of Child Labour', *British Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies*, 10 (1987), 189-99; Ludmilla J. Jordanova, 'Cultures of Kinship', in Ludmilla J. Jordanova (ed.), *Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine 1760-1820* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), 203-27. Cunningham explored how sentimental language first used for referring to climbing boys was then adopted by commentators on other child workers. He also explored analogies of climbing boys and other child workers as slaves. Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1991), chapter 4. Plotz focused on Charles Lamb's discussion of climbing boys, particularly his reference to them as 'young Africans of our own growth'. Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), chapter 3.

## 7.1 Childhood

According to Cunningham and Jordanova, the most significant aspect of Hanway's exertions on behalf of climbing boys was the emotive language he used to describe their toils and the way he emphasised that they were children – beings of 'tender years', in 'a sacred state of life' that required 'compassion'. As Cunningham put it:<sup>5</sup>

It would be difficult to argue that the immediate lot of the climbing boys improved in any significant way as a result of Hanway's book [*Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers*, 1785, red.], but he had given expression to a mode of thinking about the children of the poor which had no precedent and many successors.

Cunningham contrasted the sentimental language of this campaign with the medical idiom of factory reform. This overlooks the specific ideas that Hanway and his associates expressed about the conditions requisite for climbing boys' development. Unlike in earlier communications, during the 1780s, they described the bodies of climbing boys in order to portray their fate as adverse to childhood. This transition suggests that bodily rhetoric was sometimes avoided and at other times combined with other idioms to maximise impact.

In 1773, Hanway and his associates urged master sweeps to offer apprentices the 'common necessities of life', including 'proper rooms and beds, regular and sufficient food, and such clothes as the poor child can appear in, to worship God on the Sabbath-day'.<sup>6</sup> They asked magistrates

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<sup>5</sup> Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Jonas Hanway, *The Defects of the Police the Cause of Immorality* (London, 1775), p. 95.

and the public for support because the boys' treatment was adverse to 'the preservation of their lives' and because 'these poor children can no more plead their own cause, than infants at the breast'.<sup>7</sup> Although portraying their treatment as unwholesome and cruel, their bodies and minds were not used to convey its impact, nor was the impact of their actual work on their development discussed.

These omissions contrast with Hanway's other activities. As discussed in chapter 2, during the late 1760s, Hanway wrote extensively about the impact of early work, arguing that children should be employed in tasks appropriate to their strength and maturity. Hanway practised what he preached. At his insistence, the Foundling Hospital made provisions for children with handicaps, apprenticing them to appropriate trades or providing employment in the hospital.<sup>8</sup> Hanway worked together with doctors who studied the health of infants and children, including William Buchan who took note of his exertions for climbing boys.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 93 and p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Ashley Mathisen, 'The Problem of Problem Children: Apprenticing Mentally and Physically Disabled Children in the Eighteenth Century' (Forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> Buchan was medical attendant at the branch of the London Foundling Hospital in Ackworth in the West Riding of Yorkshire – a position through which he became a friend of Hanway. His *Domestic Medicine* was the most popular of an increasing number of treatises and advice manuals dealing specifically with the health and illnesses of infants and adolescents: George Armstrong, *An Account of the Diseases Most Incident to Children, from Their Birth to the Age of Puberty* (London, 1777); William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine: Or, a Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases by Regimen and Simple Medicines* (Dublin, 1769); William Cadogan, *Essay Upon Nursing and the Management of Children from Their Birth to Three Years of Age* (London, 1748); Michael Underwood, *A Treatise on the Diseases of Children, with General Directions for the Management of Infants from the Birth* (2 vols, London, 1789). For Buchan's discussion of climbing boy relief: William Buchan, *Advice to Mothers, on the Subject of their own Health and on the Means of Promoting the Health, Strength, and Beauty of their Offspring* (London, 1803) in:

Why did these preoccupations not show through in the activities of the 1773 Committee? Hanway regarded climbing as both the most hazardous aspect of the boys' situation and a necessary evil. Alternative methods used abroad were unsuited to England's architecture.<sup>10</sup> Writing in detail about the boys' physique would have directed attention to this practice, highlighting the impracticality of their ameliorative proposals. Hanway admitted in his *Sentimental History* (1785): 'With all the care which can be taken of them, their health will be much exposed.'<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, this publication dealt at length with the physical marks of injury caused by climbing and stressed that the damage done was worsened by the boys' particular state of development. Hanway communicated these ideas in three ways, all relying to some degree on bodily depictions.

The first was similar to claims made during the 1770s that the boys, as children, were defenceless:<sup>12</sup>

Many other occupations expose the health of men; but they are free agents; and being arrived at the maturity of their reason; they do what they please: and we shall find that their demand for their work generally bears a proportion to the risk which attends it.

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Samuel Roberts, *Tales of the Poor, or, Infant Sufferings* (2nd edn., Sheffield and London, 1813), 16-19.

<sup>10</sup> He referred specifically to the ball and brush used in Scotland's taller but straighter flues and climbing *men* who swept Germany's wider chimneys. Jonas Hanway, *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers in London & Westminster* (London, 1785), p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. xl.

<sup>12</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. xl.



A similar idea, but one more typical in juxtaposing sentimental, religious *and* mercantilist idioms: 'There are many occupations which shorten life, but none in which the helpless infant, in his sacred state of life, is so much violated: nor is there any in which a more scanty pay is provided'.<sup>13</sup>

The second focused on the damage caused to the boys because of their physical and mental attributes as children:<sup>14</sup>

These poor children begin their toilsome journey of life, at so early a stage as five to eight years old, differing in quality and exertion of infant strength, from all the other various employments which arts and commerce, the necessaries or the ornaments of life, have introduced.

[...]

The thoughts of children are tender; they have a native love of truth; their hopes of some distant good, and fears of distant evils, influence their minds as the operations of reason in adults; with this difference, that, like wax, they receive any impression. – Of what vast importance is it then, to make that impression tend to their present and future happiness.

In the second example, Hanway again discussed the children's physiology in sentimental and religious idioms to maximise its rhetorical impact. Elsewhere he similarly stressed their closeness to God, as children, as 'childhood keeps them from being polluted by sin'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 44. According to Taylor, Hanway generally juxtaposed various strands of argumentation, without clear hierarchy or divisions. 'Hanway was indulging in what was to be his life-long approach to writing – a marshalling of all the arguments he could unearth to support his view, regardless of inconsistency, in the hope that there would be something in his potpourri to sway his reader.' James Stephen Taylor, *Jonas Hanway: Founder of the Marine Society: Charity and Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London and Berkeley CA: Scholar Press, 1985), p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 25 and p. 156.

<sup>15</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 7.

The third line of rhetoric focused on the injuries of a single boy. One letter in *Sentimental History* had the core elements associated by Laqueur with 'humanitarian narrative'. Hanway used an individual sufferer to communicate a social evil, inviting readers to give their attention to 'a particular object of the misery I have endeavoured to describe'. The boy's body communicated the hardship endured ('his legs and feet resemble an S more than an L', 'his hair felt like a hog's bristles and his head like a warm cinder') and displayed concrete sources of distress (his master had forced him to climb '*before* his bones acquired a fit degree of strength'; his parents and the magistrates had allowed his binding at too young an age). Hanway proposed clear remedies (leather patches to 'fortify' his arms, knees, shoulders and back; a climbing cap to protect his nose and mouth from inhaling soot) and highlighted the authenticity of his account by including elements of uncertainty ('how he uses his knees is difficult to describe or comprehend') – strategies found by Laqueur in medical notes from the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

However, Hanway's narrative contained elements specific to his time and world view. He emphasised the boy's worthiness, reflecting the preoccupation with recipients' deservingness in contemporary philanthropy.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, he connected the case to readers' duties as

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<sup>16</sup> Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details and the Human Narrative', p. 183.

<sup>17</sup> Hanway stressed the boy's loyalty to his master, even when treated cruelly and suffering from the hazards innate to the job: 'He was once blind for six months, but still he did his work.' Hanway, *A Sentimental History*. On the increasing preoccupation with recipients' deservedness: Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), chapter 6; Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: From the 1690s to*

Christians: 'He who cherishes hope in a life to come, on Christian principles, must follow the banners of Christ. Would not *He* have shown mercy in such a case?'<sup>18</sup> '[T]rue Christian ladies of his neighbourhood' had taken the boy into their care. Their intervention implied 'reprehension' to those who allowed boys like him to use their childhood frames in a manner that was detrimental to them:<sup>19</sup>

the true meaning, as I understand, is, that this boy is rescued from the iron claws of cruelty, in the last resort, and as a monument of reproach to those in whose hands he has been sorely treated; and consequently it should operate as a lesson of *reprehension*

These examples show that 'humanitarian narrative' was only one way in which bodily rhetoric was used to portray violated childhood and that such rhetoric was sometimes avoided. The final example also highlights that Hanway strengthened a conventional storyline by connecting it with long-standing traditions of Christian charity and new forms of philanthropy in which he played a crucial role.

After 1800, abolitionists and reformers continued to justify the need for regulation by referring to climbing boys as 'infants' and 'children', similarly deploying bodily rhetoric. In a letter to SSNCB, surgeon Richard

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1850 (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 6-8; Michael J.D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>18</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 81.

Wright reiterated Hanway's claim that the boys' work was adverse to their development.<sup>20</sup>

the deformity of the spine, legs, arms, &c. of chimney-sweepers generally, if not wholly, proceeds from the circumstance of their being obliged not only to go up chimneys at an age when their bones are in a soft and growing state, but likewise by that of being compelled [...] to carry bags of soot [...] far too heavy for their tender years and limbs

Similar to Hanway's assertion that mercantilist policies should target these workers because they were 'helpless' children, Henry Brougham urged parliament to exempt climbing boys from laissez-faire because of their immaturity.<sup>21</sup>

the present bill only went to regulate the labour of those who were unable to make the necessary arrangements for themselves. [...] If the parties to be protected had been of an age sufficient to protect themselves, he thought the principle of interference would not only be wrong, but criminal, be the nature of their employment ever so unwholesome or severe.

During the same debate, Henry Grey Bennet argued that climbing caused 'premature ageing'.<sup>22</sup>

Compared to Hanway, the rhetoric was applied to a much broader set of climbers. Hanway had spoken expressly about 5- to 8-year-olds, hoping that they might be spared, but now apprentices of all ages were referred to by abolitionists as 'infants' and 'youthful and helpless

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<sup>20</sup> '1816 Report of Public Meeting', p. 7. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>21</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, HC Deb, 17 February 1819, vol. 39, 450-51. Henceforth, 'Hansard'.

<sup>22</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 17 February 1819, vol. 39, 454. 'He was astonished to hear [...] that when those beings exhibited every symptom of premature old age, distorted limbs, humped backs, and sickly constitutions, the hon. gentlemen should represent them as flourishing in health and strength, and forming a nursery for the navy.'

innocents'. Such indiscriminate references *were* challenged by those seeking to minimise intervention. Thomas Denman objected: 'At first he had thought that the measure of his hon. friend merely went to the employment of children of very tender age; but he now found that the measure was of a much more comprehensive nature.'<sup>23</sup> But master sweeps who opposed abolition embraced the abolitionists' broad conception of 'childhood' and its 'vulnerable' and 'dependent' annotations as it supported their claim that the care of apprentices should be reserved for respectable, settled masters like themselves.

Generic depictions of sweeps and factory workers as 'infants' and 'children', reinforced associations between labourers and children. One manufacturer complained in 1837 that 'all workers in mills, are spoken of as being children, all children are spoken of as "delicate", or, as being "infants of tender years"'.<sup>24</sup> It also prevented the campaigns from contributing to medical understandings of children's physiology. Just as Hanway and associates had claimed that an 8-year-old 'can no more plead their own cause, than infants at the breast',<sup>25</sup> abolitionists after 1800 implied that 8- and 14-year-olds were essentially the same.

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<sup>23</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 17 February 1819, vol. 39, 452.

<sup>24</sup> Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>25</sup> Hanway, *The Defects of the Police*, p. 100.

## 7.2 Slavery

Analogies between climbing boys and slaves similarly relied in part on bodily rhetoric. Initially, comparisons were based on the boys' physical and mental subjection to their masters. Campaigns to abolish the slave trade provoked parallels with Africans shipped to British plantations. Like these slaves, climbing boys were 'sold' into their trade. The boys' sootiness and black skins became more important during campaigns to abolish slavery. Some campaigners used the boys' blackness to highlight that Britain had 'Africans of our own growth'. Others stressed the boys' essential whiteness, to urge Britons to prioritise their relief. These changes confirm that bodily rhetoric was deployed differently by different speakers and in different contexts. They also reveal the opportunities and challenges attached to pursuing reform of multiple causes and through multiple channels.

Hanway and his associates compared climbing boys to slaves because of the masters' authority and their neglectful treatment. In December 1773, they wrote to sweeps:<sup>26</sup>

We appeal to your hearts, as free subjects, whether the meanest of us, born in this land of liberty, ought to languish in want of necessary food and raiment; or be deprived of such Christian instruction, as the religion of our country requires? If the supreme magistrate cannot enslave a subject, how much less ought *you* to have the privilege of degrading human nature, by plunging your fellow-creatures into such a depth of misery?

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<sup>26</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 66-67.

Along similar lines, in his *Sentimental History* Hanway accused others who allowed the boys' subjugation of despotism:<sup>27</sup>

as subjects of a free country, we are bound by the stronger obligations, to see justice done to those who are opprest (sic); but when this extends to the *infant state*, in which the parties cannot plead their own cause, if no one pleads it for them, the evil may at length reach to a magnitude too horrible to think of! [...] It is that thing by which so great a part of mankind have introduced slavery into the world, and all its woes! [...] He who feels a propensity to laugh at such reasoning, applied to chimney-sweepers boys, his mind may be best suited to Asiatic despotism.

Hanway reinforced this image of slavery as powerlessness by asserting that the climbing boy:<sup>28</sup>

because he is a boy, and miserably poor, therefore [...] is treated as if he were an animal of a different species. He is absolutely in a state of suffering under a tyranny more grievous than Egyptian bondage. [...] the poor child is condemned, by the death, or poverty, or profligacy of the parent, to hazard his life and his limbs in the dark paths of a strait (sic) chimney, at a time when he cannot judge of his service or his danger.

Note the emphasis on Britain as 'a land of liberty' and climbing boys as helpless 'infants'. Also note that this slavery was likened to 'Asian despotism' (inspired by Hanway's traumatic experiences in Persia) and exploitation in biblical times (unsurprising given Hanway's piety) – not to slavery in Britain's colonies. Stephen Taylor has suggested: '[Hanway] vigorously opposed slavery as inconsistent with reason and religion, but this issue that was so central to the Evangelicals did not entirely meet the combined interests of Hanway and other Christian mercantilists.'<sup>29</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>27</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 49-50. Hanway got caught up in civil war by rebels whilst on a trade mission for the Russia Company to the Shah of Persia in 1744. He was kidnapped and his goods confiscated by rebels – a history retold vividly in: Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (4 vols, London, 1753).

<sup>28</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, p. 182.

to avoid associations with plantation slavery, climbing boys' dark complexions were not singled out. They were compared to 'an animal of a different species', not to humans of a different race. Their oppression was un-British, un-Christian and un-human, but not dressed in racialised language.

When parallels were drawn to African slaves after 1788, it was rarely with reference to the boys' dark skin. In 1803, a correspondent to the *Gentleman's Magazine* declared the situation of climbing boys:<sup>30</sup>

far, very far, worse than that of the Negro in the West Indies. The latter is beat, whipped, and tormented by a cruel task master; so is the miserable chimney-sweeping boy. But the Negro has his hut, his garden, his hours of leisure, and his food; the Chimney-sweeper's lodging is on the soot-bags in the cellar, and in many instances scarce any food to eat.

Apart from the harness of their conditions, climbing boys shared with African slaves the fact that they were drawn to their fate involuntarily. Those who had played a crucial role in the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 used it to demand similar measures for climbing boys. At an SSNCB meeting in June 1817, organised to petition parliament for climbing boy abolition, William Wilberforce urged those gathered: 'to manifest the same humanity for the sons of their own country that they had for the children

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<sup>30</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 73, part 1 (1803).



of Africa'.<sup>31</sup> In the House of Commons later that month, Wilberforce seconded a statement made by Bennet, who:<sup>32</sup>

could compare this traffic only to the slave trade—children were bought and sold—were kidnapped and cruelly treated—and, he hoped, the same spirit which had abolished all trades of slavery in our distant settlements, would not brook to see the helpless children of our native soil in a condition no less degrading and deplorable.

Although there is no evidence that such parallels were reinforced with reference to climbing boys' dark complexions, campaigners for the relief of factory children claimed that disproportionate attention was going out to sweeps because of their physical similarity to African slaves:<sup>33</sup>

The black faces of the little climbing boys have excited the compassion of many charitable people, who have remained quite unmoved when they have been told of the hard work, the hard fare, and the mutilated bodies of the poor children at the cotton manufactories. How *impartial* and *discriminating* is such *charity!*"

Ironically, these campaigners *did* secure protective regulations for children in textile mills in 1819, but abolition and regulation Bills for climbing boys were rejected in the Lords. Now, the climbing boy activists felt hard done by. Some blamed the boys' blackness for the lack of sympathy for the cause. London SSNCB committee member, John Hudson, complained in 1823 that the climbing boy 'partakes in some degree the fate of the negro: we lose, in his sooty complexion, all sympathy with him as a fellow-

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<sup>31</sup> *The Times*, 9 June 1817.

<sup>32</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 25 June 1817, vol. 36, 1156.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Owen, *Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System: With Hints for the Improvement of Those Parts of It Which Are Most Injurious to Health and Morals* (2nd edn., London, 1817), p. 13.

creature'.<sup>34</sup> But others felt that too much sympathy was going out to African slaves, particularly when a campaign was initiated later that year to abolish slavery in Britain's colonies.

Many campaigners believed that the two causes could go hand-in-hand, but some felt that climbing boys should be assisted first. Apart from referring to Britain as a 'land of liberty' and childhood as a state of 'innocence' adverse to enslavement – arguments highlighted by Cunningham – those who favoured the relief of climbing boys stressed their essential whiteness and greater hazards attached to their work. Both featured strongly in the 1824 *Chimney Sweeper's Friend and Climbing Boy's Album*, compiled by Sheffield SSNCB director James Montgomery. Samuel Roberts was one of many contributors who stressed the unwholesomeness of chimney sweeping. Both in stature and in strenuousness of work, slaves on Britain's plantations were better off:<sup>35</sup>

The negroes are selected for their strength, and consequent power of bearing hardship; these poor children are chosen for their youth, small stature, and consequent inability to sustain labour. [...] The labour of the negroes, however severe, rarely impairs their health, deforms their frames, or distorts their limbs; that of these weak little children almost invariably produces [...] these lamentable effects;

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<sup>34</sup> John C. Hudson, *A Letter to the Mistresses of Families: On the Cruelty of Employing Children in the Odious, Dangerous, and Often Fatal Task of Sweeping Chimnies, and on the Facility with Which the Practice May Be Almost Wholly Abolished* (London, 1823).

<sup>35</sup> James Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing-Boy's Album* (Sheffield and London, 1824), p. 12.

Having outlined in detail the ailments that arose from employing children in this way,<sup>36</sup> he exclaimed: 'Is not this the most shocking, the most revolting of all slavery?'<sup>37</sup> Other contributors established the harshness of climbing boys' enslavement in similar ways.<sup>38</sup> These examples indicate that, in contrast to Cunningham's suggestions, those who wished to differentiate climbing boys from colonial slaves adopted similar rhetorical strategies as campaigners who sought to prioritise other 'white slaves'.<sup>39</sup>

Depictions of climbing boys' sootiness in analogies with slavery were similarly multifaceted. Previous scholars have singled out instances where they boys' dark complexions were used to place them on equal

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<sup>36</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, pp. 12-13 and p. 14. 'The initiating of these tender infants in their horrid, difficult, and laborious calling, is invariably accompanied with more or less of laceration; their back, their knees, their elbows, their shoulders, and their toes, are always rendered sore [...] They are deprived of that natural rest which is so essential to the health and strength of children. They are continually exposed to the most dreadful and fatal accidents. They have their flesh torn by the sharp points of projecting stones or lime; they are frequently wedged, unable to move, and almost suffocated with soot, in narrow and crooked flues; they are often falling down those which are too wide for them'.

<sup>37</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 282. John Holland portrayed climbing boys as totally subdued to their masters, 'used as animate machines', and stressed that their physical attributes were adverse to the tasks performed, their 'flexible form' being 'exquisitely nerved':

But what avail his terrors or his tears;  
His knees excoriate, and his sinews cramp'd?  
Sold into slavery, doom'd to be a wretch,  
His flexible form, so exquisitely nerved,  
Goaded with curses, or at the rope's end,  
Must henceforth, as an animate machine,  
Be used, and treated vilely, day by day.

<sup>39</sup> Cunningham suggested factory reformers were distinct in emphasising that colonial slavery was less detrimental to health than the factory system. The examples recited here suggest that climbing boy campaigners adopted similar rhetoric. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*, pp. 76-77.

footing with African slaves.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, the contributors to Montgomery's *Album* avoided such analogies. They emphasised the boys' essential whiteness, symbolising their physical similarity to readers. The spoiling impact of soot, as an unnatural barrier between the climbing boy and the reader, was described through two scenarios. Either, a boy was stolen from his well-to-do home, exploited by a sweep and recovered while cleaning his parents' flue – suggesting that the reader's child could face the same fate; or, the miserable life of an orphaned infant sweep was contrasted to the comfortable life of the reader's child – reminding the reader that the climbing boy once was a child just like their own.

Exemplary of the former, Ann Gilbert's 'The Stolen Child' told of Lady Strickland who, in 1804, had rescued a boy from this trade, recognising that he was of noble birth.<sup>41</sup> Because the boy's family was never found, she adopted him as her son. Gilbert introduced the boy when still in his mother's arms, stressing his fair but fragile looks:<sup>42</sup>

One whose bright eye, whose pale or hectic cheek  
Seems nought of body, all of mind to speak?  
A flower for future manhood but too fair,  
Too frail to bloom but 'neath a mother's care

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<sup>40</sup> Plotz focused on Charles Lamb's depiction in 1823 of climbing boys as 'young Africans of our own growth'. Plotz, *Romanticism*, chapter 3. Cunningham also discussed John Hudson's observation in 1823 (SSNCB CM) that the climbing boy 'partakes in some degree the fate of the negro: we lose, in his sooty complexion, all sympathy with him as a fellow-creature' and Robert Steven's likening of master sweeps to 'negro drivers' in 1838. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>41</sup> The London SSNCB had publicised the incident in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and through hand-bills: British Museum, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.40, A Remarkable Account of a Little Boy, 1806.

<sup>42</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 294.

The boy was 'decoyed by vagrant friends', leaving his mother in distress. Fortunately for the boy 'a second mother' found him out and recovered his fair looks:<sup>43</sup>

– One who tore  
The tatters from his limbs, who wiped the gore  
That trickled from his feet with tenderest care,  
That trickled from his wan cheek, and smooth'd his tangled hair  
Then to the heavings of her bosom press'd  
The pale, thin child, and housed him in her breast.

Finally, Gilbert turned the tale into a political manifesto, urging readers to end the use of climbing boys or accept that their sons might fall victim to this slave trade:<sup>44</sup>

But is there yet a traffic that can lure  
The dark-eyed vagrant (hardy to endure  
The cry of infant anguish) to decoy  
Far from some other home some other boy?

[...]

And shall the matrons of a Christian land  
Unmoved spectators of this traffic stand?  
No! rise in virtue's strength, in feeling's glow,  
Mothers of England! Say, indignant, – No!

Note how fairness and darkness are equated with good and bad. The dark looks of the vagrant trader in little boys give away his intentions; the surrogate-mother recovers the boys' goodness by cleaning his body from soot. But it is not a racialised rhetoric – at no point is the boys' whiteness contrasted with the blackness of African children.

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<sup>43</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 296.

<sup>44</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 297.

Barbara Hofland's 'Will and Frank' followed the latter scenario.<sup>45</sup> It narrated the toils of two pauper boys, who, at the outset, were healthy, strong and of exceptional beauty:<sup>46</sup>

Frank [...] had once an open, brave, and intelligent countenance, a clear and ruddy skin, with dark sparkling eyes. Will was fair as a lily with soft features, meek expression, curling flaxen locks, and eyes like the deep blue vacit of heaven.

But climbing ruined their frames and soot spoiled their fair looks:<sup>47</sup>

half suffocated by the atmosphere which inevitably surrounded them, their inflamed eyes, heaving lungs, shrinking muscles, and withered flesh, denoted constant disease, independent of many a festering wound, hidden by their ragged garments, many a bruise concealed by the still blacker soot.

In this state, the boys cleaned the flues of a stately home. The Lady of the house – a widowed mother just like their own – watched their toils in great distress. But the narrator stressed the far greater emotions she would have felt were she able to see underneath their sooty looks and appreciate their resemblance to her own child:<sup>48</sup>

their faces were covered and disfigured, or the young widow would have seen that the child she pressed instinctively still closer to her breast, as pity for these helpless little castaway boys was excited, had received from Nature far fewer advantages than they.

Thus it was not merely a story of pauper hardship and destruction. By presenting the boys' bodies as innately resembling those of well-to-do

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<sup>45</sup> Hofland was a popular Sheffield-born children's writer, author of works including *The Son of a Genius* (1812). Dennis Butts, 'Hofland, Barbara (bap. 1770, d. 1844)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13457>' (21 August 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 308.

<sup>47</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 317.

<sup>48</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, pp. 300-301.

children; their wounds and smears became offences as great as if they had been of a different class. The boys' whiteness was one crucial feature to get this message across. But by referring to their 'flaxen locks' and 'intelligent countenance', their looks were appropriated to middle-class taste. It was a class- instead of racialised rhetoric: the contrast between their fairness and the dark complexion of African slaves was left implicit.

During the 1830s, some climbing boy abolitionists *did* deploy the boy's whiteness racially. Responding to British campaigns to abolish slavery beyond its Empire, Roberts pressed his townsmen and -women to fight slavery at home:<sup>49</sup>

Now what is the case here? Not that little beings, born slaves, of a different colour, and considered scarcely human, are bought and sold, no, but that lovely young children, not only of the same flesh and blood, of the same form and colour, but of the same nature and kindred, are commonly bought and sold

He combined racialised rhetoric with familiar arguments about climbing boys' enslavement being 'attached solely to children', occurring among people of the same country, and causing greater damage to health.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Samuel Roberts, *A Cry from the Chimneys: Or, an Integral Part of the Total Abolition of Slavery Throughout the World* (London and Sheffield, 1837), p. 18.

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, *A Cry from the Chimneys*, p. 23. Roberts regularly juxtaposed racialised idiom with these other arguments. For example: "[The American's slaves] are of a different colour, of different features, born of Slave parents, a despised race; but what are *your* Slaves? *They* are not born Slaves. *They* are, of all human beings, the most lovely, the most engaging, the most of all others claiming protection, comfort, and love. They are CHILDREN.' And 'This is no nigger. This child was not a picanniny sold by a strange slave-trader in a foreign market. No! this lovely, unoffending child, was sold when little more than seven years of age, by his own father, for two guineas in this land of liberty, in this slavery-detesting town [...] for one of the most inhuman and destructive purposes, that ever was assigned as an employment to any human being.' Roberts, *A Cry from the Chimneys*, p. 12 and p. 22.

Whilst British abolitionists preached to foreign slave holders, they allowed far greater bodily destruction to continue under their noses:<sup>51</sup>

A pretty figure you Slavery haters would cut when you got to America, were your brother Jonathan, *guessing* what you were after, to have been before hand with you, and have got a ship load of these poor dirt-black, suffering, diseased, ulcerated, cancered (sic), crippled, stunted, deformed, famished, dying, poor English children, rescued by their Uncle Jonathan from the most horrible Slavery in the world inflicted on them by *you* in their native, liberty-bestowing land!

This section has revealed the varied analogies between the situation of climbing boys and slavery. Consistent elements in such analogies took on very different meanings as the relationship between campaigns for the relief of climbing boys and of African slaves shifted over time. Bodily rhetoric was crucial for the changing implications of analogies. In the final section, we will examine how such rhetoric was deployed sentimentally.

### 7.3 Sentiment

That feelings should play *a* part in climbing boy reform was undisputed throughout this period. But there was increasing emphasis on the need to ensure that the sentiments provoked were legitimate, balanced with rational considerations, and translated into appropriate action. This provoked debates about *how* feelings might be aroused and for what purpose. Bodily rhetoric was often at the core of these. Tracing emotive depictions of sweeps' bodies and the responses to these clarifies why

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<sup>51</sup> Roberts, *A Cry from the Chimneys*, p. 29.



practical relief towards climbing boys developed in particular ways. It also illuminates shifts in the relationship between sentiment and policy-making and shows the importance of considering non-rational factors when examining shifts in attitudes to health.

Hanway realised that sentimental rhetoric could undermine philanthropy. In 1762, appealing for stricter monitoring of parish infants, he sent memoranda stripped of the emotive appeals that normally characterised his pamphleteering.<sup>52</sup> For climbing boys, he instead combined different strands of sentimental prose, distancing himself from idiom that he deployed elsewhere. He described climbing boys as 'sacred infants' that deserved 'mercy and tenderest kindness', but denied (in the same text) the need for such language: 'There needs no poetical fiction, or hyperbolic declamation, to exaggerate the evil I am complaining of.'<sup>53</sup> His book was a 'Sentimental History', not because of the invitations to readers to feel or the depictions of individual suffering (although both featured in his text), but because of the factual statements of cruelty, neglect and injury.<sup>54</sup>

Let any one (sic) examine into the merits of the cause: With all the laborious efforts which these boys make for a support, their bruised bodies, weakened eyes, frequent wounds, lungs stuffed, unwashed, unclothed, uncomfortable lodging, and scanty diet irregularly supplied, indeed constitute a Sentimental History

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<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *Jonas Hanway*, p. 106.

<sup>53</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. xxix.

Sentimentalism was prominently deployed in other contemporary campaigns. Brycchan Carey has traced the mixed fortune of ‘the rhetoric of sensibility’ in campaigns against the slave trade – political rhetoric derived from the sentimental novel, a popular genre in Britain and continental Europe since the 1740s, characterised by physical expressions of grief (tears, signs, red cheeks, etc.) in response to human suffering. The same authors and orators who used emotive prose also criticised ‘false’ or ‘pretended sensibility’ – defined as arousing feeling for undeserving victims or without appropriate action in mind. They emphasised slaves’ ability to feel and combined appeals for compassion with practical relief (boycotting slave-produced goods). Hanway deployed similar rhetoric. Illustrating the misery caused by the trade through the description of a ‘cripple boy’, he emphasised that the boy had ‘affections not inferior to the common race of men’ and presented the ameliorative actions of ‘true Christian ladies’ as a model to be followed by the readers.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in 1788, Joseph Andrews urged readers to respond emotionally to his portrayal of climbing boys, but also to rejuvenate the practical relief that had died along with Hanway:<sup>56</sup>

May I not figure to myself the benevolent render of my letters, shedding a tear over the wretchedness of these useful, but cruelly injured beings, and earnestly wishing to have some plan proposed for their relief? [...] I will lay before you the public plan which my benevolent friend Hanway had formed, which, with one material alteration only, seems calculated to relieve every distress under which the neglected beings [...] at present labor.

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<sup>55</sup> Hanway, *A Sentimental History*, p. 77 and 80.

<sup>56</sup> Joseph P. Andrews, *An Appeal to the Humane, on Behalf of the Most Deplorable Class of Society, the Climbing Boys, Employed by the Chimney-Sweepers* (London, 1788), pp. 21-22.

Interestingly, petitioning parliament in the same year, Andrews and other members of the 1788 Committee denounced the hardships of climbing boys in emotive terms, but avoided details of individual suffering:<sup>57</sup>

if the Petitioners were to enumerate such Hardships and Cruelties as have come to their Knowledge in the Course of their Inquiries upon this Subject, it would almost exceed Belief, and is better suppressed than made public in a Country renowned for its Humanity

Until 1818, this remained *the* conventional way to provoke sentiment in petitions, Commons and Lords debates and climbing boy Bills. In 1817, Henry Grey Bennet rose 'to procure the interference of parliament in defence of a helpless and infantine race of beings' employed in a 'cruel occupation', but:<sup>58</sup>

should not trouble them with a detail of the accidents, distortions of the human body, and cruelties which were the frequent consequence of this practice, nor enlarge upon the moral and intellectual debasement consequent thereupon.

However, as we saw in chapter 4, such invitations to 'feel' through a language of 'infancy', 'helplessness' and 'inhumanity' were criticised in parliament in 1818. Addressing the Lords as spokesman for abolitionists, Stephen Lushington avoided declamatory language but trusted that his factual statements had touched his audience:<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Commons Journals*, vol. 43, p. 405, 22 April 1788.

<sup>58</sup> 'Hansard', HC Deb, 25 June 1817, vol. 36, 1156.

<sup>59</sup> *The Reply of Dr. Lushington, in Support of the Bill for the Better Regulation of Chimney-Sweepers and Their Apprentices, and for Preventing the Employment of Boys in Climbing Chimnies: Before the Committee in the House of Lords, on Monday, the 20th April, 1818* (London, 1818), p. 14.

I never attempted to inflame your Lordships' feelings, by descanting in detail upon the sufferings depicted in the cases brought before you; I never attempted to excite a false humanity, by dwelling on one or two instances of peculiar hardship. I wished your Lordships to consider the case with cool and deliberate reflection; not that I think that our feelings should be laid aside upon these occasions, but that when we are examining into the effect and balance of evidence, it should be done with the most unbiased and dispassionate mind: it is impossible, however, to contemplate all the facts which have been brought before your consideration, without at the same time being sensible that they are facts which must make a serious impression upon the mind of every one who is open to the feelings of humanity.

By contrast, David Pollock stressed that those opposing abolition were sufficiently sensitive:<sup>60</sup>

Those for whom I appeal, I take leave to assure your Lordships, are as eager in the cause of humanity, as those who seek to pass the Bill in its present form; and I set out with imploring, that your Lordships will not suppose, that they entertain sentiments upon the subject in the remotest degree inconsistent with the purest principles of humanity.

As SSNCB director, Lushington's insistence not to 'dwell on one or two instances of peculiar hardship' is interesting because the London SSNCB *had* forwarded samples of coroners' inquests and magistrates' hearings to the Commons Committee in the previous year.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, provoking sentiment was an important strategy, but one that was subject to constant self-censuring and to scrutiny by other parties.

It is helpful to return to Montgomery's *Climbing Boy's Album* (1824). Several contributors adopted sentimental prose not found in discussions about climbing boys since the 1780s. Besides parents and

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<sup>60</sup> *The Speech of David Pollock, Esq. Delivered before the Committee of the House of Lords on Wednesday, the Eight of April, 1818, in Support of the Petition of the Master Chimney Sweepers against the Bill for the Better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices and for Preventing the Employment of Boys in Climbing of Chimneys* (London, 1818), p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> '1817 [400] Commons Committee Minutes of Evidence', pp. 34-41. See Bibliography for full title.

clients shedding tears for distressed climbers and invitations to readers to feel *and* act, three features stand out: the emphasis on women's superior sensibility and encouragement for them to rejuvenate the campaign; the use of climbing boys' injuries to confirm that their distress was sincere; and the portrayal of boys' own cries to demonstrate that they were sensitive beings.

John Holland's 'Appeal to the Fair Sex' deploys all three. Holland described the toils of a little boy, and pleaded his female readers to:<sup>62</sup>

smile him into frankness in your presence;  
Then could the sweep-boy tell his own sad tale!  
All that he saw, and thought, and felt, and fear'd

Note how the boy needed a female presence to speak out. Holland warned of the suffering that awaited the boy if his cries remained unanswered. While an 'unwedded beauty' was 'lapt in a paradise of golden dreams' and a mother 'slumber'd on her husband's bosom',<sup>63</sup> little Henry was forced up a noisome flue:<sup>64</sup>

Up the strait aperture of this foul flue  
Was Henry sent; awhile he made his way,  
And nought was heard, save now and then a sob  
At intervals, when paused his rattling scraper,  
A sigh surpris'd: but soon his wheezing lungs  
Inhaled the stifling damp, and the close pass  
Forbade his progress...

Note how the boy expressed his anguish through sobs and sighs, highlighting both his inability to challenge his master verbally and his

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<sup>62</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 281.

<sup>63</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 283.

<sup>64</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 285.

sensitivity to the pain endured. Unconscious, Henry was recovered by his insensitive master, the marks on his body displaying the anxiety that accompanied his death.<sup>65</sup>

He brought him down, unstiffen'd yet, and warm  
 His eye-balls started and inflamed – his cheeks  
 Still moist, and mark'd where the hot tears had flow'd  
 O, had you seen poor Henry on the hearth, Stretch'd out, a little black,  
 unlovely corse,

[...]

Surely your hearts had overflow'd your eyes;  
 And while a prayer ascended for *your* children,  
 Ah! Sure your lips had vow'd, that never more  
 Up your foul chimney should a child be sent.

Finally, he instructed readers to use their womanly sensitivity to awaken sympathy for these boys among men who could end the practice:<sup>66</sup>

O feel!  
 For 'tis your happy privilege to feel,  
 And make your feelings known; - 'tis yours  
 To rouse the dormant sympathies of man,  
 And league them in humanity's best cause;

The Sheffield composers of the *Album* were convinced of its positive impact. Two years later, Montgomery, Roberts and Holland produced a similar work for the local anti-slavery society.<sup>67</sup> Climbing boy activists elsewhere were similarly inspired. As we saw in chapter 3, the Tottenham SSNCB distributed extracts from Montgomery's work and the London

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<sup>65</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 286.

<sup>66</sup> Montgomery (ed.), *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend*, p. 287.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Roberts, James Montgomery and John Holland (eds.), *The Negro's Friend; or, the Sheffield Anti-Slavery Album* (Sheffield, 1826).

SSNCB funded a second edition.<sup>68</sup> The London Committee also resolved to deploy similar prose:<sup>69</sup>

[the Committee] have never felt disposed to wound the feelings of the public by any studied or declamatory statement of the grievances it has been their wish to alleviate; they have considered it sufficient to adduce facts, and facts alone, as appearing on trials, examinations before Magistrates, and Coroner's Inquests, with no addition of colouring or remark [...] as, however, nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed from the period of the institution of the Society, and a new generation has since sprung up, to whom the subject may be but little known, it appears requisite on this occasion to claim the attention of the youthful portion of society to a cause almost peculiarly their own.

Following this statement, the tone of the narrative changed dramatically, depicting the climbing boy as 'a stricken deer, a victim rudely torn from all the tender charities of life', accusing the legislature of 'sanctioning this sacrifice at the age of eight' and commiserating those parents 'depraved enough to sell their offspring to supply this Moloch trade of filth, disease, and death'.<sup>70</sup> Note how a language of sacrifice, tenderness and physical destruction is combined with biblical idiom.

The rhetoric of the SSCNB took a further course during the 1830s. As we saw in chapter 6, after surgeons in the 1834 Lords inquiry denied connections between climbing boys' exposure to soot and the appearance of scrotal cancer in adult sweeps, the Society found a new rhetorical

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<sup>68</sup> For a report of the first annual meeting of the Tottenham Association, including a discussion of the local distribution of reprints from Montgomery's *Climbing Boy's Album*, see: '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 38-40. See Bibliography for full title. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *Album* was published by William Alexander, committee member of the York SSNCB. London SSNCB accounts indicate that the 'parent society' paid for its printing. *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend and Climbing-Boy's Album. Second Edition with Alterations and Additions* (London and York, 1825); '1827 Twelfth London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 4. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>69</sup> '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> '1826 Eleventh London SSNCB Annual Report', pp. 14-15.

purpose for the disease. Earlier Annual Reports had avoided 'disgusting statement of cases' or 'revolting detail of the appearance and progress of the disease', but those for the late 1830s featured exactly such discussions. Sweeps were portrayed in tears and their deformed bodies described in detail, enabling readers to sympathise with the victim. But, unlike the helpless climbers boys in the *Album* and the powerless adult slaves in anti-slave trade pamphlets, in these narratives the cancer sufferers spoke out to rescue others from their fate.

In 1838, a London SSNCB director visited Joseph Harding in St. Thomas' hospital. Having lost his father and uncle to this 'grievous disease' and now facing death himself, Harding was determined to secure a safer and better future for his children:<sup>71</sup>

The tears rolled down his cheeks, as he spoke of the deception practised upon children, to induce them to be chimney-sweepers. He said, 'I have got a nice little boy two years old, please God I get over this, nothing shall ever induce me to let him be a chimney-sweeper.'

Richard Allen, another victim to the cancer, accepted his own inescapable fate but was confident that rescue might be at hand for others, if sweeps overcame their prejudice against the machine (implicitly: if readers would encourage them to do so):<sup>72</sup>

The following is an abridged report of the conversation that passed with him at different times. "How are you?" "Very bad, Sir." "Why are you not in the hospital?" "I have been, Sir, but they could do nothing for me, they began to operate, but they could do nothing for me, and now I must die, it's fairly eating me away." "What a pity that your trade opposes the machine." "Ah! Sir, if they would but encourage the machine, we should not have none of this. It's a nasty trade, Sir."

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<sup>71</sup> '1838 Twenty-Second London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 9. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>72</sup> '1838 Twenty-Second London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 11.



Through such narratives, the London SSNCB avoided the impression of arousing false or misdirected sentiment. In its 1839 Report, which included similar portrayals of cancer victims, the Committee criticised other benevolent schemes that, although born out of sympathy for climbing boys, played in the hands of those opposing the only right course of action: abolition. It denounced a scheme in Brighton, where climbing boys were educated three nights a week, attending classes 'in their working clothes'. It freed the town 'from its present disgrace' but prevented the boys from being a source 'at which the heart sickens' although the essence of their suffering had not been redeemed:<sup>73</sup>

The whole affair bears a strong resemblance to the story of the sentimental gentleman, who in one of his morning walks found a fellow-creature in a deep pit in his grounds, over a part of which he constructed a shelter at a considerable expense, giving orders that food could be conveyed from his kitchen to the pit three times in the day, and religious instruction afforded when any one was at leisure, taking every fresh friend that stopped in his house, to see his most interesting sufferer.

Despite including carefully-crafted sentimental narratives and discussing criteria for appropriate sympathetic initiatives, in the same *Annual Report* the SSNCB frankly denied ever using agitation. Strikingly, the same statement that denounced feeling as a foundation for reform activity included references to 'helpless infancy' that were clearly meant to touch the reader's heart as much as his/her mind:<sup>74</sup>

Your Committee has never resorted to excitement or agitation to further the desirable ends of this Society, and they still hope that a calm consideration of the subject, will show that there is something

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<sup>73</sup> '1839 Twenty-Third London SSNCB Annual Report', p. 9. See Bibliography for full title.

<sup>74</sup> '1839 Twenty-Third London SSNCB Annual Report'.

marvellously ungenerous in contributing to the oppression of helpless infancy.

This statement highlights that rhetoric remained a highly contentious issue.

## Conclusions

Chapter 6 showed that injuries and diseases associated with chimney sweeping were a powerful argument for regulating the trade. This chapter suggests that the bodies of sweeps also featured prominently in rhetorical images not obviously connected to medicine. These images deserve the attention from historians of medicine because they reveal attitudes to the human body and influenced how contemporaries engaged with health.

Chimney sweeping was often portrayed as adverse to childhood with reference to the state of climbing boys' bodies. But because abolitionists desired to prohibit climbing altogether and reformist master sweeps wished to highlight the need for their careful supervision if the practice continued, both used 'child', 'infant' and 'boy' generically to describe all those working as climbers. Depictions of 'boys' with 'soft bones', 'fragile frames' and 'tender minds' reinforced the idea that children were vulnerable, but undermined more careful engagement with stages of development. Consequently, although coinciding with growing interest in human physiology between infancy and adolescence, the campaign contributed little to progress in medical understanding.

Various aspects of climbing boys' bodies were singled out to convey a sense of 'enslavement'. Their sootiness and dark skin were used both to stress their similarity to African slaves and to set them apart as more deserving. The latter was sometimes communicated through racialised language, indicating that their whiteness made them different from Africans in 'nature and kindred', 'flesh and blood'.<sup>75</sup> But it was equally coined in terms of gender and class, with reformers likening the features of pauper boys to those of the sons of the middle- or upper classes. Scholars of the antislavery campaigns have found similar rhetoric in abolitionist portrayals of flogged female slaves<sup>76</sup> and rebellious male slaves<sup>77</sup>, in which racial references were juxtaposed with, or replaced by descriptions of features and movements to enable the (white, middle class) reader to connect with the slave's body. Such variations in portrayals of climbing boys' blackness show how reformers appropriated their rhetoric to particular audiences and contexts and remind us of the need to consider connections between this campaign and other contemporary reforms.

The section on sentiment highlights that the way in which feelings were aroused and how far feelings should inform philanthropy and policy came under increasing scrutiny. During the 1800s and 1810s, in SSNCB reports, petitions, parliamentary debates and public inquiries, the accepted

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<sup>75</sup> Roberts, *A Cry from the Chimneys*, p. 18.

<sup>76</sup> Henrice Altink, "'An Outrage on All Decency': Abolitionist Reactions to Flogging Jamaican Slave Women, 1780-1834', *Slavery & Abolition*, 23 (2002), 107-22.

<sup>77</sup> Celeste-Marie Bernier, "'Arms Like Polished Iron": The Black Slave Body in Narratives of a Slave Ship Revolt', *Slavery & Abolition*, 23 (2002), 89-106.

mode of arousing sympathy was by referring to the fate of climbing boys in highly emotive terms, but withholding detail of the particular miseries from which they suffered. But from 1818, the use of such language was disputed in parliament and self-censured by the SSNCB. But whereas in parliamentary debate general outlines of misery found in the trade became the accepted way of provoking feeling, the SSNCB switched to publicising reports of individual victims. This discrepancy deepened during the 1830s, when the 1834 Lords Committee sent out questionnaires to boroughs across the metropolis for information about the general state of child and adult sweeps<sup>78</sup> and the SSNCB instead printed Dickensian narratives of the toils of individual victims of cancer and other sweeping-related distress. These transitions and variations suggest that the integration of reform activities (as outlined in chapters 2-5) was not matched by a similar integration of evidence.

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<sup>78</sup> '1834 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence'. See Bibliography for full title.



## CONCLUSIONS

In 1949, George Phillips portrayed the climbing boy campaigns as a 'long struggle waged between a reactionary privileged class to maintain the status quo of the climbing boys and a liberal-minded, socially conscious group of persons striving to do away with child labor in sweeping flues by winning enough popular support to persuade Parliament to outlaw the accursed social and economic evils of the practice'.<sup>1</sup> This thesis has challenged this interpretation in many crucial respects.

As discussed in chapter 1, initially very few Britons supported the attempts to improve the conditions of climbing boys. Rather than the opposition of committed 'reactionaries' (as Phillips suggests), Hanway and fellow campaigners were undermined by widespread indifference to the toils of climbing boys. Sweeps were the source of hilarity and anxiety, enhanced by their prominent roles in May Day festivities when they entertained *and* scared the crowds with rough music,<sup>2</sup> but few recognised the 'accursed evils' that Phillips referred to as problems that required a collective response.<sup>3</sup> In trade cards from this period, sweeps stressed the

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<sup>1</sup> George L. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys: A History of the Long Struggle to Abolish Child Labor in Chimney Sweeping* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1949), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Roy Judge, *The Jack-in-the-Green: A May Day Custom* (2nd edn., London: FLS Books, 2000); Charles Phythian-Adams, 'Milk and Soot: The Changing Vocabulary of a Popular Ritual in Stuart and Hanoverian London', in Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp. 97-104.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips discussed the conditions of climbing boys as factual evils that demanded regulating: 'the hardships of their trade [were] so horrible that Parliament was forced to enact various regulatory measures for their protection'. Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 1.

decency and efficiency of their services and warned customers against 'itinerant quacks', but the humane treatment of apprentices was not among their advertised traits – reflective of both their own and their customers' priorities.

Interest in the climbing boys soared during the 1790s, as the cause was embraced by a new generation of campaigners who found inspiration in Hanway's ideas about 'police' – in which climbing boys had featured prominently – to promote a broad programme of reform. The Bettering Society adopted climbing boy relief as a model cause for promoting the welfare of apprentices, involving the labouring classes in their own reformation, and recruiting the social elites for practical philanthropy. Although the collaboration with master sweeps was short-lived, the SPICSA and SSNCB did bring together merchants and skilled traders, local administrators, bishops, MPs and peers. Nor was support for voluntary associations restricted to a particular political faction, religious denomination or socio-economic group. As shown in chapter 1, most parliamentarians affiliated to the London SSNCB Committee leaned towards the Whigs, but long-serving directors included moderate Tories such as John Southey Sommerville, and outspoken Radicals, such as Sir Francis Burdett. Evangelicals and Quakers were over-represented in provincial SSNCBs, but acted alongside high-churchmen. Both attracted disproportionate support from the middle ranks of society (a broad and heterogeneous category encompassing merchants, attorneys and manufacturers of considerable wealth as well as shop keepers, printers and

other skilled traders), but London SSNCB directors included some of the wealthiest men in the country, and detailed analysis of the Liverpool, Derby, Bristol and Sheffield Committees highlight the breadth of support. This, together with the committed support from considerable numbers of Lords, Mayors and magistrates, challenges Phillips' portrayal of reform as a battle between 'liberal' philanthropists and MPs versus 'callous' administrators and 'privileged' Lords.<sup>4</sup>

Crucially, not all those supporting regulation necessarily advocated abolition. Individual sweeps including David Porter and societies such as the USMCS were clearly committed to improving conditions for climbing boys, but *not* by prohibiting their principle activity. USMCS branches in London, Bristol and Liverpool established alliances with individuals from various backgrounds, including fire insurers, building surveyors and architects, and legal practitioners, suggesting that regulation (as opposed to abolition) attracted heterogeneous support.

Chapters 2-5 demonstrated the significance of the increasingly mixed composition of reform alliances for the character of initiatives. Hanway and his associates wished to foster reform through community action (organising sweeps into fraternities and pressing householders to keep a closer eye on the treatment of climbing boys), administrative practices (encouraging parish governors and magistrates to take greater

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<sup>4</sup> Phillips, *England's Climbing-Boys*, p. 3 and p. 5. Phillips referred to children 'apprenticed with low premiums by callous parish overseers of almshouses to men like Mr. Gramfield in *Oliver Twist*' and complained that 'even when in 1834 public opinion forced the Lords to approve a bill, passed by the Commons,' the Duke of Hamilton opposed the measure, 'voicing the hesitation of his reactionary colleagues.'



care in the binding of boys to this trade), and legislation. However, due to the small number of parliamentarians and administrators among their ranks, they relied on sympathy aroused through pamphleteering and newspaper correspondence. With a broader and better-placed support base, the SSNCB and USMCS were more successful in combining these strands of reform. Both societies encouraged householders to embrace their particular approach to mechanical sweeping (to completely adopt the new method, or to continue using boys where absolutely necessary), supported abused climbing boys in court, and played prominent roles in all aspects of legislative procedures. Moreover, they often succeeded in harmonising different types of reform activity, at multiple geographic levels.

MPs amongst the London SSNCB directors convinced the House of Commons to send out circulars pressing magistrates in London and Westminster to monitor sweeps' apprentices more closely, and used their contacts in the Home Office to arrange trials with mechanical sweeping in government offices. SSNCB auxiliary societies publicised the outcomes to encourage local householders to embrace the new method and included references to 'official' surveys in petitions which pleaded with parliament to abolish the use of climbing boys. Similarly, master sweeps in Bristol allied with local fire insurers to petition parliament against abolition and to pay for their expenses to testify in parliamentary inquiries – initiatives copied by sweeps in Liverpool. Some of the sweeps used their parliamentary experience, as Bristol's representatives for fire safety, to

convince local householders to keep the climbing boy system alive but assist them in prosecuting itinerant sweeps who neglected their duties towards their boys. These examples highlight the intersection between voluntary, legislative and administrative initiatives and challenge Phillips' focus on legislation as the object of all activism.

Chapters 6 and 7 established that making a case for reform through multiple channels also posed challenges. Concern for the physical and mental health of climbing boys was a constant theme in all channels of reform throughout this period. But, the aspects of their health that should take priority, the evidence-base to determine the exact relation between their work and well-being, and what measures should be taken, were constant sources of negotiation with different outcomes in different reform channels. As the case of scrotal cancer revealed, such changes and discrepancies resulted partly from conscious attempts by different groups of reformers to make the disease a fruitful vehicle for promoting their agenda in particular contexts. In the 1834 Lords inquiry, those advocating abolition and those promoting alternative ameliorative regulations agreed to focus interrogations about the cancer on a single issue – if cancer was caused by climbing or not – to avoid balanced but ambiguous evidence from previous inquiries. Conversely, in philanthropic pamphlets, abolitionists deliberately avoided considering the cancer's aetiology, focusing instead on the misery brought to individual victims and their families as a source of pity. However, the discussion of sentiment in chapter 7 highlights that the changing focus of health discussions was not

necessarily at the wish of reformers. Evidence and rhetoric that had long been appropriate in parliamentary debates – expressing sympathy for the hardships of boys without detailing their sufferings – was denounced as ‘false sentiment’ during the 1810s. Similarly, pamphlets and correspondence by SSNCB activists and reformist master sweeps show a constant balancing act between appearing sufficiently sympathetic to the fate of climbing boys and avoiding accusations of exaggerated sensibility. These findings not only change our understanding of how and why the climbing boy campaigns evolved the way they did, but also have vital implications for studies of reform, medicine and childhood.

With regards to the study of reform, this thesis demonstrates the value of adopting a truly integrated approach. Scholars have long recognised that moral and institutional reform in late Georgian Britain was pursued through multiple channels. Innes has shown that the Proclamation Society addressed vice by both initiating new legislation and pressurising magistrates and other local office holders to act more firmly on immoral behaviour – aided by the considerable number of administrators *and* legislatures among its members.<sup>5</sup> Scholars of the anti-slave trade and anti-slavery campaigns have shown that abolitionists advanced their objectives by encouraging parliament to pass statutory prohibition, by collaborating with the government in schemes that offered free blacks a new settlement,

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<sup>5</sup> Joanna Innes, 'Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in Later Eighteenth-Century England', in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 57-118.

and through community initiatives that hit the slave-based economy by boycotting slave-produced goods.<sup>6</sup> Scholars of pauper welfare and crime have juxtaposed parish and court records with printed depictions of the lives of the poor to highlight how the poor, influenced welfare and disciplinary practices by playing on contemporary attitudes.<sup>7</sup> Yet, no study has previously examined exactly how legislative, administrative *and* community initiatives influenced one another.

This is exactly the approach that is required to enhance our understanding of reform in this period. This thesis seeks to show how we can close the gap between two sets of historians of social policy by integrating a greater span of sources: those like Innes who focus on the business of parliament and legislative procedures as drivers for changes in regulations *and* attitudes vs. those like Hitchcock who focus on poor law administration, criminal courts and plebeian culture for changes in regulations *and* attitudes.

With respect to the history of occupational health, the breadth of work-related hazards considered in the course of the campaign, and the extensive debates that these sparked about how and by whose initiative worker well-being should be improved, stand out. It challenges the

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<sup>6</sup> Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (Paperback edn., London and New York: Routledge, 1995); John R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics in British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); David Turley, 'British Antislavery Reassessed', in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 182-99.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Hitchcock, *Down and out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004); Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *Tales from the Hanging Court* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006).

continued focus on occupational disease and preoccupation with the dangerous trade regulations of the late nineteenth century as the formative period of occupational health as an area of social and medical investigation.<sup>8</sup> For social historians of medicine, the increasing reliance on authentic medical cases in philanthropic literature and parliamentary proceedings, together with the limited role of doctors in reform societies and inquiries, are striking. It points to the uneven character of the medicalisation of British society and politics at the time. Surgeons testifying about sweeps' cancer in parliament based their observations on the general principles of physiology instead of advancing new ideas about child health and occupational health – topics that were emerging as worthy of study in their own right.<sup>9</sup> It also highlights that not every cause was equally suited to advance the medical profession. In this respect, these campaigns were closer to sanitary reform, where medics acted as advisors but not directors of reform,<sup>10</sup> rather than to charitable dispensaries and coroners' inquests that proved to be more fruitful platforms in which to reconsider and propagate the credentials of the medical profession.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Peter W.J. Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> C. Turner Thackrah, *The Effects of the Principal Arts, Trades and Professions and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity: With a Particular Reference to the Trades and Manufactures of Leeds: And Suggestions for the Removal of Many of the Agents, Which Produce Disease, and Shorten the Duration of Life* (London and Leeds, 1831).

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Michael Brown, 'Medicine, Reform and the "End" of Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *English Historical Review*, 124 (2009), 1353-88; Ian A. Burney, *Poison*,

With regards to the study of childhood, the tremendous interest in children's physical and mental development and the contradictory attitudes towards the agency of children stand out. Historians have shown that the late eighteenth century was period of intensified medical attention for the health and ill-health of babies and infants,<sup>12</sup> but this campaign highlights the extensive interest in the health of children in the next stage of development.<sup>13</sup> This period did not see the empowerment of children. Climbing boys were systematically excluded from legislative procedures regarding their own work and intervention was justified with reference to their helplessness. However, the widespread use of the terms 'childhood' and 'infancy' for a very broad category of persons employed in this trade, and requiring protection, was challenged, and detailed discussions occurred about when and how young workers could play a role in their own protection. Examples of children being intimidated by adults into statements of positive treatment were ample. However, the increasing weight attributed to children's wishes in negotiations between adults, as highlighted in chapter 5, suggests that attitudes to childhood did not evolve only towards innocence and dependency.

Four areas identified in this thesis deserve closer investigation.

Firstly, more detailed analyses of the local dynamics of reform need to be

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*Detection, and the Victorian Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Alys Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800: "Left to the Mercy of the World"* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> See also: Ashley Mathisen, 'The Problem of Problem Children: Apprenticing Mentally and Physically Disabled Children in the Eighteenth Century' (Forthcoming).

conducted. For example, the relationship between the Bristol Riots of 1831 and the prominence of Bristol's Union in the reform of parliament in 1832, along with the particularly adversarial character of climbing boy reform in the town and the prominence of Bristol representatives in the 1834 Lords Committee need further exposition. Secondly, the impact of reform on the day-to-day working practices of sweeps and the structure of the trade need further exposition. The sources are clearly available to reconstruct individual careers and the impact of reform from a variety of platforms, as made clear by the cases of William Bulphin and Thomas Wingod.<sup>14</sup> Thirdly, gender should have a more central position in future research of these campaigns. As in anti-slavery and bible movements, women played increasingly central roles in climbing boy reform from the mid 1820s. However, unlike in these other campaigns, here, women tended to work alongside men rather than in separate societies with distinct agendas. Finally, the theme of feelings versus realism is one that deserves further investigation. Climbing boy reform stimulated debate about the appropriate criteria, evidence, and procedures of reform, including the place of feelings in philanthropy, administrative practice and law-making. The influence of these debates on the formation of the 'Condition-of-

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<sup>14</sup> All adult sweeps interrogated by parliamentary committees (more than 120 between 1788 and 1840) were asked in detail about their careers – how they had entered the trade, where and with whom they had enjoyed their training, whether they had ever worked outside the trade, for how long they had been self-employed, and where they carried out their business. London masters and philanthropists presented details of former climbers, now bound to other sectors or set-up as journeymen or masters in the trade – 180 for the years 1826-1834 alone – and the House of Commons gathered details of boys bound 'privately' to sweeps, by parents or 'friends', through magistrates' offices across the metropolis – 195 since the start of the century. These sources, in combination with the census records for 1851 and onwards, provide a vital resource for tracing changes in work practices and career prospects in the trade.

England question' and social reform in England and other parts of the UK during the 1830s and 1840s needs more careful assessment.

Although health disappeared into the background in climbing boy reform after 1840, chimney sweeping clearly lends itself to a study of health policy with a longer time span. Air pollution and health-related problems were prominent topics of medical investigation, voluntary activism and legislation in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. These responses have never been examined with regards to those whose work was seen as vital for improving air-quality: chimney sweeps.<sup>15</sup> From the 1880s, sweeps' cancer also resurfaced as a key topic of medical investigation, worker and employer activism (the disease now also appeared in epidemic proportions among cotton mule spinners), and protective legislation. These responses have been studied to elucidate the character of trade union activism and shifts in understanding of disease aetiology, but never as a crucial stage in the development of public health policy. Together with the campaigns investigated in this thesis, these two later episodes provide rich ground for investigating long-term transition in the structure and wider impact of health policy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad & Dangerous People? England 1783-1846, the New Oxford History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), chapter 9.





## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Tables, Plates and Maps

#### TABLES

*Table 1: Age at Joining of London SSNCB Directors, 1804-1839*

Age	21-30	31-40	41-50	50+	Average
No. (total = 49)	6	14	10	19	47

*Table 2: Years in Service of London SSNCB Committee Members, 1804-1839*

Years on Committee	≤5	6-10	11-15	16-20	20+	Average
No. of directors (total = 111)	30	25	18	16	22	12.7

*Table 3: Age-profile of London SSNCB Directors, 1804-1839*

Age→ Year↓	Total	Unknown	21-30	31-40	41-50	50+	Average
1804	46	19	4	8	2	13	48 years
1818	48	25	0	3	7	13	54 years
1834	35	16	0	0	3	16	59 years
1839	21	10	0	1	2	8	63 years

*Table 4: Number of London SSNCB Directors (Presidents, Vice-presidents, Committee Members, Secretaries and Treasurers Combined), 1804-1839*

Year	1804	1805	1808	1811	1816	1818	1821	1825	1826
No. of Directors	46	46	46	44	52	48	49	52	44
New	46	2	7	2	17	8	8	8	4
Retired	-	2	7	4	9	12	7	5	12
Year	1827	1829	1830	1831	1833	1834	1836	1838	1839
No. of Directors	44	45	47	46	44	35	34	24	21
New	1	5	4	2	0	0	1	0	1
Retired	1	4	2	3	2	9	2	10	4



**Table 5:** *Parliamentarians Among London SSNCB Directors, 1804-1839*

<b>Year</b>	<b>1804</b>	<b>1805</b>	<b>1808</b>	<b>1811</b>	<b>1816</b>	<b>1818</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>1825</b>	<b>1826</b>
<b>No. of Directors</b>	46	46	46	44	52	48	49	52	44
<b>MPs</b>	6	5	6	5	4	7	9	10	8
<b>Lords</b>	6	6	6	6	6	5	7	8	7
<b>Combined</b>	12	11	12	11	10	12	16	18	15
<b>Year</b>	<b>1827</b>	<b>1829</b>	<b>1830</b>	<b>1831</b>	<b>1833</b>	<b>1834</b>	<b>1836</b>	<b>1838</b>	<b>1839</b>
<b>No. of Directors</b>	44	45	47	46	44	35	34	24	21
<b>MPs</b>	7	6	6	6	4	4	4	1	1
<b>Lords</b>	7	8	9	9	9	9	8	8	8
<b>Combined</b>	14	14	15	15	13	13	12	9	9

**Table 6:** *Political Orientation of MPs and Lords Among London SSNCB Directors, 1804-1839*

<b>Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>SSNCB Position, -1840</b>	<b>Position in Parliament</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
Agar Ellis	George James Welbore		VP 1826-33	MP 1818-31	Tory, then Whig <sup>1</sup>
Ashley Cooper	Anthony	7 <sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury	VP 1839-40	MP 1826-51, peer 1851-1885	Tory <sup>2</sup>
Baring	Thomas	2 <sup>nd</sup> Baronet	CM 1803-15, VP 1816-39	MP 1806-32	Whig
Baring	Francis	Sir	CM 1803-08	MP -1806	Whig
Bennet	Henry Grey		CM 1816-1825	MP 1806-07, 1811-1826	Whig <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Whig with Tory tendencies: his father reverted to the Whigs shortly before Pitt's death in 1806, his own first post was as a Tory member for Heytesbury borough, 1818-20. 'George James Welbore Agar Ellis', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 1, 52-53.

<sup>2</sup> Family was traditionally Tory, but Cooper had strong links with Whig camp through his close friendship with George Howard (Viscount Morpeth) and his marriage to the daughter of a Whig countess. John Wolffe, 'Cooper, Anthony Ashley-, seventh earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, 'http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6210' (26 September 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Radical Whig: important spokesman of the Whig 'Mountain' in 1812 and 1818 Parliaments regarding penal and prison reform, colonial abuse, slave trade by Bourbon France, mental asylums, and hospitals. 'Henry Grey Bennet', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 1, 178-81.

Boringdon	John Parker	Earl Morley	CM 1803-17, VP 1818-39	Peer 1788- 1840	Whig <sup>4</sup>
Bunbury	Thomas Charles	Sir	VP 1803-16	MP 1761-84, 1790-1812	Whig/ Independent <sup>5</sup>
Burdett	Francis	Sir	CM 1816- 1836	MP 1796- 1844	Radical/ Independent <sup>6</sup>
Burrell	Peter Robert Drummond	Baron Gwydir	CM 1816-20	M.P. 1776- 80, 1782-96, peer 1796- 1820	Independent
Burrell	Peter Drummond	2 <sup>nd</sup> Baron Gwydir, 22 <sup>nd</sup> Baron of Willoughby de Eresby	VP 1821-39	Peer 1820-65	-
Eden	George	Earl Auckland	VP 1821-38	MP 1810-14, 1814-49	Whig <sup>7</sup>
Everett	Thomas		CM 1803-04	MP 1796- 1810	Tory <sup>8</sup>
Gamon	Richard	Sir	CM 1803-05	MP 1784- 1812	Tory

<sup>4</sup> He was initially a close aid of Tory George Canning – who stemmed from Whig family but introduced himself in politics as Tory – voting with the Whigs and moderate Tories. After Canning's death, Boringdon 'drifted into Whiggism and became a firm supporter of parliamentary reform'. There are no references to his political activities post-1819. G. Le G. Norgate and rev. H. C. G. Matthew, 'Parker, John, first earl of Morley (1772–1840)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., May 2009, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21321>' (26 September 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Bunbury was a member of various Whig factions, but regularly acted as an independent. 'Thomas Charles Bunbury', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 1, 300-301.

<sup>6</sup> His family was 'lately Tory', but Burdett himself has been variously described by historians as orthodox Whig, metropolitan Radical, parliamentary liberal and revolutionary leader. Up until 1820, he was *the* national figure of radical reform movement. 'Sir Francis Burdett', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 1, 302-14.

<sup>7</sup> 'Although thought to be rather shy and reserved, he and his sisters Emily Eden and Fanny, who kept house with him, became esteemed members of Whig society'. Apart from serving as Governor-General of India (1836-42), Auckland secured prominent appointments in Whig administrations, including as the Master of the Royal Mint and President of the Board of Trade (1830) and as the First Lord of the Admiralty (1846). P. J. Marshall, 'Eden, George, Earl of Auckland (1784–1849)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8451>' (26 September 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Everett supported Pitt the Younger's government on two occasions, who was often referred to as Tory but considered himself 'independent Whig'. 'Thomas Everett', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 1, p. 719.

Grosvenor	Richard	Earl of Grosvenor, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Marquis of Westminster	VP 1803-39	MP 1788-1802, peer 1802-45	Whig <sup>9</sup>
Harbord	Edward	Lord Suffield	CM 1821-25, VP 1826-34	MP 1806-12, 1820-21, peer 1825-34	Independent <sup>10</sup>
Howard	Henry Charles	Earl Surrey	VP 1831-39	MP 1829-32, 1835, 1837, peer 1841-56	Whig
Legge	Edward	Rev. Lord	VP 1803-25	Peer 1805-27	-
Leveson Gower	George Granville	5 <sup>th</sup> Earl Gower	VP 1830-39	MP 1810s (?), peer 1834-(?)	Whig
Lushington	Stephen		CM 1803-36	MP 1806-08, 1820-41	Whig <sup>11</sup>
Martin	Richard		CM, 1825-29	MP 1801-12, 1818-27	Independent
Montagu	Matthew		CM 1816-36	MP 1786-95, 1806-12, peer 1829-31	-
Percy	Hugh	5 <sup>th</sup> Duke of Northumberland and	VP 1803-17		Tory, then Whig
Russell	John	2 <sup>nd</sup> Duke of	VP 1803-39	MP 1788-02,	Whig <sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> On Pitt's death, Grosvenor attached himself to the Whigs, his family remaining prominent in Whig politics until 1886. He voted for the Reform Bill and contributed to the Anti-Corn Law League. H. R. Tedder and rev. H. C. G. Matthew, 'Grosvenor, Robert, first marquess of Westminster (1767–1845)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11672>' (26 September 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Suffield was the primary anti-slavery spokesman in the House of Lords. 'Edward Harbord', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 2, 147-49.

<sup>11</sup> Lushington was 'a consistent supporter of the Whigs and described himself at the close of his parliamentary career as still a party man and strongly attached to party principles. However, Lushington voted independently where Whig policy on sugar duties conflicted with his anti-slavery sentiments, and he did not hesitate to praise political opponents when he considered that they had embraced sound policies'. S.M. Waddams, 'Lushington, Stephen (1782–1873)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17213>' (26 September 2010).

<sup>12</sup> The Bedford were one of the leading Whig clans, Charles James Fox was his brother's closest political mentor and The Prince of Wales was his brother's close friend, John Russell himself described as radical Foxite Whig and as a promoter of radical parliamentary reform embodied in founding of elitist Society of the Friends of the People. F. M. L. Thompson, 'Russell, John, Sixth Duke of Bedford (1766–1839)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24322>' (26 September 2010).

		Bedford		peer 1802-39	
Ryder	Dudley	Earl Harrowby	VP 1821-39	MP 1784-1809, peer 1809-46	Whig, then Tory
Somerville,	John Southey	15th Lord Somerville	VP 1803-19	Peer 1796, 1802, 1806	Tory
Sumner	Charles Richard	Bishop of Winchester	P 1828-39	Peer 1827-69	-
Thornton	Henry		VP 1803-15	MP 1782-15	Independent
Tooke	William		T 1803-38, VP 1838-39	MP 1832-37	Tory
Wigram	William		CM 1808-36	MP 1807-12, 1820-32	Independent <sup>13</sup>
Wilberforce	William		VP 1803-33	MP 17808-1825	Independent
Williams	William		CM 1816-30	MP 1818-26	Independent <sup>14</sup>
Wood	Matthew	Sir	VP 1816-38	MP 1817-43	Whig <sup>15</sup>

**Table 7:** *Medical Treatises on Sweeps' Cancer, 1775-1840*

<b>1775</b>	Percivall Pott, <i>Chirurgical Observations</i> , vol. 3, pp. 177-83.
<b>1794</b>	Benjamin Bell, <i>Treatise on the Hydrocele on Sarcocoele</i> , pp. 271-76.
<b>1809</b>	James Earle ed., <i>Percival Pott's Chirurgical Observations</i> , with detailed notes by Earle.
<b>1820</b>	Ayrton Paris, <i>Pharmacologia</i> , pp. 281-83, on scrotal cancer in copper smelters.
<b>1822</b>	Henry Earle in <i>Medico-Chirurgical Transactions</i> , pp. 268-95, on local irritations.
<b>1823</b>	Henry Earle in <i>Medico-Chirurgical Transactions</i> , pp. 296-307.
<b>1830</b>	Astley Cooper <i>Observations on the Structure and Diseases of the Testis</i> , chapter 12.
<b>1832</b>	Henry Earle in <i>London Medical and Surgical Journal</i> , no. 6.
<b>1835</b>	R. L. Cooper <i>The Lancet</i> , p. 349.
<b>1839</b>	John Lizars, <i>System of Practical Surgery</i> , 290-91.

**Table 8:** *1834 House of Lords Select Committee*

<sup>13</sup> Wigram did not speak regularly but he was noted to 'support government' and the Whigs were 'doubtful' of his support in 1810. 'William Wigram', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 3, p. 557.

<sup>14</sup> Williams 'opposed [the Tory] government though he eschewed party' and 'his ambitions were strictly local, as his not seeking a seat elsewhere clearly demonstrates'. 'William Williams', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 3, 586-87.

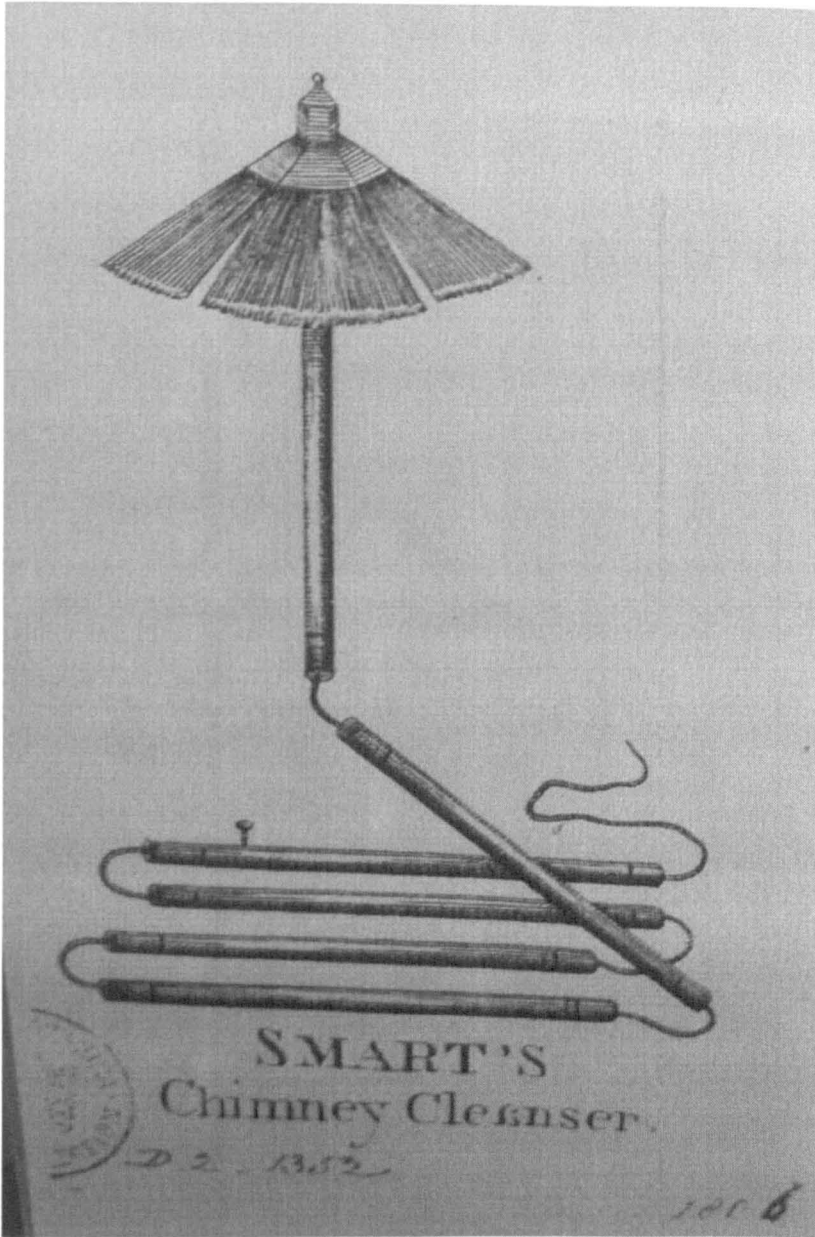
<sup>15</sup> Wood was Mayor of London between 1815 and 1816. He was 'a consistent radical and a strenuous supporter of all Whig ministries [...] sympathised with Sir Francis Burdett'. 'Matthew Wood', in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The Commons 1790-1820* (5 vols, London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), vol. 3, 645-47.

<b>Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Eden	George	Lord Auckland	SSNCB VP 1821-38
Russell	John	Duke of Bedford	SSNCB VP 1804-39
Begot	Richard	Lord Bishop of Bath & Wells	SSNCB CM 1804-24
Copleston	Edward	Lord Bishop of Llandaff	
Summer	Charles Richard	Lord Bishop of Winchester	SSNCB P 1829-39
Brooke & Warwick		Earl of Brooke & Warwick	
Cumberland		Duke	
Wentworth	Charles William	Viscount Milton, Earl Fitzwilliam	
Ryder	Dudley	Earl Harrowby	SSNCB VP 1821-39
Lyttelton	William Henry	Lord Lyttelton	
Dundas	Robert Saunders	Viscount Melville	
Parker	John	Earl Morley, Visc. Boringdon	SSNCB CM 1804-17, VP 1818-39
Lennox	Charles G.	Duke of Richmond	
Harbord	Edward	Lord Suffield	SSNCB CM 1821-25, VP 1826-34
Leveson Gower	George G.	Duke of Sutherland	SSNCB VP 1830-39
Tweedale		Marquis	
Grosvenor	Richard	Marquis Westminster	SSNCB VP 1804-39
Burrell	Peter Drummond	Lord Willoughby de Eresby	SSNCB VP 1829-1839
Wynford		Lord	



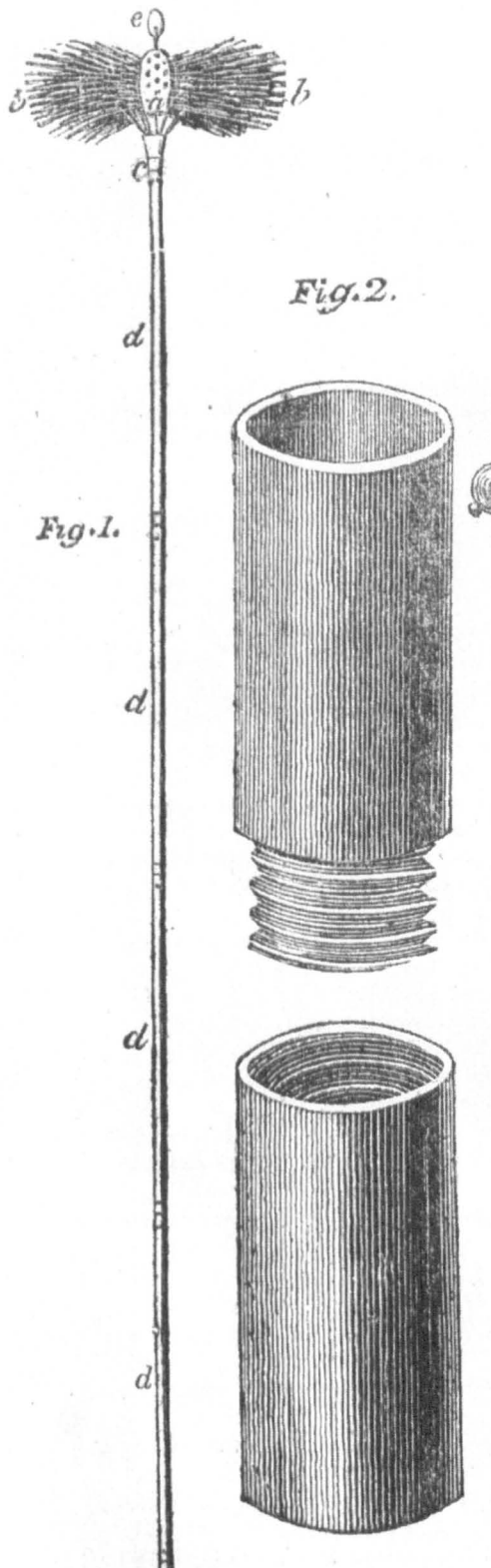


## PLATES



**Plate 1:** British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, Smart's Chimney Cleaner, 1806





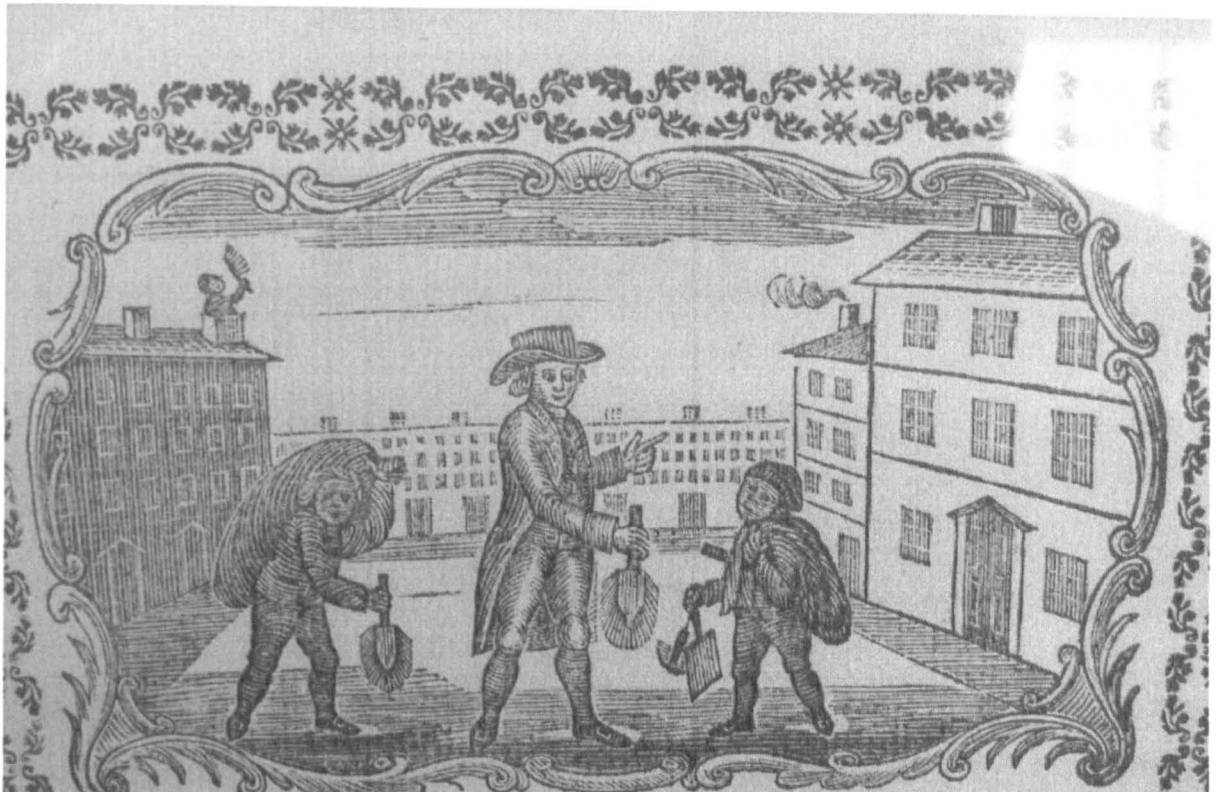
**Plate 2:** Joseph Glass's Chimney Cleaner, *Practical Information Presented to the Public by the Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys; with a Description of Glass's Improved Machinery for Cleansing Chimneys, and a List of Subscribers* (London, 1828), p. 15





**Plate 3:** British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, David Porter, 1783





**THOMAS DAVIS,**  
Chimney-Sweeper & Nightman,  
[ No. 9, ]  
Strand-Lane, opposite the New Church, STRAND :

**C**LEANS FOUL CHIMNEYS in the best Manner, having always clean Cloth for the upper Apartments, and attends with the Boys himself; also cleans SMOKE-JACKS and SMOKEY-COPPERS, and when CHIMNEYS are on Fire puts them out with great Care and Safety.

Those who please to Favor me with their Orders, shall be waited on by Day or Night, in Town and Country, at the shortest Notice, and the Favor gratefully acknowledged, *By their humble Servant,*

**THOMAS DAVIS.**

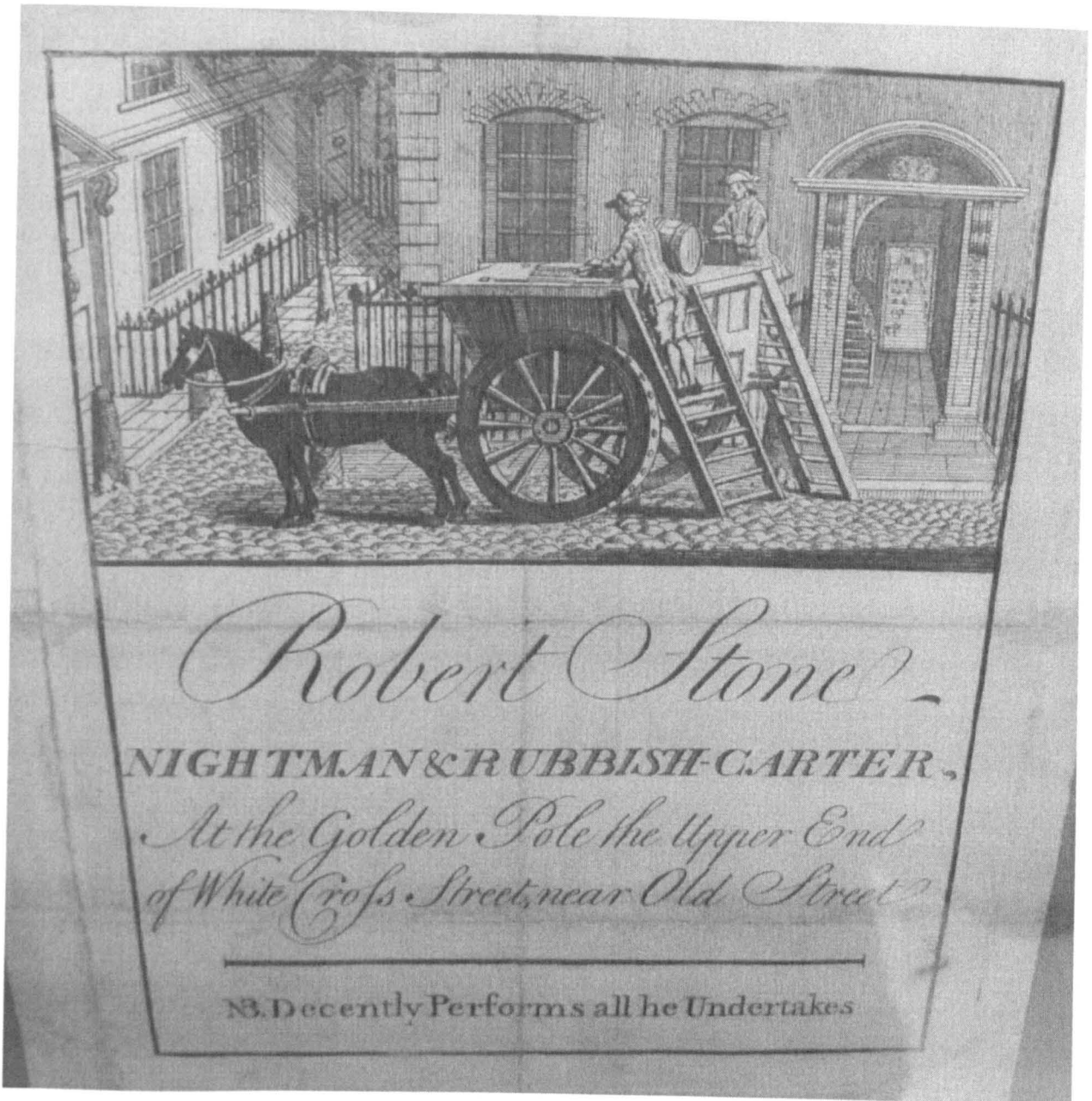
W. B. Please to take Care of this Bill to prevent Mistakes.

Printed by T. PALSER, No. 11, Turnagain-Lane, Snow-Hill.

Plate 4: British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.8, Thomas Davis, 1789







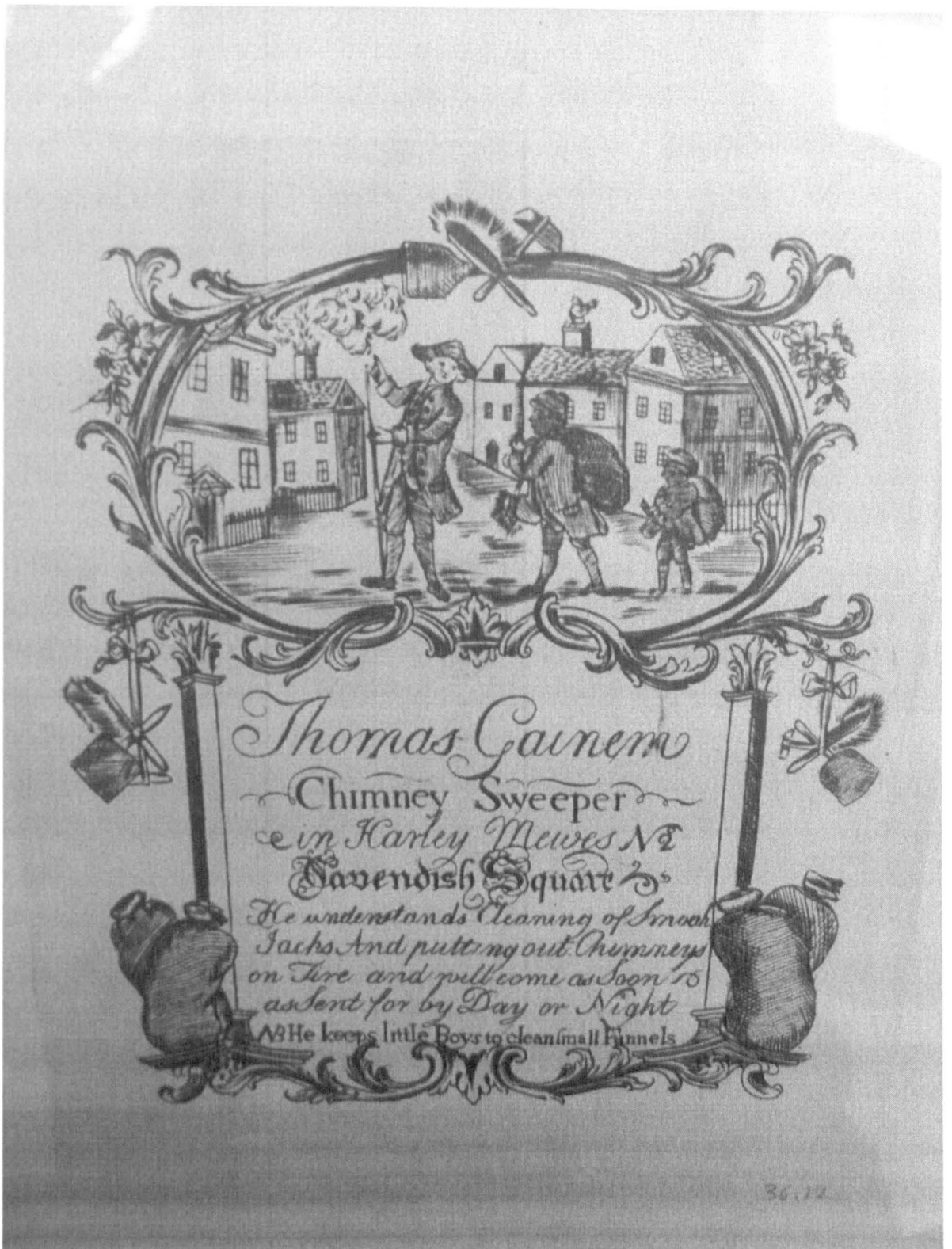
**Plate 5:** British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Heal Collection of Trade Cards, 36.36, Robert Stone, 1751





**Plate 6:** British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Heal Collection of Trade Cards, 36.2, John Bates, 1763





**Plate 7:** British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Banks Collection of Trade Cards, 36.12, Thomas Gainem, c. 1790





Robert Taylor in returning thanks to his numerous friends for the favors he has received during the last 20 years begs leave to solicit a continuance of the same, assuring them that all Orders with which he may be favored shall be promptly executed with Cleanliness and Dispatch.


**3 GLASS'S IMPROVED MACHINE.**

1836

**Plate 8:** Bristol Local Studies Library, Special Collections, Trade Card Robert Taylor, 1836







ROBERT TAYLOR'S  
Chimney Soots, Flue & Smoke  
JACK CLEANER  
BRISTOL

*Robert Taylor on returning thanks to his numerous friends for the favours he has received during the last 25 years begs leave to solicit a continuance of the same assuring them that all Orders with which he may be favoured shall be promptly executed with Cleanliness and Dispatch*

CHIMNEY POTS & SMOKE PREVENTATIVES OF EVERY DESCRIPTION  
SOLD & FIXED IF REQUIRED.

**SOOT FOR EXPORTATION.**

**Plate 9:** Bristol Local Studies Library, Special Collections, Trade Card Robert Taylor, 1841



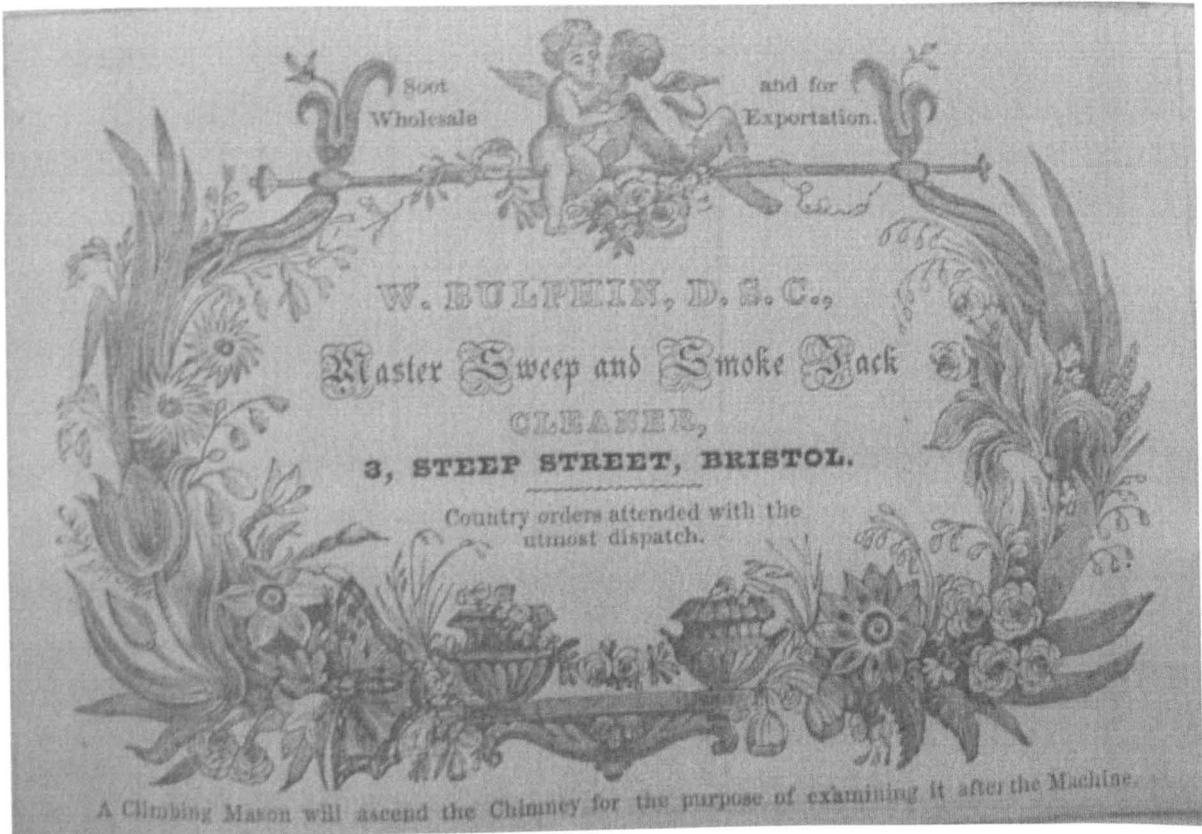


Plate 10: Bristol Local Studies Library, Special Collections, Trade Card  
William Bulphin, 1839

To meet the great and increasing demand for the Chimney Sweeping Machine, the Society for superseding the use of Climbing Boys in the town and neighbourhood of Derby, has appointed a **SECOND AGENT**, viz.

**MICHAEL PARKINS, Court No. 2, BRIDGE STREET, DERBY,**  
(Opposite Messrs. Bridgett and Co's. Manufactory)

by whom orders for the Machine will be thankfully received and punctually attended to; the same prices being charged as those paid to the common chimney sweepers.

The Society's first Agent, **JOHN JEPSON, 30, St. PETER'S STREET, DERBY,** will also be happy to receive orders for the machine; and having already swept with the apparatus more than 600 chimnies, he is prepared to affirm, that the machine, when faithfully used, is more efficient than boys in bringing down the soot, and makes less dirt in the room.

The above Society has appointed Agents of its own, not in the spirit of hostility to the sweeps, but on the principle, that no man during the last five and twenty years, has ever been known to give effect to the machine, while he retained a single climbing boy in his service.

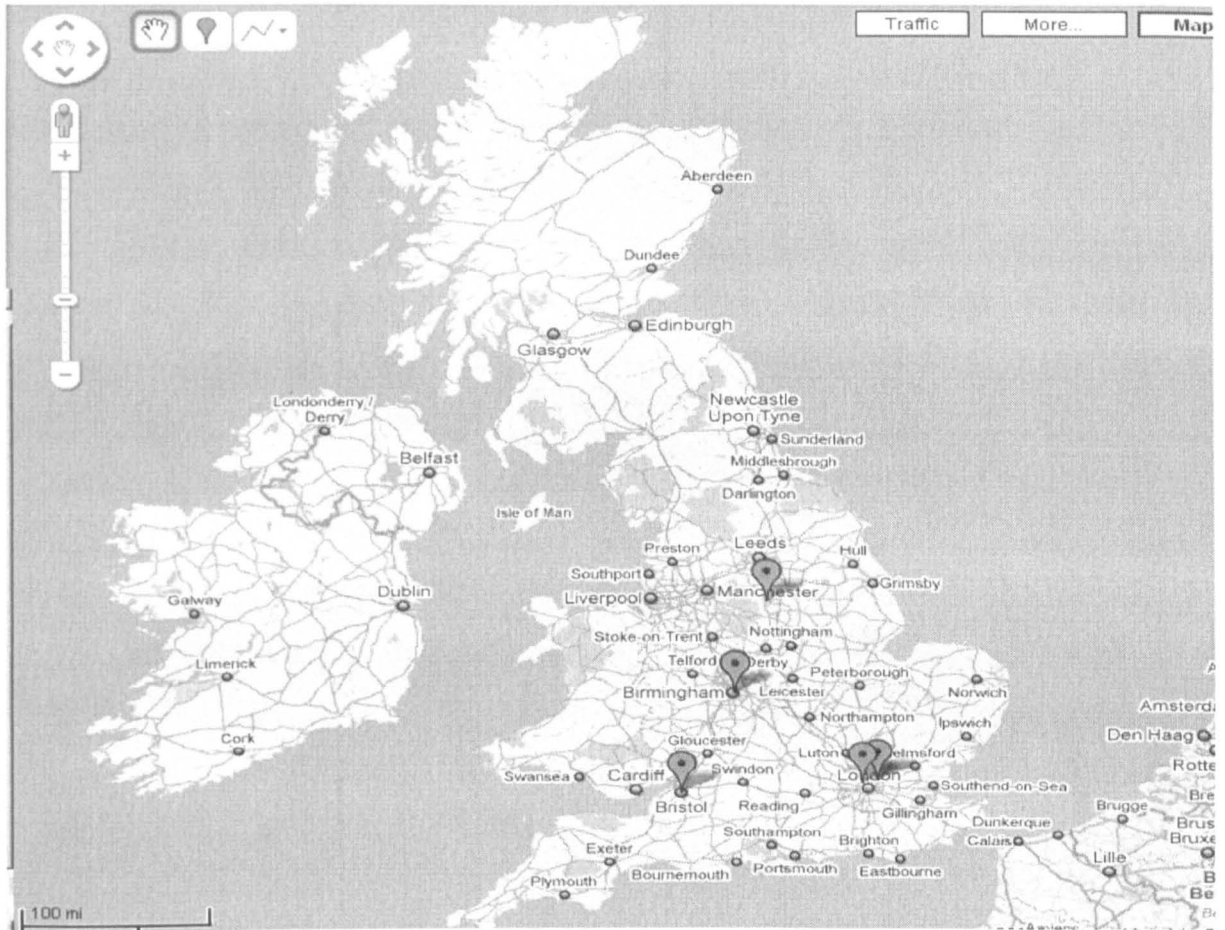
**N. B. IRON DOORS**, for insertion in the few chimnies which are too angular to admit the machine, may be obtained of the Honorary Secretary, No. 9, Market Head, Derby, at 3s. each.

Derby, Sept. 6th, 1838.

Plate 11: Leeds City Museum, Ernestine Henry Collection, Class. 363, Acc. 1782, Trade Card Michael Parkins, 1838.

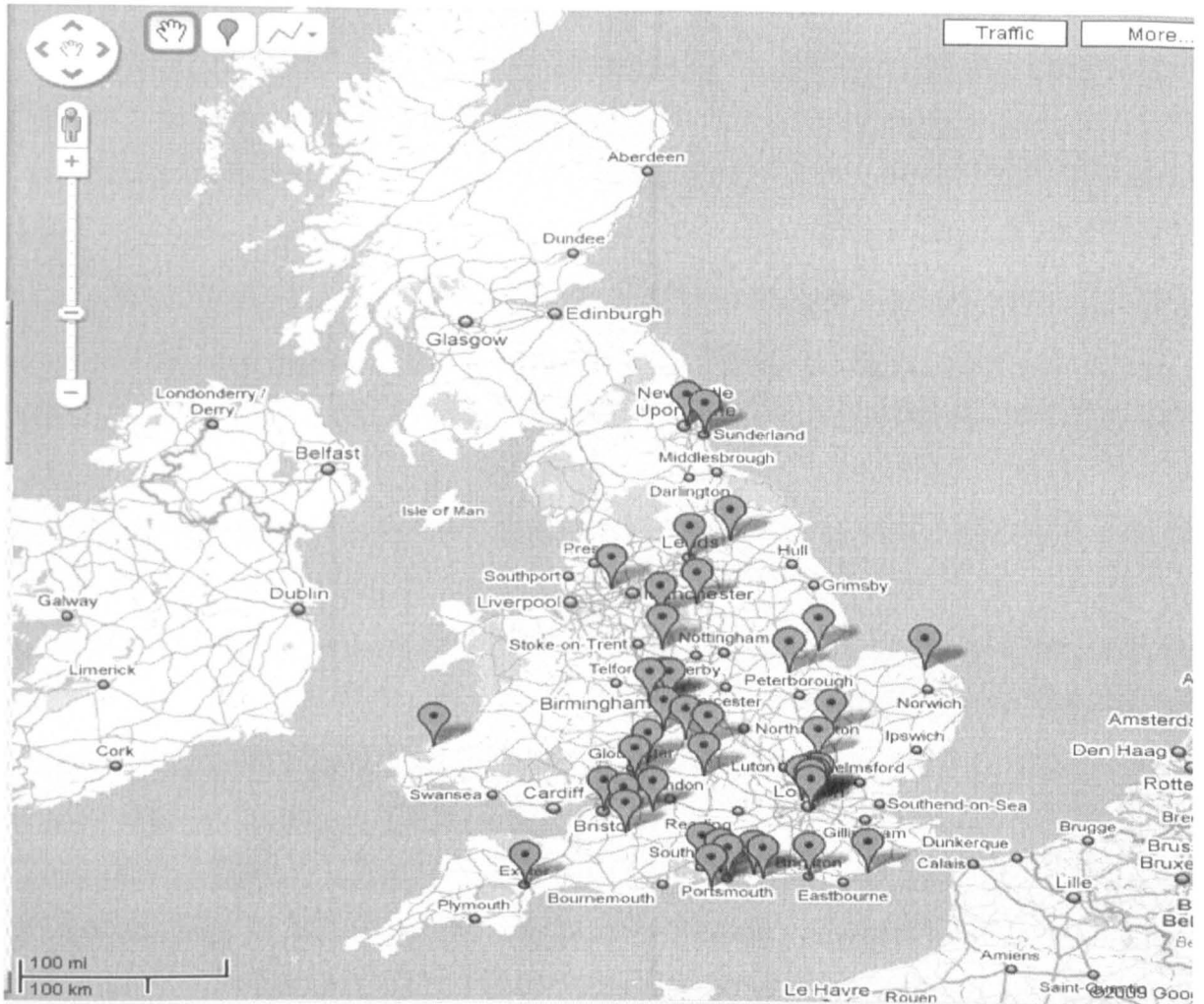


## MAPS



**Map 1:** *SSNCB Auxiliary Societies, 1809* [©2010 Google – Map data ©2010 Google, Tele Atlas]

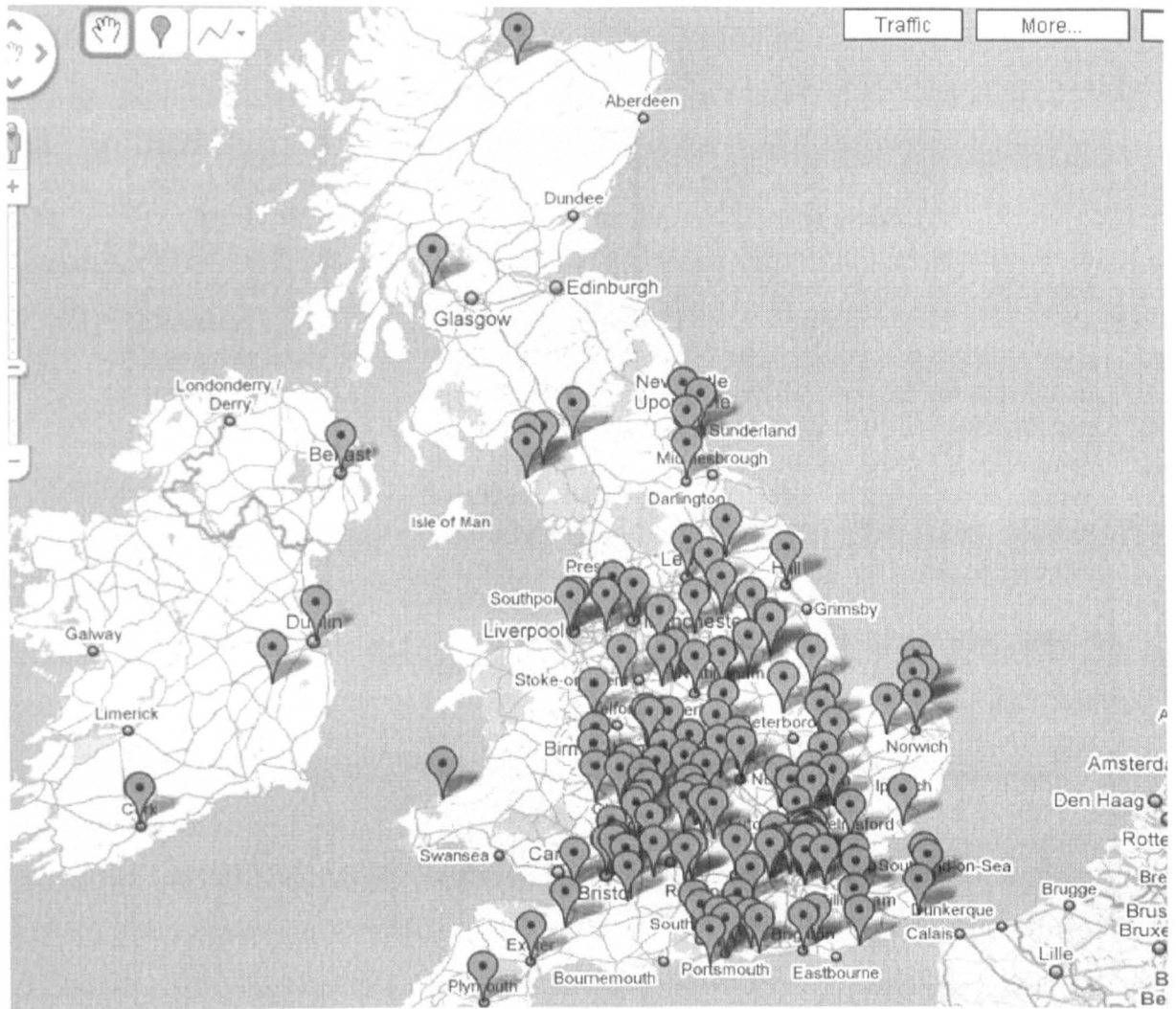




**Map 2:** *SSNCB Auxiliary Societies, 1828* [©2010 Google – Map data ©2010 Google, Tele Atlas]







**Map 3:** SSNCB Auxiliary Societies, 1831 [©2010 Google – Map data ©2010 Google, Tele Atlas]



## Appendix 2: Bills and Acts regarding Chimney Sweeps, 1788

1840

Date	Bill/Act	Observations
25 June 1788	<i>Act of 28 George III, Chapter 48, An Act for the better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers, and their Apprentices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: 8</li> <li>▪ No. assistants: six, no letting out to others</li> <li>▪ Registration: use of official indenture form; apprentices to wear climbing cap with master's name and residence (provided by master)</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: apprentice's obligation to learn the trade, obey and stay with master, and not visit ale- or gaming houses; master's obligation to ensure sufficient food, drink (amount and type unspecified), dress, lodging, personal hygiene (to be washed thoroughly once a week), church attendance (not wearing climbing outfit), religious instruction and 'humane treatment'; existing indentures of boys under 8 become void</li> <li>▪ Climbing: neither climbing in hot flues, nor use of force/violence</li> <li>▪ Street cries: apprentices not to call streets for work before or after 'unseasonable hours' (before 7am or after 12am in winter, before 5am or after 12am in summer)</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: -</li> <li>▪ Fines: varying between £5-10, payable to informer (half) and local overseer of poor/local goal (half)</li> <li>▪ In force: in Great Britain, from 5 July 1788</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: consistently referring to 'master/mistress' but only to 'boys' (no mention of girls); Porter (1801) criticised the Act for not restricting the hiring of apprentices to sweeps 'housekeepers, paying scot and lot', or to prohibit street hawking in master's absence</li> </ul>
31 May 1804	<i>Bill to explain and amend the Act of the twenty-eight year of his present Majesty for the better regulation of Chimney-sweepers and their Apprentices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age:</li> <li>▪ No. assistants:</li> <li>▪ Registration: appoint Committee of Guardians for overseeing licensing of all master sweeps within ten mile range of Royal Exchange in City of London; proposed thirty members consisted largely of London SSNCB directors, but appointments open to others</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: apprenticed till age 21, or at Committee of Guardian's discretion till 16 but then offered an alternative apprenticeship arranged by the guardians</li> <li>▪ Climbing:</li> <li>▪ Street cries:</li> <li>▪ Chimney design:</li> <li>▪ Fines: penalties for non-registered sweeps</li> <li>▪ In force:</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: only apprentices to be employed as</li> </ul>

		climbing boys; masters to pay towards a fund for the education of their apprentices for duration of their indenture
25 June 1817	<i>(432) Bill to amend Act for better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and their Apprentices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ No. assistants: 1788 Act remains in force</li> <li>▪ Registration: 1788 Act remains in force (use of official indenture form; apprentices to wear climbing cap with master's name and residence, to be provided by master)</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: Existing indentures respected and fully valid, with exception of activity of climbing or ascending flues (min age <i>to be specified</i>)</li> <li>▪ Climbing: aimed to set time frame for total abolition of climbing boys, allowing time for flues to be altered for mechanical sweeping (time frame <i>to be specified</i>); Indenture form prohibiting masters from letting boys climb <i>any</i> flue (rather than just flues on fire &amp; use of force/violence)</li> <li>▪ Street cries: 1788 Act remains in force (apprentices not to call streets for work before or after 'unseasonable hours')</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: -</li> <li>▪ Fines: 1788 Act remains in force (varying between £5-10, payable to informer (half) and local overseer of poor/local goal (half))</li> <li>▪ In force: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: Introduction to the Bill states that 1788 offers apprentices insufficient protection + invention mechanical alternatives makes climbing boys superfluous</li> </ul>
9 February 1818	<i>(13) Bill for better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and their Apprentices, and for preventing Employment of Boys in climbing chimnies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ No. assistants: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ Registration: use of official indenture form; apprentices to wear climbing cap with master's name and residence (provided by master)</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: existing indentures respected, with exception of activity of climbing</li> <li>▪ Climbing: from passing of Act no one under <i>to be specified</i> age to climb or ascend flues, existing contacts respected in all other respects; from 1 Sep 1819 no one under <i>to be specified</i> age to climb or ascend flues to clean the said or to extinguish fires, fine <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ Street cries: apprentices not to call streets for work before or after 'seasonable hours' (<i>to be specified</i>)</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: -</li> <li>▪ Fines: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ In force: from date <i>to be specified</i>, in Great Britain</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts:</li> </ul>
16 February 1818	<i>(39) Bill for better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and their Apprentices, and for preventing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: 14, subject to fine £10-50 [age raised from 8, fine raised from £5-10 in 1788 Act]</li> <li>▪ No. assistants: six</li> <li>▪ Registration: use of official indenture form; apprentices to wear climbing cap with master's name and residence (provided by master)</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: existing indentures respected,</li> </ul>

	<i>Employment of Boys in climbing chimnies (as amended by Committee)</i>	<p>with exception of activity of climbing; (addition by Commons Committee) master entitled to cancel existing indentures with under 14-year olds, apprentices thus thrown out of employ guaranteed 'good settlement' in master's parish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Climbing: from passing of Act no one under 14 to climb or ascend flues, existing contracts respected in all other respects; from 1 Sep 1819 no one under 21 to climb or ascend flues to clean the said or to extinguish fires, fine 40s-£20</li> <li>▪ Street cries: apprentices not to call streets for work before or after 'unseasonable hours' (as in 1788 Act)</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: -</li> <li>▪ Fines: varying from 40s to £50, payable to informer (half) and local overseer of poor/local goal (half)</li> <li>▪ In force: from passing of the Act, in Great Britain and Ireland</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: cancellation and settlement clause and applying to Ireland added by Commons Committee</li> </ul>
12 February 1819	<i>(50) Bill for better regulation of chimney sweepers and their apprentices, and for preventing employment of boys in climbing chimnies (as amended by Committee)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ No. assistants: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ Registration: use of official indenture form; apprentices to wear climbing cap with master's name and residence (provided by master)</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: existing indentures respected, with exception of activity of climbing; (addition by Commons Committee) master entitled to cancel existing indentures with under age <i>to be specified</i>, apprentices thus thrown out of employ guaranteed 'good settlement' in master's parish</li> <li>▪ Climbing: scheduled ban on climbing or ascending flues (date of enforcement, min. age, min-max fines <i>to be specified</i>)</li> <li>▪ Street cries: apprentices not to call streets for work before or after 'seasonable hours' (<i>to be specified</i>)</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: -</li> <li>▪ Fines: <i>to be specified</i>, payable to informer (half) and local overseer of poor/local goal (half)</li> <li>▪ In force: Great Britain and Ireland</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: identical to 16 Feb 1818 (39) Bill, but without ages and fines specified</li> </ul>
2 April 1819	<i>(200) Bill for better regulation of chimney sweepers and their apprentices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ No. assistants: <i>to be specified</i></li> <li>▪ Registration: use of official indenture form; apprentices to wear climbing cap with master's name and residence (provided by master)</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: parents to be fined for asking money for child's services, masters for offering it; <u>indentures to be cancelled in case master breaks any of its clauses</u></li> <li>▪ Climbing: <u>no longer time-frame for ban on climbing; return to 1788 Act specification that prohibited</u></li> </ul>

		<p>apprentice to climb <i>hot flues</i>, or to use of force/violence – considered a crime subject to fine and <u>imprisonment</u>; <u>girls not to climb whatsoever</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Street cries: apprentices <u>not to call street for work at any time of day</u> [instead of outside ‘seasonable hours’ as in 1788 Act]</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: new flues or flues under renovation must be made suited mechanical sweeping and not requiring coring [first mention of building instructions]</li> <li>▪ Fines: <i>to be specified</i>, payable to informer (half) and local overseer of poor/local goal (half)</li> <li>▪ In force: from date <i>to be specified</i>, in Great Britain and Ireland</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: first explicit mention of climbing girls – females not to be hired for climbing flues, seemingly allowed to carry out other duties; Bill based on agreement reached informally between Henry Grey Bennet and Committee of Master Chimney Sweepers – Bill indeed included most of statutes proposed by master sweep John Bedford in April 1818 to the Lords Committee (<i>1818 Lords Committee Minutes of Evidence</i>, p. 250-51)</li> </ul>
25 March 1834	<i>(166) Bill for better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and their Apprentices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: 14 (existing indentures of boys under 14 become void)</li> <li>▪ No. assistants: no restrictions on numbers, yet no hiring out</li> <li>▪ Registration: use of official indenture form</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture:</li> <li>▪ Climbing: employing any child under 14 in climbing flue to clean it or to extinguish fire as crime, punished accordingly</li> <li>▪ Street cries: -</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: -</li> <li>▪ Fines: between 20s and £10, payable to informer (half) and local overseer of poor/local goal (half)</li> <li>▪ In force: from passing of Act, in Great Britain and Ireland</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: introduction referring specifically to climbing as source of evil: ‘[1788 Act] found insufficient to guard and protect Children of tender years apprenticed to Chimney Sweepers against various casualties incident to the practice of cleansing flues by Climbing’ versus more general concerns for ‘ill-usage’ in all previous Bills 1817 (432), 1818 (13), 1818 (39), 1819 (50), 1819 (200): ‘[1788 Act] found insufficient to guard and protect the Boys apprenticed to Chimney Sweepers, against various acts of ill-usage and oppression’</li> </ul>
7 May 1834	<i>(277) Bill for better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and their Apprentices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: 14 (<u>existing indentures of boys under 14 remain in force</u>)</li> <li>▪ No. assistants: no restrictions on numbers, yet no letting out (fine raised to £5-10, from 20s-£5)</li> <li>▪ Registration: use of official Indenture Form; brass plate for under 14</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: existing indentures of boys under</li> </ul>

		<p>14 remain in force with exception of climbing, plus under 14 to wear 'when out upon his duty' a leathern cap with brass plate with name of master, name of apprentice and date of indenture engraved, 40s-£5 fine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Climbing: no climbing under 14</li> <li>▪ Street cries: (addition by Commons Committee) apprentices not to call streets for work at 'unseasonable hours'</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: (addition Commons Committee) detailed instructions on design of and materials to be used for newly-build or rebuild flues to facilitate mechanical sweeping Fines: between 40s-£10, payable to informer (half) and local overseer of poor/local goal (half)</li> <li>▪ In force: with passing of Act, in Great Britain and Ireland</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: everyone can act as witness irrespective of potential stake or interest in the case (possibly referring to sweeps testifying against competitors and/or to members of philanthropic societies such as SSNCB)</li> </ul>
25 July 1834	<p><i>Act of 4 &amp; 5 William IV, Chapter 35, An Act for better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and their Apprentices, and for the safer Construction of Chimneys and Flues</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: 10, yet only housekeepers who pay towards local poor rates to employ boys under 14</li> <li>▪ No. assistants: two boys on trial, four apprentices [restrictions altogether missing in previous two Bills]</li> <li>▪ Registration: use of official Indenture Form, brass plate for under 14</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: use of official Indenture Forms; (addition by Lords Committee) boy entitled to two-month trial, justices will only approve of subsequent indenture if boy desires so, emphasis on boy's free choice; (addition by Lords Committee) only Housekeepers to employ boys under 14; those under 14 to wear brass plate with name and residence of master/mistress engraved</li> <li>▪ Climbing: no one to climb flue on fire</li> <li>▪ Street cries: no calling or hawking streets for work by anyone working as chimney sweeper, at any time [previously restricted to apprentices and 'unseasonable hours']</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: detailed instructions on design of and materials to be used for newly-build or rebuild flues to facilitate mechanical sweeping, master builders subject to fines of £100 if neglecting these requirements</li> <li>▪ Fines: vary between 40s-£10, payable to informer (half) and local overseers of poor (half), master liable to imprisonment if failing to pay within period specified by Justice</li> <li>▪ In force: from 25 July 1834 until 1 Jan 1841 + parliamentary session, in Great Britain and Ireland</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: only instance in which housekeeper is legally singled out as the suitable guardian for young apprentices [in line with Hanway and Porter's demands during 1780s]; first time that such clear emphasis is laid on boys' ability and right to chose his profession</li> </ul>



		[interesting in light of previous concerns about boys being sold by their parents and forced to climb hazardous flues by abusive masters]; building instructions now for sake of 'security' rather than for 'cleansing of Chimneys by Machinery should be facilitated' [previous Bill];
14 April 1840	<i>(235) Bill for Regulation of Chimney Sweeps and Chimneys</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: 16</li> <li>▪ No. assistants: -</li> <li>▪ Registration: - [no indenture form, no brass plates]</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: masters entitled to hand-over assistants to parish between passing of Act and 1<sup>st</sup> January 1841</li> <li>▪ Climbing: no person under 21 to climb flue for sweeping or extinguishing fire</li> <li>▪ Street cries: -</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: detailed instructions on design of and materials to be used for newly-build or rebuild flues to facilitate mechanical sweeping, master builders subject to fines of £100 if neglecting these requirements</li> <li>▪ Fines: vary £5-10, payable to informer (half) and local overseers of poor (half), subject to imprisonment in case of failure to pay in time</li> <li>▪ In force: 1834 Act extended till 1 January 1841 when this Bill shall take force, in Great Britain and Ireland</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: clauses specifying master's characteristics (housekeepers), banning street hawking, introducing trials, obliging use of indenture form and restricting number of assistants all failed to make it into the Act, possibly because framers assumed that chimney sweeps would no longer need apprentices if minimum age was raised to 16?</li> </ul>
7 August 1840	<i>Act of 3 &amp; 4 Victoria, Chapter 85, An Act for the Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Chimneys</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Min age: 16</li> <li>▪ No. assistants: -</li> <li>▪ Registration: - [no indenture form, no brass plates]</li> <li>▪ Conditions of Indenture: apprentices under 16 entitled to cancel their indentures between 1 July 1841 and 1 July 1842; existing indentures of boys under 16 become void on 1 July 1842</li> <li>▪ Climbing: no one under 21 to climb flue for sweeping, cleaning or coring or for extinguishing fire [previous Bill referred only to climbing flue for sweeping or extinguishing fire]</li> <li>▪ Street cries: -</li> <li>▪ Chimney design: detailed instructions on design of and materials to be used for newly-build or rebuild flues to facilitate mechanical sweeping, master builders subject to fines of £100 if neglecting these requirements</li> <li>▪ Fines: £5-10, payable to informer (half) and local overseers of poor (half), subject to imprisonment if failing to pay in time</li> <li>▪ In force: 1834 Act extended to 1 January 1842, after which this Act takes effect, in Britain and Ireland</li> <li>▪ Other notable facts: changing master's entitlement to</li> </ul>

	discharge apprentice into apprentice's entitlement to cancel the indenture illustrating growing emphasis on child worker's rights/freedom of choice (examined in Chapter 5)
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## Appendix 3: Parliamentary Activity regarding Chimney

### Sweeps, 1788-1840

#### 1788

- 22 April Petitions to Commons by David Porter and Committee of Gentlemen, requesting regulation of sweeps' apprentices, referred to Select Committee
- 1 May Select Committee reporting based on hearings of master sweeps, Bill ordered
- 14 May Bill presented by Robert Burton, 1<sup>st</sup> Commons reading
- 19 May 2<sup>nd</sup> Commons reading
- 28 May 3<sup>rd</sup> Commons reading, passed without major amendments
- 2 June 1<sup>st</sup> Lords reading
- 11 June 2<sup>nd</sup> Lords reading, Committee of Whole House, clauses removed: restricting hiring of apprentices to sweeps who were rate-paying householders + ban on street cries
- 17 June 3<sup>rd</sup> Lords reading
- 18 June Commons accepted Lords amendments
- 25 June Royal assent for *Act of 28 George III, Chapter 48, An Act for the better Regulation of Chimney Sweeps, and their Apprentices*

#### 1804

- 24 February Petition to Commons by the London SSNCB, requesting for 1788 Act to be amended, referred to Select Committee
- 14 March Select Committee reporting based on hearings of witnesses including SSNCB treasurer William Tooke, Bill ordered
- 31 May Bill presented by Mr. Cartwright, 1<sup>st</sup> Commons reading
- 5 June 2<sup>nd</sup> Commons reading, Bill committed to Mr Cartwright and Lord John William Anderson to consider it Speaker's Chamber
- 6 July Cartwright and Anderson presenting minor amendments, accepted

- 9 July 3<sup>rd</sup> Commons reading, passed; 1<sup>st</sup> Lords reading
- 10 July 2<sup>nd</sup> Lords reading, Bill referred to Select Committee
- 13 July Select Committee returning Bill without amendments, considered by Committee of Whole House,
- 18 July Committee of Whole House put off for three months (= Bill rejected)

1817

- 5 June Petition to Commons by the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire (initiated by the Sheffield SSNCB), requesting the House to take measures for abolition of climbing boys, referred to Select Committee
- 11-17 June Select Committee hearings
- 23 June Select Committee reporting, requesting the House to take measures to prevent future employment of climbing boys, Bill ordered
- 25 June Bill presented by Henry Grey Bennet and William Wilberforce, 1<sup>st</sup> Commons reading
- 2 July 2<sup>nd</sup> Commons reading put off for three months (= Bill rejected)

1818

- 29 Jan-9 Feb Petitions to Commons from various parts of the country, requesting measures for abolition of climbing boys
- 9 February Bill ordered; Bill presented by Henry Grey Bennet, Lord Milton and Mr. Drummond Burrell, 1<sup>st</sup> Commons reading
- 13 February 2<sup>nd</sup> Commons reading
- 16 February Bill considered by Committee of Whole House, amendments made (see Appendix 1)
- 18 February Further amendments made
- 20 February Petition by London master sweeps to be heard against the Bill; 3<sup>rd</sup> Commons reading, no counsel attended on the part of the sweeps, Bill passed
- 24 February 1<sup>st</sup> Lords reading, requesting copy of 1817 Commons Select Committee report

- 10 March 2nd Lords reading, referred to Select Committee
- 11-17 March/ Select Committee hearings
- 6-20 April
- 14 May Select Committee reporting, Bill returned without amendments, but advising the House to await outcomes of Board of Works trials with mechanical sweeping
- 15 May 3<sup>rd</sup> reading put off for six months (= Bill rejected)

### 1819

- 27 January Board of Works report delivered to the Lords
- 29 January Commons requesting copy of Board of Works report
- 12 February Bill presented by Henry Grey Bennet, Drummond Burrell and James Mackintosh, 1<sup>st</sup> Commons reading
- 15 February 2<sup>nd</sup> Commons reading
- 22 February 3<sup>rd</sup> Commons reading, Bill passed
- 26 February 1<sup>st</sup> Lords reading
- 8 March 2<sup>nd</sup> Lords reading, referred to Committee of Whole House
- 15 March 3<sup>rd</sup> Lords reading put off for six months (= Bill rejected)
- 2 April Bill presented to Commons by Henry Grey Bennet, 1<sup>st</sup> Commons reading
- 26 April 3<sup>rd</sup> Commons reading, one amendment made (see Appendix 1), Bill passed
- 28 April 1<sup>st</sup> Lords reading
- 10 May 2<sup>nd</sup> Lords reading, referred to Committee of Whole House
- 12 & 18 May Committee of Whole House made several amendments
- 24 May 3<sup>rd</sup> Lords reading put off for four months (= Bill rejected)

### 1823

- 30 June Petition to Commons by Sheffield sweeps William Sampson (initiated by Sheffield SSNCB), the House resolved not to refer to a Committee

1825

- 2 March Commons requested 'Account of Boys apprenticed to Chimney Sweepers under Act 28 Geo. III c40' from metropolitan police offices (initiated by William Williams, MP for Weymouth + London SSNCB director)
- 25 March Accounts received

1829

- 19 February Petitions to Commons from various parts of the country, requesting the prohibition of climbing boys, laid on table and printed, but not referred to Committee
- 2 March Idem
- 11 March Idem
- 16 April Idem

1830

- 8 April Commons ordered answers to Circular addressed by the Home Secretary, Robert Peel to Public Offices in Favour of the Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys by the Use of Machinery
- 8 April Petitions to Commons from various parts of the country, requesting the prohibition of climbing boys, laid on table and printed, but not referred to Committee
- 27 April Idem
- 6 May Idem
- 10 June Idem

1834

- 19 February Commons ordered Account of Number of Boys apprenticed to sweeps under provisions of Act 28 Geo III C40 at several police offices within the bills of mortality, 1825-1834 (initiated by William Tooke, MP for Truro + London SSNCB treasurer)
- 25 February Accounts received

25 March	Bill introduced by William Tooke, Stephen Lushington and George Frederick Young
7 May	2 <sup>nd</sup> Commons reading, Bill considered by Committee of Whole House, amendments made (see Appendix 1)
14 May	Bill considered by Committee of Whole House, further amendments
29 May	3 <sup>rd</sup> Commons reading, passed; 1 <sup>st</sup> Lords reading
4 June	Bill referred to Select Committee to determine its Expediency
7-9 June	Select Committee hearings
9 June	Select Committee reporting, Bill considered by Committee of Whole House
13 June	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lords reading, referred to Select Committee
16 June-7 July	Select Committee hearings
8 July	Select Committee reporting, Bill returned with amendments
14 July	Bill considered by Committee of Whole House, several amendments made (see Appendix 1)
16 July	3 <sup>rd</sup> Lords reading, accepted
19 July	Commons accepted Lords amendments
25 July	Royal assent for <i>Act of 4 &amp; 5 William IV, Chapter 35, for better Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and their Apprentices, and for the safer Construction of Chimneys and Flues</i>

### 1839

15 February	Petition to Commons from Dublin, pleading measures for prohibition of climbing boys, not referred to Select Committee
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### 1840

14 February	Petitions to Lords by London fire offices, requesting the House to investigate the 1834 Act-to-be-expired
14 April	Commons Committee of Whole House considered present laws regarding chimney sweeping, Bill ordered



1 May	Bill presented by Mr Bernal, Mr Fox Maule and Sir George Grey, 1 <sup>st</sup> Commons reading
29 June	3 <sup>rd</sup> Commons reading, passed; 1 <sup>st</sup> Lords reading
2 July	Bill referred to Select Committee
3 July	Select Committee confirming the Bill's Expediency
6 July	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lords reading, Bill referred to Select Committee
10-23 July	Select Committee hearings
13 July	Lords order that Select Committee's Minutes of Evidence be printed from time to time for use of Members of House of Lords but that no copies were to be delivered except to Members of the Committee until further order
27 July	Select Committee reporting
31 July	Bill considered by Committee of Whole House, several amendments made (see Appendix 1)
4 August	3 <sup>rd</sup> Lords reading, accepted
7 August	Royal Assent for <i>Act of 3 &amp; 4 Victoria, Chapter 85 for the Regulation of Chimney Sweepers and Chimneys</i>

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