

**'With Courage and Energy Labour Conquers All':
Military masculinities and civilian transitions in the
British Corps of Commissionaires, 1859-1895**

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Abstract

The Corps of Commissionaires was founded in 1859 as an employment agency for army veterans. This was a group of men who often encountered prejudice on their return to civilian life, and this left some socially marginalised and unable to secure work, and the organisation was established to offer ex-servicemen the prospect of a different outcome. The Corps was established by Edward Walter, and this study focusses on the period from 1859-1895. Walter conceived the commissionaires as a quasi-military spectacle to emphasise the men's former careers, and this creation was predicated on controlling the men's lives; their army-style uniforms, the barracks they lived in and the parades they took part in all signified this control. This study's analysis illustrates the impact that this spectacle had on the men's lives, and the role it played in publicly promoting the commissionaire system.

This disrupted cultural norms around veterancy ; the commissionaires were respected for their prior military service, valued by employers, and admired for their self-reliance as civilians. By considering the gender and class status of the commissionaires, and examining the business practices that Walter adopted to promote the commissionaires, this study forms a bridge between cultural, social and business history. As a result, this thesis opens up new areas of enquiry into the limited studies of the lives and representations of Victorian ex-servicemen, it extends the body of work on working class life during this period, and it illuminates the role of played by marketing in promoting commercial service.

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Abbreviations

COS	Charity Organisation Society
<i>Circular</i>	<i>Monthly Circular of the Corps of Commissioners</i>
<i>ILN</i>	<i>The Illustrated London News</i>
MO	Medical Officer
OEF	Officers Endowment Fund
<i>Rules</i>	The Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissioners

Introduction

William Grayham, a former member of the 86th Royal Country Down regiment, appeared in Marylebone Magistrates' Court in London in January 1859 to face a charge of begging.¹ The former soldier stated that he had served with his regiment for eleven years before being discharged because of ill health in 1855. He appeared in court 'wearing a military dress and walked limpingly [sic] into court'. Grayham explained that he had been discharged with a pension that had elapsed after two years, and since then 'owing to a diseased hip he had been quite incapable of obtaining a livelihood by any kind of labour'.² He continued by saying 'he should be glad to get into a workhouse or any other place where he might be sheltered and obtain food'. Without this, he said he faced the 'prospect of entire starvation'.³ The magistrate discharged Grayham with the advice that he should make his way to the workhouse 'and make his sad case to the relieving officer'.⁴

The plight of men such as Grayham prompted Edward Walter to form the Corps of Commissionaires as an employment agency for disabled ex-servicemen. Walter was an Eton and Oxford-educated former army officer who had served in the fashionable 8th Hussars regiment, where he had achieved the rank of captain. Furthermore, his family owned *The Times* newspaper, and this background placed Walter firmly in the ranks of the upper middle class.⁵ The military, social and political connections that came with this were to play a key role in the Corps' success. Walter announced the formation of the Corps in two letters to the editor of *The Times* in 1859. The correspondence contained all of the constitutive elements of the members' – the commissionaires – collective identity, which was based on employment and respectability.

The first of these letters was published on 29 January 1859.⁶ Walter observed the significant numbers of disabled men who had been recently discharged from the army following the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the ongoing Indian Rebellion (1857-1859), and he stated they were 'anxious to undertake any employment that may, with their pension, furnish them the means of support and escape from idleness and its inevitable results'.⁷ He continued by claiming that 'many of your readers must at times have wanted a trustworthy

¹ 'A Disabled and Distressed Soldier', *St James's Chronicle*, 1 January 1859, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵ H.M. Vibart and Mark Clement, 'Walter, Sir Edward (1823-1904), founder of the Corps of Commissionaires', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 28 September 2006), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/36717

⁶ EW, 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 29 January 1859, p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

person to deliver a message [...] [indeed] the services of a responsible set of men would be most useful, but at the present time are not to be procured in London'.⁸ He said this need would be met through 'employing a number of [military] pensioners as *commissionaires* [original emphasis] and stationing them in some of [London's] principal streets'.⁹

Walter explained that only men of 'good character' would be selected and that 'each man will be furnished with a code of rules and tariff, and the whole body will be under the supervision of a retired non-commissioned officer [...] [the men] will be a self-supporting body'.¹⁰ In addition, the Corps would select men 'who had lost an arm, so that with the addition of a uniform and their medals there will be no difficulty in recognising them'.¹¹ The men chose to adopt the quasi-military identity created by Walter through their membership of the Corps, and their appearance was a defining facet of this.

Walter's second letter appeared two weeks later; it stated that seven commissionaires were starting work that morning as messengers.¹² He argued that the 'habits and education of a soldier, his punctuality and precision qualify him especially for this [role]'.¹³ He concluded by observing that ex-soldiers could often find it difficult to secure civilian employment, but that disabled veterans found this especially difficult. He added that there were 'so few people [...] who can find work for one armed man that many of them are in a state of distress from want of it'. Walter argued that this lack of work highlighted the 'necessity of [the men's] appeal [...] not for money but for encouragement in the occupation that they have chosen'.¹⁴

The men joined an organisation that was configured around a system that underlined the importance Walter placed on employment as a means of achieving financial independence. However, the Corps did not employ the men. It created the means for them to earn a living through their own efforts, it provided them with a uniform and it set up the messenger posts they would use to solicit work from prospective clients. In addition, as the Corps grew in size, it organised a self-funded system of welfare for the men. This included medical insurance, a barracks for them to live in and a retirement fund. All of this was made available to the commissionaires provided they agreed to conform to the organisation's stringent regulations that governed their lives inside, and outside, the workplace. These regulations were designed to prescribe the respectability that Walter claimed for the commissionaires.

⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹² EW letter, 'A Good Suggestion', *The Times*, 14 February 1859, p. 12.

¹³ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

These measures succeeded – the number of commissionaires stood at 2,826 by the time of Walter's death in 1904.¹⁵ The commissionaires had become a byword for integrity and dedication, whose services had expanded beyond that of messenger to include nightwatchman, doorman and money takers. The men were trusted service providers for some of London's most highly regarded businesses. Furthermore, the Corps received financial support from King Edward VII, and the army's officer class, from the Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Earl Roberts, down. This success was achieved during a period when the country's interest in the welfare of its veterans was, at best, inconsistent. Successive governments did not prioritise the needs of this group – their pensions remained meagre, employment opportunities were scarce and ex-servicemen were disproportionately represented on the registers of workhouses.

This thesis explains how the Corps succeeded in such an unpromising environment and it demonstrates that this success rested on the collective identity of the commissionaires. There was a duality to this identity – it was both traditional and modern – that gave rise to a new type of veteran. The visual identity of the men invoked the traditions of the British army and allowed the Corps to assert a continuity in character and bearing from soldier to veteran for the commissionaires.¹⁶ This continuity formed the basis of the men's work identity, which positioned them as trusted employees in the service economy of the Victorian period. This disrupted cultural norms around veterancy; the commissionaires were respected for their military service, valued by employers and admired for their self-reliance as civilians. By considering the gender and class status of the commissionaires and examining the business practices Walter adopted to promote the commissionaires, this study forms a bridge between cultural, social and business history. This is delivered by addressing the following questions: how was this identity conceived and controlled by Walter, how was it promoted to employers and the army to garner their support, why did men choose to adopt the identity of the commissionaire, and how was it represented in contemporary newspapers and periodicals?

British Veterancy

The volume of scholarship on the experiences of British veterans before the nineteenth century is small. Peter Reese provides an overview of this period with a focus on state welfare and private philanthropy, and the role this support played in assisting soldiers to transition back into civil society; this overview forms part of a wider study of these themes,

¹⁵ LMA/4777/B/02/02, *Annual Circular of The Corps of Commissionaires*, 1904, p. 12.

¹⁶ The terms 'soldier,' 'soldier of the ranks' and 'rank and file' are used interchangeably throughout this study to refer to the most junior member of the army's hierarchy, the private.

which runs up to the 1980s.¹⁷ Geoffrey Hudson's analysis of state provision for disabled ex-servicemen in the seventeenth century illuminates how this provision was administered locally and provides a useful frame of reference for analysing the provision of army pensions during the period of this study.¹⁸ The most significant scholarship is that of Caroline Nielsen, whose work delivers a detailed examination of the role of the Chelsea Hospital. She explores its development as the administrative body for the distribution of state pensions for former soldiers in the eighteenth century, and the role played by the hospital in caring for its small numbers of in-pensioners. Nielsen also analyses representations of the veteran during this period and highlights how this figure came to embody a masculine identity that was rooted in conceptions of disability, domesticity, poverty and ageing, which were explored culturally.¹⁹ As we will see, representations of the Chelsea Pensioner have attracted cultural historians of the late nineteenth century, and the enduring appeal of these men established a narrative that the Corps set itself up against.

Prior to this thesis, there has been one published study of the Corps, written by Reese, which is an institutional account of the Corps' foundation and its development up to the mid 1980s.²⁰ It was sponsored by the Corps and this influence is clear in the work, which takes a largely uncritical view of the organisation. Nonetheless, it provides a helpful introduction to the Corps, from which the thesis has benefited.

1. The Victorian Veteran

The historiography of ex-servicemen of the Victorian period is more developed than what has been described above. However, it is limited and there is a significant opportunity to extend these studies; this thesis realises this opportunity by opening new areas of enquiry into the lives and representations of this group. The existing work can be divided into two historiographical traditions: social history and cultural history

¹⁷ Peter Reese, *Homecoming Heroes: An Account of the Reassimilation of British Military Personnel into Civilian Life* (Leo Cooper, 1992).

¹⁸ Geoffrey L. Hudson, 'Disabled Veterans and the State in Early Modern England', in *Disabled Veterans in History*, ed. by David A. Gerber (The University of Michigan Press, 2012), pp. 117-44.

¹⁹ Caroline Nielsen, 'The Chelsea Out-Pensioners: Image and Reality in Eighteenth-Century and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Care' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Newcastle University, 2014), and Caroline Nielsen, 'Representations of the Elderly Veteran Soldier in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', in *Men After War*, ed. by Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper (Routledge, 2013), pp. 18-35.

²⁰ Peter Reese, *Our Sergeant: The Story of the Corps of Commissionaires* (Leo Cooper, 1986).

i. Social histories of the British army and its veterans

This first of these approaches is delivered within broader studies of the Victorian army, in which the experiences of the ordinary soldier are analysed in the context of the institutional structures they operated in. The focus on the men as veterans is brief. The two most important studies of the Victorian army are Alan Ramsay Skelley's *The Victorian Army at Home* and Edward Spiers's *The Late Victorian Army, 1868-1902*. In addition, French's *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People c.1870-2000*, adopts a similar approach, but his analysis of the Victorian army is conducted within the broader context of the army's development across the twentieth century.²¹

Each of these studies exemplifies what has been described as the 'new military history'. Catriona Kennedy and Matthew McCormack observe that the advent of this historiographical approach can be traced to the early 1960s, and that it broadened the traditional focus of the discipline of military history from the battlefield to how combatants and their parent societies experienced war.²² Michael S. Neiberg argues that 'to use a well-worn phrase, the difference between traditional and new military history is that the former is top down, whereas the latter is bottom up'.²³ Peter Kasten concurs, observing that 'new military history' is comprised of a 'fascination with the recruitment, training and socialisation of personnel, combat motivation, the effect of service and war on the individual soldier [...] civil-military relations, and the relationship between military systems and the greater society'.²⁴ Writing two decades later, Joanna Bourke argued that rather than being 'new', this approach was 'distinctly middle aged [...] [the term] is often simply a convenient sobriquet'.²⁵ Whether this study falls into that category is a moot point, but it is in dialogue with Skelley and Spiers.

Skelley provides a detailed analysis of the social – rather than military – aspects of the rank-and-file soldier's experiences of the British army during this period. What emerges is a seminal study of the type of men who enlisted in terms of their social background, the terms

²¹ Alan Ramsay Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home* (Croom Helm, 1977); Edward Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868 to 1902*, (Manchester University Press, 1992); David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People c.1870-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

²² Catriona Kennedy and Matthew McCormack, 'Introduction', in *Soldiering in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1850: Men of Arms*, ed. by Catriona Kennedy and Matthew McCormack (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.1-14 (p. 3).

²³ Michael S. Neiberg, 'War and Society', in *Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History*, ed. by Matthew Hughes and William J. Philpott (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 42-59 (p. 42).

²⁴ Peter Karsten, 'The "New" American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored', *American Quarterly*, 36.3 (1984), pp. 389-418 (p. 389).

²⁵ Joanna Bourke, 'New Military History,' in *Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History*, pp. 258-280 (p. 258).

under which they joined the army and their experiences during their military service.²⁶ Because of his focus on the men's background and service lives, Skelley's analysis of their experience as veterans is necessarily brief. As a consequence, his analysis of this topic is limited to three themes: an examination of the soldiers' pensions, the lack of interest from the army in the welfare of its former soldiers, and a survey of the private organisations created to help these men transition back into civilian life. In exploring this last theme, he provides a brief commentary on the Corps.²⁷ Skelley's analysis illustrates that the veteran of this period was financially neglected by the society he had served, and that the gaps in welfare provision for veterans were too great for private organisations to fill. He notes that the failure of the state to fill this gap, 'when the army was increasingly in the public eye and when recruitment was difficult at best', was damaging both for the army and the War Office.²⁸

Spiers's focus on the experiences of the veteran is even more brief. However, this focus complements Skelley's in the way the former links the fortunes of ex-servicemen with his characterisation of the poor public opinion held towards the ordinary soldier during this period. The result of this, Spiers notes, was that the social composition of the rank and file was weighted towards the lower strata of the working class, with unemployed men representing a disproportionate level of recruits into the army.²⁹ He notes that there was a 'deeply rooted prejudice against military service [...] [which was] keenly felt within respectable working class families'.³⁰ Furthermore, he observes that the army's recruitment problems were further exacerbated by the conditions some veterans experienced, having left the army with poor employment prospects and low pensions, while the image of the ex-soldier begging in the street endured throughout this period.³¹

David French locates veterans and their support in the context of the development of the regimental tradition of the British army. He notes that, following the War Office reforms of the organisational structure of the army in the late nineteenth century, it was important that the newly established regiments quickly established a sense of esprit de corps. The purpose of this was to enhance their effectiveness as fighting units.³² One important aspect was the promotion of the idea of the regiment as a family. As one contemporary commentator noted, following enlistment, men joined a particular regiment or corps, 'expecting to remain in it for

²⁶ See Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 15-20, for an introduction to his study and its focus.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²⁹ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 129.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 146.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

³² French, *Military Identities*, p. 76.

the whole of their military career, and to identify with it as closely as he identified with his own family.³³ French demonstrates that this familial aspect of the regiment was expressed in the growth of regimental associations, which were established by officers with the purpose of supporting serving as well as former soldiers and their families when they had fallen on hard times.

The opportunity for this thesis to be in dialogue with these studies is threefold. First, it provides a detailed addition to the brief surveys Skelley and Spiers deliver of the factors that influenced the experiences of the ex-soldier of this period and, in doing so, it explores how the Corps was conceived to help ex-servicemen overcome the negative views of veterans that they highlight. Second, it extends their analysis of how these experiences had a broader impact on the British army in areas such as recruitment, and how the Corps positioned itself to the army as a solution to this problem. Third, by examining how the Corps secured financial support from the army's regiments, it extends French's limited account of the role played by regimental paternalism in respect of veteran welfare.

In addition, the scholarship of these three historians illuminates how control was exerted in the Victorian army. As French notes, control informed every aspect of the soldiers' lives; they were 'pre-eminently men of discipline [...] the army wanted not only disciplined bodies, but also disciplined minds'.³⁴ This mattered not simply because of the impact discipline had on the battlefield, but also because of the impact it had on the image of the army. As Skelley argues, 'much of the Victorian army's mystique and its reputation for steadiness came from the unswerving obedience that it demanded'.³⁵ By analysing how the Corps adopted a similar approach to discipline, this study extends these examinations of the army's approach to discipline, through its analysis of how it was transposed on to a civilian organisation. This analysis is delivered in the context of how it was used to uphold the hegemony of the commissionaire system, which, to paraphrase Skelley, was part of the mystique of the Corps and fundamental to its success as a commercial organisation.

ii. **Cultural histories**

The approaches adopted by cultural historians of the British veteran of this period analyse what Michael Paris has highlighted as a paradox. He argues that the attitudes of British society towards the rank and file was 'paradoxical and ambiguous [but we] must be careful to draw a distinction between officers and the rank and file, because officers were respected,

³³ Ibid., p. 1.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

³⁵ Skelley, *The Victorian Army*, p. 135.

admired and had considerable social status'.³⁶ French makes a similar observation: 'on the one hand, flesh-and-blood rank-and-file soldiers were shunned by much of "respectable" society [...] on the other hand, the soldier in the abstract had become an icon held in growing public esteem'.³⁷ Examining this paradox and analysing the impact it had on the fortunes of the Corps is an important focus for this study.

The effect on these societal views on the way in which the Victorian veteran was represented is explored by Michael Brown and Joanne Begiato.³⁸ Their study illuminates how, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the veteran was co-opted into displays of popular imperialism and public largesse, as well as how the figure of a particular type of veteran – the Chelsea Pensioner – took on a didactic role centred on generating public enthusiasm for the army.³⁹ Alongside this work, Lara Kriegel's study of the way the veterans of the Crimean War were 'rediscovered' by the public provides additional evidence of how public perceptions of the Victorians towards their former soldiers changed.⁴⁰ This was a group of men who, since their return from the Crimean War some forty years earlier, had been largely ignored by British society, but were now being co-opted to help drive public interest in the army in the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁴¹ This study builds on that work by analysing how the commissionaires were promoted to the public and how this promotion brought forward new conceptions of veterancy that were opposed to the representations highlighted in the above studies.

These changing representations of the veteran occurred within the context of the evolving relationship between British society and the army during this period. Public interest in the rituals and symbols of the British army was nothing new, especially its parades and uniforms, which combined to form what Scott Hughes Myerly describes as the 'military spectacle', a

³⁶ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 30.

³⁷ French, *Military Identities*, pp. 232-33; Spiers also highlights this paradox and argues that while the ordinary soldier's actions could be lauded, this was not accompanied by any rise in either the soldiers' status, or the army's reputation as an employer for working class men; see *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 202. This ambiguity was well established. For an account of this paradox in the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, see Catriona Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Military and Civilian Experience in Britain and Ireland*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 37-38.

³⁸ Michael Brown and Joanne Begiato, 'Visualising the Aged Veteran in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Memory, Masculinity and Nation', in *Martial Masculinities: Experiencing and Imagining the Military in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Michael Brown, Anna Maria Barry and Joanne Begiato, (Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 102-135.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-05.

⁴⁰ Lara Kriegel, 'Living Links to History, or Victorian Veterans in the Twentieth-Century World', *Victorian Studies*, 58.2 (2016), pp. 289-301, doi:10.2979/vict

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 297; for a detailed analysis of the veterans of the Crimean War and the Indian Rebellion, see Glenn Fisher, 'The Crimea and Indian Mutiny Veterans Associations of the 1890s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cardiff, 2020).

phenomenon that was to prove an enduring source of popular entertainment throughout the period.⁴² The Corps' adoption of this allowed it to create its own spectacle and this became the most important element of its publicity, expertly engineered by Walter to publicise the organisation's links with the army. These links were forged against a backdrop of Michael Brown's observation that 'there can be little doubt that the latter decades of the nineteenth century saw the army assume an ever greater and more positive role in British society'.⁴³ Indeed, as Michael Dawson contends, 'during the growth of popular imperialism in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, heroic masculinity became fused in an especially potent configuration with representations of British imperial identity'.⁴⁴ He points to the 'revolutionary expansion of publishing and popular readership' as playing an important role in this period in the promotion of this form of heroism to the public.⁴⁵ However, as he also notes, cultural representations of military heroes – for adult readers – tended to focus on the officer class.⁴⁶ This thesis builds on that scholarship by highlighting how the Corps capitalised on these trends by making its spectacle the foundation of its marketing and promotion of the commissionaires' collective identity,

However, while the latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed an upsurge in the army's popularity and a related interest in veteran welfare, these sentiments were far from consistent in this period. As Kate McLoughlin notes, 'the Victorian public loved, feared, sighed over, smiled at and ignored its former soldiers'.⁴⁷ If the Corps was to survive as a commercial organisation, it had to find a way of prospering outside of these periods of 'love'; appeals to the sentiment of the British public would not be enough. This thesis demonstrates how it achieved that through its creation of a positive work identity for the commissionaires. This needed to confront not just the ambiguity towards the soldier highlighted above, but also the army's reputations as an employer. As Spiers notes of this period, 'service in the ranks remained a career of lowly status and of little esteem'.⁴⁸ This study explores the impact these varying civilian attitudes had on the development of the commissionaire system. It examines the way Walter capitalised on positive public sentiment, how he battled

⁴² Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars Through the Crimea* (Harvard University Press, 1996). This has also been described as the 'pleasure culture of war'; see Paris, *Warrior Nation*, pp. 8-9.

⁴³ Michael Brown, 'Cold Steel, Weak Flesh: Mechanism, Masculinity and the Anxieties of Late Victorian Empire', *Cultural and Social History*, 14:2, (2017), p. 155-81 (p. 157), doi:h10.1080/14780038.2016.1269538

⁴⁴ Michael Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 146.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

⁴⁷ Kate McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics, British Literature in the Age of Mass Warfare, 1790-2015* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 256.

⁴⁸ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 147.

negativity towards veterans and how this, in turn, influenced the experiences of the men who joined the Corps.

The time period for this study is 1859 to 1895, which was the publication date of the last edition of the *Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires* (hereafter the *Rules*), to be released under Walter's leadership of the Corps. The extended time period allows this study to deliver what Jessica Meyer identifies as an opportunity for veteran scholarship, which is to move away from its current approach to periodisation.⁴⁹ She observes that the overwhelming tendency in studies of the impact of war on its combatants during the twentieth century is to focus on conflicts and their immediate aftermaths. As a consequence of this, she argues that 'scope remains [...] for examining how men's lives and their sense of self as gendered social actors was shaped by shifting social meanings across periods in relation to peace as well as war'.⁵⁰ This study realises this opportunity and applies it to the nineteenth century.

Gender

This thesis views the men of the Corps as a gendered construct, in recognition of the circumstances which led Walter to create the idealised masculine identity of the commissionaires. As Matt Houlbrook, Katie Jones and Ben Mechen note, 'masculinities, like men, were always of a particular time and a particular place'.⁵¹ Walter created the commissionaires' masculinity to counter the prejudices held by some towards veterans, which were described above. Where these prejudices held the veteran to be disreputable, dependent and ill-disciplined, the commissionaire was respectable, self-reliant and disciplined. These qualities underpinned the exceptionalism that Walter claimed on behalf of the men of the Corps, and the men's masculinity was a product of the social conditions of the late 1850s. This process of creating an identity in relation to another, is a common technique employed in the historical construction of masculinities. As John H. Arnold and Sean Brady observe, 'masculine identity is often figured relationally and/or comparatively'.⁵² Indeed, as Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer argue, 'an awareness of "otherness" has long been recognised as a key factor in the process of identity formation, both individual and

⁴⁹ Jessica Meyer, ' "Formal Qualifications for Full Masculine Status"? Challenging the Fragmentation of the Male Life Cycle Through the First World War Pension Archives', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain: A History for the Present*, ed. by Matt Houlbrook, Katie Jones and Ben Mechen, (Manchester University Press, 2023), pp. 121-35 (p. 126).

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 126.

⁵¹ Matt Houlbrook, Katie Jones and Ben Mechen, 'Introduction: Histories for the present', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, pp. 1- 46 (p. 3).

⁵² John H. Arnold and Sean Brady, 'Introduction', in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, ed. by John H. Arnold and Sean Brady, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-14 (p. 3).

collective'.⁵³ As we will see, this sense of 'otherness' was consistently used by Walter to distance the commissionaires from the negative views many employers had when it came to employing veterans; he did this by contrasting the exceptional commissionaire with the stereotypical veteran of this period. Ben Griffin argues that 'the performance of a particular masculinity is accorded recognition by others'.⁵⁴ The veteran aspiring to become a commissionaire needed to understand what form this recognition might take, and how it could benefit him.

This study analyses how Walter made these points of difference meaningful to ex-servicemen and employers; that is, how his abstract ideal moved to a reality, and how this was predicated on the way the Corps operated. It achieves this by examining the organisational structures he established to uphold his philosophy, and illustrating the impact this had on the lives of the commissionaires. As a result of such an approach, this thesis responds to John Tosh's call for historians of masculinity to focus on 'behaviour and agency', and to 'reconnect with [their] earlier curiosity about experience and subjectivity'.⁵⁵ This thesis argues that Walter's philosophy occupied a dominant position in the Corps, and this dominance influenced the men's agency within the organisation, and their experiences as commissionaires.

This argument is informed by R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is predicated on the belief that this form of masculinity is not fixed or inviolable; rather, 'it is the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in any given pattern of gender relations a position always contestable'.⁵⁶ Tosh attributes a utility to the concept of hegemonic masculinity 'because it reminds us that masculinity carries a heavy ideological freight [...] it makes socially crippling distinctions not only between men and women but between different categories of men'.⁵⁷ As Connell maintains, hierarchies operate *within* groups of men, and this power structure is maintained through a process of 'dominance and subordination'.⁵⁸ These dynamics as conceived by Connell are historically contingent; different masculinities are in a constant state of interaction with one another.⁵⁹ Thus, she contends that 'different

⁵³ Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer, 'Introduction', in *Masculinity and the Other: Historical Perspectives* ed. by Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 1-18, (p. 1).

⁵⁴ Ben Griffin, 'Perceptions of Crisis in the History of Masculinity: Power and Change in Modern Britain', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, pp. 158-77, (p.159).

⁵⁵ John Tosh, 'The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?', in *What is Masculinity: Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, pp. 17-34 (pp. 18 and 31).

⁵⁶ R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edn., (Routledge, 2020), p. 76.

⁵⁷ John Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity?', in *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 29-58 (p. 44).

⁵⁸ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 78.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

forms of masculinity exist together, and the hegemony of any given form is constantly subject to challenge'.⁶⁰ Connell's concept has not been without its critics, as Griffin highlights.⁶¹ These criticisms are centred on the view that her theorisation of a historical process that sees hegemonic masculinities progressing in a linear fashion, are too simplistic. As Simon Yarrow argues, 'too much emphasis on the discursive claim of particular hegemonic masculinities can obscure our understanding of the social context in which individuals and groups accomplished, maintained and reproduced their gendered claims'.⁶² For Henry French and Mark Rothery the problem is that 'Connell and other scholars working with the theory have conflated transient and changeable social stereotypes with deep-seated and enduring forms of hegemony'.⁶³

These criticisms are surely correct in this; grand narratives are not always helpful in mapping how masculinities were experienced by different groups of men that sat outside these stereotypes, nor do they reflect the complex reality whereby class and other markers interact with masculine identities. Martin Francis's critique of the scholarship regarding the impact of domestication on the formation of masculinities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century substantiates this.⁶⁴ He argues that when viewed together this scholarship combined narrative of 'domestication, reaction, and ultimate re-domestication is not without merit', but historians must be alive to nuances in men's behaviour and the apparent contradictions that this gave rise to in the inter-war period.⁶⁵ He observes that 'While the authors of male adventure stories appeared to find it necessary to denude their narratives of domestic material, this did not preclude their books being read by suburban fathers who would only an hour ago or so previously, have been found tending their gardens or reading bedtime stories to their daughters.'⁶⁶

Objections such as this, prompt Griffin to suggest that 'hegemonic masculinity is an ideal that does not necessarily describe any real men'.⁶⁷ He does however offer suggestions as to how historians can make use of the model to analyse power relations over time. The most

⁶⁰ Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Polity Press, 2000), p. 54.

⁶¹ Ben Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem', *Gender & History*, 30.2 (2018), pp. 377–400, (pp. 380–84).

⁶² Simon Yarrow, 'Masculinity as a World Historical Category of Analysis', *What is Masculinity*, pp. 114–138 (p. 119).

⁶³ Henry French and Mark Rothery, 'Hegemonic Masculinities? Assessing Change and Process of Change in Elite Masculinity, 1700–1900', in *What is Masculinity*, pp. 139–166 (p. 142).

⁶⁴ Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century British Masculinity', *The Historical Journal*, 45.3 (2002), pp. 637–652.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 641.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 643.

⁶⁷ Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem', p. 384.

pertinent suggestion for this study is addressing the problem of scale. He urges us to look beyond hegemonies that operate at a societal level, arguing that it is more profitable to recognise that multiple masculinities operate across multiple social formations within the same society.⁶⁸

The workplace is certainly one of these formations. As Tosh argues, 'occupational communities [have been] the foundation of a confident masculine identity'.⁶⁹ Indeed, Helen Smith's study of the post war steel industry of South Yorkshire demonstrates how, 'work and the workplace [act] as [important] sites of both collective and individual identity'.⁷⁰ Smith's arguments around the importance of the everyday are important; she demonstrates why historians should focus on the daily realities of how men experience masculinities, and the impact that this has on their lives. However, she is perhaps too quick to reject the theory of hegemonic masculinity, with her assertion that 'it needs rethinking to take into account the intersectionality of gender with other identities'.⁷¹

There is compelling evidence of how hegemonic masculinity has been usefully applied by historians to the masculinities of the workplace. First, Wendy Gagen's study of the Eastern and Associated Telegraph Companies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries points to the importance of company culture, how it created a masculine ideal and communicated the benefits of adopting this ideal to its staff.⁷² In addition, there is Julie Anderson's analysis of the work schemes created by the St Dunstan's home for blind ex-servicemen. She argues that men's participation in these schemes was contingent on them conforming to the charity's ideal of a stoical response to their disability; this idealised response had been created by St Dunstan's to allow it to promote itself to the public. Anderson shows how not all of the men who were helped by the charity could uphold this ideal as they adjusted to their disability, and the impact that this had on their lives compared to their colleagues who could fulfil the identity of the stoic.⁷³ And Albert J. Mills highlights how British Airways co-opted wartime conceptions of the masculinity of the British fighter

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.387.

⁶⁹ John Tosh, 'Reflection: Masculinities and History for the Present', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, pp. 178-82 (p. 182).

⁷⁰ Helen Smith, 'Reimagining Working-Class Masculinities In The Twentieth Century', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, pp. 136-157, (p. 136).

⁷¹ Ibid., p.138

⁷² Wendy Gagen, "'Not Another Hero.'" The Eastern and Associated Telegraph Companies' Creation of the Heroic Company Man', in *Men After War*, ed. by Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper, (Routledge, 2013), pp. 92-110.

⁷³ Julie Anderson, 'Stoics, Creating Identities at St Dunstan's, 1914-1920,' in *Men After War*, pp. 79-91.

pilot to launch the company in the 1920s, and how this relied on the identity of the white heterosexual fighter pilot of the First World War.⁷⁴

From the perspective of the contemporary workplace, Barbara Plester demonstrates the impact on men who are unwilling to contribute to a homophobic and misogynistic work culture.⁷⁵ Furthermore, military sociologists have highlighted the role played by gender in forging identity. These studies have been undertaken within contemporary military organisations, and this work indicates the role played by conventions specific to these environments; rank and professionalism foster multiple masculinities, while the repetition of routine tasks such as drill and inspections solidify these relationships.⁷⁶ As we will see throughout this study, these constitutive elements of military masculine identity were all present in the Corps by design and used to uphold the power relations in the organisation. Therefore, this study develops this contemporary analysis of the military, by applying it to a historical quasi-military environment that adopted the emerging regimental traditions of the British army and are still present in armies today.

Informed by these workplace studies, this thesis takes inspiration from these workplaces studies of hegemonic masculinity, and applies Connell's model within the occupational environment of the Corps, where the representation of the commissionaire brand was the very foundation of its being. In doing so this thesis seeks to demonstrate how applicable it is to an analysis of working class masculinity, and thus offer a counterpoint to the objections put forward by Smith which have been outlined above.

In addition to applying gender to its analysis of the Corps' organisational structure and the exercise of power within it, this thesis uses its gendered lens to evaluate the business impact of the marketing and promotion of the commissionaire system. In doing so, it responds to Katrina Honeyman's argument that by adopting a gendered approach, the 'historian can learn how notions of masculinity are manipulated to sell goods'.⁷⁷ Taking its cue from that argument, this study views the commissionaires' collective identity as a gendered brand. In

⁷⁴ Albert J. Mills, 'Cockpits, Hangars, Boys and Galleys: Corporate Masculinities and the Development of British Airways', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 5.3 (1998), pp. 72-188.

⁷⁵ Barbara Plester, "'Take it like a man!'" Performing hegemonic masculinity through organizational humour', *ephemera* 15(3), August 2015, pp. 537-559.

⁷⁶ Marcia Kovitz, 'The Roots of Military Masculinity', in *Military Masculinities – Identity and the State*, ed. by Paul Higate (Prager Publishers, 2003), pp. 1-13 (pp. 8-9); Frank J Barrett, 'The Organisational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3.3 (1996), pp. 129- 142 ; Annica Kronsell, 'Gendered Practices in Institutions of Hegemonic Masculinity', in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7.2 (2005), pp. 280-298.

⁷⁷ Katrina Honeyman, 'Doing Business with Gender: Service Industries and British Business History', *Business History Review*, 81.4 (2007), pp. 471-493 (p. 491-'92).

classifying the men's identity in this way, it uses the signifiers of a brand as put forward by Karl Moore and Susan Reid in their study of the historical development of commercial branding practices.⁷⁸ They argue that brands fulfil two purposes: the first 'is as a conveyor of information (origin and quality) regarding goods and/or services to [...] consumers [...] [and as] conveyor[s] of image or meaning (status/power, value and/or personality)'.⁷⁹

For the commissionaires and the system they operated in, this image and meaning were conveyed by the quasi-military identity they adopted, both of which were taken from the traditions of the regimental system of the British army. David French argues that these traditions could appear arcane and of little importance to those outside the army, but they were deemed crucial to those within it. He observes that the regiment was 'conceived as being based upon a shared comradeship that transcended the inequalities of power that existed within it'.⁸⁰ He contends that regiments did not rely solely on rules and regulations to instil discipline and a sense of esprit de corps in its men to maintain these relationships. In addition to the written form of the rule book, in a bid to make its principles 'more concrete and visible [...] [regiments utilised] a combination of physical symbolism and public ceremonial'.⁸¹ Walter's experience as an army officer would have given him direct knowledge of this approach and its advantages in promoting esprit de corps among the commissionaires. He transposed the army's approach on to the Corps to achieve this, but if the commissionaire system was to succeed commercially, this approach needed to be made meaningful to those outside the Corps. This study analyses how he sought to do this, and the business results that were achieved as a consequence.

However strong the commissionaires' veteran status was through the brand they upheld, this study recognises that the men were commissionaires longer than they were soldiers. Indeed, no matter how indelible the commissionaires' identity as ex-servicemen, they were working class men and this informed their civilian identities. The commissionaires competed alongside other working class men in the Victorian employment market, and commissionaires who were married and had families also contended with the challenges faced by other working class households. As a consequence, this study analyses the commissionaires' experiences in the context of working class life during this period, and this allows it to explore the interrelated themes of workplace control, occupational identity and welfare provision .

⁷⁸ Karl Moore and Susan Reid, 'The Birth of Brand: 4000 years of Branding', *Business History*, 50.4 (2008), pp. 419-32.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

⁸⁰ French, *Military Identities*, p. 79.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Class

The respectable commissioner was an ideal conceived by Walter, and his promotion of it needs to be considered in the context of what Sonya O. Rose termed the 'Victorian cult of respectability'.⁸² As Peter Bailey has observed of this period, 'there can of course be no doubt that respectability was a clearly recognised and much exalted contemporary ideal.'⁸³ As was the case with gender, historians have noted how constructions of respectability in this period could often be based around relational claims between one group and another. For Walter this relied on positioning the respectable commissioner in relation to the image held in some quarters of the disreputable veteran. This was, as Julie-Marie Strange has observed, a common rhetorical device in contemporary discussions around working class respectability.⁸⁴

Furthermore, this device was appropriated by working class men themselves to lend legitimacy to their claims, as the following three examples illustrate. Rose indicates how it was used in the workplace as trade unions sought to further their interests through negotiations with their middle class employers. As she notes, the language of respectability provided a 'cultural script through which conflict between capital and labour was played out'; it therefore differentiated the claimants from non-respectable members of the working class.⁸⁵ This technique was also evident in the political sphere. As Robert Saunders has observed, in adopting the language of 'respectability', working class leaders who campaigned for political reform created an exclusive social group. This group was defined as much by what it wasn't as by what it embodied, and thus members of the respectable working class were defined by these reformers in 'opposition to paupers, criminals and those in positions of dependence'.⁸⁶

This discourse was also appropriated by friendly societies. These voluntary societies were clubs organised as mutual societies that men could contribute to, in order to provide sickness and burial insurance. As Simon Cordery notes, they were predicated on a

⁸² Sonya O. Rose, 'Respectable Men, Disorderly Others: The Language of Gender and the Lancashire Weaver Strike of 1878 in Britain', *Gender & History*, 5.3 (1993), pp. 382-97 (p. 383).

⁸³ Peter Bailey, "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?'" Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-class Respectability', *Journal of Social History*, 12.3 (1979), pp. 336-353, (p. 338).

⁸⁴ In her study of working class grief and funeral practices in this period, she notes how 'definitions of the "respectable funeral" were usually set in opposition to the pauper burial'; see Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 7.

⁸⁵ Rose, 'Respectable Men, Disorderly Others,' p. 385.

⁸⁶ Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867: The making of the Second Reform Act* (Ashgate, 2011), p. 19.

'redefining [of] respectability in a collective working class context'.⁸⁷ They provided insurance, which exemplified the self-reliance of their members and which was consistent with middle class conceptions of respectability. This respectability, though, was celebrated in the working class social environments; these societies often met in pubs and the convivial drinking associated with this formed an important part of their attraction to members. That said, the social life of the societies often involved more than just drinking; they fostered a sense of brotherhood, and their regalia and rituals – most notably, processions often organised around public holidays – provided the opportunity for their members to claim a social superiority over their fellow working class men.⁸⁸ To be a member of a friendly society, observes Paul Johnson, was to acquire 'the badge of the skilled worker, but the badge had to be properly paraded if the maximum amount of social prestige was to be gained'.⁸⁹ The intention of the displays was to communicate the idea that the societies' members came from a different social grouping. In the same way, as noted by Saunders above, we see the device of emphasising what the men were as much as what they were not.

These examples of the trade unionist, the political campaigner and the friendly society member indicate the levels of autonomy working class men could fashion for themselves, in how they located themselves in the middle class construct of respectability. The environments these men occupied illustrate what Bailey describes as 'situational contexts [...] [which] enable[d] the individual to manipulate the social order'.⁹⁰ The members of the friendly societies had taken elements of respectability and fashioned them to their own ends. As Cordery notes, 'friendly societies used respectability to forge an arena of autonomy for working class mutualism'.⁹¹

Not all working-class men had this autonomy owing to the workforces they were part of, yet they enjoyed high levels of welfare provided by their employers; this placed the men on an equal footing with members of the most well-funded friendly societies. The purpose of this provision was to imbue these men with middle class conceptions of respectability in order to deliver a sense of legitimacy in the organisations they worked for. In return for this provision these men submitted themselves to a high level of control by their employers. Walter would claim to clients that the Corps' approach to discipline was different to other organisations. However, it was far from exceptional in its use of discipline to regulate its workforce. As

⁸⁷ Simon Cordery, 'Friendly Societies and the Discourse of Respectability in Britain, 1825-1875', *Journal of British Studies*, 34.1 (1995), pp. 35-58 (p. 35).

⁸⁸ Paul Johnson, *Saving and Spending: The Working Class Economy in Britain, 1870-1939* (Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 65-66.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁹⁰ Bailey, "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?'" , p. 349.

⁹¹ Cordery, 'Friendly Societies and the Discourse of Respectability', p. 40.

Christopher Dandeker notes, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of large-scale enterprises in industrialising economies, and a number of these companies established bureaucratic systems to control the behaviour of their rapidly expanding workforces.⁹² This was a period which as Pieter Spierenburg reminds us, in the wake of the emergence of the industrial economy 'a new system of social control became firmly established'.⁹³

The most notable of these workforces were the employees of the railways and Post Office, and the police forces of this period.⁹⁴ There are parallels with each of these and the Corps whose success relied on the support of middle class clients. Mike Savage observes of the railway industry, that it needed to convince middle class customers not just that they could trust the physical infrastructure, but that they could also trust the railway companies' working class employees to operate the system.⁹⁵ When it came to engendering public confidence in these employees, appearance was deemed crucial, and the adoption of a quasi-military uniform played a key part. As Frank McKenna comments, 'this was the uniformed, polished and shaven railwayman. Before the coming of the railway, many workers were characterised by their fustian jackets, unshorn chins and a tendency to drink heavily'.⁹⁶ When it came to instilling behavioural discipline in the men, the rule book occupied a central importance that regulated their behaviour in 'great detail and precision'.⁹⁷ Patrick Joyce has similarly noted the importance of a quasi-military uniform for Post Office employees, and the role of the organisation's staff rules in regulating the men's behaviour.⁹⁸ Indeed he argues that the adoption of quasi-military uniforms and good-conduct stripes ensured that its letter carriers were as visible as possible to the public, which was a key aspect of regulating the men's

⁹² Christopher Dandeker, *Surveillance, Power and Modernity: Bureaucracy and Discipline from 1700 to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 176-183.

⁹³ Pieter Spierenburg 'Introduction', in *Social Control in Europe: Vol 2, 1800-2000*, ed. by Clive Emsley, Eric Johnson and Peter Spierenburg (Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 1-20 (p. 14).

⁹⁴ The size of these workforces was significant; the numbers employed in the railway industry has been estimated at around 500,000 by the end of the nineteenth century, by the early 1890s the number of people working for the Post Office was 137,000 (113,500 of these were men), , and by the mid- 1880s the number of policemen nationally was around 53,000 men, see Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'Paternalism Reinvented in Victorian England,' in *Social Control in Europe: Vol 2* , pp. 70-92 (FN 17, p.89).

⁹⁵ Mike Savage, 'Discipline, Surveillance and the "Career": Employment on the Great Western Railway, 1833-1914,' in *Foucault, Management and Organisation Theory: From Panopticon to Technologies of the Self*, ed. by Alan McKinlay and Ken Starkey (Sage Publications, 1998), p. 76.

⁹⁶ Frank McKenna, 'Victorian Railway Workers', *History Workshop*, 1 (1976), pp. 26-73 (p. 26).

⁹⁷ Savage, 'Discipline, Surveillance and the "Career"', p. 76.; see also PW Kingsford, 'Industrial Relations', in , *Victorian Railwayman: The emergence and growth of railway labour, 1830-1870*, (Routledge, 2006) pp. 64-87.

⁹⁸ Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State Since 1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 131-32; see also Martin Daunt, *Royal Mail, the Post Office Since 1840* (The Athlone Press, 1985), pp. 254-59.

behaviour.⁹⁹ Martin Daunton notes that this was a successful practice that motivated the workforce and was instrumental in the organisation's good reputation with the public.¹⁰⁰

Clive Emsley observes of the formation of the 'new' police forces of this period how positive coverage in the press played an important role in establishing a good reputation with the middle class, which bred confidence in the English 'bobby'.¹⁰¹ As was the case with the Post Office, this was an occupational identity that owed much to the adoption of quasi-military traditions in the form of its uniforms, the way in which it drilled its men and the hierarchies the police constables worked in. As Chris A. Williams notes of the system of regulation, 'the new policeman [was] defined by a manual [...] [which] described the type of person that the police officer is supposed to be, or become'.¹⁰² Therefore the ultimate aim of this bureaucracy was, as Haia Shpayer-Makov argues, to enable the force to recruit men of the right calibre; that is, individuals who would not only be willing to internalise the values and ethos of the organisation they were joining, but would also 'appear respectable to the public'.¹⁰³ She notes that the men in the Metropolitan Police of this period were 'the object of regimented control by police management'.¹⁰⁴ The role of the police uniform in symbolising this is noted by Clare Sandford-Couch, who argues that the aspects of the policeman's physical identity 'could be used as a "visual shorthand" [...] through which the status and values of the new police could be made public'.¹⁰⁵ This study's exploration of the role played by the Corps' visual spectacle and the organisation's regulations in delivering on the promise of the commissionaire brand builds on these studies by providing insights into an occupational identity that has not previously been analysed in this way.

Occupational control could extend beyond the workplace and into employees' lives through the provision of welfare by employers in many of the large companies and organisations of this period.¹⁰⁶ As Shpayer-Makov argues, paternalistic systems of welfare offered a highly efficient way of controlling workforces during this period to enhance their performance; it was

⁹⁹ Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom*, pp. 132.

¹⁰⁰ Daunton, *Royal Mail*, pp. 254-59.

¹⁰¹ Clive Emsley, 'The English Bobby: an Indulgent Tradition', in *Myths of the English*, ed. by Roy Porter (Polity Press, 1992), pp. 114-35.

¹⁰² Chris A. Williams, *Police Control Systems in Britain, 1775-1975: From Parish Constable to National Computer* (Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 41.

¹⁰³ Haia Shpayer-Makov, *The Making of a Policeman: A Social History of a Labour Force in Metropolitan London; 1829-1914* (Ashgate, 2002), p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Clare Sandford-Couch, 'Policemen and their Moustaches: (Self-) Fashioning Professional Identity in Nineteenth Century Newcastle-Upon-Tyne', *Northern History*, 6.2 (2023), pp. 227-49 (p. 247), doi:10.1080/0078172X.2023.2195451

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Melling, 'Welfare Capitalism and the Origins of Welfare States: British Industry, Workplace Welfare and Social Reform, c. 1870-1914', *Social History*, 17.3, (1992), pp. 453-78 (p. 477).

the 'carrot' alongside the regulatory 'stick' of the rule book.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, when it came to the welfare provision of the Metropolitan Police, he argues that it gave rise to a system whereby 'compliance with organisational imperatives [were] compensated by economic security for life'.¹⁰⁸ The Corps' system of welfare provision can be viewed in this way both in terms of the levels of control inherent in the organisation's welfare system, the aim of the system and how it acted to communicate the respectability of the commissionaire to middle class employers.

Disability

If these workplaces exerted an ever growing level of control over their workforces, then another group were controlled by their lack of work and the economic marginalisation that came with this; this was the disabled. The founding members of the Corps were all amputees having lost an arm due to their military service, and their identity was central to the organisation's initial publicity through Walter's letters to *The Times* as we have previously seen. The Corps was set up to specifically find work for these men, and the way in which their interests were promoted to their potential middle class employers was radical, in that it went against the prevailing attitudes of the nondisabled towards those with disabilities during this period. How then can these attitudes be characterised and how can this study contribute to the existing historiography of disability in this period?

The most significant of these attitudes in terms of its impact on the wellbeing of the disabled of this period, was centred around employment. As Martha Stoddard Holmes notes, 'most nondisabled people resisted the idea that disabled people could work... [and] given this cultural context, how could a person with a disability build a life of economic stability, much less develop a satisfying sense of self?'¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, as Ryan Sweet observes, this was a period 'where physical wholeness was so heavily valued, those who were missing limbs often found work hard to come by'.¹¹⁰ In a society that valued work and placed it as the cornerstone of respectability, to not be in employment could result in a level of exclusion that threatened a disabled individual's claim for citizenship. The philanthropic response to this, whilst well meaning, may have provided employment for some disabled people, but as Anne

¹⁰⁷ Shpayer-Makov, 'Paternalism Reinvented', pp. 70-92.

¹⁰⁸ Shpayer-Makov, *The Making of a Policeman*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁹ Martha Stoddard Holmes, 'Working (with) the Rhetoric of Affliction: Autobiographical Narratives of Victorians with Physical Disabilities,' in *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*, ed. by James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), pp.27-44 (p. 27).

¹¹⁰ Ryan Sweet, *Prosthetic Body Parts in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), p. 129.

Borsay reminds us, this work could often place the disabled on a 'stereotyped spectrum of economic activities'; these activities were most likely to be home based and centred around often menial and low paying work such as basket making.¹¹¹ The low wages typically associated with this kind of work and the seclusion that came with it through home working did little to address the poverty of the disabled people.¹¹²

Some disabled people they had no choice but to seek employment outside of the home and they could find themselves equally marginalised. As Bernard Gleeson observes, disabled people such as the commissionaires were often excluded from the mainstream economy. He notes how contemporary accounts of Victorian street life invariably featured disabled people, so that the 'disabled beggar or trader is usually an element within the kaleidoscopic backdrop of furious modern street-life'.¹¹³ This presence was borne out of necessity for many who may have had to resort to begging, or what he describes as 'petty street trading'.¹¹⁴ As a consequence of this, he argues that for many disabled people during this period, the 'street was a place of subsistence as much as it was a stage that constantly retold the story of their social difference and exclusion'.¹¹⁵ As we have seen the messenger posts that the commissionaires occupied were on London's streets and the opportunity for this study is to contribute to Gleeson's analysis to understand how the Corps was able to position the commissionaires such that they did not suffer from the exclusion that he demonstrates. In addition, this study seeks to demonstrate how the services offered by the Corps did not fall within the stereotypical spectrum described by Borsay, and overcome the prejudicial attitudes highlighted by her and others.

For many, the nature of their job led to disability. Amy W Farnbach Pearson notes that due to the nature of their jobs and housing, members of the working class were significantly more likely to be disabled than the middle or upper classes of this period.¹¹⁶ However, exclusion from the workplace did not befall all men who became disabled through work. certain types of disabled workers could find themselves working alongside the nondisabled. For David Turner and Daniel Blackie, the evidence of this offers a counterpoint to the narrative that the inevitable result of industrialisation, was that disabled people were forced out of the

¹¹¹ Anne Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750: a History of Exclusion*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 123.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹¹³ Bernard Gleeson, *Geographies of Disability*, (Routledge, 1999), p. 110.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹¹⁶ Amy W. Farnbach Pearson, 'Restoration and Usefulness: Victorian middle class attitudes towards the healthcare of the working poor', in *Disability and the Victorians: Attitudes, interventions and legacies*, ed. by Iain Hutchinson, Martin Atherton and Jaipreet Wirdi, (Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.21-37, (p. 21).

workplace, they describe claims such as this as ‘empirically dubious’.¹¹⁷ Certainly their account of the role played by disabled people in the factory reform movement of the mid nineteenth century; Turner and Blackie’s analysis challenges the stereotypes of this period that characterised the ‘factory cripple’, as defenceless, lacking in agency and worthy only of pity.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, their study of disability in the coal economy of this period. demonstrates that that inclusion of disabled miners could lead them to being reintegrated back into their communities.¹¹⁹ They observe that there were two kinds of disability that coal workers could face: occupational and general disability.¹²⁰ The former meant the individual ‘was unable to pursue their normal employment due to ill health or injury’, while the latter ‘meant [that] a person was totally incapacitated from *any* [original emphasis] kind of work.’¹²¹ They illustrate that when disabled coalminers were unable to return to their former jobs underground, they could still be assimilated back into the coal industry, through working in less arduous positions above ground. While these positions could also be taken by children and the elderly, roles such as offered disabled coal miners an opportunity to reclaim their masculinity through work.¹²² Integration like this is indicative of mutuality within these communities which ultimately gave rise to a trade union movement which conferred generous support on disabled miners.¹²³

This type of inclusion was not the case with all industries. Jamie Bronstein relates how a contemporary trade union publication characterised the experiences of individuals disabled through working in the railway industry.¹²⁴ The publication claimed that ‘what made the lives of the disabled so “wretched” and “lingering” was the decision of railway owners to relegate amputees to employment only out of sight [...] to avoid offending public sensibilities’.¹²⁵ There were likely commercial considerations that lay behind this, after all if this was an

¹¹⁷ David M. Turner and Daniel Blackie, ‘Disability and political activism in industrialising Britain, c. 1830–1850’, *Social History*, 47.2 (2022), pp. 117–140 (p.120), doi:10.1080/03071022.2022.2044202

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

¹¹⁹ David Turner and Daniel Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution: Physical Impairment in British Coalmining, 1788–1880*, (Manchester University Press, 2018), pp.23–54.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 36–7.

¹²² Ibid., pp. 36–40.

¹²³ Turner and Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution*, p.190; see also Ben Curtis and Steven Thompson, ‘“A Plentiful crop of cripples made by all this progress”: Disability, Artificial Limbs and Working Class Mutualism in the South Wales Coalfield, 1890–1948’, *Social History of Medicine*, 27.4 (2014), pp. 708–727, doi:10.1093/shm/hku009

¹²⁴ Jamie Bronstein, *Caught in the Machinery, Workplace Accidents and Injured Workers in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 88.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 88.

industry seeking to establish a legitimacy for its proletarian workforce, presenting its customers with evidence of the danger and harm that this workforce encountered on a daily basis could well undermine claims around the safety of rail transport. This marginalisation of amputees was not limited to the railways.

As Susan Burch and Lindsay Patterson observe, 'As co-constituting concepts, gender and disability reflect specific cultural beliefs within historically and geographically situated environments.'¹²⁶ This process had especially negative consequences for male amputees such as the founding members of the Corps. Erin O'Connor observes, 'Victorian ideals of health, particularly of male health, centred on the concept of physical wholeness: a strong vigorous body was a primary signifier of manliness.'¹²⁷ Indeed, she demonstrates that a missing limb for some men could lead to a feminisation from contemporary medical observers owing to the condition of phantom limbs.¹²⁸ She notes that prosthetics offered men the prospect of 'restoring' their bodies to its original state of wholeness, and through this reclaim their masculinity; indeed 'Victorians situated the prosthetic reassembly of the body as the natural end point of amputation.'¹²⁹ This opportunity was denied to the commissionaires. As we will see in the next chapter the provision of prosthetics to the ordinary soldier was a very rare occurrence, and when a man of this rank did receive one it was likely down to charity; the price of these items, even the most rudimentary were beyond the means of these men, unlike their officers. This study will examine what opportunities the Corps offered amputees from the army's rank and file, and how these opportunities developed across the period of this study. It will examine if the provision of work acted as a form of 'prosthetic' by allowing disabled commissionaires to reclaim their masculinity through their labour in the mainstream economy, and whether the relationship with their nondisabled colleagues gave rise to the type of communality that was evident in the coalmining communities of this period.

Business

There is a consensus among business historians that the mid to late nineteenth century witnessed an explosion in the volume and complexity of marketing messages. Changes in technology were a key driver of this and, as Anat Rosenberg has noted of the emergence of mass advertising during this period, 'many features of advertising were new and felt new,

¹²⁶ Susan Burch and Lindsey Patterson, 'Not Just Any body: Disability, Gender, and History', *Journal of Women's History*, 25.4 (2013), pp. 122 -137 (p. 123).

¹²⁷ Erin O'Connor, *Raw Material: Producing Pathology in Victorian Culture* (Duke University Press, 2000), p. 104.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.113-5.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.105 and 117.

images expanded in complexity [...] visual style[s] left no cultural association untapped'.¹³⁰ These changes were most in evidence in outdoor poster advertising and press advertising in print and periodicals, and these media were enthusiastically adopted by consumer brands; first, as Ross Petty has noted, by medicine, tobacco and alcohol brands, but by the 'turn of the century, the practice [of brand marketing] appears widespread'.¹³¹ Indeed, as Roy Church and Christine Clark highlight in their study of packaged goods manufacturers during this period, marketing dominated product innovation when it came to driving commercial success.¹³²

John Mercer's analysis of branding in this period delivers a similar focus on these product areas, which reflects the dominance of this type of marketing.¹³³ These studies provide a useful context for understanding the increasing sophistication of marketing practices during this period. Furthermore, while their work focuses on products rather than services, Petty and Mercer's analyses offer insight into the motivations of business owners that can be applied to Walter in how he sought to protect the commissionaire brand. The research that has been of most benefit to this thesis is Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange and Bertrand Taithe's study of the marketing and promotional strategies employed by British charities during this period.¹³⁴ Their work draws attention to the innovative marketing techniques employed by these organisations, and this provides a much-needed balance to the business histories of this period that have focused on the marketing of consumer goods.

Many of the techniques these charity brands employed were utilised by the Corps. By exploring the role they played in the organisation's development, this study provides an additional case study of the role of innovative marketing in developing a philanthropic brand during this period. In particular, this thesis's focus on the creation of a visual identity for the commissionaire brand, and how it was used to drive publicity, adds fresh insight into how cultural phenomena have been harnessed for the purposes of brand marketing.

¹³⁰ Anat Rosenberg, *The Rise of Mass Advertising: Law, Enchantment and the Cultural Boundaries of British Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 1-2. See also Moore and Reid, 'The Birth of Brand: 4000 years of Branding', p. 429.

¹³¹ Ross D. Petty, 'A History of Brand Identity, Protection and Marketing', in *The Routledge Companion to Marketing History* (Routledge, 2016), ed. by Brian DG Jones and Mark Tadajewski, pp. 97-114 (p. 104).

¹³² Roy Church and Christine Clark, 'Product Development of Branded Packaged Household Goods in Britain, 1870-1914: Colman's, Reckitt's, and Lever Brothers', *Enterprise and Society* 2. 3 (2001): pp. 503-542.

¹³³ John Mercer, 'A Mark of Distinction: Branding and Trade Mark Law in the UK from the 1860s', *Business History*, 52.1, (2010), pp. 17-42 (p. 19).

¹³⁴ Sara Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange and Bertrand Taithe, *The Charity Market and Humanitarianism in Britain, 1870-1912*, (Bloomsbury, 2019).

Sources and methodology

This thesis is the first academic study to make use of the Corps' archive, which covers the first 150 years of the organisation's operations, from its inception in 1859 through to 2009, by which time it was known as Corps Security.¹³⁵ The structure of the archive is broadly consistent with the way business archives are typically organised around topics, each of which, as Alan McKinlay notes, falls within a hierarchy.¹³⁶ This ordering begins with financial records, board papers, correspondence to senior figures within the organisation, data and contracts, personnel records and, finally, photographs and miscellaneous items. The documents within each of these categories are then arranged chronologically.¹³⁷ Yet as he goes on to remind us, however standard this taxonomy appears, an organisational archive is not a 'passive repository of dead files [it is] an active agent shaping the way that the present and future are codified and constructed'.¹³⁸ However, it is not always easy to highlight this historical process in action. As Stephanie Decker observes, the majority of business archives do not lend themselves to an ethnographic approach, that is for the 'researcher to reconstruct the embedded rules of knowledge production'.¹³⁹ As Matthew S Hull similarly notes, the standard appearance of bureaucratic documents belies the complexity of the processes that guided their production; they should be viewed by the researcher as being 'constitutive of bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge, practices, subjectivities, objects, outcomes and even the organisations themselves'.¹⁴⁰

The analysis of the extant documents produced and collated during the period of this study – 1859 to 1895 – provides an example of where this type of reconstruction has been possible. By locating the embedded rules within the Corps' documents, it is clear that their contemporaneous collation, as well as the nature of these materials, indicate the active role played by Walter in constructing an archive that reflected how he wanted his contribution to the Corps to be understood. This highlighted two factors: the first was his desire to assemble documents that would reflect the dominant position he wanted his philosophy to occupy

¹³⁵ The Corps of Commissioners rebranded as Corps Security in 2008 to better reflect its activities as a provider of security products to businesses. See: < <https://www.corpssecurity.co.uk/about-corps-security/corps-security-history> > [accessed 23 June 2026].

¹³⁶ Alan McKinlay, 'Following Foucault into the Archives: Clerks, Careers and Cartoons', *Management and Organisational History*, 8.3 (2013), pp. 137-154, (p. 141), doi:10.1080/17449359.2012.761498.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 141.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 141.

¹³⁹ Stephanie Decker, 'The Silence of the Archives: Business History, Post-colonialism and Archival Ethnography', *Management and Organisational History*, 8.2 (2013), pp. 155-173 (p. 157), doi:10.1080/17449359.2012.761491.

¹⁴⁰ Matthew S Hull, 'Documents and Bureaucracy', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012), pp. 251-267 (p. 253), doi:10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.104953.

inside the Corps – they were an expression of his power. This is most apparent in the sheer volume of his business correspondence in the archive, which amounts to upwards of 250 letters. These letters with three groups of individuals: private supporters of the Corps (including employers), the senior leadership of the British army and various figures within the Charity Organisation Society (hereafter the COS). The vast majority of this correspondence is Walter's own – very few copies of the letters he was responding to, or his correspondents' replies, have been retained, and thus we see further evidence of the importance he placed on preserving expressions of his power.

The second factor was Walter's desire that these letters be retained for posterity, which is indicated by the importance he placed on this material – the efforts made to ensure their continued accessibility are evident. This can be seen in the manner in which a large number of these letters were transcribed into two copy books of correspondence. These copy books cover the periods 1868 to 1877, and 1877 to 1898, and the first page of the second instructs the Corps' officers to ensure that Walter's most important letters are transcribed into this book and grouped alphabetically according to their recipients and the relevant page numbers recorded.¹⁴¹ Walter evidently viewed his correspondence as having a historical significance, as this rule, which was embedded in the second copy book, makes clear. The materiality of these copy books also indicates the importance he placed on posterity; they are large, heavy, bound in leather, clearly designed to be retained and to protect the copies of the correspondence within their covers.

These letters constitute ego documents, which, in organisational settings – such as the Corps' archive – have been defined by Morten Tinning and Christina Lubinski as documents that 'reveal the historical self as a feeling and thinking being in the world'.¹⁴² Recognising this level of agency is important for this study's analysis of Walter's correspondence, which indicates just how dogmatic his approach was. This was somewhat out of kilter with the style of correspondence typically associated with men of Walter's social background in the nineteenth century. As Nancy W Ellenberger notes, these individuals were 'conditioned, as professionals increasingly were [...] to repress feelings and write with remoteness and dispatch'.¹⁴³ In contrast, aspects of his didactic personality do appear in these letters, and these will be highlighted as part of this analysis. The purpose of this is not to view them as

¹⁴¹ LMA/4777/B/03/02/058, Letter book: Formal letters to and from the Founder, 1877-1898, p. 1.

¹⁴² Morten Tinning and Christina Lubinski, 'Ego-documents in Management and Organizational History', *Management and Organisational History*, 17.3-4. (2022), pp. 166-188, (p.167), doi:10.1080/17449359.2022.2158107.

¹⁴³ Nancy W. Ellenberger, 'Constructing George Wyndham: Narratives of Aristocratic Masculinity in Fin-de-Siècle England', *Journal of British Studies*, 39.4 (2000), pp. 487-517 (p. 489).

components of what Ellenberger refers to as the construction of a 'kind of interior biography'.¹⁴⁴ Rather, it is to demonstrate Walter's moralistic attitudes, in particular how they suffused the manner in which the Corps was organised and their impact on the commissionaires themselves. These attitudes indicate the importance he placed on the commissionaires' respectability. However, while presented as absolutes, there were, as we will see, often inconsistencies in the way these attitudes were shared with his correspondents. Through highlighting these, along with a commentary on the coercive principles that underpinned his conception of respectability, a critical analysis of his correspondence is delivered, rather than simply a narrative account of these documents.

Five other extant sources are utilised by this study. First, the *Rules*; these booklets codified the behaviour of the commissionaires across a range of areas – their duties both in and outside of work, their compulsory participation in the Corps' regular parades and inspections, their appearance and their mandatory financial contributions to the Corps' welfare funds. Alongside this, the disciplinary framework of fines and the grounds for dismissal were detailed, as well as the role played by the senior officers. The level of control evident in these documents provides a clear understanding of how the commissionaire brand was constructed and represented; consequently, the *Rules* are the foundational documents for this study. Central to the analysis of these documents will be the adoption of techniques associated with corporate serial history. These techniques are predicated on identifying 'repeatable facts' and analysing them using replicable techniques within a series of documents across a predetermined period.¹⁴⁵ The purpose and format of the *Rules* were unchanged during the period. Furthermore, while the type of content contained in these documents was consistent – for example, the rules around the commissionaires' uniforms – their formulation was subject to change. Consequently, they fulfil the criteria of being 'repeatable facts', and their analysis will illuminate any evolution in how the Corps expressed its organisational identity and the identity of the commissionaires.

As well as being a detailed summation of the commissionaire brand through their delineation of the regulations that governed the lives of the commissionaires, the *Rules* also fulfilled a performative function. This judgement is based on Michael Heller's typology of sources present within organisational archives such as the Corps. The rule books can be categorised

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 489.

¹⁴⁵ Martin Rowlison, John Hassard and Stephanie Decker, 'Research Strategies for Organizational History: A Dialogue Between Historical Theory and Organization Theory', *Academy of Management Review*, 39.3 (2014), pp. 265-66; see also Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History*, 3rd edn (Polity, 2019), pp. 22-23.

as what Heller calls a 'performative documentary source'.¹⁴⁶ He defines these documentary sources as those that constitute 'traces of organisational discourses and practices which constitute the organisation through their enactment [...] they make the organisation look, smell and feel as it should'.¹⁴⁷ In viewing the *Rules* in this way, this study relies on a close reading of the text to determine not just what it says, but also what it represents. It also considers the form the rule books took, as well as their public distribution, to understand what they represented to individuals who chose not to fully read the text.

The second source is the *Annual Circular and Illustrated Advertiser of The Corps of Commissionaires* (hereafter the *Circular*). This publication was distributed to the public to promote the commissionaires' services and provide a summary of the organisation's annual accounts, as well as list the senior army officers and regiments who supported the Corps and the financial value of their subscriptions. As with Walter's letters, the way in which these documents have been collated underlines the contemporaneous importance placed on preservation and, thus, posterity; they are bound in rich leather and the front cover of each volume features gold embossed lettering that indicates the dates of the circulars within. The *Circular* distilled the commissionaire brand while also giving the Corps legitimacy by the way it publicised its finances.

This emphasis on representation and the role of the performative character of a historical document can also be applied to the *Circulars*, which, based on Heller's typology, are categorised as a 'performative narrative source'.¹⁴⁸ The *Circulars* presented the Corps to the general public and they developed a carefully planned narrative to explain what the organisation was and the services the commissionaires offered. Thus, understanding the design of the *Circulars*, their use of iconography in the form of the Corps' crest, as well as their method of distribution, becomes as important as my reading of the text and understanding the information it imparted to the reader. The third source is a collection of publicity photographs commissioned during this period. These photographs comprise various tableaux that feature small groups of commissionaires, as well as the senior officers of the Corps.

The fourth category of materials analysed is the books of press clippings that collated the coverage the Corps received in contemporary newspapers and periodicals. This coverage comprised newspaper reports regarding individual commissionaires, articles on the aims of

¹⁴⁶ Michael Heller, 'Rethinking Historical Methods in Organization Studies: Organizational Source Criticism', *Organization Studies*, 44.6 (2023), pp. 987-1002 (p. 996-'98), doi: 10.1177/01708406231156978.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 996.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 993-'5.

the Corps and how it worked, accounts of the organisation's parades and inspections, and satirical cartoons that featured fictional commissionaires. While diverse in nature, a common theme runs through these sources – they all included representations of the commissionaires' quasi-military identity. These cuttings books were collated contemporaneously and there are eight volumes that cover the period under analysis. Viewed together, they demonstrate Walter's motivation and his strategy in marketing the commissionaire brand to the public. There are eight books that cover this period and the volume of materials that have been retained underscore the importance that he placed on press coverage for the Corps.

However valuable these cuttings books are as source material, there is a danger of partiality in the types of clippings that were collated by the Corps. Put simply, are the types of publications from which clippings were taken, predisposed to providing the Corps with favourable publicity? This is not the case, as the cuttings books featured were assembled from a broad range of publications that catered to working class and middle class readerships. The breadth is important, as it provides evidence of the size and diversity of the audience that would have read these reports. Newspaper readership grew dramatically in this period, which, as Richard Altick notes, was due to the removal of the remaining tax on newspapers in 1861. The result of this was that 'no longer [...] were daily newspapers beyond the great body of middle-class buyers'.¹⁴⁹ This was reflected in the success of newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily News*, which had achieved circulations of 200,000 and 150,000, respectively, by the 1870s.¹⁵⁰ *The Times* features heavily in these books, which is not surprising, given the Walter family's ownership of the newspaper. This, however, does not devalue the coverage. *The Times* was the most influential British newspaper of this period, as Andrew Hobbs has noted, even as its circulation declined relative to the sales of other newspapers aimed at the middle classes.¹⁵¹

Working class readership of newspapers grew similarly during this period. However, due to the time pressures of work, this group was far more likely to read the Sunday press than daily publications. The *News of the World* and *Weekly Times* were popular among 'artisans and small tradesmen', while the *Weekly Dispatch*, *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper* (hereafter *Reynolds's*) and *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* appealed to a broader working class

¹⁴⁹ Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*, 2nd edn (Ohio State University Press, 1998), pp. 355.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

¹⁵¹ Andrew Hobbs, 'The Deleterious Dominance of The Times in Nineteenth-Century Scholarship', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18.4 (2013), pp. 472-497, doi: 10.1080/13555502.2013.854519.

readership.¹⁵² The circulation of the latter was particularly significant. By 1886, it was selling 750,000 copies per week, which reflected its populist editorial focus on what one contemporary observer described as ‘discontent [...] with everything [...] which is not of the lowest workingman level’ and sensationalist crime reporting.¹⁵³ Each of these newspapers is present in the cuttings books.

Understanding the class differences in the readership of contemporary newspapers is important; it allows for a more nuanced examination of the way in which the working class commissionaires were represented to each publication’s readership. In addition to national newspapers, regional newspapers were also collated in the cuttings books, which reflected the Corps’ expansion outside of London. This process started in 1876 with the opening of a Corps office, or outquarter, in Belfast. By 1895, the Corps had outquarters in all the major provincial cities, employing 727 men, or 33% of the organisation’s total strength.

In addition, the cuttings books feature a variety of commissionaires not just the ‘good’ ones, thus we see reports of men whose criminal behaviour and prosecution would have brought shame on the Corps.¹⁵⁴ However, this breadth of publications alone, and the range of commissionaires that feature in the cuttings books is no guarantee of impartiality in the cuttings books. Therefore, to counter any selectivity in the retention of these materials, I have constructed my own sample from contemporary press coverage using keyword searches. This sample has provided additional source material that sits alongside the press clippings collated by the Corps.¹⁵⁵ The newspaper coverage that each chapter analyses is therefore comprised of clippings from the cuttings books, as well as my own sample.

The final type of document this study engages with is the Corps’ personnel records for the Birmingham branch.¹⁵⁶ The nature of these internal records – including their nomenclature – was directly borrowed from the army; the personal background of each man was entered in the Admissions Roll. In addition, the behaviour of commissionaires who broke the Corps’ rules, and the fines they received, were detailed in the Defaulter’s Book. The records start in 1890, so the amount of data available for analysis is comparatively small. However, it provides rich insight into the men’s service careers, the disciplinary challenges the Corps encountered with some of its members and the measures taken to punish these men. As

¹⁵² Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 356.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

¹⁵⁴ These reports cover crimes such as bigamy, sexual assault, murder and infanticide

¹⁵⁵ The sample was constructed using the *British Library Newspapers* digital archive using a variety of keywords, including ‘Corps of commissionaires’, ‘Commissionaires’ and ‘Edward Walter’.

¹⁵⁶ This is the only branch or outquarter with extant personnel records for this period.

such, they provide the means to offer an impressionistic analysis of the commissionaires in question.

In delivering its analysis, this study is alive to the danger of what Tosh describes as some gender scholars' subordination of 'practice to representation', the results of which, he argues, can result in a 'curiously detached kind of cultural analysis'.¹⁵⁷ Peter Mandler's conception of the 'throw' has provided inspiration for how the analysis of these various materials can be viewed.¹⁵⁸ His concept is a call to arms, so that analysis of cultural texts move beyond an analysis merely of its meaning and what it represents, and as such do not end up being detached. In analysing a text, he argues that cultural historians must consider 'its significance in wider discursive fields: its "throw", its dissemination and influence; that is, the conditions not only of its production but also of its distribution and reception'.¹⁵⁹ The nature of the Corps' archive lends itself to this approach, and my application of Mandler's concept can be best thought of as identifying the degree to which the commissionaire brand was put to work in material contexts in order to sell the concept.

This thesis demonstrates that the Corps did succeed commercially, and it argues that this success was a result of Walter's entrepreneurial skill, which saw him combine his military experience and knowledge with modern marketing techniques. This combination is evident in the way Walter constructed, controlled and communicated the commissionaire brand to sell it to its three constituencies: veterans considering joining the Corps, employers and the army's officer class, which the organisation relied on for financial support. This study focuses on three quantitative indicators measurements to evaluate the Corps' success in selling the commissionaire brand: the number of men the Corps recruited; the types of roles and the value of the wages the organisation secured for the commissionaires from employers; and the money it raised from the army, in the form of subscriptions, to fund the organisation's running costs. It was dedicated to the welfare of its members, but, as these measures of its success indicate, it operated as a hybrid: two parts commercial to one part charity.

¹⁵⁷ John Tosh, 'Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender', in *Masculinities in Politics and War*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, (Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 41-58, (p. 52).

¹⁵⁸ Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1.1 (2004), pp. 94-117, doi:10.1191/1478003804cs0002df.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 96. Mandler's article sparked a fierce debate in the subsequent issues of the journal; see in particular, Colin Jones, 'Peter Mandler's "Problem with Cultural History", or Is Playtime Over?', *Cultural and Social History*, 1.2 (2004), pp. 209-15, doi:10.1191/1478003804cs0012df.

Chapter overview

Chapter 1 analyses the first five years of the Corps' existence. It begins by considering how the welfare of veterans, and particularly those with disabilities, came to be considered a social problem, and how the nature of this problem led to Walter's conception of the commissionaire brand, and the visual identity he constructed for it. It then considers how the commissionaire system was enacted so the brand could be made meaningful to employers. The chapter concludes with an analysis of public attitudes towards the Corps and the role the marketing of the Corps' spectacle played in this.

The Corps' regulations were updated periodically by Walter, and the organisation's rule books provide the primary unit of analysis for Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Each of these chapters analyses the role played by the *Rules* in codifying the commissionaire's identity and how different aspects of it were communicated to the organisation's three constituencies of ex-servicemen, employers and army officers. These chapters demonstrate that the regulations formed a fundamental part of the Corps' publicity strategy. The time period that each of these chapters analyses is 1864 to 1895.

Chapter 2 analyses the conditions of employment in the Corps, the nature of the regulations the men had to conform to, and the economic benefits that came with this, as described in the *Rules*. This chapter also analyses how these regulations were promoted to employers, and the role they played in ensuring they were upheld in order to safeguard the commercial value of the commissionaire brand.

Chapter 3 explores the role welfare provision played in these regulations. It analyses the role of the financial, domestic and bodily discipline to which the men had to conform in order to promote the commissionaires as a respectable body of men. In addition, analysis of Walter's correspondence with Corps staff illustrates the impact of this welfare system on individual commissionaires and their families.

Chapter 4 addresses the role the *Rules* played in securing the financial support of the army, and how Walter used the Corps' selection criteria to argue that the organisation was helping the army address its recruitment issues. The regulations connected to the annual parade are also considered to deliver insight into the role played by these events in forging a shared identity between the commissionaires and the army. In addition, analysis is provided of the press coverage these events generated for the Corps.

Chapter 5 analyses the press coverage the commissioners generated themselves through their everyday working lives. It demonstrates how congruent these representations were with the commissioner brand and argues that this underlines the success of the marketing strategies the Corps adopted to promote the brand to the public. This analysis provides a qualitative measure of the Corps' success which complements the quantitative indicators outlined above.

Chapter 1 – Transitions

The readers of *The Illustrated London News* (hereafter ILN) were provided with an introduction to the commissionaire system in an article published on 12 March 1859, titled 'The Commissionaires'.¹⁶⁰ The significance of the article is that it featured the first published image of the commissionaires. (Figure 1.1) The physical identity of the commissionaires as represented in this illustration, with their amputated arms, confronted the reader with an arresting sight – the men's disability, their military bearing (with their confident and upright stature) and luxuriant beards affirmed their heroism, sacrifice and, above all, their manliness.¹⁶¹ The image, along with the accompanying text, challenged contemporary attitudes towards amputees and their place in the employment market. The article stated that the Corps had been founded to 'furnish a means of employment for maimed pensioners of her Majesty's service' and 'to ensure the good working of the system, a strict code of rules has been drawn up for the guidance of its members, which they are obliged to sign on engagement'.¹⁶²

The importance of these rules was emphasised in an account of the commissionaires' working lives. The article noted that the men paraded at 9am every day before 'being posted at their respective [messenger] stations by the corporal in charge'. Furthermore, it observed that 'on Sundays, they march to church in the morning, parading for this purpose in Trafalgar square [sic], by the statue of Sir Charles Napier'.¹⁶³ Their quasi-military identity was further underscored by the description of their uniform, which was a 'green cloth tunic, with trousers of Oxford mixture, forage cap, belt and a great coat, all supplied by Messrs. Dolan, the military clothiers of St Martin's Lane'.¹⁶⁴ The report noted that the Corps' strength stood at

¹⁶⁰ 'The Commissionaires', *ILN*, 12 March 1859, p. 259.

¹⁶¹ Christopher Oldstone-Moore has commented of this period that, having previously been relegated as unfashionable, a consensus emerged around beards, and why men should cultivate them. This consensus relied on the 'idea that beards were integral to that elemental masculinity which still pertained in the modern age, first by contributing to men's health and vitality, and second by serving as the outward mark of inward qualities — particularly independence, hardiness, and decisiveness- that were the foundations of masculine authority'. See Christopher Oldstone-Moore, 'The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 48.1 (2005), pp. 7-33 (p. 8), doi: 10.2979/VIC.2005.48.1.7

¹⁶² *ILN*, 12 March 1859, p. 259.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 259. Napier was a celebrated army officer who had been born into a distinguished military family, and who had earned a reputation as a reforming general and one who took an active interest in the welfare of the ordinary soldier, see: Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 81-92, and Peter Burroughs, 'An Unreformed Army? 1815-1868', in *The Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. by David G Chandler and Ian Beckett, (Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. 161-86 (p. 170). Thus, the choice of this statue for the men to parade next to would have served to emphasise the commissionaires' former military service.

¹⁶⁴ 'The Commissionaires', *ILN*, 12 March 1859, p. 259.

eighteen men, and that it was anticipated 'that in the course of a few months this will be increased to one hundred [...] and no part of the metropolis left without them'.¹⁶⁵



Figure 1.1 'Metropolitan Commissioners,' *ILN*, 12 March 1859, p. 260.

The embodied utility, dignity and discipline of the men in the illustration indicated that they inhabited a different world to that of William Grayham, the disabled veteran we met in the Introduction. Where his world was characterised by misery and desperation, theirs was a life of respectability and self-reliance based around work.

This chapter examines how the world of the commissioners came into existence, and it demonstrates how the men became a valued element of London's service economy. It argues that this success was the result of the promotional and marketing techniques that

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

Walter developed to promote the commissionaire brand. These techniques were centred on representing the commissionaires as an exceptional body of men, and this exceptionalism was constructed to challenge the negative perceptions of many employers towards ex-servicemen.¹⁶⁶ Where veterans could be held by some employers to be ill-disciplined, unskilled and disreputable, the commissionaires were represented as a disciplined, useful and self-reliant group of men who were deserving of employment. These were the brand attributes that underwrote the value of the commissionaire system the men were part of. The time period for this chapter's analysis is the first five years of the system, 1859 to 1864. These were the Corps' formative years, during which time Walter established the guiding business principles that would come to underpin the organisation's growth. Through its exploration of this period, the chapter provides the foundation for the thematic analysis that follows across the rest of this study.

The chapter begins by exploring public concern for the welfare of the ordinary soldier in the Crimean War. This concern was significantly heightened compared with the last major conflicts the country had been involved in: the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815). As Catriona Kennedy illustrates, public knowledge of these wars was typically mediated by contemporary newspapers, which uncritically published official government accounts of battles and casualties, and thus, for the literate classes, the 'human destruction was filtered through the sanitised language of the battlefield despatch'.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, because the working class supplied the majority of the army and navy's manpower, the consequences of this destruction was most keenly felt by this group. In contrast, most of the middle and upper classes were far more likely to have had only a very limited experience of wartime bereavement and disability, either from within their families or wider social circle. As Kennedy notes, the mortality rate among the rank and file was nearly fifty times greater than it was in the officer class.¹⁶⁸

The Crimean War ended this isolation of the middle and upper classes, and it marked a turning point in the relationship between British society and its army. As Spiers observes, 'after thirty nine years of peace, the home army suddenly became the focal point of public concern'.¹⁶⁹ This concern was fuelled by the rapid advances in technology during the 1850s, which, as Ulrich Keller argues, 'helped construct [a] martial spectacle on an unprecedented [and] technically advanced scale'.¹⁷⁰ These advances ranged across a number of areas,

¹⁶⁶ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 211-21.

¹⁶⁷ Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 180.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁶⁹ Edward Spiers, *The Army and Society: 1815-1914* (Longman, 1980), p. 97.

¹⁷⁰ Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War* (Gordon and Breach, 2001), p. 4.

each of which had implications for the way in which the British public's understanding of the war was mediated.¹⁷¹ At a personal level for those with relatives or friends at the front, improvements in steamships meant that soldiers' mail reached home ever more quickly. Holly Furneaux observes that 'the distance between civilian and martial spheres was reduced...[improved technologies] facilitated regular exchanges of letters and objects [that] allowed soldiers and those at home to participate in significantly overlapping communities of feeling.'¹⁷²

Photography was a nascent technology at the start of the war, so its cumbersome apparatus, and technical limitations did not allow for the production and capture of spontaneous images. Consequently, photographs of the British soldier were staged and formal. Moreover they favoured portrayals of officers rather than the rank and file; when the ordinary soldier did appear, he was typically as an adornment to his superior, and orderlies and attendants were more likely to appear than fighting men.¹⁷³ The most high-profile photographer at the front was Roger Fenton, who was attached to the War Office, and even though he retained the commercial rights to his work, the nature of his photography raised the prospect of his work amounting to government propaganda.¹⁷⁴ As Natalie Houston has remarked, his compositions to the modern viewer 'appear contrived and empty.'¹⁷⁵ One particularly controversial image featured an ensemble of soldiers wearing warm winter uniforms in the hope that this would allay public concern over the poor equipment supplied to the soldiers, but the image was taken in the Spring and thus it presented a highly manipulated account of the soldiers' experience in Crimea. The predominant style of these photographs owed much to the established conventions of military painting, with their focus on portraits and landscape.¹⁷⁶ However, to contemporary audiences they were novel and held a documentary authority, even if this authority was bogus.

It was the press that provided realism and immediacy in its representations. Improvements in telegraphy meant that by the end of the war the time for reports from the front being received in Britain, had reduced from fourteen days to two hours.¹⁷⁷ The public's demand for news

¹⁷¹ For a detailed overview of the impact of technology, see: Yakup Bektas, 'The Crimean War as a Technological Exercise,' *Notes and Records*, 71 (2027), pp. 233-62, doi:10.1098/rsnr.2016.0007

¹⁷² Holly Furneaux, *Military Men of Feeling: Emotion, Touch and Masculinity in the Crimean War* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 13, doi:/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198737834.001.0001

¹⁷³ Keller. *The Ultimate Spectacle*, pp. 121 and 135.

¹⁷⁴ Natalie M. Houston, 'Reading the Victorian Souvenir: Sonnets and Photographs of the Crimean War,' *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14.2 (2001), pp. 353-83, (p. 363-65), doi:/10.1353/yale.2001.0025

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

¹⁷⁶ Orlando Figes, *Crimea: the Last Crusade* (Penguin, 2011), pp. 307-08.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas Smits, 'Looking at the Same World: the European Illustrated Press and the Emergence of a Transnational Visual Culture of the News, 1842-1870' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Radboud University Nijmegen, 2019), p. 184.

coverage soared; new daily newspapers launched and the circulations of illustrated periodicals enjoyed unprecedented growth. By the mid-1850s the combined circulations of these publications, which included titles such as the *ILN* and *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*, stood at around 1,000,000 per week.¹⁷⁸ The former played an influential role in shaping public opinion by publishing the engravings of the artists that it retained at the front. Their work reflected the war far more accurately than Fenton's staged photography; this difference was especially marked when it came to portraying the often desperate privations of the rank and file, particularly during the winter of 1855, when lack of supplies caused public outrage.¹⁷⁹

However popular these visual representations were, it was the newspapers that proved to have the greatest influence in shaping middle class opinion, even if the sales of the most influential publication, *The Times*, had a comparatively small circulation.¹⁸⁰ As Houston, points out, the war became a 'grand national spectacle observed through [journalism] that involved even those with no direct personal ties to the soldiers'.¹⁸¹ Newspapers provided a public forum for Furneaux's 'overlapping communities' to interact and, as Stefanie Markovits notes, this medium 'become the acknowledged vehicle for the dissemination of political opinion'.¹⁸² Public opinion quickly moved from enthusiasm for the war to intense criticism of the way it was being directed by the politicians at home and executed by the army's senior leadership in the field.¹⁸³

Markovits uses the concept of 'participatory journalism' to analyse the form that the public debate took in the contemporary press.¹⁸⁴ She describes how, in reaction to this reporting, newspapers were bombarded with letters from their readers. This correspondence was not just critical of the government and the army, it also devoted itself to offering practical suggestions on what could be done to improve the welfare of the soldiers at the front. Readers offered tips on how the soldiers could paper over the cracks of their draughty wooden huts, they wrote recipes for the men to cook at the front, proffered advice on the best food for their horses, and a letter to *The Times* advised the 'Women of England' on the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 187 and Bektas, *The Crimean War as a Technological Exercise*, p. 248.

¹⁷⁹ Bektas, 'The Crimean War as a Technological Exercise', pp. 238-39, and Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War*, pp. 100-05.

¹⁸⁰ *The Times*'s circulation during the war was in the region of 50,000, see Smits, 'Looking at the same world', p. 187.

¹⁸¹ Natalie M. Houston, 'Reading the Victorian Souvenir', p. 354.

¹⁸² Stefanie Markovits, 'Rushing Into Print: "Participatory Journalism" During the Crimean War', *Victorian Studies* 50.4 (2008), pp. 559-86, p. 562.

¹⁸³ Olive Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics During the Crimean War* (Macmillan, 1967), Chapter 3, pp. 70-93.

¹⁸⁴ Markovits, 'Rushing Into Print', p. 574-75.

quickest way to knit socks for the men at the front.¹⁸⁵ As Markovits states, unlike in previous wars, 'letters were not about memorialising the past but about affecting the present'.¹⁸⁶

A further expression of this phenomenon was *The Times* 'Sick and Wounded Fund,' which offered an opportunity for its readers to act on their concerns by making donations that would provide immediate practical aid to the soldiers in the field, through the provision of better supplies and improved medical aid.¹⁸⁷ The fund was launched in October 1854 and it raised more than £7,000 within the first few weeks of being operational.¹⁸⁸ Consequently, the role occupied by newspapers throughout the Crimean War was very different compared to what it had been in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars; as Orlando Figes observes, this level of interaction between the publications and their readers demonstrated that the 'public [had become] actively involved in the debate about how [the war] should be fought'.¹⁸⁹ And as Keller has noted, 'the Crimean War [was] the first *media* [original emphasis] war in history'.¹⁹⁰ The public discussions this engendered resulted in the issues of the welfare of the rank-and-file soldier occupying a central position in this debate.¹⁹¹

The chapter then moves on to examine how this debate around soldiers' welfare, particularly those who were disabled through their military service, influenced Walter's conception of the commissionaire system, and the regulations that he enacted to deliver public confidence in the commissionaires. This section analyses how he created a positive visual identity for the commissionaires and the disciplinary system that he established to uphold this identity. It demonstrates that this system was designed to address the threat posed by the transgressive commissionaires who chose not to uphold Walter's ideals. The construction of this identity around amputees was radical; as we saw previously, individuals with this impairment could face highly prejudicial attitudes based on their appearance. The depiction of the commissionaires in the *ILN* discussed above, and the analysis of subsequent publicity below, indicates that the men of the Corps were presented with an opportunity to regain their manliness through electing to become commissionaires.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 575-76.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 575.

¹⁸⁷ Stephanie Markovits, *The Crimean War in the British Imagination* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 25, Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, p. 16

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁸⁹ Figes, *Crimea: the Last Crusade*, p. 306.

¹⁹⁰ Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, p. 251

¹⁹¹ Glenn Fisher, 'The Crimea and Indian Mutiny Veterans Associations of the 1890s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cardiff, 2020), pp. 35-7.

This was based around the role of messenger which would fall within Gleeson's classification of 'petty street trading'.¹⁹² As Gareth Steadman Jones notes, the position of messenger was one of the lowliest positions in the street economy and disabled, often older men competed alongside young boys to earn as little as 5s per week.¹⁹³ The services these individuals offered required no specialist knowledge, and the abundant supply of labour could quickly undermine any advantage an individual offering themselves as a messenger might accrue.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the commissionaire competed for employment in the lower strata of London's street economy, offering himself for menial employment.

This chapter demonstrates that the commissionaire brand, and the system in which it operated, provided the disabled men with an opportunity to confront the societal attitudes that surrounded disability at the time, and thus avoid the exclusion illustrated by Gleeson. Walter's intention for the disabled commissionaires can be viewed as being similar to the economic reassimilation that Blackie and Turner have characterised which took place in the coalfields of the nineteenth century, which was previously discussed.¹⁹⁵ The amputated limbs of the men underlined they could not return to the army, they experienced occupational disability, but that did not mean they could not be usefully employed by the public through becoming commissionaires.

The chapter ends with an analysis of the promotional and marketing techniques that Walter employed to promote the commissionaire system to the public, and their reaction to the commissionaire brand. These techniques relied on creating a quasi-military spectacle around the commissionaires; this conception was novel and constructed, so that it was well placed to capitalise on the emerging technologies described above. However, it was anchored in much that was familiar. Viewed in this way, the commissionaire brand was what Eric Hobsbawm has termed an 'invented tradition'; that is, a 'set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules, and activities of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past'.¹⁹⁶ Hobsbawm further contends that the traditional can be invoked to serve the purposes of the novel, and where this has occurred, 'novelty is no less novel for being able to dress up easily as antiquity'.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Gleeson, *Geographies of Disability*, p. 110.

¹⁹³ Gareth Steadman Jones, *Outcast London: a Study in Relationships Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Penguin, 1992), p. 63.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁹⁵ Blackie and Turner, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 23-54.

¹⁹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The quasi-military identity of the commissionaires was rooted in the traditions of the Victorian British army. While these traditions could hardly be described as belonging to antiquity, they were as we saw in the Introduction, highly recognised and appreciated. Walter was aware of this public appeal and he established a variety of rituals within the Corps to make the commissionaires appealing to the public. He carefully assembled the visual elements of the commissionaires' brand by – as Hobsbawm would describe it – 'borrowing from [one of] the well supplied warehouses of official ritual [and] symbolism'.¹⁹⁸

The commercial use that Walter made of these rituals is explored through referencing Roddy and others' concept of the 'seasonal shop window' which was discussed previously.¹⁹⁹ This chapter extends their scholarship by analysing how Walter similarly conceived of a series of 'shop windows' for the Corps. The aim of these was to elicit interest and engagement from the people who experienced the commissionaires' events directly, as well as generate publicity in the form of press coverage, which would then introduce the event to a wider audience. The success of this strategy is evaluated through examining the press coverage the Corps received during this period and illustrating what this coverage indicated in terms of public attitudes towards the commissionaire system.

1. The welfare of the rank-and-file soldier

Concern for the welfare of the rank-and-file soldier continued after the men had returned home. Much of this concern was focused on the transition of disabled ex-servicemen of the rank and file, which came to be viewed by the middle class as a social problem in the war's aftermath, one that demanded action by the government.

The emerging media conventions described above, that is visual representations of the army's rank and file, newspaper and periodical reporting on the welfare of these men, and their readers' concern and involvement in this issue, crystallised in the aftermath of the war. This shaped the public debate surrounding the transition of disabled soldiers back into society; to paraphrase Keller, this was the first media demobilisation. One result of this was that the middle and upper classes were exposed to the conditions faced by disabled ex-servicemen, irrespective of whether they had family members or friends who had been directly affected. In other words, the impact of class on the levels of public awareness around the human impact of war, which was discussed above in relation to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, was significantly lessened.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁹⁹ Roddy and others, *The Charity Market*, pp. 46-50 .

However, class continued to have an impact in other areas. This can be seen when it came to the experiences of disabled officers compared with those of the disabled men of the ranks. As Rachel Bates has noted, the middle class officers could afford to pay for private medical care, which was not an option for the rank-and-file soldiers.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, as Keller illustrates, wounded officers could be assimilated back into the army with their careers restored, which was not possible for men of the ranks.²⁰¹ Cultural representations of disabled officers emphasised this privileged position; one example of this is how an officer who had lost both his legs featured in a 'heavily over-painted photograph [that] somehow managed to represent him with comfortably crossed legs'.²⁰²

The contemporary representations of the disabled men of the ranks signified not just the low level of support made available to them by the army, but also their lack of agency. What follows is an exploration of some of the most potent of these representations. This provides an understanding of the context that Walter capitalised on when launching the visual identity of the commissionaire brand. A particularly poignant image in the *ILN* conveyed the experience on one disabled working class soldier. Published on the front page on 3 February 1855, it featured a recently returned soldier convalescing in the military hospital in Portsmouth.²⁰³ (Figure 1.2)

²⁰⁰ Rachel Bates, 'Exposing Wounds: Joseph Cundall and Robert Howell's Royal Assignment', *Critical Military Studies*, 6.2 (2020), pp. 118-39 (p. 133), doi: 10.1080/23337486.2019.1631727

²⁰¹ Colonel Sir Thomas St. Vincent HC Troubridge lost both his legs at the Battle of Inkerman, yet he 'continued to be on duty at the Horse guards and received promotions to full Colonel and Aide-de-Camp to Queen Victoria'; see Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, p. 202.

²⁰² Ibid., p.202 and Bates, 'Exposing Wounds,' pp. 133, 137 and FN 13, p. 138.

²⁰³ 'Scene in the Military Hospital at Haslar', *ILN*, 3 February 1855, p. 97.

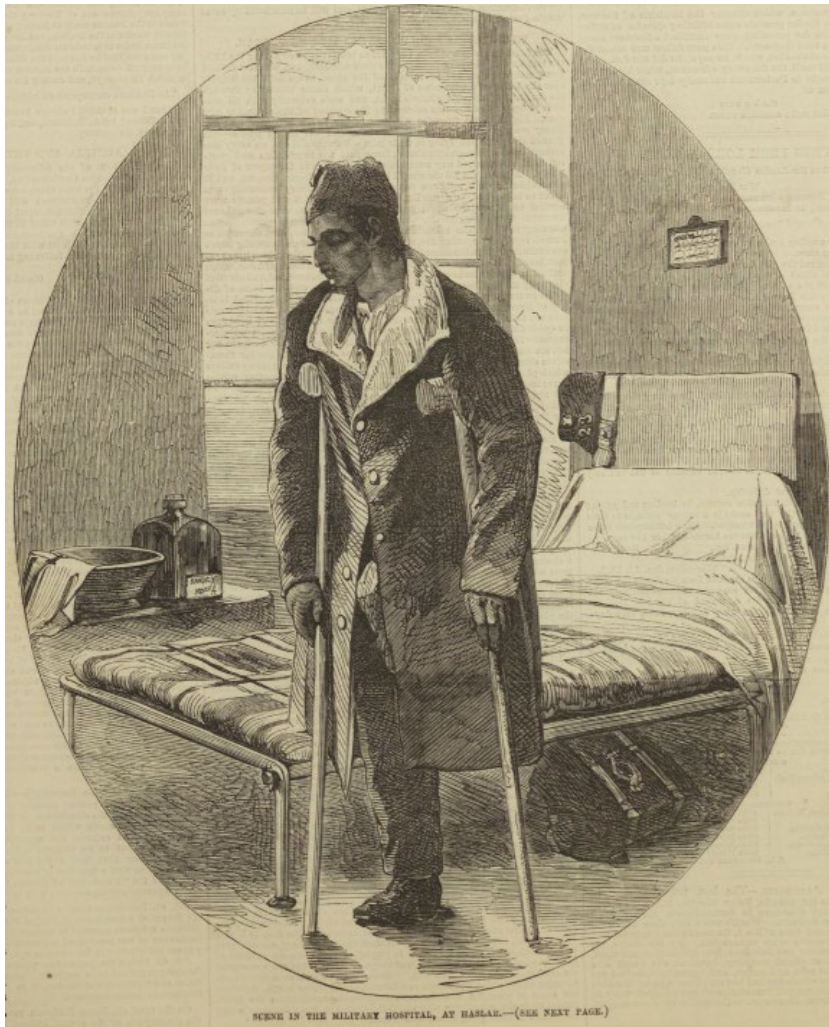


Figure 1.2 'Scene at the Military Hospital at Haslar,' *ILN*, 3 February 1855, p. 98.

The image was published in response to the high numbers of men who were being discharged from the front and who were now being treated in the country's military hospitals. The image was surrounded by a report of the fall of the administration led by Lord Aberdeen, following intense public criticism of the manner in which the government had been conducting the war.²⁰⁴ As Bates argues, this image demonstrates how 'representations of mutilation and individual suffering were used to heighten the response to political events.'²⁰⁵ Moreover, Keller notes that this image of the unnamed soldier of the 23rd Regiment was deployed by the *ILN* in the hope that it would lend further weight to the growing middle class call for reform of the way the war was being managed by the government.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ See Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 108, and Figes, *Crimea: the Last Crusade*, p. 311 for an account of the fall of the administration.

²⁰⁵ Bates, 'Exposing Wounds', p. 122.

²⁰⁶ Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, p. 98.

The portrayal of returning soldiers that had been published two weeks earlier in the pro-government *Lady's Magazine* offered a more positive view of the homecoming of disabled veterans. (Figure 1.3)

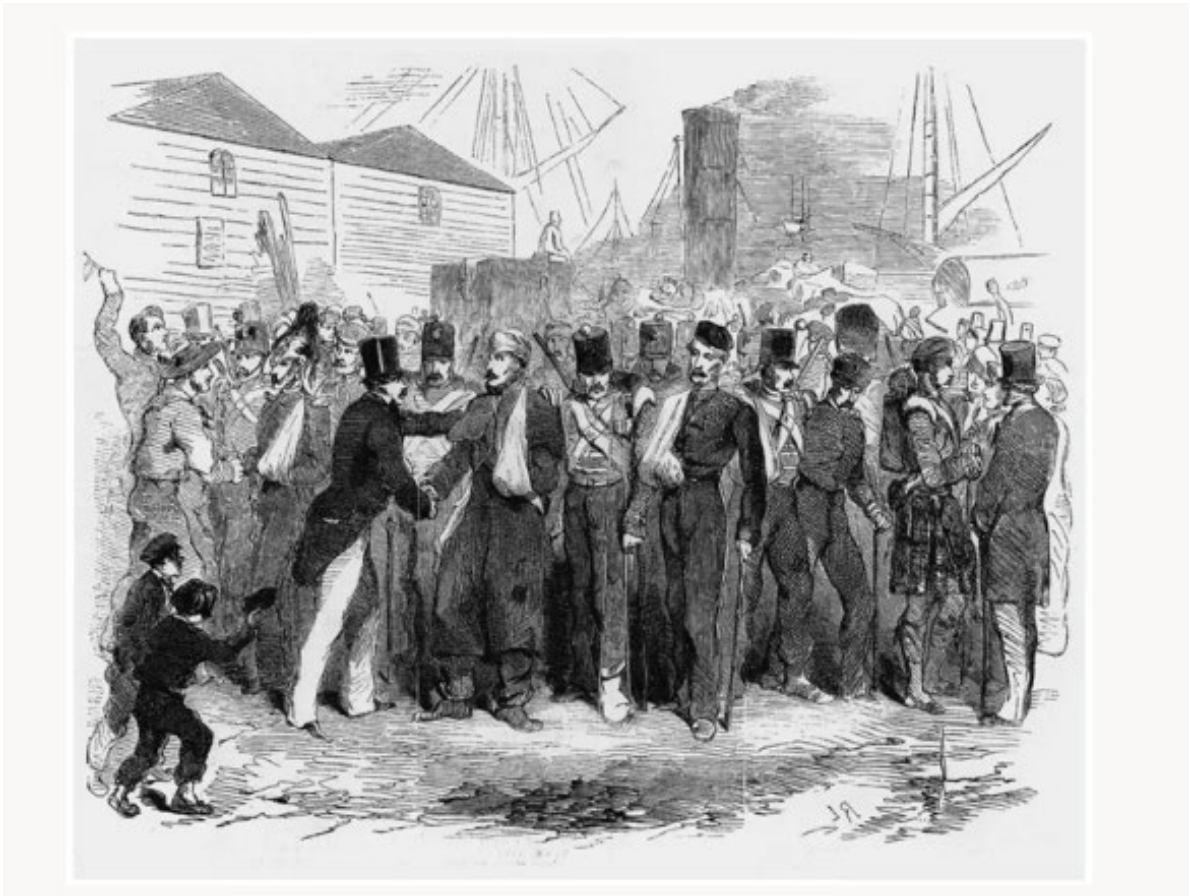


Figure 1.3 *Lady's Magazine*, 13 January 1855 (reproduced in Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, p. 182)

The veterans are surrounded by welcoming crowds and their disabilities appear minor; the men have their arms in slings and some are leaning on walking sticks.²⁰⁷ The contrast between that image and the homecoming of the despondent and isolated amputee portrayed in the *ILN* could not be starker. Yet there is a commonality to both images, which is that each portrayal was designed to serve a wider purpose, and thus the homecomings of these men had been appropriated by both publications to further political agendas.

These portrayals foreshadowed the rising public interest in the plight of disabled veterans on their return home. This reflected the sheer numbers of men who were being discharged from the army for medical reasons.²⁰⁸ A report in the *Evening Mail* in September 1856 depicted the pathos of the situation of some of the men who were discharged from Chatham Military

²⁰⁷ Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, p. 181.

²⁰⁸ Bates, 'Exposing Wounds,' p. 127.

Hospital.²⁰⁹ The report noted that 'a number of hospital orderlies belonging to the Medical Staff Corps have left [Chatham] in charge of blind and disabled soldiers for the purposes of conducting them to their respective houses'.²¹⁰ In order to meet the need of these men, the Chelsea Commissioners – the body in charge of granting army pensions – met every week rather than every four weeks as usual.²¹¹ Yet these pensions were, as Alan Skelley observes, 'often inadequate [...] in many cases [they were] insufficient to support a semi-invalid, let alone a man with a family to care for'.²¹²

It was little wonder, then, that some disabled ex-servicemen resorted to begging. Indeed, these men were considered numerous enough by Henry Mayhew in his portrayals of poverty in this period that 'Naval and Military Beggars' featured as one of seven sub-groups in his taxonomy of mid-Victorian mendicants.²¹³ He distinguished the 'soldier proper' beggar from the mendicant who had assumed the dress of an ex-servicemen, and stated that the former abhorred begging and viewed it only as a last resort. He continued by listing – approvingly – the menial jobs these men were willing to undertake. But he concluded by stating that, 'if my readers would inquire why a man so ready to work [cannot] [...] obtain employment he will receive the answer [...] the vice of the discharged soldier is intemperance.'²¹⁴ This was an established narrative around these men, so, for Mayhew, intemperance among this group could result in indigence. In asserting this, he was passing a clear moral judgement regarding the deservedness of the men he encountered.

However, contemporary newspaper reporting of disabled soldiers offered a less judgemental view. For example, the *Morning Chronicle* described the 'Miseries of a Wounded Soldier' on 17 April 1856.²¹⁵ It reported that an unnamed disabled soldier had been discharged from the military hospital in Canterbury with 3s4d, along with the instruction that he should travel to Maidstone, where he had enlisted. The veteran was unable to walk any real distance and, consequently 'he stayed in the city till [sic] he spent all his money [...] went to the Cock public house to rest himself and was unable to move himself'.²¹⁶ He later received some assistance from a doctor, who stated that the soldier was 'unfit to be removed, he being in a very dangerous state'.²¹⁷ The veteran was, therefore, admitted to the local workhouse. The overseer of the workhouse applied to the city's Poor Law Commissioners for guidance on

²⁰⁹ 'Military and Naval Intelligence,' *Evening Mail*, 3 to 5 September 1856, p. 7.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹¹ Bates, 'Exposing Wounds,' p. 127

²¹² Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 206.

²¹³ Henry Mayhew, *London's Underworld*, ed. by Peter Quenell (Spring Books, 1969), pp. 370-78.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

²¹⁵ 'Miseries of a Wounded Soldier', *Morning Chronicle*, 17 April 1856, unnumbered page.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

what to do with the man.²¹⁸ The official was advised that the 'military authorities ought not to have discharged [the soldier] [...] and if the circumstances were represented to them, probably they would take him back till he got well'.²¹⁹ However, until that could be arranged, the 'burden of relief fell on the overseers [...] till they got rid of the sick man'.²²⁰ Should the overseer attempt the man's removal, he was advised 'to get first a medical certificate, so as to relieve himself of the responsibility should [the veteran] die before [the overseer] could accomplish his purpose'.²²¹ The report would have left the reader in no doubt as to the brutal conditions some discharged men faced.

As they had done during the war, newspaper readers wrote with suggestions on how to support men like this. 'M', a reader of *The Times* noted in November 1855 that he had been prompted to write by the newspaper's reports of the 'thousands of soldiers to whose sturdy courage we are indebted to for the glories of the Crimean campaign, [who] have returned home [...] discharged from active service [...] their constitutions being shattered by disease or wounds'.²²² 'M' stated that it was wrong that men 'who had so cheerfully and valiantly sacrificed health and limb, be left to shift for themselves [...] If the situation continued that would be a deep stain on our national character [...] it should not be'.²²³ The country, the writer concluded, should show that 'we are a grateful people, and show it by our active and practical sympathy for the soldiers who suffer for us'.²²⁴ Writing to the *Morning Advertiser*, on 10 May 1856, 'ER' observed that no practical help had been offered by the government to disabled ex-servicemen. This lack of support, along with the conduct of the war, had left 'England in truth [...] deluded, disgraced and betrayed'.²²⁵ Yet he stated that the public were now being enjoined to take part in celebrations, which he deplored. He urged people not to spend their money on 'such nonsense', and argues that their money should be spent on supporting the country's ex-servicemen.'²²⁶

The personal support given by Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, and their concern for the welfare of the army's disabled veterans, was well publicised. This went some way to filling the gap left by the lack of government support highlighted by 'M,' and 'ER.' The royals delivered a more immediate institutional response, even if the support the queen

²¹⁸ For an overview of the new Poor Law and its administration in this period, see: Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State : A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution*, 6th edn (Bloomsbury, 2024), pp. 42-60

²¹⁹ 'Miseries of a Wounded Soldier', *Morning Chronicle*, 17 April 1856, unnumbered page

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² 'Our Duty towards our Disabled Soldiers, to the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 2 November 1855, p. 10.

²²³ Ibid., p.10.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

²²⁵ 'The Hollow and Inglorious Peace: The Forthcoming Illuminations', *Morning Advertiser*, 10 May 1856, p.4.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

offered was more symbolic than practical.²²⁷ Approving newspaper coverage of the receptions she held for disabled ex-servicemen, and her visits to military hospitals, emphasised the deep interest she took in these men.²²⁸ As a result of these encounters, she commissioned Joseph Cundall and Robert Howlett in 1856 to take a series of photographs that featured some of the men she had met on her visit to the military hospital in Chatham. While these photographs were commissioned privately by the queen for her personal collection, they enjoyed some public exposure. At least one of the prints featured in a public exhibition two years later and Private Thomas McKaverey, a subject of another print, attended an exhibition on 'surgical celebrities' to demonstrate the innovative crutches he had received.²²⁹

The collection of photographs provided a stark reminder of the situation that disabled veterans could find themselves in. One example, which featured a tableau of ex-servicemen, all of whom were amputees, is particularly noteworthy. (Figure 1.4)



Figure 1.4 Joseph Cundall and Robert Howlett, 'Private William Young, Corporal Henry Burland and Private John Connery', 1856, reproduced in Bates, 'Exposing wounds,' p. 125.

²²⁷ 'Gossip of the Week', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 27 May 1855, p. 9; an equally sardonic view was offered by the *Daily New York Times*, 6 June 1855, p. 4.

²²⁸ *Morning Advertiser*, 7 March 1855, 'Inspection of Wounded Soldiers', p. 4, *ILN*, 14 July 1855, p. 42, 'Woolwich', *West Kent Guardian*, 23 February 1856, unnumbered page.

²²⁹ Bates, 'Exposing wounds,' p. 129.

The men's missing limbs are central to this image and, as Bates argues, the prosthetic held by the man on the right offers hope. However, she contends that these images 'expose[d] individual suffering and trauma as much as they showcased bodily resilience and the progress of surgery'.²³⁰ But was this 'showcase' of their own devising, or were they ordered to adopt this pose, as Keller wonders?²³¹ Certainly, the men's abject expressions, their averted gazes and the slightly odd way the prosthetic leg is being handled suggest, at the very least, a discomfort with being photographed. Whatever the reality behind the staging of the image, the prosthetic limb was a rarity for men of his rank and the fact that he had it, was testament to the generosity of the queen, who had donated it. This largesse was in stark contrast to the level of post-operative medical care that disabled rank-and-file soldiers received, which, in most cases, was minimal. The gift formed part of the wider welfare support donated by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and this served a political purpose, as Bates has noted. Being seen by the public to support the ordinary soldiers of the war helped reinforce the special relationship the monarch had with the army, which was something that had come under threat.²³² Once again, we see how the welfare of disabled veterans was appropriated to serve the aims of groups – be that the royal family or the British government – that were not necessarily aligned with their own.

Keller argues that these images 'made real the ideality of the social order'; the portrayal of the men's suffering as invalids was not applied to officers who had had limbs amputated.²³³ This is a crucial point, and it can be equally applied to the image of the amputee in the *ILN*, which was discussed above. The images of these men from the rank and file stripped them of any agency – they are despondent and hopeless. The contrast with the representations of disabled officers and the options that could be made available to them could not be starker.

These images prefigured a public appeal made by 'Wounded Soldier' in a letter to the *Standard* that was published in August 1859.²³⁴ The letter was written to castigate the government for its lack of action in addressing the plight of disabled veterans like him.²³⁵ The writer wondered what 'the government intended to do with all the wounded and disabled soldiers on the strength?'²³⁶ He drew attention to the 'hundreds of men in Chatham [military hospital], and other places that are perfectly useless'.²³⁷ Men like him had 'lost the use of our

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 137.

²³¹ Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, p. 201.

²³² Rachel Bates, 'Queenly Sentiment and Royal Prerogative', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 20, (2015), pp. 1-25 (p. 9), doi:10.16995/ntn.708

²³³ Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, p. 202.

²³⁴ 'Unfair Treatment of Wounded Soldiers,' *Standard*, 30 August 1859, p. 4.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

limbs fighting for our Queen and country [...] and they could no longer do anything for themselves nor get out of the way of those who can do something'.²³⁸ 'Wounded Soldier' was clear that the men, who, like him, 'love[d] their Queen and country', deserved better treatment from the government, which needed to start with being discharged from hospital so they could return home and get on with their lives.²³⁹ The letter provides insight into the frustration that disabled veterans could experience in hospital, a frustration that could well have been felt by the men in the above photograph.

2. Enacting the commissionaire system

Walter conceived the idea of the commissionaire system as a way of providing 'Wounded Soldier', and others like him, with an opportunity to become useful again, as well as giving newspaper readers such as 'M' and 'ER' the means to offer them practical support through employing them. Indeed, usefulness was at the heart of how he chose to promote the system to the readers of *The Times*, which were discussed in the Introduction. Walter had observed that 'there are numerous daily instances in which the services of a responsible set of men would be most useful, but at the present time are not to be procured in London'.²⁴⁰ He stated that this need would be met through 'employing a number of [military] pensioners as *commissionaires* [original emphasis] and stationing them in some of [London's] principal streets'.²⁴¹ Walter noted that there were 'so few people [...] who can find work for one-armed men that many of them are in a state of distress from want of it'.²⁴² However this was not an appeal for charity, as he made clear. He stated that this lack of work highlighted the 'necessity of [the men's] appeal [...] not for money but for encouragement in the occupation that they have chosen'.²⁴³

This dissociation from charity was a shrewd entrepreneurial move by Walter in a society where public interest in the welfare of veterans was inconsistent. As we saw with *The Times* 'Sick and Wounded Fund', the public's response to charity appeals on behalf of soldiers at the front in the Crimean War was as rapid as it was generous. But the public's enthusiasm for the welfare of the serving soldiers of the rank and file soon waned. As Spiers observes, by 1860 'The health of the army 'no longer provoked fierce passions and lengthy

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 4

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 4

²⁴⁰ EW, 'To The Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 29 January 1859, p. 6.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁴² EW letter, 'A Good Suggestion', *The Times*, 14 February 1859, p. 12.

²⁴³ Ibid., p.12.

editorials.²⁴⁴ Indeed, the public debate became focused on the pre-war issue of how the army should cut costs, rather than why it deserved increased funding.²⁴⁵

If the Corps was to succeed, it needed to be independent of this public fickleness. It also needed to be strictly governed by Walter if he was to convince the public that the men were reputable and could be trusted as employees. Without this, the exceptionalism that he claimed for the men would be little more than that – a claim. The public needed to be convinced they should employ the commissionaires, not just in periods when they were well disposed to veterans, but whenever they needed a man to fulfil the services the Corps offered. The positive tone of the article, and the attractive illustration of the commissionaires in the *ILN* of 12 March 1859 (discussed above), that the Corps could elicit a positive response to this call. This was an early indication of how Walter's conception of the commissionaire brand could generate positive publicity. Indeed, the article's illustration underscored the importance of the men's visual identity. This was further emphasised in the first publicity photographs that Walter commissioned of the eight founding commissionaires. The first of these photographs feature the men in their uniforms assembled around a cannon. (Figure 1.5)

²⁴⁴ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 161.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-62.



Figure 1.5 undated publicity photograph sourced from the Corps' archive.

The second photograph of the commissioners featured the men in a studio portrait. (figure 1.6)



Figure 1.6 undated publicity photograph sourced from the Corps' archive.

There are similarities between these two images and the photograph of the patients in Chatham hospital. Both groups of men are amputees, both are arranged as a tableau, and props play an important role in the photographs' composition. For the men at Chatham, it is the prosthetic; for the commissioners it is the cannon. But despite these similarities, the photographs of the commissioners offer the opportunity for the men's disabilities to be viewed differently. The men's uniforms are attractive, as opposed to the demeaning and characterless hospital-issued clothes worn by the patients. (Figure 1.5) The presence of the cannon provides a strong visual clue as to the commissioners' former lives as soldiers, which is emphasised by their war medals. Their disabilities further connect the men to their former lives as soldiers. These three elements combine to deliver a powerful suggestion of bravery, sacrifice and, above all, fortitude.

Joanne Begiato argues that disabled veterans ‘could be accorded a manly status’, as their bodies demonstrated the sacrifice these men had made in performing their martial duty.²⁴⁶ She also notes how ‘the martial man’s appeal was frequently represented through his body, perfectly attired in regulation uniform [...] and manifested in his size, gait and posture’.²⁴⁷ All of these elements are present in the photographs of the commissionaires, but absent from the illustration of the amputee at the Haslar hospital, or the photograph of the men at Chatham.

The studio portrait communicates these values, but it also evokes a spirit of comradeship among the men. It is more intimate than the cannon image and its setting underlines the prestige of the Corps, or at least the money that Walter was prepared to pay for these photographs. As we saw previously, these kind of images were expensive and, therefore, associated with officers. When men of the ranks were featured in Fenton’s staged photographs of the Crimean War, discussed above, they were there to act as adornments to their officers. The photographs of the commissionaires are staged, but the men feature by themselves, and they are there for themselves. This leads to the final consideration in analysing the two images of the commissionaires, which is the level of agency they have compared with the hospital tableau. The men have chosen to be in the Corps; therefore, these two photographs emphasise that their lives have moved on from the environment of the military hospital. Furthermore, the photographs promote their interests as commissionaires. This is something that could not be said of the Chatham men, whose image, formed part of a wider royal agenda. When viewed together, these two images emphasise that the commissionaires are deserving of support, whereas the image of the Chatham patients calls for our pity.

The images of the commissionaires also symbolised the promise of them being a disciplined body of men, and the printed *Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires* (hereafter the *Rules*) made clear to the commissionaires what was expected of them if this promise was to be delivered. These expectations were communicated by referencing the men’s former army service in the Corps’ ‘Form of Engagement,’ which all commissionaires were required to sign as a condition of entry. This stated that ‘the success and permanency of every Institution depends mainly on its proper organisation and the impartiality with which its Rules [sic] are carried out. As soldiers the Commissionaires [sic] must often have experienced the truth of this, and will therefore see the necessity and advantage of enforcing

²⁴⁶ Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain, 1760-1900-Bodies, Emotion and Material Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 88.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

the strictest discipline, and maintaining the principles and habits they have acquired [in the army] and on which the Commissionaire Corps is founded.'²⁴⁸

What Walter was expressing here was the men's responsibility towards upholding the dominance of the collective identity they had signed up to. This emphasis on rules and regulations would have been familiar to the men. As French observes, discipline in the British army informed every aspect of a soldier's life both on and off duty, with the result that 'his whole being was regulated by those the army had set over him'.²⁴⁹ Similarly Skelley notes that 'from the time of his enlistment until the date of his eventual discharge the soldier's every movement was regulated and strict obedience was expected to regulations concerned with the minutest details of conduct'.²⁵⁰ The life of the commissionaire was subject to similar levels of regulation. Each man undertook to 'conform strictly to all the Rules and Regulations made by [Walter] ...for the maintenance of discipline and order in the Corps'.²⁵¹ The *Rules* encompassed areas that ranged from their duties while working as messengers, their appearance both on and off duty, their compulsory attendance at the daily and weekly parades, and their mandatory church attendance every Sunday.²⁵² These regulations were designed to ensure that the behaviour of each man would contribute to the 'success and permanency' of the Corps; the *Rules* emphasised that a collective reputation for discipline could only be achieved through the actions of each individual commissionaire.

The army's regulations were also designed to serve a greater purpose, which was a soldier's reliability on the battlefield. As General Sir Garnet Wolseley – a future Commander in Chief – argues with regards to the rank-and-file soldier, 'unless his mind is as disciplined as his body, unless he has learned self-control, unquestioning obedience and respect for his superiors, and habits of order and of method, he can never be a successful soldier in the field'.²⁵³ But for the majority of soldiers, the likelihood of experiencing active combat after the Crimean War was low.²⁵⁴ Approximately 50% of the army was stationed at home, and the majority of their time was taken up with routine and repetitive work, which, as Spiers notes, was 'monotonous [...] and was rarely interrupted by military training [...] fatigue duties probably loomed larger than military training'.²⁵⁵ Thus, the men's greater purpose – that is,

²⁴⁸ TNA/HO 45/7354, *Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires*, 'Form of Engagement', 1859.

²⁴⁹ French, *Military Identities*, p. 61.

²⁵⁰ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 137.

²⁵¹ TNA /HO 45/7354, 'Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires', 'Form of Engagement', 1859.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Sir G. Wolseley, 'England as a Military Power in 1854 and 1878,' quoted by French in *Military Identities*, p. 62.

²⁵⁴ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 206.

²⁵⁵ See Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 17-18, and Spiers, *The Late Victorian British Army*, pp. 142-43.

fighting in a war – was a distant prospect for most soldiers and even training for it was not prioritised by the army's leadership.

In contrast, the distance between the commissionaires and *their* greater purpose – upholding the collective identity they had signed up to – was far less. It was a tangible and ever-present part of their daily lives; the *Rules* as mentioned above regulated the men's behaviour both in and out of the workplace. As a consequence, the men had to become accustomed to a different dynamic between themselves and the body they were part of. The commissionaire system depended on the patronage of employers who would directly interact with individual commissionaires, so the men needed to recognise that their personal behaviour could shape employers' views of the Corps. This, in turn, might influence how successful the organisation would be in securing employment for its members. If the individual commissionaire showed through his behaviour that he was unreliable or untrustworthy, he ran the risk of not being engaged by that employer again. Where this happened, his actions had the potential to undermine the organisation's legitimacy as a provider of labour, and therefore his actions could jeopardise the chances of his colleagues securing work from that same employer. Put simply, each commissionaire had a personal responsibility to uphold the collective identity of the Corps. This dynamic between the man and his colleagues was very different to what he had been accustomed to with his comrades in the army.

A further difference between the life of a commissionaire and that of a soldier was the threat of dismissal. This fate befell 144 commissionaires, or 22% of the Corps' admissions, in the first five years of it operating.²⁵⁶ By comparison, the threat of dismissal from the army through court martial was markedly reduced for members of the rank and file during this period. As part of a broader programme of liberalisation (discussed in the following chapter), the army came to rely more on summary punishments handed down by their regiments' commanding officers, and these usually took the form of a fine, rather than a more serious sanction.²⁵⁷ The ultimate sanction on their behaviour – dismissal – was a distant prospect for the vast majority of serving soldiers.

The threat of dismissal from the Corps was brought into focus by Walter by the way he announced the first disciplinary action he was forced to take. He had dismissed Arthur Lodge – who had only been a commissionaire for a week – and this was communicated to the men

²⁵⁶ LMA/4777/B/02/003, *Annual Circular of the Corps of Commissionaires*, 1904, p. 12.

²⁵⁷ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 128-30.

in a printed general order on 7 March 1859.²⁵⁸ Walter stated that the cause of Lodge's dismissal was that he had 'absented himself from his [messenger's] post without leave on two separate occasions'.²⁵⁹ The Order underlined the exemplary effect Walter wanted this dismissal to have on the men. He explained that Lodge had 'brought discredit on the Corps, the success of which depends so much on the conduct of its individual members'.²⁶⁰ His comment underscores a tension that was intrinsic to the commissionaire brand. This paradox was that the strength of the brand depended on the commissionaires' collective behaviour, but individuals such as Lodge could undermine its strength through their own behaviour. However dominant the position of the commissionaire brand was, it depended on the way that it was upheld by the Corps' *Rules*, and consequently there was always the potential for instability due to the behaviour of its members.

Stability was crucial if the commissionaire system was to be financially viable. Walter stated that the commissionaires' employers must be 'able to depend on [their] regular attendance [at the post] and punctuality... [and] if they cannot find a commissionaire when they require one, they naturally disbelieve the advantages they were promised in the introduction of a new system'.²⁶¹ He made clear that he could not 'too strongly impress on the Commissionaires [sic] that the misconduct of any one of them damages the whole number, and their success will depend entirely on their faithfully, and strictly observing all the Rules [sic] laid down for their guidance'.²⁶² He averred that 'discipline is so essential to the Success [sic] of the Commissionaire [sic] system [...] it is necessary that means should be provided to enforce it'.²⁶³ He also noted that a lack of respect for the Corps' regulations, presented a danger to the organisation, whose 'high estimation by the Public has been obtained entirely by carrying out in Civil life the principles and advantages of the Military System'.²⁶⁴

The most common disciplinary issue that the Corps had to contend with among the men was drunkenness and this had the potential to substantiate the kind of prejudicial beliefs espoused by Henry Mayhew, which were discussed earlier. Walter adopted a transparent approach with the public when it came to dealing with the issue. This is clear through an analysis of a series of letters he wrote to *The Times*; this correspondence gave him the

²⁵⁸ LMA/4777/B/04/001, 7 March 1859. General orders were written exclusively by Walter during this period, and they took the form of printed notices that were posted in the Corps' barracks and were for the attention of all commissionaires.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ LMA/4777/B/04/001, 28 April 1859.

opportunity to affirm the action he had taken to remedy this situation. There was, he asserted in May 1861, 'an abundance of work for all the wounded men in the country, provided a spirit of self-reliance is united with honesty and sobriety'.²⁶⁵ He was however 'sorry to say that the absence of the last most necessary qualification has obliged me to dismiss several men'.²⁶⁶ In April 1862 he stated that he had had 'occasion to dismiss upwards of 50 men during the last three years, most of them for being incorrigible drunkards'.²⁶⁷ The *Rules* were unequivocal on drinking, stating 'Drunkenness at any time. Dismissal.'²⁶⁸ It fell to the Corps' Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) to keep an eye on the men and ensure they were not drinking too much, and this was a perennial challenge. As one of the NCOs remarked of the commissionaires, 'half of the drunken old fellows only care to be in the public house'.²⁶⁹

This responsibility for discipline was consistent with the role that NCOs fulfilled in the army, and, as a former army officer, Walter would have been aware of the advantages of this system. As Spiers observes of the Victorian army, NCOs dominated the lives of the rank and file. They 'fulfilled a vital role in the training, discipline and internal functioning of every military unit, and served as an indispensable link between the officer[s] and the rank and file'.²⁷⁰ There was also a consistency around the issue of drinking. Drunkenness was endemic to life in the regimental barracks, and a common cause of disciplinary action.²⁷¹ As we have seen, it served the Corps to assert a continuity between the men's identity as commissionaires and their former lives as soldiers. But drunkenness was an area of continuity that endangered the Corps' reputation as a provider of reliable employees. The exceptionalism that Walter claimed for the commissionaires could be quickly undermined by the men if they reinforced the stereotype of the drunken soldier.

Through these letters to *The Times*, Walter was acknowledging that drunkenness was a reality of the lives of some commissionaires and he wished to publicise that he had acted against it. The aim of this was to provide reassurance to the public of the reliability of the commissionaire system as a whole. By drawing attention to the relatively small numbers of 'incorrigible drunkards', Walter was able to assert the sobriety of the majority of men within the Corps. It also allowed him to demonstrate his own ethics on this issue, by drawing

²⁶⁵ EW, 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 9 May 1861, p. 9.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁶⁷ 'The Commissionaires', 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 14 April 1862, p. 9.

²⁶⁸ TNA /HO 45/7354, *Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires*, 'Fines and Punishments'.

²⁶⁹ B/03/02/04, letter to EW, 27 August 1860.

²⁷⁰ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 137. French similarly notes 'The basic function of [...] NCOs was to ensure that the other ranks carried out the orders that were passed down through them from their officers, and they did so without hesitation or question.', see: French, *Military Identities*, p. 173.

²⁷¹ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 145-6.

attention to the fact that he had employed the ultimate sanction that was available to him, which was the dismissal of this 'incurable' minority.²⁷²

However, this sanction was not applied consistently, as the case of Commissionaire Jack Seale indicates. Seale was one of the founding members of the Corps and, like the others, had had his arm amputated.²⁷³ The organisation's internal correspondence indicates that he was disciplined for drunkenness on numerous occasions from August to October 1861. However, he was not one of the 'upwards of 50 men' Walter had dismissed according to his letter to *The Times* in April 1862. Seale could be violent when drunk and this disrupted the daily lives of his comrades in the barracks, but despite this extreme behaviour he remained in the Corps until 1867. The organisation's records concerning this commissionaire, demonstrate how commercial considerations could override disciplinary issues. Harold Young was one of the Corps' NCOs (and therefore senior to Seale), and he provided Walter with a detailed description of the latter's behaviour when he returned to the barracks after a 'good bout of drinking'.²⁷⁴ According to Young, Seale's wife refused to let him into their room and she began to throw 'flower pots and all kinds of things at him, 'her husband then started to 'beat [her] and she ran about calling out murder'.²⁷⁵ Young continued by stating that he had heard from other commissionaires that Seale was 'constantly beating his wife' and two of them had said they would 'resign or do anything rather than remain in the barracks with Seale and his wife'.²⁷⁶ Despite this, Young described the commissionaire to Walter as 'very useful and intelligent' and he 'therefore hope[d] that [Seale would] not resign'.²⁷⁷

As noted above, the Corps' *Rules* stipulated that men would face immediate dismissal if found drunk. However, in this instance, Seale's work identity was not allowed by the Corps to be overshadowed by his drunken and violent domestic identity. His commercial usefulness was indicated by the wages he earned through overseeing the delivery of circulars and handbills for clients. He received £1 per week, which placed his earnings on an equal footing with the Corps' newly appointed sergeant major.²⁷⁸ That Seale's behaviour was overlooked in this period underscores the commercial value that individual commissionaires offered the Corps, as well as illustrating the wages they could earn as a consequence of working well. But his continuing presence in the Corps contradicted what Walter had told the

²⁷² The morality and ethical dimensions of the public discourse surrounding alcohol, Walter's attitude on this issue, and his disciplinary approach to drunkenness is analysed in detail in Chapter 2.

²⁷³ He was one of the eight founding commissionaires in the two publicity photographs analysed above, and he had lost an arm in the Crimean War.

²⁷⁴ LMA/B/03/02 /04.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

commissionaires about the first dismissal from the Corps in 1859. As we saw above, he made it clear to the men their duty towards one another in upholding the collective identity that they had signed up to. Put another way, it indicates that there could be limits to the Corps' transparency regarding discipline if Walter considered there were extenuating circumstances, as was the case with Seale.

However, the Corps' response to the numerous cases of men who stole their uniforms after they had been dismissed from the Corps was unequivocal. The purpose of this theft was to secure employment by posing as bona fide commissionaires.²⁷⁹ For Walter, these imposters represented something approaching an existential threat to the Corps, as their dishonesty threatened the collective reputation of the commissionaires. Roddy and others have noted the concerted efforts charity brands made to combat imposters, and thus help their donors to 'avoid giving to the "wrong" institution'.²⁸⁰ This can be applied to how Walter chose to respond to the threat posed by these former commissionaires. As was the case with the instances of drunkenness discussed above, Walter adopted a public approach in dealing with this issue; once again he relied on the letters pages of *The Times*. He stated in a letter to the newspaper on the 9 April 1861 that, in response to the number of complaints he had received from the public on the issue of fake commissionaires, he 'could no longer allow a reputation which has been gained by good conduct and strict discipline to be endangered by [his] silence'.²⁸¹ Walter later asserted that 'work should not be given to men who wear false colours and have disgraced the uniform they continue to adopt'.²⁸²

Walter initiated a series of changes to neutralise the threat of fake commissionaires. These measures included issuing the men with new caps that had the word 'Commissionaire' embroidered on to them, and a bronze collar badge.²⁸³ In addition, employers were cautioned to only employ men if they produced an official ticket book from the Corps.²⁸⁴ In doing so, Walter placed responsibility on the public to check the credentials of commissionaires and so join the effort to encourage honourable self-reliance.

However, imposters' knowledge of the way the messenger posts worked offered them an additional opportunity to pose as genuine commissionaires. The example of ex-commissionaire Wilfred Gardener provides the clearest example of how imposters

²⁷⁹ The *Rules* stated that the uniforms were the property of the Corps and were to be relinquished following dismissal or resignation; see TNA /HO 45/7354, *The Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires*, 'Clothing Equipment and Dress'.

²⁸⁰ Roddy and others al, *The Charity Market*, p. 76.

²⁸¹ EW, 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 9 May 1861, p. 9.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁸³ 'The Commissionaires', 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 14 April 1862, p. 9.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

threatened the Corps. Having been wounded while serving in the Royal Artillery during the Crimean War in 1856, Gardner's army career marked him as a veteran who was aligned with the ideals of the Corps. He joined the organisation in September 1860, meaning he was a commissionaire for only ten months before being dismissed in June 1861.²⁸⁵ He was brought before Bow Street Magistrates Court in August 1863, where it was alleged that he had dishonestly extracted 4s2d from two clients for taking letters between them.²⁸⁶ One of these clients was Lady Mary Hamilton, whose valet engaged Gardener while the latter was standing at an official commissionaires' post in the wealthy St James's area of London.²⁸⁷

The Corps' quartermaster sergeant, David Masters, attended the trial, where it was reported that he 'wished it to be understood that no person wearing the uniform of the Corps was a licensed member unless wearing the bronze badge on his collar'.²⁸⁸ Masters' attendance underlines the importance of protecting the Corps' reputation as a service provider to people of Hamilton's background. Gardener's response to the allegation of overcharging was that, as he was no longer a member of the Corps, 'he thought he had a right to charge what he pleased [...] and he was determined to injure the reputation of the Corps'.²⁸⁹ The fraud perpetrated by him – while wearing a close approximation of commissionaires' uniform – represented a calculated attack on the Corps' identity. In passing a sentence of six months hard labour on Gardener, the magistrate stated that the Corps was 'comprised of respectable men and were a great service to the public [who] should be protected from these frauds'.²⁹⁰

This statement echoed Walter's comments to the men regarding the dismissal of commissionaire Lodge. The magistrate was indicating that he understood the threat individuals such as Gardener posed to the men's collective identity. In other words, he was acknowledging that the stability of the commissionaires' brand depended on the actions of each man who had elected to join the Corps. This case indicates that the promotional and marketing techniques Walter had developed to promote the commissionaire brand were working. For the Corps to succeed, the public needed to recognise the commissionaires' uniform and understand what it represented in terms of the men's reliability. The case of Gardener suggests this was being achieved. But as public awareness and understanding of

²⁸⁵ 'The Army in the Crimea', *The Times*, 3 May 1855, p.12; it is not possible to discern the cause of his dismissal, see LMA/777/E/01/001, Admissions Roll of the Corps of Commissionaires, for the dates of his time as a commissionaire.

²⁸⁶ 'Police,' *The Times*, 31 August 1863, p. 9.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁸⁸ 'Before Mr Payne', *Standard*, 9 September 1863, p. 7.

²⁸⁹ *The Times*, 31 August 1863, p. 15.

²⁹⁰ 'Before Mr Payne', *Standard*, 9 September 1863, p. 7.

the commissioner brand grew, the opportunity for it to be exploited by criminals such as Gardener increased.

3. Public attitudes towards the commissioners

Walter attempted to secure statutory protection for the commissioners' identity to provide further protection against imposters misleading the public. He wrote to the Undersecretary of State at the Home Department on the 14 April 1862 to inform him he was seeking to have a clause specific to the men's identity inserted 'into the Bill now before the House of Commons regarding Trade Marks [sic]'.²⁹¹ To illustrate what he was hoping to trademark, Walter enclosed a copy of the *Rules* that detailed the men's uniform and the way in which the commissioners' system operated.²⁹² The internal departmental response, which was appended to Walter's letter, was far from sympathetic. The note from the Undersecretary declared that, 'this is a very curious case indeed and that [he] should like to know what the Dept thinks of the formation of this Corps with its Barracks, Uniform and a Commanding Officer. [original emphases]'.²⁹³ He continued by noting that the Corps was 'patronised by the Commander in Chief, but [he could] hardly conceive that possible'.²⁹⁴ There is no record of any response the Undersecretary may have received regarding his question. Nonetheless, his note is significant. It demonstrates that his opinions, and his lack of empathy with the manner in which the Corps represented its quasi-military identity, were out of step with public attitudes. As we saw with Gardener's court case, the public understood and valued the commissioner brand, even if the Home Office official did not.

The same was true of the royal family, despite Grey's comment regarding the Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge – a cousin of Queen Victoria – who had been a patron of the Corps since August 1859.²⁹⁵ This patronage had come about through Walter petitioning the queen for her permission to append the descriptor of 'Royal' to the 'Corps of Commissioners'. He was not alone in this. As Frank Prochaska notes, receiving endorsement by the royal family was highly sought after by charities in this period, because 'nothing else gave greater momentum to charitable work [...] than royal associations [...]

²⁹¹ TNA/HO 45/7354, EW to the Undersecretary of State for the Home Department, 14 April 1862. The Corps was not included in the act. Indeed, as Roddy and others note, statutory provision for the trademarking of brands did not come about until 1876; see Roddy and others, *The Charity Market*, p. 77. There is no evidence in the Corps' archive that it took advantage of this under Walter's leadership.

²⁹² TNA/HO 45/7354, undated internal Home Department note from Undersecretary Sir George Grey.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ LMA/4777/B/03/02/005, letter from the Private Secretary of Queen Victoria to General Sir George Weatherall, acting on behalf of EW, 4 August 1859.

nothing else made members of the public reach for their chequebooks with greater alacrity.²⁹⁶

From the perspective of the royal family, supporting the Corps had the potential to provide further evidence to the public of their commitment to the army's rank and file. As we have already seen in the discussion regarding the Cundall and Howlet photographs, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert took an active and well-publicised interest in the welfare of the rank-and-file soldier during and after the Crimean War. Their continuing influence can be seen in the pressure they brought to bear on the government to institute the Army Sanitary Commission.²⁹⁷

It was clear in the letter that Walter received from the palace that the queen approved of the Corps. The response to his request for patronage petition informed him that 'Her Majesty is very glad to hear that the plan for the employment of these poor men [as commissionaires] has been so successful.'²⁹⁸ He was assured that the Corps was seen by the queen as an 'experiment [which] has worked wonderfully well, and has been not only a great boon to these wounded men, but a great convenience to the public'.²⁹⁹ However, Walter was informed that 'it would not do for her Majesty [sic] to give to what is after all a private undertaking, the title of Royal'. In light of this, the suggestion was made to Walter that the Corps should be described as being 'Under the Patronage of his Royal Highness the Commander in Chief'.³⁰⁰

While this was not precisely what Walter had requested, this patronage represented a positive alignment with the most senior figure in the army's hierarchy. The Commander-in-Chief was the military head of the army and he was responsible for its senior appointments, training and discipline.³⁰¹ However, the importance of this patronage went beyond the symbolic. The position was as we have seen, occupied by the queen's cousin the Duke of Cambridge. Hew Strachan notes that the Duke 'was seen as young, professional and reform

²⁹⁶ Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The making of a Welfare Monarchy* (Yale University Press, 1995), p. 75; see also: Roddy and others, *The Charity Market*, p. 29.

²⁹⁷ Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, p. 94.

²⁹⁸ LMA/4777/B/03/02/005, letter from the Private Secretary of Queen Victoria, Colonel Charles Phipps, to General Sir George Weatherall, acting on behalf of EW, 4 August 1859. Bates notes that Phipps was a 'key courtier and advisor to the Queen [...] he was an important arbiter of royal interests [...] [and] a keen protector of royal prerogative in relation to army affairs'. See Bates, 'All Touched my Hand,' p. 5. He is likely to have advised the queen on why the royal family's involvement with the Corps would have further underlined its importance to the army.

²⁹⁹ LMA/4777/B/03/02/005, Phipps to EW, 4 August 1859.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ For an account of the evolution of this role in the nineteenth century see; Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, pp. 53-65.

minded'.³⁰² He had endeared himself to the army's leadership by not only serving in the Crimean War as a general, but also defending the leadership's performance in the face of the staunch criticism it received around its conduct in the field.³⁰³ This popularity was further reinforced through his championing of the conventions of the army's regimental system.³⁰⁴ Thus, the patronage that Walter secured would have sent a clear message to the army's officers, namely that the powerful and popular Duke was supporting the Corps, and that they should follow suit.

We have already seen how important these regimental conventions were in the Corps through the discussion of its regulations, its approach to discipline and the importance of the commissionaire's uniform. Of equal importance was the manner in which Walter harnessed opportunities for the commissionaires to publicly demonstrate their collective identity. This represented a proactive approach, which was centred on representing the commissionaires as a disciplined, useful and self-reliant group of men who were deserving of employment. Walter created a series of events to promote the commissionaire brand. These planned events – or, to use Roddy and others' terminology – 'shop windows' provided him with the opportunity to construct a positive and consistent narrative around the Corps that could counter the negative publicity the actions of former commissionaires such as Gardener had given rise to. These events ranged from the routine tasks of the commissionaires, such as their weekly parades, through to the occasional, such as the annual parade and inspection, as well as the concerts performed by the newly instituted Corps' band.

In developing this promotional strategy, Walter was harnessing the power of the military spectacle; that is, martial displays of order and discipline by the British army in the civilian realm. Myerly notes that the army was aware of the publicity value of the spectacle and how it could serve a wider purpose when it came to engendering positive public sentiment towards it, and that 'some commanders devoted careful attention to crowd pleasing'.³⁰⁵ Walter was equally careful in how he choreographed the commissionaires' visual identity. Each of the events mentioned above traded off the visual appearance and appeal of the Corps' own spectacle, which were linked to the contemporary army's traditions. In doing so, they provided additional opportunities to assert the continuity between the commissionaires and their former lives as serving soldiers, which, as we have seen, was fundamental to their collective identity.

³⁰² Ibid., p. 63. The administration of the army was the responsibility of the British government.

³⁰³ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, pp. 99, 105, 111.

³⁰⁴ French, *Military Identities*, pp. 88, 92, 97.

³⁰⁵ Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, p. 150.

Crucially, these events were choreographed in ways that could be appreciated and enjoyed by the public. In addition, because they were based directly on traditional army rites that were familiar to the public, this association delivered credibility to the Corps. The regularity of these events represented a deliberate strategy by Walter to generate publicity for the organisation on an ongoing basis. The regulations concerning church attendance made these intentions tangible to the men, as well as making clear what their responsibilities were. It was not the fact that attendance was mandatory that is so notable, or that they were marched to the church (which was consistent with what the men would have experienced in the army as part of their weekly routine).³⁰⁶ What set the Corps' approach to church attendance apart was the manner in which it was carried out. The *Rules* allowed the men a degree of flexibility, albeit within very tightly controlled parameters, so as to maximise the publicity potential of this weekly spectacle. The regulations stated that those men who were Church of England would 'parade for this purpose in Trafalgar Square, and march either to Westminster Abbey or some other Church in the Neighbourhood of Headquarters [sic]'.³⁰⁷ Those men from other denominations were permitted to attend their own churches, but to maximise the number of commissionaires that would be visible to the public, their attendance in Trafalgar Square for the parade was compulsory. Similarly, married commissionaires who had received a dispensation to attend a different church with their wives, or men who had been permitted to work on a Sunday, were mandated to attend the parade on alternate weeks.

Through enacting a very public military spectacle in a prestigious and busy locale, these stipulations ensured that the Corps was as visible as possible to the public every Sunday morning. Trafalgar Square was one of London's most important public spaces and the men would march along some of the capital's busiest streets to arrive at Westminster Abbey, one of the capital's most impressive churches, and synonymous with royal pageantry. Put simply, this was a carefully constructed event that was designed to provide a weekly public showcase for the Corps.

This technique was writ large in the Corps' annual inspection, which took place for the first time in June 1862 at London's Wellington Barracks in St James's Park. This location was significant, as the commemoration of the Duke of Wellington's greatest triumph, at Waterloo, was to be celebrated three days later with Waterloo Day. The ceremonial aspects of the event were widely reported on, but the deserving nature of the commissionaires' identity was

³⁰⁶ Michael Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War* (Routledge, 2005), p. 185.

³⁰⁷ TNA/HO 45/7354, *Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires*, 'Divine Worship' 1859.

also stressed through the reporting on the address given by the Duke of Cambridge. That the Duke had agreed to inspect the men provided evidence that his involvement with the Corps went beyond a symbolic patronage, and that he was prepared to become actively involved in the organisation.

The event took place on the 15 June, and the Duke inspected two hundred and fifty commissioners.³⁰⁸ The report in *The Times* observed that the 'smart manner in which [the commissioners] had turned out proved their desire to uphold the character of the corps, and their wish to merit the honour conferred on them by the inspection of the General commander in chief'.³⁰⁹ His address to the men underlined to them his support for the Corps, and he wanted the commissioners to know that he had 'been much gratified and [...] [he took] a warm personal interest in [them]'. The Duke continued by assuring them that they had established 'strong claims upon [his] esteem altogether [...] you have served your Queen and the country with honour'.³¹⁰ The Duke wanted to make clear to the men that his esteem was influenced as much by their post-service lives as it was by their military careers. He praised the men of the Corps for 'submitting to organisation and control for the laudable purpose of earning your own livelihood in an honourable and independent manner'.³¹¹ The commissioners were congratulated by the Duke for their 'endeavours to maintain [themselves] in honest independence and to deserve by labour the position of useful members of society secure for you the cordial sympathy of every right minded person,' and the commissioners were congratulated for being men 'of so much character and self-control'.³¹²

Walter and the Corps' officers were then singled out for praise by the Duke, who stated that he was 'not at all surprised that their efforts, and your self-discipline [...] have been appreciated by the public'.³¹³ In addition, the newly formed Corps band – which was described as being off thirty two men – was inspected by the Duke and following this their 'performance gave the greatest satisfaction'.³¹⁴ This is consistent with Trevor Herbert and Helen Barlow's assertion that 'military bands were important in the staging of all ceremonial events [...] [and] military music was genuinely admired as a form of cultural patriotism'.³¹⁵

³⁰⁸ 'The Corps of Commissioners', *The Times*, 17 June 1862, p. 7.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹⁵ Trevor Herbert and Helen Barlow, *Music and the British Military in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 216.

In creating the Corps' band, Walter also sought to establish a new source of income for the organisation. As Myerly notes, the most popular military bands often 'performed at private social functions [...] as well as at non-military public events including the dedication of new churches, buildings [...] and they drew large crowds'.³¹⁶ The band held the same potential for the Corps. An article in *The Times* on 24 June 1862 noted that it had secured an area within St James' Park for its concerts 'by permission of his Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge'.³¹⁷ The band was comprised of twenty-five men, all of whom had served their full period of enlistment in the army or navy, and their first concert had been attended by 'between 200 and 300 persons [...] [who had been] provided with chairs for a fee of 2d'.³¹⁸ The article noted that following the performance of the national anthem at the end of the performance, 'the commissionaires retired amid hearty cheers'.³¹⁹

The band began a series of weekly concerts the following summer, which were announced in July 1863.³²⁰ The price of admission was 3d, or 5s for a season ticket to cover all of the concerts up to the end of September, and thus it is clear that Walter recognised the commercial potential of the band.³²¹ However, it should be noted that the concerts fulfilled a role that went beyond entertainment and raising funds. This can be seen in the coverage the band received in the *Illustrated Times* towards the end of the season.³²² The front page of the periodical was dominated by an illustration that depicted one of the band's concerts, with the men playing by lantern light and a large crowd in attendance.³²³ (Figure 1.7)

³¹⁶ Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, p. 142.

³¹⁷ 'The Corps of Commissionaires', *The Times*, 24 June 1862, p. 14.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³²⁰ LMA/4777/B/02/001, *The Monthly Circular and Illustrated Advertiser of the Corps of Commissionaires*, July 1863, p. 4.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, Readers of the *Circular* were also informed that the band was 'ready to take any engagements either by day or for the season'. In addition, the Corps' 'String Band [could] be engaged separately for Balls, Bazaars, Picnics etc'.

³²² *Illustrated Times*, 19 September 1863, pp. 177-78.

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. 177.



Figure 1.7 *Illustrated Times*, September 1863, p. 177.

The repertoire of the band was described as 'high class and their execution more than creditable [...] and amongst about 1,500 people there was an absence of noise and confusion which was quite wonderful'.³²⁴ This comment regarding the attendance at the

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 178.

concerts indicated how successful the events had been at presenting the commissionaire brand to the public, and generating funds for the Corps.³²⁵ The article focused on the continuity between the band members and their former lives as soldiers, which allowed it to single out the band's disabled members for particular praise. It remarked that a number of the band had been 'crack musicians in their regiments in years gone by' and approvingly observed that 'those who have been maimed [...] [and able to] hold an instrument are stirred with an enthusiasm for their art.'³²⁶ The article described these disabled commissionaires as singular men, worthy of admiration because they had 'overcome many physical difficulties which in less earnest men might have been insurmountable'.³²⁷

There was one commissionaire who received particular praise. This was Albert Wilkins, the commissionaire who was collecting tickets. He was described as a 'one of the last of England's veterans [...] a soldier of Waterloo, and the last of those who fought at Hougoumont, where he had been a bugle player'.³²⁸ His appearance was described as 'youthful [...] which bespeaks strength well used, and that temperance which is one of the best soldierly attributes'.³²⁹ He had last served in the army as a member of the Coldstream Guards' regimental band 'as far back as 1821[...] [and] is still a hale and hearty trumpeter in the Corps of Commissionaires, of which he is deservedly a distinguished member'.³³⁰ Thus, Wilkins was presented as the embodiment of the exceptionalism that Walter claimed for the commissionaires. He was singled out to represent the collective identity of the commissionaires, but unlike the cases of Lodge and Gardener, it was for positive reasons. Wilkins exemplified the commissionaires' brand, whereas the behaviour of the other two men threatened it.

Daily rituals enacted by the commissionaires also attracted positive publicity. This is indicated by the coverage they received in contemporary periodicals, which linked the men's appearance and the form the rituals took with the trust being placed in the Corps by a growing number of middle class employers. There are two examples of this type of coverage, each demonstrating an understanding of the role the Corps' disciplinary approach had in establishing the men as trusted employees. Both pieces affirm the exceptionalism

³²⁵ The nature of the crowds was also reported by the *London Standard*, which commented that the band had attracted 'large and fashionable audiences'; 'Promenade Concerts at the Agricultural Hall', *London Standard*, 19 September 1863, p. 6.

³²⁶ *Illustrated Times*, 19 September 1863., p. 178.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Walter claimed for the commissionaires, and validated the actions he had taken to uphold this as the Corps' strength had grown.

The first of these was a short article on the commissionaires that was published by the *Penny Illustrated Paper* on 19 October 1861, and which was accompanied by an illustration titled 'The Commissionaires' Roll Call'.³³¹ The power of this illustration lies not just in the portrayal of this daily ritual, but also in how it represents the men's disabilities in a positive light – their stance is disciplined, they are neatly attired and their medals are to the fore. Above all, they are ready to work.³³² (Figure 1.8)



Figure 1.8 'The Commissionaires' Roll Call,' *Penny Illustrated Paper* on 19 October 1861, p24.

The article was addressed to the 'Gentle Reader', who was reminded that should they require a messenger who was 'intelligent enough to understand you even in delicate or

³³¹ *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 19 October 1861, pp. 23-4.

³³² It is not possible to know the precise numbers of disabled commissionaires in this period, as the extant personnel records do not record if the men were disabled or nondisabled. This issue is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

difficult matters, who [was] honest enough to be entrusted to take your money to the bank [...] [and] attentive and courteous', they should employ a commissionaire. These were men who had 'in all probability bled for you, [...] [you] should be glad then to bleed for him in a more harmless fashion'.³³³ The article continued by noting that only men of 'good character' were permitted to join the Corps and that those 'who have been seriously injured, as by amputation of an arm without being incapacitated enjoy a preference'.³³⁴ The article was written so as to evoke a sense of duty in its readers towards the commissionaires, based on the latter's military service. But this was not simply a call for altruism; the article noted that the Corps operated as 'a kind of semi-military government, conducted with a detailed routine'. The message of the article, which was reinforced by the illustration, stressed that the men were disciplined and could be trusted.

The second example is an article titled 'Our Commissionaires', which was published in *Chambers's Journal* on 12 July 1862.³³⁵ It opened with the assertion that 'those who are much about town [...] must have noticed certain smart looking men, clothed in uniform, but not apparently, either soldiers or sailors'. The Corps, the article noted, had been established for the benefit of ex-servicemen who had been 'thrown upon the wide world for subsistence'. Noting that the education levels of many veterans was low, the comment was made that 'such men [...] often fall into crime and debauchery'.³³⁶ It stated that the key challenges Walter faced were interlinked, and these were, how could he 'drill them into good conduct, and whether the public would employ them?'³³⁷ It offered the evidence of how the Corps had achieved this by noting the elements of the men's quasi-military identities from their uniforms, the disciplinary code of conduct they operated under and the fact that they lived in barracks.³³⁸ It acknowledged that the 'sobriety and honesty' of each recruit could not be guaranteed and described those men who could not conform as being 'black sheep', whom Walter had dismissed. The result was 'that none remain who shall taint the rest', and the article then praises him for having 'striven to show that commercial usefulness and military precision can be combined'.³³⁹

The piece also provided its readers with a useful summation of how the men operated. It noted how they assembled at their posts, which were at fixed locations across London, and that these 'smart looking fellows are on the alert for, but not soliciting employment [...] [they]

³³³ *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 19 October 1861, p. 23.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³³⁵ 'Our Commissionaires', *Chambers's Journal*, 12 July 1862, pp. 28-30.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

stand conspicuously at their posts, waiting to be hired'.³⁴⁰ The men, then, are deemed respectable through being implicitly compared to other messengers, and to reinforce this the article lists the tariffs the men are allowed to charge.³⁴¹ The article also observed that there had been a growth in permanent employment, with men working in 'clubs, public offices and large commercial establishments', 'as door attendants and nightwatchman'.³⁴² It also noted that 'during the London season, the commissionaires are much employed in a manner somewhat important to fashionable folks – delivering visiting cards, return thanks, invitations etc'.³⁴³

This success was attributed to Walter's approach to discipline. The report stated that 'if the originator of the scheme had not been a strict disciplinarian, the whole affair would have fallen to the ground'.³⁴⁴ The piece concluded with the observation that 'one little bit of discipline is remarkable – the commissionaire gives the military or naval salute to any officer in HM Service, in *uniform* [original emphasis] whom he may meet in the street'.³⁴⁵ Despite these comments on what it perceives as idiosyncrasies in the Corps' approach to discipline, the article portrays the commissionaires as a body of men who are trusted by prestigious employers and 'fashionable folks'. This indicates that the men had started to embed themselves into the fabric of London. The commissionaires were presented as established players on the London urban stage who were valued and stood apart from the other workers in the city's street economy which were discussed above. Furthermore, the article encapsulated the commissionaire brand and the system designed to uphold it, and this was communicated in language that reflected Walter's conception of the commissionaire system.

Conclusion

The manner in which the Corps asserted its continuity with the British army was fundamental to its success. This success rested on establishing an exceptionalism for the men that represented the commissionaires as valuable employees to middle and upper class employers. This was crucial if Walter was going to confound the stereotypical view held by many, which labelled veterans as disreputable. That Walter was able to succeed in transposing military values on to the Corps, underlines his assertion that the continuity that existed between the identity of the commissionaires and their former lives as soldiers was real and not an illusion. But this reality needed to be constructed and made valuable by him,

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁴² Ibid., p. 29.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

both to employers and prospective commissionaires alike. This was the *raison d'être* of the commissionaire brand and, in particular, its visual identity as constructed by Walter. This identity was comprised of two elements: their physical impairment and their uniform. These factors combined to establish their bodies as commercially useful, alongside a promise of their respectability. By combining these elements, Walter was able to take the undignified trade of messenger and give it an air of respectability, through establishing a branded service that middle class consumers could trust. In this way he confounded the view of the nondisabled that disabled individuals were unable to work. Walter demonstrated that the disabled commissionaires could work and, in doing so, they could avoid the indigence of the disabled men featured in the newspaper coverage of returning veterans that was discussed above.

The continuity between the Corps and the army allowed Walter to create a publicity strategy that adroitly played on the public's appreciation of the military spectacle, which generated the positive press coverage outlined above. But it should be noted that however compelling these representations were, they belied the complexity of how the Corps operated. This complexity was a product of the behaviour of some men, who were unable, or unwilling, to uphold the commissionaires' collective identity by adhering to its rules. The actions of these transgressive individuals threatened the stability of this identity and held the potential to undermine the dominance of the commissionaire brand. The Corps' approach to discipline was designed to uphold it in the face of these challenges. This dynamic was particularly important in the organisation's formative years. The commercial success it enjoyed in this period is testament to the fact that the commissionaire brand proved itself to be stable in the face of these challenges. As the organisation grew, these disciplinary challenges were to become more serious. One of the ways Walter sought to contend with this was to adopt an even greater level of transparency with the public regarding the Corps' regulations and it is this transparency that the following chapter will analyse.

Chapter 2 – Employment & Control

The publication of the 1864 *Rules* marked a decisive shift in the way the Corps regulated the behaviour of the commissionaires and the way this regulation was represented to the public. As the front cover of the *Rules* stated, it was 'Printed for the General Information of the Public and Sold for the Benefit of the Corps'.³⁴⁶ This public distribution demonstrated a transparent approach – the regulatory documents discussed in the previous chapter were solely intended for the Corps' internal use. The *Rules* were also materially different in that the document was now a stapled booklet, and printed on superior paper stock, rather than a collection of separate papers. These changes demonstrate that the document was designed to be retained as a tool of reference both for employers and the commissionaires themselves.³⁴⁷

The purpose of these measures was to establish the *Rules* as a marketing tool to promote the commissionaire brand with employers, as well as being for men leaving the army and considering their employment options. The intention of the booklet was to clarify around how the organisation would deliver on its promise of the commissionaire being a disciplined, reliable and trustworthy employee, and why it was advantageous for ex-servicemen to adopt this identity. The *Rules* achieved this by setting expectations for the commissionaires' behaviour and outlining the sanctions they would face if they did not live up to the standards enshrined in the regulations. Alongside this, the regulations made clear how the men could capitalise on their military training in the civilian world. We have already seen how Walter created a strong visual identity for the commissionaires, by creating the Corps as a spectacle through the men's uniforms and the quasi-military displays that they were involved in. Where these symbols embodied the commissionaire brand, the *Rules* codified it by establishing a system of discipline and control. This chapter demonstrates how the evolution of these regulations, along with the Corps' commitment to transparency, turned the commissionaire system into a commercially viable service.

As a rule book, the document was didactic, but it also formed a commercial compact between employers, the commissionaires and the Corps; it demonstrated to businesses the commercial value of employing a commissionaire over another man, and made clear to

³⁴⁶ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001. The public was informed that 'copies of the Rules of the Corps may be obtained by forwarding One Shilling in postage stamps to the Adjutant of the Corps'; see LMA/4777/B/02/001, *Monthly Circular*, December 1867, p. 1. A summary of the regulations was also published in editions of the *Monthly Circular* from November 1868 to June 1871, which would have extended the readership of the *Rules* beyond those who were willing to pay for it; see LMA/4777/B/02/001.

³⁴⁷ By 1875, the men had to show that they had a copy of the *Rules* on them as part of their daily inspection; see LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 9.

prospective commissioners the value to them of joining the Corps; this value for both audiences was enshrined in the commissioner brand. This chapter's analysis of the role played by the *Rules* in promoting the brand begins with an examination of the levels of control that governed the tripartite relationship between the commissioners, employers and the Corps. This control rested on surveillance enacted by the Corps over the other two parties, as well as a system of financial bonds, incentives and sanctions. This financial system was devised by the Corps and it applied to the commissioners, employers *and* the Corps itself. Each party was bound to the other two members of the compact through the organisation's disciplinary code. This code was fundamental to making good on the exceptionalism that Walter claimed for the commissioners, and the role these measures played in upholding the Corps' disciplinary code is explored.

The control inherent in these regulations must be considered in the context of scholarship surrounding the broader levels of social control in the urban environment that were enacted during the Victorian period. Joyce describes this control as being part of the 'oligopticon'.³⁴⁸ That is, an urban space 'where one was watched and was watched: in the public park [...] in the public squares'. Individuals', Joyce continues, were 'led to present themselves in ways that would be "publicly" acceptable, and in presenting themselves to others, these others, in a reciprocal "calculated administration of shame"'.³⁴⁹ As we will see, this concept of public representation and the implications of incorrect or, for the Corps, disreputable behaviour by the commissioners, and how it was monitored and controlled, is a useful frame of reference. This chapter extends Joyce's argument by introducing the workplace to his list of public spaces – the commissioners both presented themselves and worked in full gaze of the public; this was, after all, how they secured work as messengers from middle class customers.

For Chris Otter, these spaces 'can be termed [the] "bourgeois visual environment", denoting material conditions in which sight can prevail, civil conduct be exposed to view, and those eminently Victorian qualities of reserve and distance maintained'.³⁵⁰ The commissioners' respectability can be added to this list of 'qualities'. Otter further argues that 'liberalism as a technique of rules hinged upon public visibilities and the materialities underpinning them'.³⁵¹ These materialities encompassed 'wide streets, slum demolition, sewerage and street

³⁴⁸ Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (Verso, 2003), p. 147. Joyce contends that the oligopticon eventually becomes the 'demotic omnipticon'. This study does not adopt the latter term, and through its use of 'oligopticon', this study is in dialogue with the work of Chris Otter.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 148.

³⁵⁰ Chris Otter, 'Making Liberalism Durable: Vision and Civility in the late Victorian City, *Social History* 27.1 (2002), pp. 1-15, (p.3).

³⁵¹ Ibid, p. 14.

lighting'.³⁵² For the Corps, we can add the textual and visual materiality of the *Rules*, which, as we saw above, was designed to be retained as a source of reference both for the commissionaires and their employers. Otter argues that this concept of visibility and its reliance on technology and their 'everyday richness and complexity [is superior] to monolithic abstractions like the panopticon'.³⁵³

The Corps adopted an open approach to how its disciplinary code was upheld, and the chapter moves on to analysing the role this transparency played in promoting these regulations to employers. This openness was an extension of the approach we saw in the previous chapter – the letters Walter wrote to *The Times* on the issue of drunkenness and imposture. This analysis makes clear that drunkenness was a perennial problem for the Corps, and the disciplinary implications of this are considered. (Please note that the moral aspect of the Corps' attitude towards drinking is analysed in the next chapter. This analysis is delivered in the context of the Corps' approach to bodily discipline among the commissionaires.) The chapter concludes with an exploration of the opportunities that were available to commissionaires. In doing so, it seeks to answer why the men were willing to transfer from the disciplined environment of the army to the even more controlled and controlling environment of the Corps.³⁵⁴

The period this chapter analyses is from 1864, when the first edition of the *Rules* was published, to 1895, which was when the last edition was released under Walter's leadership. This analysis is delivered through examining four of the six extant editions of the *Rules* that were published during this period – the 1864, 1875, 1883 and 1895 editions.³⁵⁵ The time between each of these editions allows for a sequential analysis of the way the regulations developed, and thus how the economic compact described above evolved over time to meet the needs of the three parties. This delivers insight into how the Corps operated, how it wished to be perceived by the commissionaires and their employers, and how the *Rules* changed. These changes were considerable; pagination alone increased from 41 pages in the 1864 edition to 119 pages in the 1895 edition.

³⁵² Ibid, p. 3.

³⁵³ Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (The University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 21. This rejection of the panopticon has been criticised by Mikael Hård. He argues Otter's distinction is not necessarily helpful and that the latter's conception of the oligopticon is not as far removed from Foucault's panopticon; see Mikael Hård, 'The Victorian Eye and its blind spot, toward a cultural assessment of technology, *History and Technology*, 26.2 (2010), pp. 173-177, (p. 174-'75).

³⁵⁴ The army adopted a more liberal approach to discipline during this period to make it more attractive to recruits; see Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 144-7.

³⁵⁵ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001 (1864), 002 (1875), 003 (1876), 004 (1878), 005 (1886) and 006 (1895).

1. Control

When compared with the regulations discussed in the previous chapter, the 1864 *Rules* reflected an enlargement of the scope of the orders relating to the daily lives of the commissionaires. The level of detail the regulations stipulated were consistent with what the men had experienced in the army. As French notes of the army's standing orders, 'They regulated in minute detail every soldier's deportment, appearance and daily routine.'³⁵⁶ This is evident in the way in which the focus of the Corps' regulations started with the commissionaires' living arrangements. The men were informed that the barracks had been 'hired for the use of the Single Men [sic]... [and consequently] all of them will be required to live there [...] [and] in no case will any single man be permitted to live out of barracks unless he is in the First Class of the Corps'.³⁵⁷ This affected the majority of commissionaires. Many of the barracks' regulations were enforced through inspections carried out by the Corps' NCOs and officers, or by ongoing monitoring of the commissionaires' behaviour. When viewed together, the broad scope of these orders indicate the level of surveillance the men were subject to outside of work hours, and thus how far the Corps' influence over them extended. Each commissionaire was responsible for the daily cleaning and ventilation of his bedroom, and maintaining his underclothes, which were worn underneath their uniforms and which they were required to supply at their own expense.³⁵⁸ Furthermore, every morning before leaving for work, the men would be inspected by the Corps' sergeant major, who would assess their appearance. From 1875, every commissionaire was required to have a copy of the *Rules* on him as part of this inspection.³⁵⁹

The importance of the men's appearance shifted to their workplace once they were present at the messenger posts. The men were instructed 'not to lounge about or enter into conversations with dirty dressed persons'.³⁶⁰ The reasoning behind the second half of this regulation was made clear by the *Rules*, which reminded the commissionaires that 'a man is known by the company that he keeps, so the public will judge most unfavourably of any Commissionaire who associates with those whose *outward appearance* is generally a fair index of their *personal character*'. [original emphases.]³⁶¹ In addition, it was stated that 'smoking in the streets in uniform [was] strictly prohibited' and should a commissionaire find himself lost and in need of directions he was to 'apply to a policeman [...] a respectable

³⁵⁶ French, *Military Identities*, p. 100.

³⁵⁷ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001. p. 35. Married commissionaires could elect to live in the barracks, although this practice declined over time.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 36-38.

³⁵⁹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/002. p. 9.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁶¹ Ibid., p.4.

shop, but on no account enter a Public house as his doing so will subject him to severe punishment'.³⁶² This was as much about emphasising the temperance of the men as it was viewing the pub as a site of 'dubious' morality. Thus, the men's respectability was to be judged on more than just their physical appearance. Even seemingly innocuous behaviours, such as asking for directions in the wrong place, held the potential to undermine the commissioner's character, according to the *Rules*.³⁶³

This was the Corps' surveillance writ large through the reminder of the power of its uniform. As we saw earlier, the Corps hugely valued the symbolic power of the uniform and its ability to positively contribute to the organisation's spectacle and, therefore, affirm the commissioners' reputation. But it is clear through the statement above that Walter wanted the men to understand that their uniforms also had the capacity to act as an agent of control. By communicating the commissioners' identity, it extended the bodily regulation of the barracks into the public space. However, commissioners were far from alone in this; as Jane Tynan observes of the Metropolitan Police in this period, if the men 'were tempted to behave badly, their uniforms would give them away on the streets'.³⁶⁴

The commissioners were also instructed to monitor the behaviour of their colleagues. We saw in the previous chapter how Walter had affirmed the importance of collective responsibility to the men, when he announced the first dismissal of a commissioner to them. This was made formally clear in the *Rules*, which stated that 'it cannot be too strongly enforced upon the attention of the men that the misconduct of one of them, will materially damage the reputation of the Corps and the success of the System'.³⁶⁵ Indeed, the men were instructed that they were duty-bound to report any fellow commissioner to the Corps' sergeant major for 'any instances of misconduct [...] especially if committed in public'.³⁶⁶ It was therefore made clear to the men that they were the subjects of the Corps' surveillance network, *as well* as its agents.

On their return to the barracks, the commissioners' evening meal would be served between 6pm and 8pm, which the men would eat communally in the mess.³⁶⁷

Commissionaires could supply their own food but were forbidden to 'bring in Liquors of any

³⁶² Ibid., pp. 4-6.

³⁶³ The relationship between respectability and character is explored at length in the following chapter.

³⁶⁴ Jane Tynan, 'Codes, Police Uniform and the Image of Law Enforcement,' in *A Cultural History of Law in the Age of Reform*, ed. by Ian Ward, (Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 55-71 (p. 64), Joyce makes a similar observation for the uniforms of the postmen of this period, and the impact this had on discipline within the Royal Mail; see Joyce, *The State of Freedom*, p. 131-'32.

³⁶⁵ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 6.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁶⁷ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 38.

kind'.³⁶⁸ A man had to apply for permission to be out for the evening, but he had to return no later than 11.30pm, at which point the doors would be locked and all lighting extinguished.³⁶⁹ The non-payment of rent by some commissionaires was a perennial problem; to combat this, the regulations concerning payment got tighter. The 1875 edition of the *Rules* stipulated that the men were required to pay their weekly dues on a Saturday before 6pm or on the following Monday, no later than 9am.³⁷⁰ Failure to pay on time would incur a daily fine of 2d until the rent was paid, and if the rent was still outstanding by the end of the fourth day, the commissionaire faced dismissal.³⁷¹

Otter argues that the oligoptic system relied on the 'embedding of points of supervision, the creation of networks of inspection and the constitution of physical privacy'.³⁷² The first two elements can be applied to the Corps' surveillance network but not the third. As the above description makes clear, the men had little privacy under the Corps' regulations. This was, as we have seen, similar to what the commissionaires experienced in the army. Once again it was the organisation's NCOs who played a pivotal role. In addition to the role they played in the day-to-day life of the barracks, fulfilled an important role as exemplars of the organisation's disciplinary code. This role was made clear in the first edition of the *Rules* in 1864. The NCOs were told they 'must set an example themselves' because if there was not a 'strict observance of [the] Rules, the Corps would suffer reputational damage which would reduce its ability to secure "the employment of its members"'.³⁷³ These rather abstract notions were made concrete in the 1883 edition of the *Rules*.³⁷⁴ The regulations stated that the Corps' NCOs should 'guard their own interests by insisting on a rigid observance of duty upon the part of all'.³⁷⁵ They were exhorted to report 'to the officers in command [...] any laxity or impropriety on the part of a colleague which may justly throw suspicion upon his public or private character'.³⁷⁶ The aim of this was to protect the reputation of the Corps, and thus the commercial value of the commissionaire brand, by highlighting men who were 'unfit for the discharge of an honourable and responsible trust'.³⁷⁷ Once again, we see a similarity between what was expected of the Corps' NCOs and the role they had fulfilled in the army.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁷² Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, p. 63.

³⁷³ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 11.

³⁷⁴ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, pp. 96-103. These pages were taken from a document entitled 'Duties and pay of the Staff Sergeants of the Corps of Commissionaires 1882', which had only been distributed the previous year to the organisation's NCOs and not the public; see LMA/4777/B/01/03/003.

³⁷⁵ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 99.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

As Skelley observes, the army's NCOs were 'the link between officers and [the] rank and file [...] upon whom much of the functioning of discipline depended'.³⁷⁸ That these instructions were expressed in very militaristic language underlines the influence of the army's disciplinary approach on the way the Corps was run.

Employers were also required to ensure that the commissionaires upheld the Corps' disciplinary code. The former group were co-opted into the organisation's surveillance network by an appeal to their self-interest. The *Rules* proclaimed that 'employers will find it as beneficial to themselves, as it is to the men, to make them comply strictly with the rules of the Corps'.³⁷⁹ As Walter stated to an employer, 'if Commissionaires [were] allowed to act as they please, there will soon be an end to the Corps, and any benefits that may have arisen to the Public or the soldiers from the organisation of this Institution'.³⁸⁰ The reputation of the organisation would diminish, Walter claimed to another correspondent, 'if the commissionaires were not strictly looked after and [thus] allowed to [...] behave as they pleased'.³⁸¹ There was an inherent irony in these comments; in promoting the interests of commissionaires to these employers, Walter paints a negative, almost infantilised view of the men; without strict control they would harm not only their own interests, but also their employers. The lack of agency accorded to the men through the *Rules* is a recurring theme throughout this chapter's analysis.

The role that employers were required to fulfil was made clear with the introduction of the 'Employee Engagement Form' (EEF) in the 1875 edition of the *Rules*. Walter stated that for the Corps to be able to secure permanent employment in 'responsible situations was a matter of great importance for the prosperity of the Institution'.³⁸² However, there was an acknowledgment by the Corps that a degree of flexibility was required. The *Rules* stated that 'every facility will be afforded for the exemption of men from any regulation that may be found incompatible with the requirements of their employers'.³⁸³ To take advantage of this, employers were requested to be clear on their requirements at the time of engaging the commissionaire. However, this apparent flexibility was tempered by an obligation on the part of these businesses or individuals to recognise that 'Commissionaire[s] permanently engaged [...] must conform strictly to the Rules [sic] of the Corps'.³⁸⁴ It was made clear that one of the most important of these regulations was for the men to wear the commissionaires'

³⁷⁸ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 196.

³⁷⁹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 8.

³⁸⁰ LMA/4777/B/03/03/057, EW to the Secretary of the Albert Club, 1 March 1866.

³⁸¹ LMA/4777/B/03/03/057, EW to Messrs Jackson and Graham, 1 March 1866.

³⁸² LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 17.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 12.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

uniform when privately employed. Indeed, it was only in the 'cases of domestic service or duties of a special character' where permission to not wear the uniform would be given, and even then, Walter described such requests as 'not only paying me a bad compliment but also a man's own comrades'.³⁸⁵ The reason for this was the publicity potential afforded by the uniform, as discussed in the previous chapter. The *Rules* made this clear to the men, stating that it was a 'distinction involving honor [sic] to those who wear it, and involving many advantages both to Members of the Institution [sic], as well as the public in general'.³⁸⁶ Absent of any agreement in this respect, an employer would not be allowed to engage a commissionaire. This indicates that the ultimate priority for the Corps was for the smooth running of the commissionaire system, rather than accommodating employer preferences.

Employers were subject to discipline themselves, as the EEF reminded them. They were 'answerable to the Officer Commanding the Corps [i.e., Walter] for the proper conduct and appearance of each Commissionaire whilst in his employment'.³⁸⁷ This accountability meant that employers – like the commissionaires – were subjects *and* agents of the Corps surveillance network. To reinforce this, the commissionaire system incorporated a series of financial bonds and sanctions between the Corps and the men's employers. There was an inherent complexity to all this that may have been alien to employers, some of whom may not have been quite so regimented (if at all) in the way they managed other members of their staff.

Walter described how this surveillance network operated in a letter to Mr Lewis in October 1878.³⁸⁸ Lewis was the former employer of Herbert Andrews, a commissionaire who had been recently dismissed from the Corps for drunkenness. The purpose of Lewis's letter was to request that Walter rescind this dismissal and readmit the commissionaire into the Corps.³⁸⁹ Walter expressed regret that he was unable to do this, as it would undermine the commissionaires' reputation among the public. To underscore this point, he stated that the public was 'entitled to look upon the sobriety and honesty of the Commissionaire [sic] as qualities similar to those in a Bank of England note, payable on demand, i.e.: under all circumstances and all times'.³⁹⁰ This analogy would have readily communicated to Lewis that the Corps was making a promise to its clients around the dependable and unfailing nature of the commissionaires' probity. For the value of this 'currency' to be maintained,

³⁸⁵ LMA/4777/B/03/03/057, EW to Revd. WJ Sankey, 6 October 1870.

³⁸⁶ LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 15.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁸⁸ LMA/4777/B/03/02/042 EW to Mr Lewis, 14 October 1878.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*

Walter averred to Lewis that he had to be completely objective in his application of the Corps' regulations; in this sense, he positioned himself as an object of surveillance, too.³⁹¹

Walter explained it would be 'impossible for [him] to face the men on parade if [he] allowed any private consideration or personal feelings to influence his decisions' and partiality would 'be extremely unfair [...] [it would also be] eventually ruinous to the well conducted men if [he] sacrificed their reputation, and consequently wages'.³⁹² This determination to adhere to impartiality led him to assert that, although commissioner Andrews had a wife and children, this did not entitle 'him to any different treatment to that meted out to his comrades, and [that] drunkenness in [his] eyes generally aggravates the situation'.³⁹³ He continued by making clear to Lewis the responsibilities of employers in monitoring the behaviour of the commissioners. Walter declared that employers were, 'in point of honour, bound to assist us and themselves [original emphasis] by reporting every serious incident of misconduct [...] [he felt] sure of their general assent to do their duty' [original emphasis].³⁹⁴ Walter stated that he therefore had to reject Lewis's appeal on behalf of Andrews.

What Walter was explaining to Lewis was that employers had to agree to limit their hiring practices to suit the Corps. This responsibility was made clear in the *Rules*, which stated that when they engaged a commissioner, the employer 'binds himself in a penalty of Five Pounds [...] not to retain him in his employment if he resigns his Membership of the Institution [sic], or is discharged from it by order of the Commanding Officer'.³⁹⁵ The stipulation also applied to commissioners who resigned from the Corps 'after getting [that] permanent situation through these means'.³⁹⁶ The 1883 edition of the Rules went further, introducing a monetary guarantee for clients, provided they also agreed to be subject to a fine if the situation called for it. This recognised the responsibility of the Corps for the honesty of its members, and the guarantee would be a fixed rate commensurate with rank.³⁹⁷ This ranged from £15 for a private commissioner, up to £50 for a sergeant major, and employers could apply to have these increased if they deemed a higher amount was appropriate.³⁹⁸ In this way the Corps and its clients accepted a level of financial risk, with the

³⁹¹ The *Rules* stipulated that Walter as 'the Commanding Officer [was] bound by the existing Rules of the Corps as much as the men themselves'; see LMA/4777/E/01/01/002, p. 26.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 26

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 26

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁹⁷ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 25.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25; to benefit from this insurance, the 1895 *Rules* stated that employers were required to pay an annual subscription of 10s; see LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 60.

former taking the most risk through the sums it offered clients to indemnify the men's honesty.

This system of bonds and sanctions between the Corps and employers also provided the commissionaires with a financial incentive in the form of a small annual bonus. This relied on employers filling out a form that was designed to provide the Corps with an understanding of the commissionaire's employment.³⁹⁹ The employer was asked to provide the details of the man's employment, such as his hours of duty, the nature of his work and his weekly wage, and whether he was able to attend church every Sunday.⁴⁰⁰ The employer was also asked to provide details about the man's conduct by answering two questions: was the commissionaire 'smart in his appearance and does he wear the Uniform [sic] of the Corps whilst on duty at your Establishment?' and was the employer 'satisfied with [the commissionaire's] conduct in all other respects?'⁴⁰¹ The responses to these questions would determine if the man was eligible to receive an annual bonus, which would be credited to a fund that would 'be paid to his representatives at his death'.⁴⁰² The commissionaires were aware of their employer's influence over their bonus, and this knowledge was designed to ensure they upheld the Corps' regulations. As the Major Adjutant of the Corps (Walter's second in command) stated to employers, 'it is hoped [...] that this increase to the comfort of the men, will be [an] inducement [...] to good conduct, and in no small degree to the advantage of the men'.⁴⁰³

To return to Walter's Bank of England analogy, the propriety of the commissionaires was the currency of this agreement and the *Rules* made clear that each of the three parties had a role to play in ensuring this currency would not be debased. Maintaining the value of this currency was advantageous to each party. The commissionaires benefitted from permanent employment, and employers were promised a trustworthy and motivated workforce. The success of this dynamic allowed Walter to secure employment contracts from other employers, which, in turn, encouraged more veterans to join the Corps. In short, this was a virtuous cycle that drove confidence in, and the value of, the commissionaire brand. However, there was a power imbalance in this agreement that was made clear on the cover of the *Rules*. The front of the booklet proclaimed that it was *The Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires By The Founder*.⁴⁰⁴ This statement would have left the

³⁹⁹ LMA/4777/B/04/010, Memorandum from John Wilkinson Major and Adjutant Corps of Commissionaires to private employers, 10 August 1874.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, front cover.

commissionaires and employers in no doubt as to the balance of power in the tripartite relationship that the *Rules* were designed to promote: the institutional interests of the Corps came first. This was made clear to the Duke of Cambridge in April 1888, who as we have seen was an important supporter of the Corps. The Duke had taken up the case of a former commissionaire, disgruntled at his treatment, but the response from the Corps was blunt and emphasised this imbalance.⁴⁰⁵ The commissionaire in question could 'appeal to the Law Courts of the State if he [was] still dissatisfied', but the letter stated that, like all commissionaires, 'the conditions [he had] agreed to previous to their admission as commissionaires are clearly drawn'.⁴⁰⁶ In other words, the Corps would not consider the commissionaire's grievance, as to do so would ignore the man's agreement to abide by its regulations.

This agreement was contained in the 'Commissionaires' Form of Engagement' that the men signed on joining the Corps. The form was placed at the start of the rule book, which they were required to retain, and the first clause stated that the man agreed 'to engage [himself] as a Commissionaire formed by Captain Edward Walter [...] and to conform strictly to all of the Rules and Regulations made by him from time to time for the maintenance of discipline and order in the Corps'.⁴⁰⁷ The men were also required to sign a declaration at the back of their rule book to indicate they had 'carefully read all of the foregoing Rules which I perfectly understand, and agree to abide by, as well as all others made from time to time by the Officer in command of the Corps'.⁴⁰⁸ Achieving this level of comprehension is likely to have been challenging for many of the signatories. As we have seen above, the *Rules* was a lengthy document at forty-one pages, and this pagination increased throughout the period of this chapter's analysis, with the result that the 1895 edition ran to 119 pages.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore the level of detail was often dense and the document may well have been intimidating, given the limited educational attainment men of their rank achieved in the army. They came from an environment that, as Sharon Murphy observes, could be suspicious of improving the rank and file's levels of literacy for fear that it would empower them to challenge their officers.⁴¹⁰ Alongside this, there was often an unwillingness by the men to attain even the lowest level of

⁴⁰⁵ LMA/4777/B/03/02/051, Lieutenant Wilkinson to unnamed recipient, 16 April 1888.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴⁰⁹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001 and LMA/4777/B/01/01/006.

⁴¹⁰ Sharon Murphy, "'Quite Incapable of Appreciating Books Written for Educated Readers:": the Mid-Nineteenth-Century British Soldier', in *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850-1900*, ed. by Beth Palmer, Adeline Buckland, (Routledge, 2016), pp. 121-132, (p.125).

educational attainment and, consequently, illiteracy remained a perennial characteristic of many soldiers throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁴¹¹

Nonetheless, the commissionaires had to financially guarantee their behaviour, irrespective of whether they had fully understood the regulations they had signed up to. The men were required to deposit the sum of £1, which acted as a 'guarantee of good conduct and obedience to the Rules of the Corps'.⁴¹² This sum was the equivalent of a week's wages for the majority of commissionaires, so it was no small undertaking. In addition, it was deposited on the understanding that the money would be forfeited should the man be dismissed from the Corps for a breach of the disciplinary code.⁴¹³

The threat of this forfeiture formed part of the Corps' wider framework of financial punishments in the form of fines, and these were part of the commissionaires' daily lives. The scale of fines ranged from 3d for not informing an officer of absence due to illness and 'being untidy in appearance, such as having long hair, being unshaven or having any part of the uniform [...] deficient or out of repair', to 5s for offences such as being absent from a parade or overcharging a client.⁴¹⁴ The men were informed that fines were imposed in order to penalise behaviour that undermined '*the general welfare and interest of his Comrades, but [also] to compensate the Corps in some degree for the trouble and expense entailed by the necessity of keeping on extra staff for the maintenance of good order and discipline* [original emphasis]'.⁴¹⁵ This mirrored what the men would have experienced in the army, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, became increasingly reliant on this form of summary punishment.

2. Transparency

The level of fines and their contribution to the Corps' income were listed in the organisation's *Circular*, which was distributed free of charge to publicise the commissionaire system to the public. This served the purpose of underlining to the public just how seriously it took discipline amongst the commissionaires. In 1864, the total value of fines, including the forfeiture of caution money, was £75, or c.6s per commissionaire; this had risen to £198, or approximately 3s per head, by 1882.⁴¹⁶ A similarly transparent approach was also to be found in the way the Corps published its aggregate personnel statistics from 1875 in the

⁴¹¹ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 95.

⁴¹² LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 3.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13. This scale of fines was maintained up to 1895.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴¹⁶ LMA/4777/B/02/001, *Quarterly Circular* July 1864, p. 4, and *Annual Circular* 1882, p. 8.

Circular. Looking at the period from 1864 to 1895, there was an average of 72 dismissals per year.⁴¹⁷ During that same period, the average annual strength of the Corps was 1,063, meaning that, on average, 7% of commissionaires were dismissed per year.⁴¹⁸ Taken in isolation, these figures drew attention to a negative facet of life in the Corps for its two client groups: for veterans, it gave the Corps the appearance of a risky place of work, considering the money that all commissionaires had to deposit on admission; and for employers, the figures did not indicate a stable or reliable source of employees.

However, these figures should be seen in a positive light. The reason for this, is because of what they communicated about the way the commissionaire system benefited from the disciplinary approach enshrined in the *Rules*. This is evident through a more detailed analysis of the dismissal figures as a proportion of the Corps' strength. The dismissal rate fell from 11% in the ten-year period from 1864, to 10% in the next ten-year period, to an average of 5% from 1884 to 1895.⁴¹⁹ In other words, things were improving and this can be understood in two ways: for veterans, the Corps looked to be a far less risky prospect; and for employers, the Corps was now offering a more stable and well-behaved group of workers. This improvement is apparent in the growth figures of the organisation during the period from 1864 to 1895. The annual strength of the Corps rose from 245 to 2,131 commissionaires, which indicates that it was able to secure employment for a significantly greater number of commissionaires from a larger pool of employers. This was evidence that the Corps was making good on its promise of the commissionaire being a valuable and trustworthy employee, which was the essence of the commissionaire brand. This level of transparency can be viewed as being similar to a process associated with urban improvement during this period. Otter argues that openness played a 'catalytic role [...] the perception of failure, combined with shifting thresholds of tolerance fuelled a limitless desire for more improvement'.⁴²⁰ The Corps had demonstrated this same desire through these figures. By applying Otter's argument to the development of urban policing in this period, David Churchill states that the 'the catalogue of [the police's] failure was generative of a process of reform'.⁴²¹ This statement can be applied to the Corps; it is clear that in publicising its 'failures' in this way, the Corps was publicly signalling its focus on consistently

⁴¹⁷ Author's analysis of the statistics published in the 1904 edition of the *Annual Circular*, LMA/4777/B/02/003, p. 12.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁴²⁰ Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, pp. 95-96.

⁴²¹ David Churchill, *Crime Control and Everyday Life in the Victorian City: The Police and the Public* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 35.

improving the discipline of the men, and therefore the commercial value of the commissionaire brand.

Drunkenness was a recurring source of transgressive behaviour in the Corps and it therefore presented an ongoing threat to this commercial value. This mirrored the disciplinary problems of the army. The army had an endemic drinking culture, and the reasons for this have been highlighted as boredom on the part of the men due to the 'dispiriting, humdrum routine' of the soldiers' day, along with the army's customs; up to the middle of the 1860s, soldiers received a daily allowance for beer and issuing wine and spirits when the men were stationed abroad.⁴²² The result was, as French notes, that many offences were committed by men who may not otherwise have broken army regulations, had they not been drunk. Furthermore, the link between drinking and sexually transmitted diseases among the rank and file was well established, and a constant source of anxiety for the army's hierarchy.⁴²³ As a Royal Commission on discipline in the army reported in 1868, 'drunkenness [was] 'a lamentable, and disgraceful blot on the military character and connected with the vast majority of crimes tried by courts martial'.⁴²⁴

Drinking was a serious problem in the army and this was an element of the soldier's former life that was not welcome in the Corps, and thus was reflected in the organisation's approach to discipline. Walter issued a series of general orders to the commissionaires that were reprinted in the 1895 edition of the *Rules*, with the result that documents originally intended to be internal were shared with the public. This underlined to employers how seriously the organisation took this issue, and the punitive measures it adopted to deal with transgressive commissionaires. This transparency was a continuation of the approach that we saw Walter take with his letters to *The Times* in the previous chapter concerning drunken commissionaires.

The fines that were introduced to punish drinking were listed in the *Rules*. The monetary values of these sanctions were far greater than the men would have been used to in the army.⁴²⁵ The Corps' fines were graduated based on the seniority of the offender, and whether the commissionaire had offended before. A commissionaire with the rank of private

⁴²² Peter Burroughs, 'Crime and Punishment in the British Army 1815-1870', *The English Historical Review*, 100.396, (1985), pp. 545-571, (p. 555); see also French, *Military Identities*, p. 109, and Edward Gosling, 'Tommy Atkins, War Office Reform and the Social and Cultural Presence of the Late-Victorian Army in Britain, c. 1868-1899 (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Plymouth, 2016), p. 295, <<https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/foahb-theses-other/41>> [accessed 25th November 2025].

⁴²³ French, *Military Identities*, pp. 109-110, Skelley, *The Victorian Army*, pp. 53-54.

⁴²⁴ Burroughs, 'Crime and Punishment in the British Army, 1815-1870', p. 556.

⁴²⁵ The army's fines ranged from 2s for a first offence, up to 10s for a repeat offender; see Skelley, *The Victorian Army*, p. 141.

would be fined £1 and required to pay an additional £1 caution money.⁴²⁶ This total figure of £2 was increased to £3 for a corporal and £4 for a sergeant.⁴²⁷ For a second offence, the commissioner would be required to 'obtain the security of one or more of his comrades in the sum of ten shillings each [...] as a bond for his future sobriety and good conduct'.⁴²⁸ Furthermore, if a repeat offender had obtained a rank above private, this would be stripped from him and only reinstated provided he had not committed 'any breach of the Rules [...] for a period of twelve months'.⁴²⁹

In addition to prescribing the levels of fines the Corps' officers needed to apply, the *Rules* also provided them with a definition of drunkenness that was designed to end any ambiguity through the use of martial language. The regulation stated that a commissioner could never be considered as 'Being under the Influence of Drink', or 'Having Been Drinking'.⁴³⁰ Rather, a 'Commissionaire who would Be unfit for duty in a Powder Magazine [sic] in consequence of his intemperance in drinking, is equally unfit for service as a Commissionaire [sic]'.⁴³¹ *Furthermore, a 'Commissionaire WHO IS NOT PERFECTLY SOBER, in the most unrestricted sense of the term is DRUNK, and will be treated accordingly [Original emphases]'*.⁴³²

The commissioners were also informed that the distinction between being on and off duty, which they had grown accustomed to in the army, no longer applied to them. The regulations stated that a 'Commissionaire is "On or for Duty" from the moment of his Attestation [sic] till the time when he is struck off the Roll'.⁴³³ This provides one of the clearest examples of how the Corps sought to control the commissioners' behaviour; the men were considered to be on duty even when they were not working. The reason for this was the potential for reputational damage that could be caused by public drunkenness. This was made clear in the *Rules*, which stated that 'of all the crimes that injure the reputation of the Corps, drunkenness is the most fatal in its effects'.⁴³⁴ The reason for this was that it was 'often witnessed by hundreds of employers (the uniform itself attracting attention), and leads not only to the loss of the offender's situation [...] but [also] lowers the reputation of the

⁴²⁶ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 107.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 107.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴³² Ibid., p. 109.

⁴³³ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 105.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

institution and deprives its respectable members of the opportunity of earning their daily bread'.⁴³⁵

The *Rules* were clear on the danger of drinking, stating that 'drunkenness at any time [was] liable to dismissal'.⁴³⁶ However, this threat did not lessen the problem of drinking among the commissionaires, and this is illustrated through my analysis of personnel records of the Birmingham division of the Corps.⁴³⁷ The division was established in 1890 and the extant records for the period from 1890 to 1895 have been analysed. At an aggregate level, 28% of the commissionaires who joined the division in that period were dismissed.⁴³⁸ This is significantly higher than the average of 7% of all admissions to the Corps, discussed above.⁴³⁹ Of these dismissals in Birmingham, drunkenness was the most commonly recorded crime.

However, despite the scale of this problem, it is clear that the division adopted a degree of flexibility when it came to punishing some commissionaires for drinking. For example, commissionaire Charles Nicholson was caught drunk while working at the city's Liberal Club in 1890 and then going absent without leave for nine days.⁴⁴⁰ Despite the severity of, as well as the public nature of this crime, he was not dismissed. He received a fine of £1 and had to double his caution money, although he was later dismissed for being 'drunk when presenting himself for duty'.⁴⁴¹ Commissionaire Patrick Collins was also found guilty of public drunkenness. He was 'drunk in the streets of Birmingham on the 2nd January 1893', but he was also not dismissed; instead, he was fined £2 and had to increase his caution money by the same amount.⁴⁴² This transgression had not been reported by commissionaire Lionel Hawkins, who had been with Collins, yet despite not abiding by the regulations concerning the reporting of fellow commissionaires which were discussed above, Hawkins himself only received a fine. He was subsequently fined £1 six months later for 'being drunk when

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p. 106.

⁴³⁶ LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 13; this stipulation remained in place throughout this period.

⁴³⁷ As mentioned, in the Introduction, the Birmingham division is the only one whose personnel records for this period survive.

⁴³⁸ Author's analysis of the Birmingham division's Admission Roll LMA/4777/K/03/01/001, and Defaulter's Book, LMA/4777/K/03/01/003.

⁴³⁹ The reasons for this are unclear, but it could be symptomatic of the inevitable 'growing pains' in setting up a division.

⁴⁴⁰ LMA/4777/K/03/01/003.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

employed at the Bodega restaurant'.⁴⁴³ Collins, on the other hand, was dismissed for his second offence – being drunk while working as a nightwatchman.⁴⁴⁴

These examples indicate that the Corps could adopt a flexible approach when it came to applying its regulations, even for the most serious of offences, which was public drunkenness. The reasons why the cases of the three commissioners analysed above were dealt with leniently is unclear. However, the case of commissioner Arnold Enright, who joined the division in 1891, provides a clue. Enright was fined for 'neglecting his duty [while working] at the Corporation Show in Bingley Hall when in charge of a party', and had to double the caution money he had on deposit with the Corps; he was also demoted.⁴⁴⁵ The accompanying text in the Defaulters Book from the officer in charge stated that it was 'an extremely bad case. And were it not for his previous good character and sixteen years' service in the Corps I should have dismissed him.'⁴⁴⁶ However, these cases should not obscure the fact that the system of discipline in the Corps was exacting. As shown above, this increased across this chapter's period of analysis, while, at the same time, the army liberalised its own approach to discipline to boost recruitment. Despite this increasingly stringent approach to discipline, the Corps recruited an average of 5% of the men who left the army in this period.

3. Opportunities

The *Rules* made clear the opportunities available to members of the Corps, provided they were willing to abide by its disciplinary framework, and in doing to become subjects and (to a far lesser degree, agents) of the organisation's surveillance network. A contemporary study by Linda Cooper and others is useful in helping to understand the motivations of the men who joined the Corps. The study adopts Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, *capital* and *field* to analyse the transition of service personnel from military to civilian life.⁴⁴⁷ The concept of habitus revolves around individuals adopting a 'system of unconscious dispositions formed through regular social encounters and experiences'.⁴⁴⁸ The study's authors argue that, in a military context or field, this can be related to the process whereby service personnel 'become habituated to military ways of being and acting in order to become

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Linda Cooper, Nick Caddick, Lauren Godier, Alex Cooper and Matt Fossey, 'Transition from Military into Civilian Life', *Armed Forces and Society*, 44.1 (2018), pp. 156-77.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 161.

resilient to the demands of military and combat life'.⁴⁴⁹ The notion of capital is based on the recognition that, in any labour market, there are certain qualities such as skills or qualifications that are valued and can be exchanged in return for employment. However as the study argues, 'it is often the case that [...] military institutionalised cultural capital does not transfer easily to the workplace'.⁴⁵⁰ Cooper and others indicate that this can hinder some ex-service personnel in their transition from the military to the civilian field, and that this can be due to the realisation that the skills or capital they have accumulated, do not 'always map onto the demands of everyday life'.⁴⁵¹

The Corps was an environment where the habitus of the Victorian ex-serviceman would be understood and valued. Skelley observes that 'if [ex-soldiers] had a trade or calling before enlistment, seven years or more service would be enough to ensure that they forgot much of what they knew and lost whatever connections they might have had'.⁴⁵² Therefore, the Corps' quasi-military environment would have offered something familiar to the discharged and perhaps disoriented soldier. The same environment was, as we have seen above, present in the Post Office and the Metropolitan Police. However, having had a deliberate policy of recruiting ex-servicemen, this policy was rowed back; the common complaint of both organisations was that veterans did not possess the required levels of initiative or commitment. Their men's military training had, according to them, been detrimental to their civilian employment.⁴⁵³

This would have been especially true for men discharged from the army through disability. The Corps' crest, which was on the front cover of the *Rules*, affirmed the organisation's commitment to disabled veterans. (Figure 2.1)

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 163-'64.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 165.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 165.

⁴⁵² Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 211.

⁴⁵³ Daunton, *The Royal Mail*, p. 210-211, Shpayer-Makov, *The Making of a Policeman*, pp. 90-92.



Figure 2.1 LMA/4777/G/O4/003, the Corps of Commissioners' Crest, undated.

As Roddy and others note, the crests of late-Victorian British charities could be highly effective in 'communicating the essence of an organisation at a glance'.⁴⁵⁴ They further argue that charities' uses of slogans helped 'clarify the branded product's purpose [...] [they had] to be designed to extend and support, rather than contradict or confuse the impressions created by the brand name'.⁴⁵⁵ The Corps' crest exemplified these techniques, and by featuring on the front cover of the *Rules* and *Circular*, it provided a striking reminder to people outside of the organisation as to its commitment to disabled veterans. The crest depicted two imposing disabled commissioners, both of whom had lost an arm. Their veteran status is emphasised by the surrounding flags, cannons and a ship's anchor, while their stature is undiminished by their disability. By supporting a shield inscribed with the organisation's Latin motto, which translated as, 'With Courage and Energy, Labour Conquers

⁴⁵⁴ Roddy, Strange and Taithe, *The Charity Market*, p. 62.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

All', they indicate their commitment to economic independence and overcoming the adversity their disability might present to ex-servicemen who are not members of the Corps. It is an image of indomitability and hope, and the two commissioners' dedication to work is unassailable.

The image subverts an important element of the contemporary visual language used to depict working class men. As Joanne Begiato observes, 'muscular arms exposed by rolled up sleeves ready for labour and grasping tools, were the most potent symbol of 'heroic' men's labour'.⁴⁵⁶ While these men had only one arm, their medals and their other sleeve, empty as a result of their amputation signify that they are literally, and not figuratively heroic. The illustration softened the men's amputations for the viewer, which would have helped audiences engage with it. As Erin O'Connor argues, 'despite ample opportunities for scientific observation in "civil life" and "asylums for soldiers", amputation was an ontological conundrum, a profoundly difficult phenomenon to apprehend'.⁴⁵⁷ The crest offered a sanitised depiction of amputation that would have eased this difficulty for the civilian viewer.

However, there was another intended audience for the crest for whom this difficulty would not have existed – veterans. Amputation was a common occurrence for many soldiers who were injured in battle. Thus, men with amputated limbs would have been a familiar sight in the army, and even if a veteran did not have direct experience of this, there would have been an understanding of, and sympathy towards, this type of disability. It reflected a common experience, the comradeship that military service imbued.

Thus, the crest symbolised that the Corps held the potential of a supportive environment for amputees, but it also held out the possibility of work for these men. This was made clear in the 1864 edition of the *Rules*, under 'Qualification. The regulations stated that 'those who have been severely wounded will have the preference for admission into the Corps'.⁴⁵⁸ This commitment was made good in a series of publicity photographs commissioned by the Corps.⁴⁵⁹ The photographs feature men either singly or in pairs in their uniforms, underlining that they are serving commissioners and, consequently, in employment. The significance of the two images facing one another in the Corps' photographic album is that this positioning made a conscious link between the disabled commissioner and his nondisabled comrade. (Figure 2.2) His identity as a commissioner indicates that the man had secured

⁴⁵⁶ Begiato, *Manliness in Britain*, p. 192.

⁴⁵⁷ O'Connor, *Raw Material*, p. 115.

⁴⁵⁸ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁹ The archive does not contain any information regarding the intended audience for these photographs; however, their composition suggests a military audience.

work in a valued mainstream employment market, which, as discussed in Chapter 1, was a rare occurrence during this period, when disabled individuals were typically economically marginalised.



Figure 2.2. LMA/4777/H/O2/006, undated publicity photographs.

Once a disabled veteran was admitted to the Corps under the condition outlined above, he received no other form of preferential treatment and any form of favouritism was strictly prohibited. As the *Rules* stated to the Corps' NCOs, they had to perform 'their duties with the strictest justice and regularity, and particularly avoid "screening", such a habit not only most injurious to the interests of the Corps'.⁴⁶⁰ Indeed, with the exception of the privileges accorded to different ranks, the organisation's regulations did not allow for any special interest groups or factions to develop; equality of opportunity was a defining feature of the Corps. This was an important consideration for the Corps if it was to succeed in attracting as many sections of the army as possible.⁴⁶¹

As Kevin Lynch and Matthew Lord observe, the notion of a unified British army was a misnomer to a certain extent, given the disparate and diverse military traditions that it was comprised of: this was a diversity born out the country and regions that each regiment came

⁴⁶⁰ LMA/B/01/01/004, p. 48.

⁴⁶¹ The Corps also sought applications from the Royal Navy; however, the numbers of commissionaires who joined from this branch of the military was very small compared with the numbers who joined from the army; soldiers accounted for approximately 96% of the Corps' strength.

from, and whether the regiments were based at home or abroad.⁴⁶² There was also the arcane hierarchy that placed one division above another, for example class distinctions placed the cavalry over the artillery, who in turn came above the infantry, and even within divisions, some regiments were more fashionable than others; uniforms mattered in the army, and each regiment had its distinctive look.⁴⁶³ The unified identity of the Corps needed to be forged from these disparate traditions, and any suspicion of favouritism of one regiment over another, or indeed one group over another could have threatened this process.

This equally applied to the disabled commissionaires compared to their nondisabled comrades, which can be illustrated through an examination of a petition Walter received from a group of commissionaires in the autumn of 1865.⁴⁶⁴ The petition was signed by sixty eight men, both disabled and nondisabled, and the purpose of the petition was to make a claim for preferential treatment for the disabled men when it came to assigning messenger posts to the commissionaires. They asserted that they were being unfairly treated in this respect and were not being given a fair share of the most remunerative posts, and to substantiate their claim they referenced the entrance qualification in the *Rules* which gave priority to disabled veterans. In doing so, the men demonstrated that they understood the power of the Corps' regulations, and how the *Rules* had been conceived by Walter, and they used this knowledge to structure their appeal to him. This was a shrewd move by the petitioners. They asserted that nondisabled men were taking messenger posts from them, which the petitioners claimed had been created to 'ameliorate their comparatively helpless conditions'.⁴⁶⁵ They argued that disability precluded some men from taking certain roles, but this did not include that of messenger, which should be reserved exclusively for that group. The men stated that 'wounded men have to face their wives and families without a single penny, [despite] standing amidst the inclemency of the weather for ten or twelve hours at a time'.⁴⁶⁶ The men argues that the Corps was the 'wounded man's only refuge [...] [they] consider[ed] themselves the [Corps'] cornerstones and claim[ed] the "privilege" of permanent situations and good posts'.⁴⁶⁷ Their use of the word 'cornerstones' is hardly surprising, given

⁴⁶² Kevin Linch and Matthew Lord, 'Introduction,' in *Redcoats to Tommies: The Experience of the British Soldier from the Eighteenth Century* (Boydell Press, 2021), pp. 1-16, (pp. 12).

⁴⁶³ Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, p. 48.

⁴⁶⁴ LMA/4777/B/04/002, 'Copy of a Memorial addressed to Captain Walter and his Reply', 31 October to 9 December 1865.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

the iconography of the Corps' crest and the cause under 'qualification'. Yet they went on to demonstrate why the attitudes of employers could undermine this position.

They staked a claim on the most remunerative messenger posts on the basis that 'most employers will not have wounded men, yet in great measure they could be compensated for the disadvantages accruing from disability, by giving them the best posts on the street and not placing them with nondisabled men'.⁴⁶⁸ The petitioners recounted a poignant incident involving a commissioner with a wounded leg, which brought home the physical challenges men like him faced on the streets. This man was working alongside a nondisabled commissioner at a messenger post, 'and a gentleman on the other side of the street wanted a Commissioner [sic] to deliver a letter [...] the able-bodied man was across the street and had the letter before the other [commissioner] had his stick out of the mud'.⁴⁶⁹ Their argument rested on an appeal to Walter's sense of obligation towards disabled commissioners. However, his response rejected their accusations of inequality between the disabled and able-bodied commissioners.

Walter's arguments relied on dismantling the men's case through detailed reference to the *Rules*, as well as making personal judgements.⁴⁷⁰ He began by stating that he supposed any sense of discontent would be found within men who had transgressed the Corps' *Rules* (although he did not specify what these transgressions were); these men could not expect to be immune to the 'natural penalties' that such behaviour resulted in and 'wounded men must not to be exempt' from such punishment.⁴⁷¹ Therefore, should any commissioner experience financial hardship, Walter stated that the man could alleviate that situation 'through his own industry and good behaviour [...] any artificial restrictions and privileges that could be devised would not compensate for a deficiency in 'Self-Help' [sic] and 'Self Control' [sic]'.⁴⁷² There was, Walter claimed, no 'want of work...and every opportunity is taken to place wounded men in Permanent Situations [sic]'.⁴⁷³

Walter went on to disabuse them of the belief that disabled men were 'cornerstones' of the Corps and stated that any man's progress depended on his 'daily conduct in the Corps'. No man should therefore expect any privilege owing to his disability.⁴⁷⁴ He continued by stating that he wished to address the behaviour of some of the letter's signatories, who had only

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

themselves to thank 'for the consequences of mixing in questionable company'.⁴⁷⁵ This argument was suffused with Walter's personal morality, which, as we will see in later chapters, was a common thread both in the way he constructed the *Rules* and in his private correspondence. Walter continued by stating that many of these men would be aware of the 'positions lost to the Corps through the drunkenness and incapacity, not to say work [original emphasis] of some of their comrades', and that the majority of the men had no money deposited in the savings bank.⁴⁷⁶ Walter concluded by saying that he 'deplored 'the mischievous tendency to set one section against another viz the wounded men against those who have equally done their duty [...] the position of each commissionaire will depend mainly on the habits of energy, and self-respect which everyone has it in their power to exercise' [original emphasis].⁴⁷⁷ Walter consequently rejected the men's petition.

The petition was lengthy and it gave further examples of the personal impact of what they perceived to be favourable treatment of the nondisabled, and how this worked against the interests of the disabled commissionaires. Walter's response ignored these examples; his response to the petitioners was grounded in the principles of self-reliance, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was integral to the Corps' philosophy as he had envisioned it. Nonetheless, at the heart of the petition were legitimate concerns and the men painted a powerful portrait of the physical hardships they endured as messengers. Furthermore, their arguments illustrate the expectations that had been raised by the Corps among its disabled members, and how, even at this early stage of the organisation's development, its disabled members were beginning to feel marginalised. The petitioners' interpretation of the selection criteria around disabled men being given preference when it came to admission, and how it should be applied to them once they became commissionaires, was doomed to fail. Walter was committed to providing disabled veterans with employment opportunities through membership of the Corps. However, once they had become a commissionaire, disabled men had to rely on their own actions and conform to the behavioural standards enshrined in the *Rules*. Walter's view was that for a man to succeed as a commissionaire, he needed to work with this and not against these principles of self-reliance. This applied as much to disabled men as it did their nondisabled colleagues. The *Rules* as discussed above made no allowance for favouritism.

However, Walter believed that the Corps had to respond to the preferences of employers for nondisabled men if the organisation was to prosper. He conveyed this in a letter to *The*

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

Times on the January 1881.⁴⁷⁸ He stated that his 'original intention was to furnish wounded soldiers and sailors a suitable occupation, and without any assistance outside'.⁴⁷⁹ Having adopted this approach for the first six years of the Corps' existence, he had 'proved its practability [sic]'.⁴⁸⁰ His letter continued by observing how the organisation's 'success attending the experiment [had] enlarged the [Corps'] original sphere of work, and owing to the encouragement of employers, what was intended for the benefit of a few disabled men has developed itself by force of circumstances into a means of providing work for the able-bodied also'.⁴⁸¹ This shift in emphasis had already been reflected six years earlier, in the 1875 edition of the *Rules*. The first clause under 'Qualification' stated that 'those who are incapacitated from ordinary work through the effects of service, will have every advantage given them consistent with fairness to their comrades and the interests of the public. Men who have lost a leg or in some other ways are unable to walk long distances, or undertake laborious work, will be permitted to remain at Head-Quarters till some suitable occupation is provided for them.'⁴⁸²

Put simply, the interests of the disabled man would not be prioritised if this was to the detriment of nondisabled commissionaires, through the Corps' ability to secure employment for them. Nondisabled men were after all the overwhelming majority of veterans during the period of this chapter's analysis, which as previously discussed did not feature a significant conflict, and thus it was unusual for a man to be disabled through active service. However, where a man was severely disabled, accommodation would be provided at the Corps' offices, whilst the strong likelihood of work for these men was implied. It should be noted that there is no archival record of what employment was actually provided, and as we will see the Corps was more successful in finding work for men who had had an arm amputated.

Walter held particular views of disability based on how it affected the organisation's ability to secure work from employers for disabled veterans. He did not view corporeal loss as a barrier to a successful career in the Corps, as he explained in a letter to Colonel Annesley in July 1879.⁴⁸³ The colonel had asked what the Corps might be able to do for a man recently wounded in service. Walter asserted that 'there will be no difficulty in providing a good living for the man, or indeed any other similarly situated if he is able and willing to comply with our

⁴⁷⁸ The letter was subsequently reprinted in the 1883 edition of the *Rules*; see LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, second page but unnumbered.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 4; this wording was also used in the 1883 and 1895 editions of the *Rules*; see LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p.1, and LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p.9.

⁴⁸³ LMA/4777/B/03/03/057, EW to Colonel Annesley, 12 July 1879.

conditions of service'.⁴⁸⁴ He made similar assertions in his correspondence with Vice Admiral Sir Edmund Fremantle, who had written to enquire about a former member of his crew who had lost an arm in service.⁴⁸⁵ Walter stated that the man in question had joined the Corps and was 'in a permanent situation earning 26s per week [...] his future depends of course on himself, and as long as his conduct is good he will be able to live in comfort'.⁴⁸⁶

Walter went on to relate the experiences of another man who had lost an arm. This man, he noted, was only '5ft. 3in. in height, and [Walter] should have thought was scarcely suitable for a Service [sic] in which Physical [sic] strength is of the greatest importance. However, I daresay he will get the same wages if he proves honest and sober'.⁴⁸⁷ The same claims were made to a Mr Watson who had written to Walter from Montreal to request advice on setting up a Corps of Commissionaires in that city.⁴⁸⁸ Watson was informed that 'smart intelligent one armed Commissionaires could easily earn from 25s to 35s per week' and it was only men who were 'idle, drunken and worthless' who could not find employment.⁴⁸⁹ Thus, for Walter, it was the men's behaviour, and not their corporeal loss, that would determine their fortunes as commissionaires.

This attitude towards amputee veterans was highly progressive. As we saw previously, the Corps and its provision for disabled men can be seen in the same light as Blackie and Turner's analysis of employment for this group in the coalmining industry. The Corps – like miners – looked after their own. This, however, was not the case in all industries in the period as we saw previously in the discussion of Bronstein's study of industrial accidents. The effacement of the disabled in the railway industry was comparable to what disabled veterans could typically experience in the army. As we saw in the previous chapter, the army was quick to discharge disabled men from its hospitals and return them to their home communities after the Crimean War. Skelley indicates that this continued throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, as the army wanted to 'get rid as soon as possible of the men unable to perform their duties'.⁴⁹⁰

This was clearly not the case in the Corps; as we have seen, disabled men were central to the organisation's visual identity. However, in order to not dilute the commissionaire brand, and damage the Corps' ability to provide work for disabled veterans, Walter distanced

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ LMA/4777/B/03/02/037, EW to Vice Admiral Sir Edmund Fremantle, 22 June 1894.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ LMA/4777/B/03/03/057, EW to Mr Watson, 25 January 1875.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Skelley, *The Victorian Army*, p. 206.

himself from others who were interested in promoting the interests of disabled veterans. This can be illustrated through reference to two related examples. The first of these can be seen in his correspondence with the army hospital at Netley. The hospital's doctors would often send discharged men with disabilities to the Corps in the hope that employment could be secured for them. However, in 1890, Walter asserted that men discharged from the army as being unfit – that is, infirm and not disabled – were not suitable candidates as 'employers will not pay for inferior work'.⁴⁹¹ Seven years later, Walter provided clarity on precisely what qualified a veteran as infirm. He detailed six medical conditions to the hospital, which included epilepsy, respiratory problems and syphilis, that disqualified men from joining the Corps. This was owing to the problems the organisation experienced in securing employment for men with these impairments.⁴⁹² The Corps, stated Walter, 'did not mind men who have lost an arm or a leg unless their general health is injured'.⁴⁹³ He asserted that the responsibility for those men who could not work lay with the War Department. It was their 'duty, and [he] should say privilege of providing for the proper maintenance of those who have lost their [...] health in the service of the state'.⁴⁹⁴ In other words, Walter was only prepared to admit disabled veterans whom he felt he could place in employment; not all disabilities could have the same priority for the Corps.

The second example is Walter's correspondence with General Synge, which provides a striking example of this outlook. Walter wrote to Synge on 26 April 1890 in response to the latter's request for assistance in the development of a proposed 'convalescent and training home for discharged and invalided men of the Army and Navy'.⁴⁹⁵ The concept of rehabilitative training for disabled soldiers was innovative, and Synge's proposal prefigured the mass adoption of these techniques for disabled servicemen during the First World War.⁴⁹⁶ Walter began by reaffirming the Corps' support for disabled veterans through stating that it continued to 'do as much as possible for men who have been discharged from H.M. Service [sic] for wounds and disability caused by active service'.⁴⁹⁷ This meant that, in line with the Corps' established principles around securing employment for disabled veterans, it

⁴⁹¹ LMA/4777/B/03/02/058 EW to Miss Norman, 2 June 1890.

⁴⁹² LMA/4777/B/03/02/058 EW to Colonel Liddell, Assistant Adjutant General, 20 February 1897.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ LMA/4777/B/03/02/057 EW to General Synge, 26 April 1890.

⁴⁹⁶ For scholarship on the topic of rehabilitative work schemes for disabled veterans after the First World War, see: Anderson, 'Stoics, Creating Identities at St Dunstan's, 1914-1920,' pp. 79-91, Emma Bartlett, 'Reassembling Disabled Identities: Employment, Ex-servicemen and the Poppy Factory', *Journal of Social History* 54.1 (2020), pp. 210-236, Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home : Disabled Veterans In Britain And Germany, 1914-1939*, (University of California Press, 2001), pp. 34-5, 113-4, Jeffrey S. Reznick *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War*, (Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 116-36.

⁴⁹⁷ LMA/4777/B/03/02/057 EW to General Synge, 26 April 1890.

only admitted men 'who are able [original emphasis] as well as willing to earn their own living'.⁴⁹⁸ As a consequence of this, it would not be possible for Walter to become involved in anything that represented a 'departure from the original intention of this institution'.⁴⁹⁹ He elaborated on this by noting there could be 'no doubt of the evil you desire to remedy' and said he would support Synge, but only in a private capacity.⁵⁰⁰ Walter clearly felt that anything other than private support for Synge would detract from the Corps' aim of securing employment for disabled veterans in mainstream (that is, non-rehabilitative) work environments.

The mainstream employment market was, according to Walter, increasingly aware of the benefits of employing commissionaires. What this meant for veterans was as well as a familiar *habitus*, membership of the Corps held the promise that the *capital* they had acquired in the army had an economic value. As Walter assured the commissionaires, 'the highest qualities essential in an honourable military career are equally important in real life, and certain to secure a due reward'.⁵⁰¹ This led to his claim that 'the employers of labour are now perfectly aware of the advantages resulting from a training acquired under the grand old regimental system',⁵⁰² The *Rules* increasingly made provision for a transfer of *capital* from the military to the civil sphere, and the regulations demonstrated the economic reward that was attached to this. The 1875 edition stated that any man who joined the Corps with 'regimental discharges of a high rank or character' would be permitted to assume the rank of a First Class commissionaire.⁵⁰³ As well as commanding a higher weekly wage, these men, along with the Corps' NCOs, wore gold lace chevrons on the sleeves of their jackets so that the public would be aware of their higher status.⁵⁰⁴ By 1883, the *Rules* reflected a greater emphasis on the commissionaires' service record, with all NCOs able to transfer their military rank directly to the Corps, thus allowing them to maintain the advantages they had accrued in the army.⁵⁰⁵

The sooner a man could achieve First Class status, the sooner he would qualify for permanent employment, which, in turn, provided an opportunity to achieve financial independence. To qualify for First Class, a commissionaire had to have been in the Corps for a minimum of twelve months, and further progression, such as receiving the Good Conduct

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ LMA/4777/ B/04/010, general order, 20 June 1881.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 28.

⁵⁰⁴ LMA/4777/B/02/001, *Quarterly Circular* 1875, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁵ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 46.

Badge, relied on depositing £5 annually in the savings bank.⁵⁰⁶ A commissionaire was classified as being permanently employed when he was engaged by a private individual or company to fulfil roles that ranged from being a door attendant at a shop or members' club to factory gate keeper or invalid attendant.⁵⁰⁷ During the period of this study, the numbers of men in private employment rose from 438, or 78% of the total strength, in 1875 to 1,523 (86%) in 1895.⁵⁰⁸ The numbers of men who occupied temporary positions – such as the casual role of messenger – decreased accordingly from fifty-nine to nine.⁵⁰⁹ As we saw in the previous chapter, these men were stationed at posts across London, where they waited to be engaged by individuals. They were paid according to the time it took them to deliver a package and, with no guarantee of work, the position brought with it a high degree of financial insecurity. This was the most poorly paid of the services the Corps offered and was correspondingly unpopular with the men.

As the Corps' business developed and the numbers of commissionaires grew, the pay Walter was able to command for those in private employment increased significantly. By 1875, the weekly wage of a commissionaire in permanent employment was £1, and this rose to £1 2s by 1895.⁵¹⁰ This compared favourably to the upper tier of wages for unskilled labourers at the time, which ranged from £1 for railway porters to £1 1s for coal labourers.⁵¹¹ By 1895 the weekly wage of the commissionaire had risen to between £1 5s and £1 7s.⁵¹² Furthermore, the Corps' tariff of wages stated that for commissionaires of 'special attainments and high education [...] [their] Salaries [sic] would range from £1 10s to £2 10s.⁵¹³

While the nature of these roles was menial, they offered advantages that might have been absent within skilled and better paid working class male occupations of the period. As Trevor Lummis argues, 'what really affected working class material life was not the level of skill but the *demand* [original emphasis] for that skill'.⁵¹⁴ His analysis indicates that across a working lifetime, relatively unskilled labour – that is, work that did not require a man to have undertaken a craft apprenticeship – could provide comparable income levels to better paid

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁰⁷ LMA/4777/B/02/002, *Annual Circular* 1885, p. 2. These work environments were no less public than the streets where the commissionaires secured work as messengers, and thus the concept of oligoptic urban spaces continues to be relevant for this analysis.

⁵⁰⁸ LMA/4777/B/02/001, *Quarterly Circular* 1875, p. 3 and LMA/4777/B/02/003, *Annual Circular* 1895, p. 12.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ LMA/4777/B/01/002, *Quarterly Circular of the Corps of Commissionaires*, July 1875, p. 2, and LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 2.

⁵¹¹ Trevor Lummis, *The Labour Aristocracy 1851-1914* (Scholar Press, 1994), p. 165.

⁵¹² LMA/4777/B/02/003, *Annual Circular*, 1904, p. 2.

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵¹⁴ Lummis, *The Labour Aristocracy*, p. 160.

skilled jobs. Furthermore, the latter type of work might be subject to seasonal fluctuations in demand, so unemployment could be a common feature for those workers.⁵¹⁵ Thus, using Lummis's typology, those commissionaires in permanent employment had the potential to achieve economic security.

The changing nature of the roles the Corps offered provided an additional opportunity for an ex-serviceman to realise an economic advantage. This could be achieved through maintaining his physical capital, provided, of course, the man's physicality allowed for this. Joanne Begiato notes that, in some contexts, the identity of the working class man of the period became imbued with 'aestheticised qualities and the association of their physicality with economic prosperity [was], akin to the associations of military bodies with national defence'.⁵¹⁶ For the commissionaire who could fulfil this ideal, the opportunity to work in active roles such as a gymnastics or drill instructor offered the opportunity to transfer his existing military aestheticism for financial reward.⁵¹⁷ The role of nightwatchmen also offered this potential. David Churchill observes the growing demand by employers for men to fulfil this role during the mid-nineteenth century, and those hiring often prioritised candidates who were former soldiers, or men who were strong and fit.⁵¹⁸ The men who possessed these physical qualities, and who secured a nightwatchmen's role, were able to command an even higher wage. Their weekly wage of £1 3s in 1883 represented a premium compared with the regular commissionaires' wage of £1.⁵¹⁹

Age was not necessarily a barrier to a commissionaire fulfilling these physical criteria. Walter stated to an employer that 'there are few commissionaires who in point of age are young, but plenty who though over 40 – in consequence of having lived steady respectable lives – are in appearance and habits both young and active, [meaning] we have never had the slightest difficulty in obtaining the rate of wages laid down in the tariff [...] the average [weekly] wage of those commissionaires who have been 2 years in the Corps exceeds 27s [£1-7s]'.⁵²⁰ He concluded with the assertion that the employer could 'make [his selection] of a commissionaire at the Office [sic] [...] but they must [...] pay the price affixed to the article'.⁵²¹ As we will see throughout this study, Walter relied on language that both validated

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

⁵¹⁶ Begiato, *Manliness in Britain*, p. 168.

⁵¹⁷ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, , p. 2.

⁵¹⁸ Churchill, *Crime Control and Everyday Life in the Victorian City*, p. 135.

⁵¹⁹ LMA/4777/B/02/002, *Annual Circular*, July 1895, p. 2.

⁵²⁰ LMA/4777/B/03/02/057, EW to unnamed correspondent, 10 March 1880. It should be noted that Walter only occasionally clarifies whether the weekly wages he quoted included the man's pension, while it also needs to be borne in mind that the wages quoted to potential employers might have contained a degree of overclaim as he sought to establish that the commissionaires were in high demand.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

and commodified the identity of the commissionaire. In this, Walter's language would appear consistent with contemporary army philosophy. As Myerly notes in his discussion of army discipline, it was intended to ensure soldiers 'would respond automatically under any circumstances, as if they were cogs in a machine (and they were frequently referred to as "machines")'.⁵²²

The 'regular' commissionaire's weekly wage of £1 was associated with roles such as clerk, timekeeper, domestic servant and medical attendant. Positions like this did not necessarily have a requirement for the commissionaire to be nondisabled.⁵²³ Absent of this, the man's character would be called on by Walter to justify a competitive wage. Walter noted to a potential client of the Corps that 'fortunately we have now, and always have had, plenty of work for our own members'.⁵²⁴ He outlined an annual wage of £100 for a 'really respectable man and a useful [original emphasis] wife, and when these rare qualifications is [sic] added to the absence of a family, the wages asked for are no more than their market worth'.⁵²⁵ Thus, the Corps could offer the veteran security through steady employment and the promise of economic independence. These were opportunities that were out of the reach of a significant number of ex-servicemen throughout this period.⁵²⁶

The growing number of physical roles the Corps now offered in response to the needs of employers was advantageous to some commissionaires, as highlighted by Walter in his letter to *The Times* on 29 January 1881 (discussed above). However, as the letter makes clear, this put some disabled men at a disadvantage. Where a man had visible disabilities especially a missing limb, the cultural *capital* he had accrued in the army through their disability was literally embodied; their disability acted as a constant reminder to the onlooker of their military sacrifice. However, their disability might have diluted their physical capital, which, in turn, might have hindered them in their search for employment, despite the Corps' commitment to these men.

Evidence of this commitment and how it affected the individual can be seen in one of the Corps' publicity photographs. (Figure 2.3.)

⁵²² Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, p. 75.

⁵²³ LMA/4777/B/02/001, *Annual Circular 1878*, p. 2.

⁵²⁴ LMA/4777/B/03/02/057, EW to the manager of the Sheffield Union Bank, 9 November 1876.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 212.



Figure 2.3 LMA/4777/H/O2/006, undated publicity photograph.

The man's uniform, with the three distinctive chevrons stripes, conveys the commissioner's rank as sergeant, and thus communicates that his disability has not hindered him from serving in the Corps at that level. This raises two possibilities for the viewer: the first is that the man had achieved this rank through his performance in the Corps, which allowed him to follow the path to promotion, as outlined above; the second is that he had achieved this rank while serving in the army and had been able to retain it – and the advantages that went along with it – on joining the Corps. The *Rules* made provision for this second scenario and it was detailed in the 1883 edition, which stated that 'Commissionaires wishing to retain their

former rank in HM's Service may obtain Acting Rank', which would then be confirmed following the successful completion of a six-month probationary period.⁵²⁷

Thus, for all men who entered the Corps as either a private or NCO, there was a clear pathway to promotion and the associated financial benefits laid out for them in the *Rules*. This pathway sat alongside the different pay rates available to the men, depending on the roles they performed for their employers. These elements would have acted as a powerful incentive to conform to the Corps' disciplinary code and, as such, they provided the final element of the organisation's system of surveillance through encouraging self-monitoring. The behavioural standards the Corps set for the commissionaires were high, but the men who could live up to these expectations were rewarded with a level of economic stability that eluded many army veterans of the period, especially those with disabilities.

Conclusion

The Corps' *Rules* were instrumental in increasing the commercial value of the commissionaires and because of this the rulebook should be viewed as more than just a collection of regulations. The Corps' approach in this area created a tripartite relationship between the commissionaires, their employers and the Corps. This was a reciprocal commercial relationship whereby each party was aware of their responsibilities towards the others, and the financial bonds and penalties enshrined in the organisation's regulations ensured that these responsibilities were honoured. This was predicated on a remarkable level of transparency that was adopted by the Corps, which the ever-increasing pagination of the rule book testified to. The rulebook was an organic document that changed to meet the needs of each of the three parties. In doing so, it created an identity for the commissionaires that was valued by employers, and it allowed a largely unskilled group of men to gain secure employment; it also helped veterans overcome prejudices that could blight many as they moved from the army into civilian life. This was particularly true of those men with disabilities, who, despite changes to the *Rules*, were still able to benefit from membership of an organisation that served employers who increasingly favoured the nondisabled.

This chapter has demonstrated that the *Rules* should not simply be viewed as disciplinary tool. Indeed, the iterations of the document that were published during this period, represented the development of an economic compact that extended beyond the commissionaires and the Corps to include the men's employers, who were required to play a more active role in their relationship with the organisation. The commissionaires' identity provided the currency that enabled this tripartite relationship to flourish. In addition to the

⁵²⁷ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, pp. 46 and 96.

benefit of secure employment, commissionaires were able to access a level of welfare provision that far exceeded what they had experienced in the army, and compared favourably to what was offered by the most paternalistic employers of the second half of the nineteenth century. The basis of the Corps' welfare programme provides the focus for the following chapter

Chapter 3 – Welfare and Control

In June 1877, Walter wrote to Heathcote Long of the COS, responding to the latter's request for information regarding a former commissioner.⁵²⁸ The commissioner in question was James Pearson, who had been a member of the Corps for fifteen years prior to his death in November 1876.⁵²⁹ His wife had applied to the COS for support, and Long's letter sought further information about the family's background in order to decide if her application should be supported. The COS had been founded in London in 1869 and its principal aim was to 'educate and reform the recipients of charity so that they might become once more independent, self-respecting individuals'.⁵³⁰ For an individual to be deemed worthy of the organisation's support, they had to demonstrate that they were able to help themselves.⁵³¹ The COS operated a strict vetting procedure with applicants, so it must have decided that Pearson's widow's case was worthy of further investigation.⁵³²

Walter said he was sorry to hear of Mrs Pearson's predicament, but he offered no information regarding her background that might have helped the COS in deciding whether to assist her or not.⁵³³ Moreover, he showed no interest in what had happened to her following the death of her husband, although this did not stop him from offering advice to the COS. The nature of this advice illustrated the importance Walter placed on the welfare system that operated in the Corps for the commissioners and their families, and how he represented it to those outside of the Corps. Walter stated that, as far as Pearson's widow was concerned, he 'extremely regret[ted] her present condition [...] [but felt] some satisfaction in knowing that she as well as the Public are indebted to this Corps for the opportunity it afforded her late husband of earning a handsome income for so many years, and making some provision against the future'.⁵³⁴ In other words, the organisation had provided the means for the former commissioner to be financially self-reliant, which benefited him and his family, and ensured they should not require support from the COS. Walter then pointed out it was 'not his fault if they [had] saved so little', and that, furthermore,

⁵²⁸ LMA 4777/B/03/02/48.

⁵²⁹ LMA 4777/E/01/001, Admissions and Discharge Log Book 1859-1928.

⁵³⁰ Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, 6th edn, p.133.

⁵³¹ Robert Humphreys, *Sin, Organised Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England* (MacMillan, 1995), p. 151; see also Lynn Hollen-Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 369; Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995), p. 48.

⁵³² For an overview of this vetting process and how the COS worked with other bodies, see Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870-1900* (Boydell Press, 2007), p. 63; Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector*, pp. 48-9.

⁵³³ LMA 4777/B/03/02/48.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

‘when people have had to pay heavy rates [...] we think it only fair (where an absolute necessity arises) that we should derive some advantage from them’.⁵³⁵

Walter was making clear that he felt that it was Pearson’s lack of financial discipline – which he made clear by his comment regarding the commissioner’s lack of savings – that was the cause of his family’s predicament. From Walter’s perspective, the Corps had afforded the former commissioner opportunities he had not taken advantage of. These opportunities lay within the Corps’ welfare system, which this chapter analyses. This will deliver an understanding of how the provision of welfare was used as a source of control over the commissioners, and how this complemented the workplace control discussed in the preceding chapter. An outline of the welfare system’s principal features is given, before examining Walter’s motivations in creating this system and how it was designed to uphold the men’s respectability.

The chapter then moves on to a thematic exploration of the role discipline played in upholding key elements of the welfare system. The first area of discipline required of the men was financial. They had to demonstrate that they possessed this by fulfilling the Corps’ admissions criteria and then maintaining it through regular contributions to the organisation’s savings bank. The level of domestic discipline they were expected to uphold is then explored, by focusing on what was expected of those commissioners and their families who lived outside of the Corps’ barracks. The expectations of the role that would be played by the men’s wives was exacting, and was consistent with what was expected of the wives of soldiers who were permitted by the army to marry on the ‘strength’, that is those women who lived alongside their husband in the army’s barracks; this permission was only given to a minority of the rank and file.⁵³⁶

Whilst this was limited, a recent study by Lynn MacKay has demonstrated that the army valued the domestic duties that these women were required to perform. Yet, they were subject to close supervision and in some cases army discipline, when their behaviour was deemed transgressive.⁵³⁷ For those wives who were not permitted to live in the barracks, wider societal attitudes towards them could be ambiguous. MacKay notes the deeply conflicted public attitudes towards these women. They could, she argues, provide a ‘lightning rod for criticism’ from the middle and upper classes [...] [who] viewed them as ‘rowdy, ignorant, prone to drunkenness, lacking necessary homemaking skills and all too likely to fall

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ French, *Military Identities*, p. 129.

⁵³⁷ Lynn Mackay, *Women and the British Army, 1815-1880* (Boydell and Brewer, 2023), p. 82; these behaviours could range from drunkenness and rowdy behaviour to refusing to obey an order from an officer; see *ibid*, p. 104.

into prostitution in the absence of husbands'.⁵³⁸ Yet there was a growing view that the absence of their husbands left them unable to cope 'in the absence of the patriarchal head of the family'.⁵³⁹ By focusing on the role of the commissionaires' wives, this analysis extends MacKay's work through its focus on another field, where the wives of former soldiers performed a role which offered a counterpoint to the prevailing negative societal views of the rank and file's wives.

The chapter then analyses the types of bodily discipline the men and their families had to maintain. The discipline that was expected of the commissionaires in this final area ranged from healthcare to alcohol consumption and through to their funeral arrangements. Begiato notes that 'desirable standards of manliness required adult men to attain a high level of emotional and bodily management'.⁵⁴⁰ The same was true of the commissionaires if they were to live up to the high behaviour standards enshrined in the brand.

As was the case in the preceding chapter, the editions of the *Rules* published between 1864 and 1895 form the primary source material for this analysis. In addition, Walter's correspondence, the Corps' *Circulars*, and press coverage of the welfare system across this period are analysed. The common theme across these materials was the promotion of the commissionaires as a respectable body of men. This promotion was aimed at two groups: veterans considering a career in the Corps and employers. As Walter claimed to Long, the Corps was 'intended for respectable men, not for beggars or improvident people [original emphasis]'.⁵⁴¹ In making these claims around the commissionaires' self-reliance, Walter was invoking what a contemporary observer described as the type of man who could 'command good work and good pay all year round [...] [he] provides [...] for the proverbial rainy day [...] and on the whole is a person rather to be envied than pitied'.⁵⁴²

However, as Keith McClelland notes, even where factors like these might have been in place, it was no guarantee of material comfort, as 'scarcity and insecurity were persistently dominant features of [working class] lives'.⁵⁴³ Working class respectability was contingent on the material conditions of the family, which could fluctuate over time. As such, respectability,

⁵³⁸ Ibid, p. 64.

⁵³⁹ Ibid, p. 64.

⁵⁴⁰ Joanne Begiato, 'Punishing the Unregulated Manly Body and Emotions in Early Victorian England', in *The Victorian Male Body*, ed. by Joanne Ella Parsons and Ruth Heholt (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 46-64 (p. 48).

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p.48.

⁵⁴² Thomas Wright, 'Our Craftsmen', quoted in Keith McClelland, 'Masculinity and the "Representative Artisan" in Britain, 1850-1880', in Michael Roper and John Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (Routledge, 1991), pp. 74-91, (p. 74).

⁵⁴³ Keith McClelland, 'England's Greatness, the Working Man', in *Defining the Victorian nation : class, race, gender and the Reform Act of 1867*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 71-118 (p. 105).

as conceived by the working class themselves, was flexible and it could be based on what was available to people to differentiate themselves from those around them. This could vary within communities, even from street to street. As Johnson argues, 'what might be respectable to some might be shocking to others'.⁵⁴⁴

1. The Welfare System

The provisions of the Corps' welfare system sought to eliminate subjective interpretations of respectability. The *Rules* presented the system as a framework underpinned by the premise that it eradicated the economic uncertainty some working class families of this period could fall prey to. There was a certainty to the Corps' system, which evolved to cover multiple aspects of the lives of the commissionaires and their families. Respectability for the commissionaires was fixed and controlled by the Corps; it was an absolute rather than the relative conceptions of respectability that Johnson highlights. The 1864 edition of the *Rules* indicated that the Corps provided the commissionaires with a savings bank, plus a sickness and burial fund, to which they contributed. The aim of this fund was to provide 'the men with relief in the time of Sickness, and the payment of their Funeral expenses in case of death'.⁵⁴⁵ By 1895 this welfare programme had grown to encompass areas that included medical provision for commissionaires' wives and children, a newly created role of medical officer hereafter MO) solely dedicated to the Corps, as well as a retirement and convalescent fund.⁵⁴⁶

In providing the commissionaires with access to these types of welfare, the Corps had much in common with other employers of the period. As Joseph Melling has observed, occupational welfare schemes became a common feature among the industrial economy of the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁴⁷ However, this commonality belied the diverse motivations that lay behind the provision. For example, in his study of the British textile industry during this period, Patrick Joyce identifies a paternalistic strain within some employers, which found expression in the provision of welfare for their staff. He argues that 'the degree of paternalism practised depended in large measure on the history of the individual trade or industry'.⁵⁴⁸ He further asserts that 'paternalism may be at its most effective [when]

⁵⁴⁴ Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, p. 226.

⁵⁴⁵ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, pp. 16, 26.

⁵⁴⁶ The provision of welfare for the men and their families was detailed across eighteen pages of this edition of the *Rules*, which reflected the importance Walter placed on this subject. As a point of comparison, twelve pages were devoted to workplace regulations and discipline; see LMA /4777/ B/01/01/006.

⁵⁴⁷ Joseph Melling, 'Welfare Capitalism and the Origins of Welfare States: British Industry, Workplace Welfare and Social Reform, C. 1870-1914', *Social History*, 17.3, (1992), pp. 453-'78 (p. 477).

⁵⁴⁸ Patrick Joyce, *Work Society and Politics: The culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Methuen, 1980), p. 134.

deference [is] given not to the abstraction of traditionalism, but the embodiment of that ethic'.⁵⁴⁹

Walter's background as an army officer would have exposed him to a well-established tradition of paternalism, which would have instilled in him an understanding of the advantages to the British army that flowed from this. The army's culture of obedience and a willingness to follow orders rested on a concern for the rank and file's welfare from their officers; it therefore formed part of a transactional relationship. As Hew Strachan observes, the British army of this period operated as a 'sort of rural community where deference was rewarded by solicitude for the men's welfare'.⁵⁵⁰ Walter's exposure to this system would undoubtedly have made him aware of how the army improved its welfare provision for its soldiers during this period. These improvements ranged from building new barracks, enhancing their medical provision, and improving the men's diets.⁵⁵¹ The intention behind these changes was to help the army retain more soldiers when they got to the end of their first period of enlistment, as well as making it more attractive to recruits.⁵⁵² Furthermore, while these provisions, especially the living conditions in their barracks, could be basic, serving soldiers saw these provisions as integral to their terms of service and an extension of their wages.⁵⁵³

Consequently, Walter would have been aware that if he was to succeed in attracting sufficient numbers of veterans to move to the institutional life of the Corps, the welfare it offered had to be at least comparable to what the men had experienced in the army. This is not to ignore his 'higher' motivations in this area. As we saw in Chapter 1, he was driven by a sense of obligation towards the army's veterans, whom he felt had been let down by British society. Indeed, it was his heartfelt concern for these men – especially those with disabilities – that had motivated him to establish the Corps. However, an understanding of his attitudes and their likely origin can only partly explain why the Corps' welfare programme came to play such an important role in the organisation's development.

We saw in the Introduction how different organisations were motivated by concerns around the legitimacy of their workforces with their middle class customers. At a broader level, this type of provision also aided industrial relations. This contention is informed by Robert

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 135.

⁵⁵⁰ Hew Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy: the Reform of the British Army 1830-54* (Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 111. This observation is echoed by French, who notes the importance of regimental associations and how they fostered the idea of the regiment as a community by undertaking to provide financial assistance for serving and former soldiers, along with their families. See French, *Military Identities*, p. 80.

⁵⁵¹ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 22-4, 36-8, 44-'53, 63-8.

⁵⁵² Gosling, 'Tommy Atkins, War Office Reform', p. 59.

⁵⁵³ MacKay, *Women and the British Army*, p. 67.

Fitzgerald's study of the development of occupational welfare in British industry, which is based on case studies of a variety of industries of this period.⁵⁵⁴ He acknowledges the importance of paternalistic traditions as a factor that drove this development, but he argues that 'The greatest influence [...] was the nature of a company or an industry's market.'⁵⁵⁵ Fitzgerald's analysis identifies that the promotion of good relations between management and workers was an important factor in determining the level of welfare companies offered their employees. He points to the belief by management that strikes were typically caused by feelings of economic insecurity – the provision of welfare would help ameliorate this anxiety, reducing the number of industrial disputes.⁵⁵⁶ Fitzgerald's analysis also highlights how the provision of welfare helped those companies with large workforces engender a sense of loyalty among their employees, thus reducing staff turnover. He further highlights how this was particularly important in the railway industry, which placed a premium on retaining motivated and disciplined workforces.⁵⁵⁷

The relationship between Walter and the commissionaires cannot be viewed through the lens of industrial relations, nor was the Corps a large employer; nonetheless, some similarities can be drawn with Fitzgerald's analysis. As mentioned above, Walter's army experience would have demonstrated the pragmatic advantages of providing welfare for the commissionaires, both in terms of establishing obedience among the men and making the Corps an attractive place to work. However to fully understand Walter's motivations with regard to welfare, we need to revisit the nature of the Corps' business and the challenges it faced in establishing the men as trusted service providers to a largely middle-class customer base.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Corps was similar to the traditional employment agency, but its proposition relied on a level of transparency and professionalism that was typically absent from these existing agencies. If the promotion of the respectable commissionaire as created by Walter was to succeed, the means by which this would be achieved needed to be demonstrable. The sections of the *Rules* that regulated the welfare system provided this demonstration and the commissionaires' respectability was 'guaranteed', provided the men abided by these regulations. This was of crucial importance if Walter's claims around the men's respectability and, therefore, suitability for employment in positions of trust, were to have credence, given the poor reputation soldiers had in the eyes

⁵⁵⁴ Robert Fitzgerald, *British Labour Management & Industrial Welfare: 1846-1939* (Croom Helm, 1988). The study encompasses detailed case studies of the railway, gas, iron and steel, chemicals, and brewery industries.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14. Melling's analysis details a similar group of motivations; see 'Welfare Capitalism and the Origins of Welfare States', p. 461.

⁵⁵⁷ Fitzgerald, *British Labour Management & Industrial Welfare*, pp. 31-42.

of some middle-class observers. As one contemporary observer noted, 'there was in the minds of the ordinary God-fearing citizen no such thing as a good soldier; to have a [family] member who had gone for a soldier was for many families a crowning disgrace'.⁵⁵⁸

The most important of these regulations in underwriting this guarantee to prospective clients was that the payments to the various welfare funds were mandatory. The public distribution of the *Rules* made this guarantee transparent. As the scope of the welfare system grew, so did the number of funds the men were mandated to contribute to, rising from two in 1864 to five in 1895.⁵⁵⁹ The level of their contributions was listed in the *Rules*, and thus the financial commitments that the men made in providing for their own welfare and those of the families was quantifiable. As Bailey has observed, while 'Respectability primarily enjoined moral rectitude [...] it also demanded economic continence and self-sufficiency'.⁵⁶⁰ When viewed alongside the financial indemnities around the men's probity in the workplace, the welfare sections of *Rules* demonstrated that the men possessed these qualities. This provided a potent tool to be used in the promotion of the commissionaire system. Thus, the Corps' welfare framework formed a key component of the marketing strategy to promote the commissionaire brand to a middle class customer base.

The aim of the regulations related to the men's welfare was to demonstrate to middle class employers that the working class commissionaires held similar values to them. Walter said the Corps was 'a club not a charity in any sense or shape, and its members though not rich are well off and thoroughly independent, and I trust, actuated by as high principles as many of their richer countryman'.⁵⁶¹ With this statement, Walter was claiming a parity for the commissionaires with people who were wealthier than them, and therefore of a higher social class. As a contemporary periodical stated on respectability, its attainment was 'exact of everyone as a condition of being allowed to associate upon terms of ostensible equality with the rest of the human race'.⁵⁶² The mandatory nature of the men's contributions, as well as the nature of the welfare provision that was funded by them, underlined that the commissionaires were self-reliant and had, therefore, achieved an equality with respectable members of society. This equality communicated that the men could be trusted to occupy positions of trust through delivering the services the Corps offered its middle class clients.

⁵⁵⁸ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 133.

⁵⁵⁹ LMA/ 4777/B/01/01/001, pp.16-17,26, LMA/ 4777/B/01/01/006, pp. 74-91, 92-3.

⁵⁶⁰ Bailey, "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?'" , p. 338.

⁵⁶¹ LMA/4777/B/03/02, EW to the Honourable Secretary of the COS, Montagu Street, 28 January 1875.

⁵⁶² *The Cornhill Magazine*, 'Anti-Respectability', 8 September 1863, quoted in Bailey, "'Will the real Bill Banks Please Stand Up'", p. 338.

The commissionaires were working class, but the *Rules* presented them as holding similar values to the Corps' clients.

The cornerstone of this strategy was the emphasis the Corps placed on the responsibility of the commissionaires themselves. This emphasis on the individual was consistent with middle class conceptions of respectability, which, as Simon Cordery observes, 'rested on the premise that that individualism and self-help were [its] twin foundations'.⁵⁶³ But at the heart of the commissionaires' putative self-reliance was a contradiction – it was mandated. As Joyce argues, the central tenet of many privately run occupational welfare systems was that 'the self-reliant workman was to be helped to help himself'.⁵⁶⁴ Approaches such as these were praised by middle class observers for the values they attempted to inculcate in their workforces, and which 'promoted the entrepreneurial virtues of thrift and hard work'.⁵⁶⁵

2. Financial discipline

The Corps' entrance criteria were designed to act as a signifier of the applicant's respectability in the way these stipulations evaluated the financial discipline the man had shown in the army. The *Rules* stipulated that, depending on their service background and health, veterans who applied to the Corps had to demonstrate they had accrued set levels of savings. The men were then required to deposit these savings in the Corps' savings bank. In 1864, this stipulation applied only to men who suffered from 'impaired health, whose temporary pensions [had] expired [but] may be admitted on depositing £25 in the Saving's Bank'.⁵⁶⁶ This money would be returned to the commissionaire when he left the Corps.⁵⁶⁷ By 1883, the requirements around the amount of money a man had to deposit had been extended to cover those who had served in the army for a limited time and had either not accrued a pension, or their temporary pension had elapsed. The amount of deposit was determined by the man's age and rose from £5 if the man was aged 25 to £20 if he was 35.⁵⁶⁸

Thus, the *Rules* were skewed in favour of those applicants who had been awarded permanent pensions. Absent of a pension, an applicant had only one source of income, which was his wages as a commissionaire, and therefore Walter held that the mandatory deposit these men were required to make in the Corps' banks underwrote their future self-reliance. Those men who received permanent pensions were not mandated to pay anything

⁵⁶³ Simon Cordery, 'Friendly Societies and the Discourse of Respectability in Britain', p. 35.

⁵⁶⁴ Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, p. 137.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵⁶⁶ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 2.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁶⁸ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001.

into the Savings Bank on their admittance as they were assured of an income, and therefore their self-reliance, in Walter's eyes, was assured.⁵⁶⁹ However, while the majority of pensions were permanent in status, 38% were granted on a temporary basis.⁵⁷⁰ Therefore, the stipulations regarding the mandatory deposits could well have affected a significant number of applicants, which, in turn, might have dissuaded some from making an application.

The same can be seen in relation to those men who applied to join the Corps having served in the Army Reserve, which had been created in 1870.⁵⁷¹ The Reserve was compulsory for men who had only committed to serving in the permanent army for six years, and the vast majority of them did not qualify for a pension.⁵⁷² As a consequence, Reservists were required to deposit a higher amount than those men on temporary pensions. The amount of this deposit could be as high as £50 for married men.⁵⁷³ This payment was designed to 'prove their ability to keep a wife in the proper manner by previously having saved fifty pounds'.⁵⁷⁴ An absence of these funds was taken by Walter as an indication of the man's lack of character, his respectability and, therefore, his likely inability to be self-reliant as a commissionaire.

The source of these funds was as important as their amount, as Walter repeatedly asserted to his correspondents. He stated that any applicant who had relied on charity for his admissions money was 'unfit to associate with Commissionaires'.⁵⁷⁵ In other words, Walter held that this class of men represented a threat to the collective respectability of the commissionaires, through their apparent inability – according to the *Rules* – to support a wife. A man who had to rely on others for his admissions money was marked as not respectable, unless there were extenuating reasons, such as ill health.⁵⁷⁶ Walter stated that a man 'having once experienced the facility of living on the industry of others [...] is probably ruined for life', and, as a consequence, those individuals who provided charity to ex-servicemen were 'doing more harm than good'.⁵⁷⁷ We saw in the previous chapter how Walter equated drunkenness with a moral failing, and referencing alcohol provided him with the means to further decry charity. He claimed that a man 'having tasted charity [...] became like the Tippler [sic] [...] and [the recipient is] unable to resist the temptation of living on the

⁵⁶⁹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p2, LMA/4777/B/01/01/002,p4 LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 1, LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 7.

⁵⁷⁰ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 209.

⁵⁷¹ Gosling, 'Tommy Atkins, War Office Reform', p. 42.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵⁷³ LMA/4777/B/04/010, general order 247, July 1895.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ LMA/B/03/02/057, EW to The Secretary St Giles and St Georges COS, 7 June 1875.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, EW to FS Colenso, 10 June 1876.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, EW to WS Beton Karr 26 June 1876, and EW to CS Loch, 31 July 1880.

industry of others instead of depending on his own'.⁵⁷⁸ What Walter claimed here was that charity degraded the aspiring commissionaire and could eliminate the potential of his capacity for self-reliance.

Walter explained to a correspondent who had enquired as to whether a man could deposit funds that he had received from someone else, that this might be permissible in some instances.⁵⁷⁹ This was contingent on the man being adjudged to be respectable in his appearance. Walter explained that the man had to be 'clean in his outward appearance and properly dressed'.⁵⁸⁰ However, in granting this flexibility, he took the opportunity to express his doubts about the respectability of the applicant, given his inability to have saved the money himself. This, in turn, could have a detrimental effect on his career as a commissionaire. Having agreed to accept an individual who had relied on a donation from the COS, Walter noted that the chances of the applicant having received 'what is usually meant by charitable assistance being good for much are very small'.⁵⁸¹ In accepting the grant of another man's admission money, he informed the donor that 'strictly [original emphasis] speaking, it is fatal to the admission of a man if he applies for outside assistance for the purposes of becoming a commissionaire'. He continued by asserting that when men who have required assistance to join the Corps, 'it rarely [...] turns out satisfactorily.' [original emphasis].⁵⁸²

Underpinning Walter's assertions was his belief that former soldiers had had the opportunity to accrue the necessary money while serving in the army. He made clear his belief that 'every soldier [...] on his discharge form H.M. Service [sic] has ample means to become a commissionaire'.⁵⁸³ In making this claim, Walter is inferring a failure of character on the part of the applicant through not succeeding – as measured by a lack of savings – in his former employment as a soldier. As Martin Daunton observes, 'character was tested by striving, self-reliance, and the mastering of circumstances'.⁵⁸⁴ When judged against these criteria, an applicant who required a donation had 'failed' according to Walter, in that he had not taken advantage of the opportunities he had been presented with as a soldier.

These financial criteria, and the applicant's ability to fulfil them, acted for Walter as a proxy for judging the man's likely future behaviour, in particular his ability to conform to the Corps'

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., EW to H Bonsfield, 7 November 1876.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., EW to the Honourable Secretary of the COS, Montagu Street, 28 January 1875.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., EW to the Honourable Secretary of the COS, Montagu Street, 28 January 1875.

⁵⁸² LMA 4777 / B/03/02/042, EW to RJ Gunton, 2 March 1889.

⁵⁸³ LMA 4777/B/03/02/48.

⁵⁸⁴ Martin Daunton, "'Gentlemanly Capitalism' and British Industry 1820-1914', *Past & Present*, 122 (1989), pp. 119-58 (p. 132).

Rules regarding its welfare system. As he explained to a correspondent who had sought information regarding these criteria, men who did not have the requisite savings had ‘never learned to help themselves [...] [and they] rarely learn[t] the lesson afterwards’.⁵⁸⁵ However reasonable these dictates may have appeared to Walter, it must be remembered that the wages that were earned by soldiers were low, and throughout this period the ‘soldier’s financial position remained precarious and very little changed’.⁵⁸⁶ Paul Johnson notes that, for some contemporary observers, ‘the poverty of the poor was proof enough that they were improvident’.⁵⁸⁷

Walter’s views could be similarly moralistic on occasion and he was seemingly incapable of taking these financial factors into consideration. Indeed, while he was dedicated to the welfare of ex-servicemen, he was not afraid to share his negative views regarding the character of this group. He explained to a correspondent that there was a fundamental flaw in the character of ex-servicemen when he described the ‘stupidity and insobriety of the class’.⁵⁸⁸ To ameliorate this, Walter believed that veterans should apply to the Corps ‘at the proper time [...] immediately after his discharge from H.M. Services [sic]’.⁵⁸⁹ He counselled that if an applicant ‘prefers to waste his time or substance before becoming [a commissioner] he has only himself to blame’.⁵⁹⁰ Put simply, Walter is expressing his personal view that many veterans could not be helped, as they had failed to help themselves. Thus, the entrance criteria, while seemingly objective in the way they were detailed in the *Rules*, were suffused with a subjectivity based on Walter’s moral judgements.

The Corps’ savings bank played an important role in demonstrating the financial discipline of all commissioners once they had been accepted into the organisation. Walter intended that the bank would encourage thrift and impose financial discipline on the commissioners. This intention had much in common with the savings banks that the army had established at a regimental level, of which Walter would have been aware through his military service.⁵⁹¹ The War Office hoped these banks would encourage thrift so the soldiers could better support their families and prepare for life after the army, and that their savings could augment their pensions.⁵⁹² In addition, it was argued that the habit of saving would reduce the amount of

⁵⁸⁵ LMA/4777/B/03/02/042, EW to unnamed correspondent, 9 August 1880.

⁵⁸⁶ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 190.

⁵⁸⁷ Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, p. 26, Humphreys similarly notes that the ‘COS attitude was that the poor were inherently lazy’, see Humphreys, *Sin, Organised Charity and the Poor Law*, p. 147.

⁵⁸⁸ LMA 4777/B/03/02/042, EW to unnamed correspondent, 13 August 1887.

⁵⁸⁹ LMA 4777/B/03/02/058, EW to RJ Gunton, 13 May 1889.

⁵⁹⁰ LMA 4777/B/03/02/48.

⁵⁹¹ Peter Burroughs, ‘Promoting Thrift, Sobriety and Discipline in the British Army: The Establishment of Military Savings Banks’, *Histoire Sociale / Social History*, 14.28 (1981), pp. 323-37.

⁵⁹² *Ibid*, p. 324.

money soldiers spent on alcohol, which would have a beneficial effect on army discipline. As Peter Burroughs has observed, army officers argued that regular saving would have a beneficial effect on discipline; this group held that 'A thrifty soldiery with frugal habits [...] would be a sober, contented, well behaved soldier.'⁵⁹³ However, while the banks attracted a high level of deposits, the number of soldiers who chose to save their wages in this way was relatively small.⁵⁹⁴

Consequently, unlike other areas of the Corps' welfare system, which would have been familiar to the commissionaires through their military service, the way the Corps' Savings Bank was operated could have seemed alien to many commissionaires. The 1864 edition of the *Rules* stated that all men had to deposit a weekly amount of 1s after serving three months in the Corps.⁵⁹⁵ The purpose of these contributions were 'to provide for his family [...] and against the time when by reason of infirmity or other cause, the Commissionaire [sic] is unable to continue his occupation'.⁵⁹⁶ This mandated saving was there to create a culture of prudence amongst the commissionaires.

This culture echoed wider societal trends, which saw an increase in working class saving. In his survey of contemporary working class finances, Johnson notes that saving a proportion of income increasingly became a habit for many members of the working class during this period. However, this prudence belied a high degree of short-term behaviour. The patterns of withdrawals and account closures that sat behind these figures indicate that, for many working class families, savings were typically used to fund short-term pressure on their finances, rather than long-term cash accumulation.⁵⁹⁷ The latter type of saving was more characteristic of middle class families, who benefited from being able to deposit often large sums of money on an ad hoc basis, with the intention that this money would remain untouched for long time.⁵⁹⁸

It was this type of middle class behaviour that Walter was mandating among the working class commissionaires. These conditions emphasised the principle that the men would defer the benefit they accrued through their savings. Aside from the annual interest their savings

⁵⁹³ Ibid, p. 324. Similar philanthropic motivations lay behind the creation of the 'penny' savings banks of this period, which, as their name denotes, were established to encourage regular savings among those members of the working class who could only afford to save small amounts. As Duncan M. Ross argues, 'they displayed all the classic hallmarks of Victorian philanthropy in which well-meaning and dedicated members of the middle class provided the means by which the poorer classes could help themselves escape the tyranny and degradations of poverty and drunkenness'; see Duncan M. Ross, "'Penny banks" in Glasgow, 1850–1914', *Financial History Review*, 9 (2002), pp. 21–39 (p. 25).

⁵⁹⁴ Burroughs, 'Promoting Thrift, Sobriety and Discipline', p. 336.

⁵⁹⁵ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 26.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁹⁷ Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, pp. 124–5.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 99–100 and 220.

earned, the commissionaires were not permitted to make any withdrawals while a member of the Corps 'unless with leave'.⁵⁹⁹ Indeed, to access their savings in full, the men had either to resign or be dismissed from the Corps. Following this, the full balance would be paid within two weeks.⁶⁰⁰ All applications made by commissionaires regarding withdrawals were to be made to the adjutant before being forwarded to Walter.⁶⁰¹ Thus, the complex conditions that commissionaires had to fulfil to access their money in the savings bank meant that they did not enjoy the level of flexibility working class families typically relied on.⁶⁰²

The regulations regarding the commissionaires' savings became ever stricter. By 1883, the *Rules* stated that any money withdrawn would be treated as a loan that would need to be repaid within two years.⁶⁰³ In addition, the amount of money the commissionaire could withdraw was based on the length of his service in the Corps and, therefore, the amount he held on deposit. No withdrawals could be sanctioned until the total amount had reached £5.⁶⁰⁴ Furthermore, the amount of money the commissionaires were mandated to save progressively increased during this period. By 1895, all men who joined on a full army pension had to deposit 10s in the Savings Bank, and men on higher weekly wages had their weekly savings amounts increased.⁶⁰⁵ As such, the balance of power with regards to these regulations remained firmly tipped in favour of the Corps.

As mentioned above, the scope of the welfare programme had grown considerably by 1895, and this was reflected in the money the commissionaires were required to contribute to the funds associated with this. For an unmarried commissionaire who lived in the barracks this was c. 3s 6d per week; for those who were married and who elected to have their families covered by the medical fund, the weekly cost was c. 2s 5d.⁶⁰⁶ Based on their previous life in the army, the men would have been used to the concept of stoppages, which were sums of money deducted from their wages that covered a variety of costs, such as laundry, extra rations and haircutting.⁶⁰⁷ However, their experience as commissionaires differed in two respects, which relied on them playing a more active role in their finances than they were used to. First, the men would pay this money directly from their wages to the paymaster sergeant of the Corps. It was his responsibility to maintain the commissionaire's ledger,

⁵⁹⁹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 26.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶⁰¹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 46.

⁶⁰² Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, pp. 124-25.

⁶⁰³ LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 73.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁰⁵ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 74.

⁶⁰⁶ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006

⁶⁰⁷ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, pp. 134 –'5.

which recorded all the men's earnings and the money deposited in the various funds.⁶⁰⁸ Second, the men were required to record all their earnings and payments to the Corps in what the *Rules* described as their 'small book', which they had to carry at all times and which they would refer to when they signed off their individual ledger account each month.⁶⁰⁹

Thus, the emphasis was placed firmly on each commissioner, as opposed to the passive relationship the men would have had in the army regarding their wages and stoppages. However, the Corps' regulations recognised that some men may have needed help in understanding their accounts, and they were therefore permitted to nominate a fellow commissioner to assist them. But the responsibility lay with the individual commissioner to maintain his accounts and, having signed them, he could not dispute the sums involved. Moreover, any late payments would be subject to a fine.⁶¹⁰ These regulations underlined the importance of each commissioner's ledger account, but a statement at the end of this section of the *Rules* expressed the importance of the welfare system in more emotive terms. The commissioners were told that 'they must recollect that, as the Corps was founded for men who are able and willing to work, and not as a refuge for idle, stupid or incapable persons, those who profess to be unable to earn their living like their comrades, and pay their share of the expenses of the Institution are unfit to remain in it.'⁶¹¹ Those men who could not display the requisite financial discipline 'had better apply to some of the numerous charitable Institutions in which this country abounds'.⁶¹² Thus, for Walter, the Corps was not a charity. The public distribution of the *Rules* ensured that this statement acted as much as a marketing message for the commissioner brand as it did a warning to the commissioners themselves.

3. Domestic discipline

The levels of domestic discipline the men had to uphold were as exacting as the financial discipline discussed above. This can be seen in Walter's correspondence with Colonel Breton – a long-term supporter of the Corps – in 1876 regarding the case of an unnamed commissioner who had been widowed and had two children. This letter illustrates his motivation for creating the role of lady adjutant.⁶¹³ Walter stated that the commissioner needed a short holiday away from London and 'above all a little of that personal sympathy which persons in his position in life – in London at least – get so little of I dare say'.⁶¹⁴ Walter

⁶⁰⁸ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 15.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶¹² Ibid., p. 17.

⁶¹³ LMA 4777/ B/ 03/02/048, EW to Colonel Breton, 6 October 1876.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

continued by expressing the hope that the colonel's wife might know of a 'Lady or Ladies [sic] who would look after the Commissionaires' [sic] children should their father be able to get away for a month, (this part I could manage for him)'.⁶¹⁵

Walter asserted that domestic issues such as this were a perennial feature of life in the Corps and that its officers were unsuited to dealing with them. He believed that if he could meet a 'Lady,' [sic] who might be able to handle the commissionaire's children and similar cases, then 'this would be an immense advantage to us'.⁶¹⁶ He believed that a woman who possessed 'the necessary qualities would be of the greatest assistance to us in many ways [...] [and an attractive position] to anyone wishing for some occupation to which a part of her time might be devoted with great advantage to others'. He 'could promise the employment would bring much satisfaction with it'. Walter concluded by saying that with 'nearly 700 men to look after, we have no time whatever to devote to their families, [as] often as they require it, and as much as would like to do so'.⁶¹⁷

Thus, Walter went beyond a request for assistance. The letter demonstrated a rare admission by him that the Corps was found wanting in a specific area, through its inability to fully address the needs of the commissionaires' wives and families. His views also reflected the gendered and class-based division of labour that was so prevalent within the civilian world of Victorian philanthropy and voluntarism.⁶¹⁸ As Jane Lewis notes, the 'tasks of men and women were clearly differentiated', and, in this context, women took on the primary responsibility of visiting the poor.⁶¹⁹ Frank Prochaska observed that during this period, 'philanthropy was seen as the vocation of middle class women, an outlet for their domestic skills and their much heralded characteristics of kindness and compassion'.⁶²⁰ For the COS it was also a matter of authority. The organisation held that visiting should be the preserve of

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ The COS assumed that the 'superior' social standing of their visitors would provide the gravitas and respect required to affect change in the behaviour of the poor; see Humphreys, *Sin, Organised Charity and the Poor Law* p. 145. Jane Lewis observes that 'the active work of philanthropy was gendered; men served mainly on the committees of charitable organisations but did not visit the poor'; see Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Edward Elgar, 1991), p. 10. Ellen Ross has noted that poorer working class families of this period could expect to be visited by a wide range of women dedicated to improving these families' living conditions. These women could be found occupying professions including 'schoolteachers, school managers [...] district nurses [...] and COS case workers'. This was in addition to middle and upper class women who fulfilled more traditional philanthropic roles on a voluntary basis; see Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 15 & 17. Similar attitudes around the suitability of middle and upper class women for these types of roles was also prevalent in army as was detailed in the Introduction; see pp. 7-8.

⁶¹⁹ Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, p. 31.

⁶²⁰ F.K. Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', in F.M.L Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950, Volume 3, Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 385.

middle class women, as their 'superior' social standing would provide the gravitas and respect required to affect change in the behaviour of the poor.⁶²¹

The position of lady adjutant was inherently modern. Walter's conception of the role owed much to this prevailing orthodoxy regarding the emerging profession of social worker, the nature of which emphasised a systematic approach to self-help within the household.⁶²²

Bernard and Helen Bosanquet of the COS were two of the sector's leading proponents, and they believed the organisation could play a key role in helping the poor 'make more of their lives than they did before'; in other words, the poor were capable of being able to master their circumstances when supported by an outside agency.⁶²³ As Lewis has observed, this mission was predicated on the view that the greatest agent for change would be parents delivering on their responsibilities. These responsibilities were defined as 'the husband to provide, the wife to manage, and of both parents to play their part in socialising children into habits of industry and thrift'.⁶²⁴

The nascent role of lady almoner in the hospitals of this period provides an additional point of comparison. Lynsey T. Cullen's analysis of the creation of the first role of this type by the Royal Free Hospital in London in 1895, indicates that it was a position envisioned and championed by men, in this instance the hospital's male leadership.⁶²⁵ As we saw above, there are clear similarities in this with how the position of lady adjutant in the Corps was envisaged by Walter. This chapter's exploration of the latter position and its role, extends Cullen's analysis by examining the role played by the lady adjutant in an environment that was not just led by men, but whose welfare system was designed around the needs of the male commissionaires. This role also had a strong emphasis on social work among the commissionaires and their families. As such, this chapter's analysis connects with George Campbell Gosling's study of the role played by the lady almoner in interwar Bristol, and how these women pushed for their position to be more focused on social work.⁶²⁶

Walter appointed Miss Brooke-Smith to the role, which was formally confirmed in his annual report in July 1878.⁶²⁷ Her role was to evaluate the respectability of the commissionaires' homes. Where the home was deemed unrespectable, she would – in collaboration with

⁶²¹ Humphreys, *Sin, Organised Charity and the Poor Law*, p. 145.

⁶²² Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, pp. 15 and 305-'06.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶²⁵ Lynsey T. Cullen, 'The First Lady Almoner: The Appointment, Position and Findings of Miss Mary Stewart at the Royal Free Hospital, 1895-99', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 68.4, (2013) pp. 551-82.

⁶²⁶ Gosling, *Payment and Philanthropy in British Healthcare, 1918-1948*, pp. 93-104.

⁶²⁷ LMA/4777/B /02 /001, 'Report of the Commanding Officer, 1878', *Annual Circular of the Corps of Commissionaires*, p. 3.

Walter – provide advice and financial assistance to those families where she deemed the commissionaire and his wife capable of improving their situation.⁶²⁸ He asserted that ‘in a community exceeding two thousand women and children there are innumerable occasions where the position and experience of a Lady [sic] are invaluable’.⁶²⁹ He acknowledged that where he and his officers had been involved in such ‘occasions’ they had been ‘unprofitably occupied’.⁶³⁰ Walter then stated that following ‘two years consideration [he had] organised a new department – that of the lady adjutant – and to the charge of this lady all matters relating to the wives, widows or children of Commissionaires [sic] will be referred’.⁶³¹

In reality, no department was ever set up by Walter, and Brooke-Smith worked closely with the Corps’ medical officer, Dr Spratt – whom she later married – but she was not given staff to support her. Furthermore, she was the only person to occupy the role, which disappeared when she and her husband left the Corps in either 1884 or 1885.⁶³² Nonetheless, her influence was significant and Walter’s choice of the title lady adjutant underlined the importance he attached to the role. The male adjutant occupied the second most senior position in the Corps, and he was responsible for the way in which the organisation operated as a business, whether the men were fulfilling their obligations and if the Corps was fulfilling its duties to them. Therefore, the title of this new position nominally placed her alongside him. The *Englishwoman’s Review* approvingly noted Brooke-Smith’s appointment and placed it within the wider context of the growth of this type of employment.⁶³³ The report observed that ‘the value of the services of competent and qualified women in every department where women and children [...] is on the increase and has been found in every case that it has been adopted, advantageous.’⁶³⁴ A contemporary magazine report and its accompanying illustration, which placed her alongside Walter at the top of the page, symbolically communicated the importance of her role. (figure 3.1)⁶³⁵

⁶²⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

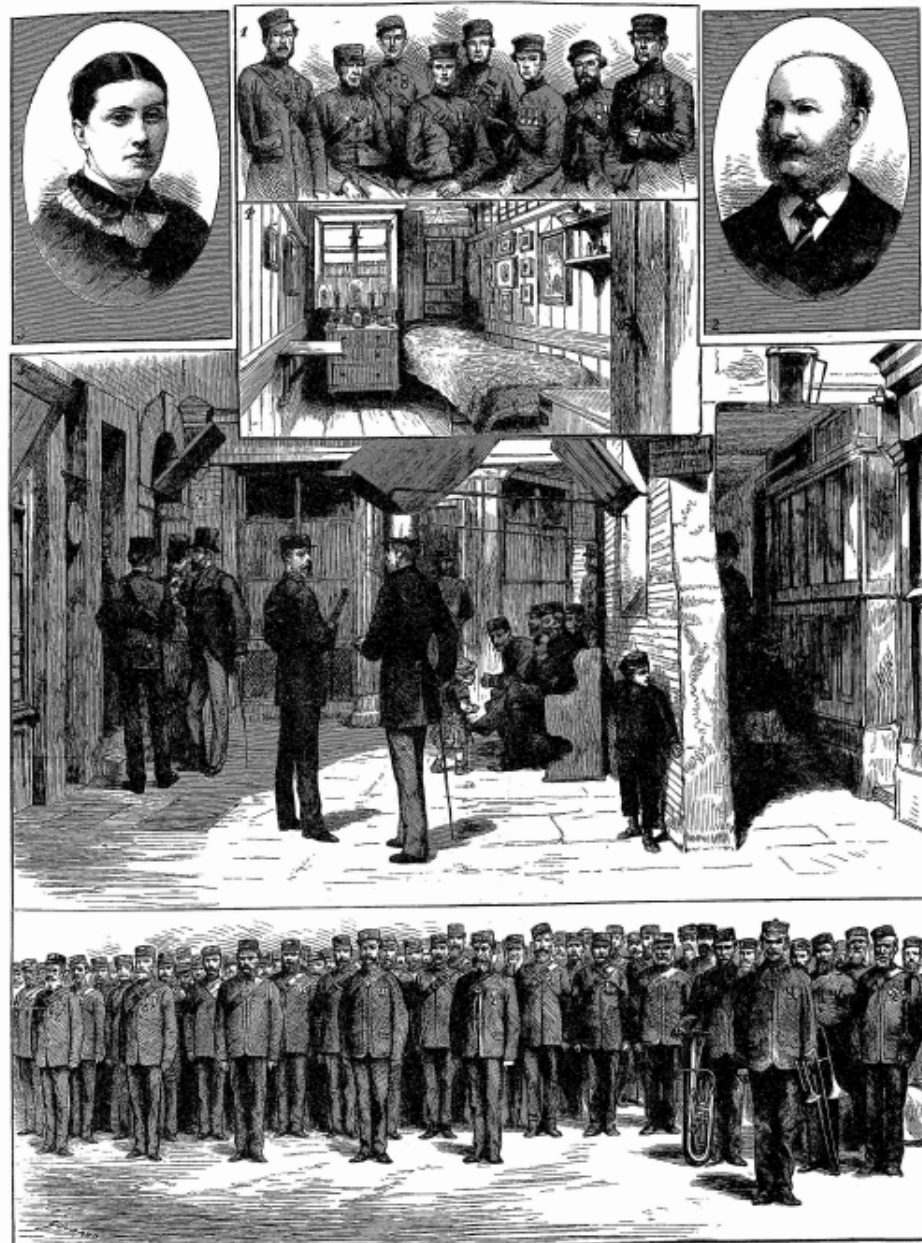
⁶³¹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶³² LMA/4777/B/02/001; the final reference to Mrs Spratt (formerly Miss Brooke-Smith) was in the *Circular* of 1884, p. 4. Walter’s correspondence is silent on why she was not replaced. Given the emphasis he had placed on the importance of the role of lady adjutant, as well as the praise he gave Brooke-Smith, this is surprising. This is reinforced by his constant references to the importance of the welfare system in his reports; in particular, the role played by the healthiness and cleanliness of the married commissionaires’ homes.

⁶³³ ‘Lady Adjutant to the Corps of Commissionaires’, *Englishwoman’s Review*, 14 September 1878, pp. 414-15.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p. 415.

⁶³⁵ ‘The Corps of Commissionaires’, *Graphic*, 31 July 1880, pp. 108-09.



1. Some of the Original Members.—2. Captain E. Walters, Founder and Commanding Officer of the Corps.—3. Mrs. Brook Smith, the Lady Adjutant.—4. A Bedroom in the Barracks.—5. The Head Quarters, Exchange Court, Strand.—6. A General Parade.
THE CORPS OF COMMISSIONAIRES

Figure 3.1 *Graphic* magazine, 31st July 1880, p. 109

Visiting the homes of those commissionaires who required support was central to Brooke-Smith's work, which was outlined by Walter in the description of her duties.⁶³⁶ She was advised by him on what information she needed to ascertain, which started with the likely age of the wife, although he cautioned her 'to not ask too close questions on this point'. She also had to note the condition of the home, how many children were in the family, their ages and if any of them were 'able and willing' to enter into domestic service.⁶³⁷ This last point echoed a contemporary guide for visitors, which was written by Charles Bosanquet and titled *A Handy Book for Visitors of the Poor in London*.⁶³⁸ In order to bring additional income into the family home and instil the habit of work, visitors were counselled to 'urge on parents the importance of getting their children out, and of selecting such kinds of employment as afford the greatest advantages in the long run'.⁶³⁹

The familial aspect of Brooke-Smith's responsibilities, both practical and pastoral, were clarified. A classified advertisement published in *The Times* announced that the 'Lady Adjutant of the Corps of Commissionaires has on her REGISTRY [sic] the names of several sons and daughters of them men who are anxious to obtain SITUATIONS in DOMESTIC SERVICE [original emphasis]'.⁶⁴⁰ These children could be 'well recommended as regards their character and desire to work'.⁶⁴¹ Alongside this, a general order advised those commissionaires living within a quarter of a mile of the Corps' barracks that Brooke-Smith had been instructed to 'take charge of such young children whose parent [...] wish to go down to the gardens of the embankment for the purpose of getting fresh air'.⁶⁴² This was to be a daily event if the weather permitted and it was envisaged that the visit to the gardens would last two hours.⁶⁴³

In his annual report for that year, Walter linked Brooke-Smith's work to the Corps' aim of securing employment for its members.⁶⁴⁴ He stated that 'when [he had] the best means of knowing what a man is at home, [he felt] perfectly secure when I send him [to an employer] [...] [he] therefore never retain[ed] anyone on the Roll [sic] whose conduct in his family relations I know to be such as would reflect discredit on his comrades as well as himself'. Walter was expressing his belief that the domestic lives of the commissionaires indicated

⁶³⁶ LMA/4777/B/03/02/018, EW to the Lady Adjutant, 27 March 1878.

⁶³⁷ LMA/4777/B/03/02/018, EW to the Lady Adjutant, 27 March

⁶³⁸ Charles Bosanquet, *A Handy Book for Visitors of the Poor in London* (Longman, 1874).

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁴⁰ 'The Lady Adjutant of the Corps of Commissionaires,' *The Times*, 13 May 1878, p. 3.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁴² LMA/4777/B/03/02/018, undated general order, EW to the Corps.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴ LMA/4777/B/02/001, 'Report of the Commanding Officer, 1880', *Annual Circular of the Corps of Commissionaires*, p. 3.

their ability to fulfil their role as commissionaires; a respectable home underwrote the respectable character of a married commissionaire, whom Walter would have confidence in sending to employers. He continued by linking his confidence with the financial guarantees he offered employers around the commissionaires' behaviour, which was discussed in the previous chapter. He claimed, 'employers [had] a double security', with the Corps' welfare system in effect guaranteeing the men's respectability, which, in turn, gave them 'an increased value in the Labour Market' [sic].⁶⁴⁵

The *Rules* delivered public clarification of Brooke-Smith's responsibilities towards maintaining the respectability of the commissionaires' families and, alongside this, the role of a newly created register of '*Families under Special Supervision*' [original emphases].⁶⁴⁶ A family would be placed on the register if their living arrangements were found to be at fault. To be deemed at fault meant not fulfilling criteria the *Rules* detailed as being 'essential to the credit of the Corps, and the welfare of the man's family'.⁶⁴⁷ In other words, the commissionaire and his wife could not allow their arrangements to discredit the collective respectability of the Corps. If they did, they faced the prospect of being placed on the register. They were instructed to maintain a home that was 'healthy and clean [...] sufficient for decency and morality [...] [and not located in] any neighbourhood notoriously disreputable'.⁶⁴⁸ Their children 'must be properly clothed and in regular attendance at a proper school, if of an age to go there'.⁶⁴⁹

Should the commissionaire be in any doubt as to where his responsibilities lay, the *Rules* offered clarity by stating that '*Every Member [sic] of the Corps is personally answerable for the conduct of each member of his family who may be residing under his roof, and if he neglects his duty as a Father [sic], or his obligation as a Citizen [sic], he will not be permitted to remain a Member [sic] of this Institution.*' [sic; original emphases throughout]⁶⁵⁰ The reference to 'obligations' may well have resonated with the middle class employers who had a copy of the *Rules*, but there could have been less certainty for the commissionaire who had to abide by them. What, he may have wondered, encompassed his duties as a 'citizen?' In addition, words such as 'disreputable', when applied to neighbourhoods, along with the instruction to keep children 'properly' clothed and educated may not have been helpful if a man was to avoid falling foul of these dictates.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁶ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 107; the purpose of the register and Brooke-Smith's role in implementing it had been outlined to her privately by Walter in March 1881, LMA/ 4887/B/03/02/018.

⁶⁴⁷ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 107.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 108.

However, Julie-Marie Strange's analysis of the role played by some working class fathers during this period indicates a strong understanding of these responsibilities by some men.⁶⁵¹ Indeed, she asserts that, for some fathers, 'toiling for dependents was a transcendental act of devotion'.⁶⁵² In addition, she highlights how working class men might suppress their own desires in order to provide for their families and, in doing so, challenge the widely held middle class views around the supposed profligacy of the working class household. Indeed, her analysis concludes that the working class fathers of her study were just as selfless and caring as their middle class counterparts.⁶⁵³ For those commissionaires who did not possess these qualities, Walter intended that being placed on the register would provide them with a 'fair chance of mending their domestic arrangements and conduct'.⁶⁵⁴ This came at a cost – the commissionaire would be charged 'one shilling per Month [sic] for the extra trouble he has given'. Commissionaires were informed that if they failed to 'conform to the regulations of the Corps and requirements of civilisation [they would] be immediately struck off the roll'.⁶⁵⁵

Walter's correspondence with Brooke-Smith regarding the family of Harold Edmonds, illustrates how the principles related to the register manifested themselves.⁶⁵⁶ The correspondence, which took place in March 1881, was concerned with how the commissionaire and his wife had broken the *Rules* regarding the necessity of keeping a respectable home and caring for their children. Walter explained to Brooke-Smith that he would be 'very much obliged if [she] would take them thoroughly in hand'.⁶⁵⁷ [original emphasis] The first stage of this was that she needed to arrange to arrange for Edmonds and his wife to appear before the adjutant, and 'there and then', the commissionaire had to agree to 'move from his current house and place himself entirely under your directions'. Walter continued by stating that if Edmonds did not agree to this, he must be 'removed from the Roll of the Corps as a disgrace to his comrades'.⁶⁵⁸ [original emphasis]

To facilitate Edmonds being able to 'effect the required reformation', Walter would allow him to withdraw any amount from his savings account that would return the family to a 'civilised state, but the money [had to be] expended under [Brooke-Smith's] direction'. This would

⁶⁵¹ Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

⁶⁵⁴ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 107.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶⁵⁶ LMA/4777/B/03/02/018.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

allow the 'children to be properly clothed and sent to a proper school [and] have proper beds etc'.⁶⁵⁹ Brooke-Smith is instructed to assist the family in finding a new home and, following that, she was to 'visit the local clergyman' and request that 'he visit them occasionally but on no account to give them anything at all beyond advice'. She was also required to assist the commissioner's son, who 'should be found work at proper wages and if possible, to lodge at a Boy's Home [sic] away from the evil influence of his parents'.⁶⁶⁰ The letter concluded with Walter stating that 'a firm administration combined with kindness [...] ought to effect great changes'.⁶⁶¹

The didactic language Walter employed indicated the strength of his feeling. It also highlighted how far he wanted to assert his moral authority over this issue, and how this authority went to the heart of the Edmonds family's arrangements. However, this was far from uncommon in the contemporary workplace. As Shpayer-Makov observes, 'the pressure to lead a respectable life was unremitting'.⁶⁶² She notes how workers in the Post Office were required to provide information on where they lived, and that they and their families were required to behave in an exemplary manner to promote an image of corporate respectability.⁶⁶³

My analysis of Walter's other correspondence with Brooke-Smith across the period from 1878 to 1881 indicates that most of her work was focused on smaller scale interventions in the lives of commissionaires. However, while less extreme than the example of the Edmonds family, these commissionaires still faced significant challenges in their personal lives, as we will see below. What is also clear is that some of the commissionaires under investigation did possess the respectable qualities that the *Rules* encouraged, but circumstances beyond their control had driven their lives off the track of respectability. In both scenarios, Walter's instructions could be didactic and, in some instances, highly judgemental. These instructions to Brooke-Smith highlighted the role she fulfilled as a gatekeeper around access to various financial benefits accrued by the men through their mandatory welfare contributions.

This raises the question of what motivated Walter in these particular instances, and in particular those occasions when he was generous with his own money, the language he employed indicates his motivation was kindness. As Prochaska argues, 'it is suggestive to think of the history of philanthropy broadly as the history of kindness'.⁶⁶⁴ His motivation in the

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Shpayer-Makov, 'Control at the Workplace: Paternalism Reinvented in Victorian Britain', p. 78.

⁶⁶³ Ibid, p. 79.

⁶⁶⁴ F.K.Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', in F.M.L Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950, Volume 3, Social Agencies and Institutions*, p. 360.

cases that did not involve his own money (that is, those where he was instructing Brooke-Smith on how to distribute the Corps' welfare funds) are less easy to divine. Alan J. Kidd argues that 'charities and mutual aid networks should both be understood as examples of "giving behaviour"'.⁶⁶⁵ As I have demonstrated, the welfare funds were a mutual aid network, albeit one that was tightly controlled by Walter and, in this context, it is helpful to construe his instructions as a 'gift'. Kidd argues that this type of gift could come with the giver's expectation that their 'giving was made dependent upon the return "gift" expected from the recipient, i.e. the status of being deserving'.⁶⁶⁶ This characterisation can be applied to Walter. His expectation was always that the commissionaire and or his family, in return for their 'gift', would restore their status as deserving by complying with the notions of respectability enshrined in the *Rules*.

An expectation of reciprocity can be seen in the case of George Wilkins, whose daughter was unemployed. Walter told the commissionaire that the Corps would assist his daughter in finding work, but this help was conditional. Wilkins had to guarantee that she would take the first position offered to her. Walter informed Brooke-Smith that if Wilkins's daughter did not comply, she 'would have to leave her father's house forthwith'.⁶⁶⁷ The importance the *Rules* placed on family members working is also evident in the case of David Parker. Walter agreed to his request to have his mandatory contributions to the Corps' bank waived, but this was on the understanding that other means of providing the household with additional money were investigated. Walter instructed Brooke-Smith to visit the family, as he 'should like to know something about the man's wife and family and whether employment can be obtained for any who are fit for work'.⁶⁶⁸

This level of control in the form of enforced reciprocity can also be seen when it came to Walter's attitude towards the men accessing cash benefits that their welfare subscriptions entitled them to. William French was suffering with an unspecified illness and requested help. This help was offered but it was conditional on the man agreeing to be admitted to Charing Cross Hospital. Following this, his family would receive half his sick pay, but Brooke-Smith had to 'ensure the proper application of this money'. She was also instructed to engage the closest baker and grocer so that they could 'supply [...] quantities of food for one month'.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁵ Alan J. Kidd, 'Philanthropy and the "Social History Paradigm"', *Social History*, Vol. 2. 2 (1996), pp. 180-92 (p. 182).

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁶⁶⁷ LMA/4777/B/03/02/018.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

As we saw previously, all men had to request permission to draw down on their savings in the Corps' bank. In the case of the Edmonds family, the severity of the family's situation meant that Walter granted them permission to withdraw whatever amount Brooke-Smith deemed necessary. In the case of Thomas Knight, Brooke-Smith was instructed to release the money that the commissioner had requested for the purchase of new furniture. Walter asserted that Knight had '£4 at his command'.⁶⁷⁰ The brevity of Walter's instruction to Brooke-Smith indicated that Knight's request was consistent with the section of the *Rules* that regulated the position of the lady adjutant. Where money was 'requisite to effect the improvement of a Family [sic] it may be withdrawn from the Commissioner's Savings Bank'.⁶⁷¹ The money would then be 'expended under the supervision of the Lady Adjutant'.⁶⁷²

However, while Brooke-Smith had the authority to approve any requests from married commissioners to make withdrawals from the bank, her responsibilities were not free from Walter's control, as the case of Harold Perkins made clear. Perkins had applied to Brooke-Smith to make a withdrawal from his savings, which she had approved.⁶⁷³ Walter noted that she had not provided any evidence explaining why the money was required, and without that he would not approve the request. He added that he had 'no objection [in providing] Perkins [...] a loan of £3 or £4 from the General Fund on condition of its repayment next Pension Day [sic] when he will have about £11-10-0 to receive but [Walter could not] cannot allow him to withdraw anything from the S[savings] Bank'. The reason he gave for this was not that the commissioner did not have the funds to meet his request, but that he was 'considerably below that required by our regulations'.⁶⁷⁴ Perkins had been in the Corps for ten years and Walter held that the commissioner 'should have about £25 in the S[avings] Bank [but] he has only now £16 and proposes to withdraw £6 – leaving him considerably less than half [original emphasis] what he ought to hold'.⁶⁷⁵

The reason for this lay in the principles of self-reliance that underpinned the commissioner's savings fund. Walter asserted that Perkins had 'no right to leave his family to chance, i.e. to be provided for at the expense of his comrades and the general public in the case of his death'. It was each commissioner's responsibility to make provision for unforeseen circumstances and Walter reminded Brooke-Smith that he could 'always get rid of my responsibility by getting rid of a commissioner who does not come up to our standard

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 108.

⁶⁷² Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁷³ LMA/4777/B/03/02/018.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

of living.⁶⁷⁶ He had acknowledged he did not know why Perkins had requested the money, but he noted the application had been made in December. Walter claimed that commissionaires typically made a 'good many applications for withdrawal' around Christmas. He advised that if the men wished to fund 'jollification', then this should be 'at their own expense', funded through a 'little extra self-denial'.⁶⁷⁷ Once again, Walter asserted his moral values into judgements regarding the commissionaire's behaviour.

However, these kinds of judgements benefited some commissionaires financially. This is evident in the way in which Brooke-Smith was instructed to disperse funds to those men Walter deemed deserving. Richard Knowles was the Corps' carpenter and was valued because of how his workshop, which provided training for commissionaires and raised funds for the organisation. Knowles was recovering from an illness and Brooke-Smith was instructed to secure a place for the man in a 'seaside institution, [and that Walter] would be very glad to pay for his maintenance there for a fortnight'.⁶⁷⁸ Francis Archer was also a recipient of Walter's generosity and once again it was the latter's perception of the commissionaire's commitment to his job that underpinned this. Archer was a commissionaire of fifteen years' standing who held a prestigious position as the doorman at the Reform Club. He had elected out of the Corps' sickness fund and Walter observed to Brooke-Smith that Archer had 'spent much of his living on Doctors and is rather the worse for it'.⁶⁷⁹ The commissionaire was a widower who, stated Walter, had been 'physically worked to death'. Walter asserted that Archer deserved the 'good advice and attention such as would be given to a 'millionaire'. Archer rarely got home before 9.30 in the evening and saw little of his children. Walter opined that a 'change of air to Southend would do great good'. Archer was given permission by Walter to take his children with him and Brooke-Smith was informed that the 'Corps [would] pay all of Archer's expenses including his railway fare and all cost of living'.⁶⁸⁰

Walter's empathy could also find expression in generosity that was not connected to money, but was based instead on a 'lenient' approach to the Corps' disciplinary code. As we saw in the previous chapter, drunkenness was one of the main disciplinary problems the Corps had to contend with, and Walter's attitude towards it could be unwavering. But as the case of Edward Vickers demonstrates, this was not always the case. Vickers had been accused of drunkenness. Walter was unsure of the soundness of the accusation and whether the

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

commissionaire should be discharged.⁶⁸¹ Walter wanted Brooke-Smith's opinion on the 'general appearance and condition of the family'. He said that where there is doubt over a man's behaviour, he was 'inclined to give a man every benefit [...] if their [sic] living in a thoroughly respectable manner'.⁶⁸²

The nature of Brooke-Smith's work, and her involvement in cases such as this, ensured that her duties were performed in private. However, her contribution to the men's health and wellbeing was often praised publicly, and she therefore played a key role in promoting the benefits of the welfare system to audiences outside of the Corps.

4. Bodily discipline

The bodily discipline that was expected from the commissionaires provided the Corps with a far more public platform with which to communicate the advantages of its welfare system, in the form of its sickness fund. This was especially true when it came to employers, both those who had an existing relationship with the Corps, and those to which the organisation was promoting its services. In contributing to this fund, the men were not just underscoring their providence, but they were also demonstrating the advantages of the Corps' healthcare provision to the public, and specifically the commercial advantage this gave their employers. For these advantages to be realised as efficiently as possible, the *Rules* made clear the bodily discipline that was expected of commissionaires when they fell ill. The aim of these regulations was to ensure that the commissionaires were treated as efficiently as possible, and to minimise the potential the man had for infecting others.

All commissionaires who were sick were required to report to the barracks, where they would be seen by either the MO or a doctor from outside of the Corps within four hours.⁶⁸³ Once they had been certified sick, the men could only leave their quarters if they had received permission from an officer and they had to take all medication that had been prescribed for them. Failure to follow these orders could result in either the man having his sick pay withdrawn, or being 'otherwise punished'.⁶⁸⁴ It was also made clear to the men that if an infectious disease had broken out in their home, they were 'strictly prohibited from coming to the Barracks or to his Employer's place of business', unless they had received written dispensation from the commanding officer of their division, or had been passed fit by a 'proper medical authority'.⁶⁸⁵ Should the commissionaire not conform to this regulation, he

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 91.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

could face dismissal, but if he conformed he would receive a weekly allowance of 12s from the sick fund.⁶⁸⁶

Walter's interpretation of the advantages of the Corps' system of healthcare, the contribution it made to the wellbeing of the commissionaires and their families, and how employers benefited from this, were regularly communicated in the report he delivered at the Corps' annual general meetings. The text of his address was always printed verbatim in the organisation's *Circular*. In his report for 1881, Walter praised the lady adjutant – now Mrs Spratt – and claimed that her work, along with that of her husband, the Corps' MO – Dr Spratt – was 'thoroughly appreciated by every Commissionaire [sic]'.⁶⁸⁷ Walter added that the annual ratio of sickness was 1.5%, which he attributed to the commissionaires' 'temperate habits and well-ordered homes'.⁶⁸⁸ In these two statements, Walter publicly linked Mrs Spratt's work to the healthiness and respectability of the commissionaires.

However, Walter's typical focus in his annual report was promoting the work of the Corps' medical team. This active promotion of the organisation's system of healthcare was exceptional for this period. As David Green and others have observed in their study of occupational health in the Victorian Post Office, in comparison with dangerous industries such as mining, 'health risks in service sector employments passed relatively unnoticed, both by the medical profession and society as a whole'.⁶⁸⁹ Indeed, despite being a public service, the Post Office did not publicise statistics regarding the health of its workforce until the early 1890s; as one contemporary observer noted, the relevant data was 'shrouded in mystery' prior to this.⁶⁹⁰ Walter's innovative strategy of promoting the Corps healthcare in this transparent manner allowed him to argue that the 'health of the men and their families is probably better than that of any other class of Her Majesty's subjects, the percentage of sickness is remarkably low', which he attributed to the work of the MO and his team.⁶⁹¹

The MO's responsibilities were focused on individual commissionaires, as well as undertaking a more preventative role, so, overall, he was tasked with promoting the health of the men. First, for all men applying to the Corps, the officer had to 'carefully inspect every candidate for admission and, if not perfectly sound record full particulars of [the] complaint

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

⁶⁸⁷ LMA/4777/B/02/001, June 1881, p. 4.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁸⁹ David R. Green, Douglas H. L. Brown and Kathleen McIlvenna, 'Addressing Ill Health: Sickness and Retirement in the Victorian Post Office', *Social History of Medicine*, 33.2 (2018), pp. 559-85 (pp. 559-60), doi: 10.1093/shm/hky081

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 562.

⁶⁹¹ LMA/4777/B/02/001, July 1886, p. 4.

as well as the cause of discharge from HM's Service'.⁶⁹² In addition, he was instructed to provide a certificate attesting to the applicant's ability to work at night as well as during the day. The purpose of this was to 'give every Commissionaire a [sic] equal and fair chance which cannot be the case if any large number of his comrades are unfitted [sic] for any but easy berths'.⁶⁹³ Once a serving commissionaire had been declared sick, the MO was required to visit the man every day until he had recovered.⁶⁹⁴ In visiting a sick commissionaire at home, he was also responsible for assessing the man's house and was required to provide a written report if he found the man's 'family living in Quarters injurious to his own health or that of his children'.⁶⁹⁵ This echoed the regulation that stipulated he was to compile a daily report not just on the levels of sickness and infectious diseases in the barracks, but also 'any suggestion he considers desirable [...] as regards the Sanitary state of the barracks'.⁶⁹⁶

The importance of these regulations, and their benefits to employers, were made clear by Walter when he praised the Corps MO and his team. The result, he claimed, was that the team's work had reduced the levels of sickness within the commissionaires, such that they 'bear a favourable comparison with that of any class of adults whatever their position in life might be'.⁶⁹⁷ Following a series of influenza outbreaks in Europe in 1890, Walter was presented with a further opportunity to make favourable comparisons between the commissionaires' health and that of the general public. He stated that as a result of the outbreak, the number of men on the sick list had risen, but 'the temperate habits of the men have naturally assisted the recovery of those who were attacked'. He then asserted that the level of sickness 'was less than half the ordinary rate of other large bodies of men similarly situated'.⁶⁹⁸ The sickness ratio the Corps recorded in 1893-1894 was 1.5%, which Walter described as 'a very remarkable fact'.⁶⁹⁹ This, he said, 'proved the great advantage of every employer engaging his servant from a class who are rarely absent from duty for causes which commonly affect persons in a similar condition of life'.⁷⁰⁰ While Walter's use of hyperbole is clear, he was making a salient point by comparing the commissionaires to other

⁶⁹² LMA/ 4777/ B/ 01/01/006, p. 92.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁶⁹⁷ LMA /4777/ B/02/001, July 1889, p. 4.

⁶⁹⁸ LMA/4777/B/02/001, July 1890, p. 4. In comparison with the Post Office, the commissionaires do appear to be a healthy group of men. Based on their sickness ratio for this year, this can be extrapolated to the number of annual sick days, which equates to 4.7 days per year. In 1895, the total number of sick days taken by male employees in the Post Office ranged between 8 and 8.3; see Green and others, 'Addressing Ill Health: Sickness and Retirement in the Victorian Post Office', p. 576.

⁶⁹⁹ LMA/4777/B/02/001, July 1895, p. 4.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

working class men. In doing so, he was not only seeking to enhance their reputation as a healthy group of men, but also demonstrating the practical benefits of the Corps' system to employers. The message to employers was clear: the Corps' medical provision delivered an efficient, disciplined and reliable workforce.

Healthcare was extended beyond the commissioners themselves; men with families were mandated to subscribe to the medical fund on their behalf. This provided their families with medical cover, but it also served a practical purpose, in that it was designed to reduce infection among the Corps. The cost for this provision was 2d per week for the commissioner's wife and 1d per child, up to a maximum of 6d, which would cover all family members.⁷⁰¹ In return for this, the family could expect to receive 'Medical Attendance of the best kind, and Medicines of the best description', and a commitment that 'those who require the attendance of the medical officer at their own houses will always obtain it'.⁷⁰² The weekly rate for the commissioners' wives was lower than the weekly rate of 4d payable by the men. This indicates that the latter subsidised the former and underlines the importance that the organisation placed on the health of its members. In addition, any commissioner who had a sick family member at home was required to report this to the Corps 'within twenty-four hours of its occurrence in order that the facts may be known to the Medical Officer'.⁷⁰³

Walter's references to the advantages that resulted from the temperate behaviour of the commissioners were reinforced by a general order issued to the men that was titled 'Definition of a Temperate Soldier', and was reprinted in the *Rules*.⁷⁰⁴ The definition was based on the belief that temperance involved a soldier not drinking alcohol prior to 'his mid-day meal [...] and [he] never touches spirits any time till after six PM'.⁷⁰⁵ Furthermore, 'a Commissioner 'cannot be considered a "temperate man" who takes any kind of Beer or Spirits except at his meals'.⁷⁰⁶ The order went on to state that 'taking "Nips" [of spirits] is equally fatal to the constitution and character of a member of the Corps'.⁷⁰⁷ To reinforce these points, Walter took the unusual step of referring to his own behaviour by pointing out that he had 'never been an "Abstainer", though he never touches Spirits except as a Medicine, and he does *not* [original emphasis] prefer a "Total abstainer" to one who knows how to [drink] with moderation'.⁷⁰⁸ The order concluded with an appeal for discipline by

⁷⁰¹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 92.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

declaring that a temperate commissioner knew how to 'use with *moderation* [original emphasis] everything which Providence has provided for the use of Mankind'.

This inclusion of this statement in the *Rules* indicated pragmatism on Walter's behalf. Indeed, the inclusion of the personal detail on his own drinking demonstrated to the men that he was not an abstainer, that alcohol could feature in a respectable life and, therefore, that his instructions could be viewed as realistic. Nonetheless, for a member of the public who was reading the *Rules* and was, as a result, aware of the strict disciplinary procedures attached to drunkenness – which were discussed in the previous chapter – this focus on temperance may have seemed contradictory. The apparent contradiction can be read as being reflective of the wider trend of accepting that temperance, rather than abstention, was a more realistic goal to be set by the army's leadership.

Walter's appeal for discipline was consistent with how the army increasingly viewed temperance as an opportunity for the rank and file to display self-control. As General Sir Frederick Roberts said of abstainers in 1888, these were soldiers 'who cannot trust [themselves] to touch stimulant without taking more than is good for him. It is the man of strong will and self-control who makes the best soldiers, and who is required for the army.'

⁷⁰⁹ The following year, the British Medical Journal noted approvingly that 'the actual money value of the increased sobriety of our Indian soldiers, in heightening the efficiency of the force as a fighting power is by no means inconsiderable'.⁷¹⁰

Peter Bailey's analysis of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (CIU) provides an example from the civilian world. He has observed that Henry Solly, the founder of the CIU, was moved to 'tolerance on the beer question [was due to] the respectable character of those clubs which had ignored the CIU ruling and sold beer to their members from the beginning'.⁷¹¹ He had come to recognise that a club aimed at inculcating the tenets of rational recreation in working men could not hope to achieve any real success if it did not serve beer. The dramatic growth in club membership demonstrated that this pragmatism had paid off.⁷¹² Middle class tolerance of working class drinking was good for business.

Walter's similarly pragmatic attitude was evident in 'The definition of a Temperate Soldier.' It acknowledged the reality that drink would play a part in many of the commissioners' lives, and perhaps tacitly accepted that abstention could reduce the Corps' ability to attract men to

⁷⁰⁹ 'Sir Frederick Roberts on Temperance in the Army,' *The Saturday Review*, 28 April 1888, p. 490; see also, Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* 2nd edn. (Keele University Press, 1994), p. 332.

⁷¹⁰ 'Temperance in the Army,' *The British Medical Journal*, 20 September 1890, p. 695.

⁷¹¹ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control* (Routledge, 1978), p. 113; see also: Cordery, 'Friendly Societies and the Discourse of Respectability', p. 55.

⁷¹² Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, pp. 117-18.

the organisation. The responsibility for moderation lay firmly with the commissionaires; Walter placed the onus on the men to display the bodily discipline that was required in order for them to be deemed temperate. This was made clear to the commissionaires in the *Rules*, which outlined the conditions surrounding the canteen that was set up in the Corps barracks. The regulations stated that the canteen – which also included a bar – was run on ‘the co-operative principle [...] everything furnished will be of good quality, and sold at a moderate price’.⁷¹³ The commissionaires were part of how the canteen would be run through ‘form[ing] a committee [...] elected yearly by themselves to perform such duties as shall be ordered by the Commanding Officer with respect to the canteen’. The regulations that governed the use of the canteen were ‘framed with as few restrictions on the convenience and requirements of the men as possible, with a proper regard for the comfort of all’.⁷¹⁴ A publicity photograph was designed to reinforce these claims. (Figure 3.2)



Figure 3.2 LMA/4777/H/O3/002, undated publicity photograph.

⁷¹³ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 31.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

While the image is undoubtedly staged, the viewer gets a strong sense of the conviviality of the bar, the comradeship and the beer on offer and, above all, how respectable it was. The bar, alongside the other leisure activities on offer to the men (which included a reading room and billiard table), epitomised rational recreation.⁷¹⁵ Brad Beaven notes that the intention of the rational recreation 'movement' was to 'eliminate the last vestiges of a brutal culture and recast the working man as an active citizen'.⁷¹⁶ This image represented the Corps' intention to do the same – to show to employers that while the commissionaires were clearly former soldiers, through the commissionaire brand they had been 'recast' as valuable employees.

However, the provision of the bar came at a price, as the regulations went on to make clear. In return for the bar, the men were informed that '*commissionaires are strictly prohibited from entering any public house or tavern within a quarter of a mile of headquarters* [original emphasis]'.⁷¹⁷ The reason for this was made clear. Once again, we can see the evidence of the Corps' surveillance network and how it was designed to uphold the values of the commissionaire brand by controlling the behaviour of the men. Should a man go into a pub, the regulations stated that the 'character and credit of the whole Corps will be compromised, by any practice of the kind which cannot fail to be noticed by Employers [sic] in general'.⁷¹⁸ As Bailey has noted of the period, 'the control of leisure was a serious matter'.⁷¹⁹ Furthermore, he argues that in a 'work-oriented culture [uncontrolled leisure] represented an invitation to idleness and dissolution'.⁷²⁰ These factors were especially true of the Corps, where any association with drunkenness was held by Walter to undermine the exceptionalism he claimed on the men's behalf. The core belief that the behaviour of the individual commissionaire could let his comrades down was expressed unequivocally. For working class ex-soldiers, this represented a high level of bodily control and loss of agency in return for the high standard of welfare provision in the Corps

This principle of relying on a personal level of bodily discipline by commissionaires to benefit them, and the Corps, was also reflected in the men's funeral arrangements. The *Rules* allowed for men to choose how to use the money they had accumulated in the burial fund. Men who wanted a private funeral would be granted £2 10s from the burial fund.⁷²¹ The

⁷¹⁵ This provision mirrored what was increasingly made available to soldiers in the army in a bid to keep them in the barracks and away from civilian pubs. See Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 160-163.

⁷¹⁶ Brad Beaven, *Leisure Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 18.

⁷¹⁷ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p.32.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

⁷¹⁹ Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, p.169.

⁷²⁰ Ibid., p. 170.

⁷²¹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 56 and LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 92. This sum had risen to £3 by 1895, LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 90.

average cost of a working class funeral in 1870 was £5 9s.⁷²² Thus the shortfall between the grant and the full cost indicates that there was a financial incentive to choosing a formal commissionaires' funeral, where all costs would be paid for by the Corps. Such financial considerations explained the popularity of burial insurance among the working class during this period.⁷²³ Yet, as Strange observes, 'even with the buffer of burial insurance, funerals left many working class families in debt'.⁷²⁴ The same would have applied to commissionaires who chose a private funeral and therefore once again we see an element of coercion in the welfare regulations.

Men who chose a formal commissionaire's funeral received a level of ceremony and prestige absent from private funerals. The former type represented the ultimate – literally and figuratively – level of bodily discipline the men could voluntarily display. The funeral arrangements involved a number of commissionaires attending the funeral; men instructed to attend a former colleague's funeral but were absent without permission faced a fine of 2s 6d.⁷²⁵ In addition, the funeral parties of the most senior non-commissioned officers would be attended by the Corps band.⁷²⁶ These arrangements emulated many of the trappings of funerals for soldiers granted military honours.⁷²⁷ As such, they provided the final affirmation of the commissionaire's status as a veteran, albeit within a tightly prescribed framework. For many commissionaires, this would have represented an attractive option.

The commissionaire would be buried at Brookwood Cemetery, in grounds bought by Walter for the exclusive use of the Corps. Brookwood, established in 1853, took its place alongside several other cemeteries built in London during this period. They were established to alleviate the pressure on overcrowded burial grounds in the centre of the city.⁷²⁸ David Cannadine has described cemeteries of this era as 'romantic rural retreats [they] were essentially an analogue of romantic rural suburbia'.⁷²⁹ Brookwood was not as prestigious as other London cemeteries, but it was well appointed, carefully designed and able to secure the custom of a middle class clientele, albeit in smaller numbers than its founders had intended.⁷³⁰ It offered Walter the opportunity to establish a dedicated burial ground for the

⁷²² Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, p. 12.

⁷²³ Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 112-15.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 179.

⁷²⁵ LMA/ 4777/B/01/01/006, p. 90.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁷²⁷ See, for example, 'Regimental News', *The Broad Arrow*, 2 November 1872, p. 571.

⁷²⁸ Agatha Herman, 'Death Has a Touch of Class: Society and Space in Brookwood Cemetery, 1853-1903', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 36 (2010), pp. 305-14 (p. 306-08).

⁷²⁹ David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain,' in *Mirrors of Mortality: Social Studies in the History of Death*, ed. by Joachim Walley, (Routledge, 2011), pp. 187-242 (p. 192).

⁷³⁰ Herman, 'Death Has a Touch of Class', pp. 311-13.

commissionaires based around uniform headstones and standard plots. As Strange observes, there was a growing trend during this period for communal cemeteries to be subdivided into specific sections. In addition to family graves, religious denominations established separate sections, allowing people to be buried according to their faith, and these segregations 're-created distinct communities'.⁷³¹ This was certainly true for commissionaires who were buried by the Corps and the arrangements reflected the fraternal aspect of the organisation. As Strange argues, headstones provided permanent narratives of the deceased's life and they enabled 'relatives to reconstruct the family unit in stone'.⁷³² In the case of unmarried commissionaires, their 'family unit' was likely to be their comrades.⁷³³

However, these arrangements would also have also held a symbolic importance for the Corps. The presence of a dedicated burial ground within such a prestigious cemetery would have presented the visitor with a potent reminder of the community of the Corps' commitment to its members, and it would have also underlined the commissionaires' respectability. As Cannadine argues, the 'elaborate funerary and mourning rituals [of this period] were an assertion of status than a means of assuaging sorrow, a display of conspicuous consumption rather than an exercise in grief therapy'.⁷³⁴ He further notes that the main beneficiary would be the undertakers, through their fees. However, in the case of the Corps, it was Walter who benefited from the construction of the commissionaires' graveyard. Certainly, the construction of an obelisk to memorialise Walter after his death in 1904, surrounded by the gravestones of former commissionaires, would have underlined his personal commitment to those men. We saw in previous chapters how the *Rules* communicated the importance of rituals, such as the weekly parade, in showcasing the Corps to the public; the burial plot at Brookwood provided the ultimate showcase. This was public memorialisation as marketing.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the development of the Corps' welfare system touched every aspect of the commissionaires' lives. It afforded them a high level of material security, which compared favourably to other occupational welfare schemes of the period. To benefit from the system, the men had to submit themselves to the control of the Corps and were mandated to deliver high levels of financial, domestic and bodily discipline, which the *Rules*

⁷³¹ Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*, pp. 166-'72.

⁷³² Ibid, p. 163.

⁷³³ For those men who were married, commissionaires could elect from 1895 to have their families buried in the Corps plot. This option represented the full inclusion of the men's families into the figurative family of the Corps. See LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 90.

⁷³⁴ Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', p. 191.

communicated to them. This mandate was predicated on the same principles of reciprocity that were analysed in the previous chapter regarding the conditions of employment in the Corps.

However, where employment was contingent on the men's behavioural discipline in the workplace, the provision of welfare relied on discipline in the commissionaires' private lives. The conditions attached to this were as stringent as those that applied to the commissionaires in the workplace. Walter held that this discipline was necessary if the identity of the respectable commissionaire was to be upheld and this identity served two purposes: it assured the public that the Corps was a worthwhile institution and ensured that only the right type – as defined by him – of veteran could enter the Corps. Walter expressed his views in moralistic language and his censoriousness suffused many of his ideas, which were encapsulated in the *Rules*. We saw earlier how work during this period could provide an environment in which character could be demonstrated and the respectable commissionaire complemented the worth of the men's character that they demonstrated in the workplace.

The welfare system emphasised this respectability and self-reliance to a public audience, most crucially to employers. Communicating these putative aspects of the men's character was key to the Corps' commercial strategy, which was to secure positions of trust for the men. This was achieved at a time when the army was not considered a respectable career choice for men from working class backgrounds. These connotations could easily have been transferred to the commissionaires, which would have hindered their employment prospects and, therefore, threatened the viability of the Corps' system. This element of compulsion in relation to the welfare system underscored the negative opinions Walter occasionally expressed regarding the lack of respectability displayed by some ex-servicemen. The *Rules* were designed so that these characteristics could, in effect, be overridden, and public distribution of the regulations means that they should be viewed as marketing material that relied on full transparency from the Corps about its workings. To assist the commissionaires in achieving the levels of discipline required of them realising this design, Walter made progressive additions to the Corps structure: established the innovative role of the lady adjutant and installing a dedicated MO for the commissionaires. The *Rules* also instituted a role for the commissionaires' wives that held them to be crucial in upholding domestic discipline at a time when societal attitudes towards soldiers' wives could often be negative.

The Corps, its foundation and its principles also afforded significant worth to Walter with the wider public. In the same way that he demonstrated the economic and moral value of the commissionaires to employers, he was also able to take their identity and illustrate its power

and usefulness to the British army. Without this demonstration, Walter would not have been able to secure the funding the Corps required. How he achieved this is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Paternalism and Martial Identity

The Corps' annual parade was regularly attended by senior army officers and it was conceived to showcase the commissionaires to these attendees. However, the purpose of the parade went beyond reuniting officers with their former charges; it also represented an opportunity for the organisation to raise funds from the army's regiments for the Corps' Officers Endowment Fund (hereafter OEF).⁷³⁵ The purpose of the fund was to finance the salaries for the senior officers and the MO. The commissionaires were self-reliant, but the Corps was not and without the OEF the organisation would not be able to function. The fund delivered the financial support for the commissionaire brand. It ensured that senior control and supervision could be provided for the men whose responsibility it was to deliver on the promise of the brand – that is, the exceptionalism Walter claimed for the men.⁷³⁶ Indeed, the occasion was viewed by him as an opportunity for the men to demonstrate to the officers who supported the Corps financially that their investment was wise and should be continued. The origins of the fund can be traced to an appeal Walter made for financial support from the public in the July 1864 edition of the *Circular*. He said the Corps needed to raise £8,000 for its newly created endowment fund and explained that this money would act as capital in order to generate an annual income of £350 that would cover the Corps' annual running costs.⁷³⁷ If this amount was raised, it would, he added, 'secure the constant supervision and employment of every respectable wounded pensioner in the United Kingdom'.⁷³⁸

The annual parade was also designed by Walter to secure publicity for the organisation by generating coverage in the press. As we will see, this coverage was significant and grew over time. We saw the genesis of this strategy in Chapter 1 and how displays of the Corps' regular activities, such as the weekly parade to church, generated favourable publicity for the organisation. The annual parades became the most important of the Corps' 'shop windows' – to use the language of Roddy and others. This chapter's analysis extends their scholarship through its exploration of the parade, and the promotional strategy developed by Walter to maximise the press coverage it generated. The success of these techniques is evaluated by examining not just the levels of press coverage the annual parades achieved from 1864 to 1895, but also the form this coverage took. The event showcased the visual identity of the commissionaire brand and this coverage benefited first from illustrations of the men on

⁷³⁵ This money was donated on a regiment-by-regiment basis and was independent of the War Office, which provided no support for the Corps during this period.

⁷³⁶ The principal annual cost for the Corps were the officers' salaries and expenses; see LMA /4777/B/ 02/001, *Quarterly Circular*, July 1864, p. 3.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

parade and, later, included photographs as periodicals adopted the technology. This chapter provides an important case study that can be viewed alongside the work of Roddy and others on the marketing strategies of philanthropic organisations in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The Corps enjoyed significant success in raising funds for the OEF. The result of Walter's ongoing appeals for this support was that, by 1895, the OEF's annual income was £2,591, an increase of 193% on the income for 1864, which was £883.⁷³⁹ This chapter illustrates the means by which this was achieved and the role Walter's promotion of the commissionaire brand played in publicising the work of the Corps and securing this money.

It begins with an examination of how Walter capitalised on an increase in the army's officer class in the interests of the welfare of their men during this period. John Keegan argues that this increase in concern for the welfare of the other ranks can be attributed to the influx of middle class men to the ranks of army officer during this period. Many of these men – Walter among them – were products of the English public school system, which had 'taught most of the [British] military[']s values, obedience, companionability, leadership [and] concern for the welfare of their subordinates'.⁷⁴⁰ Spiers, too, focuses on the social background of the army's officers and, in particular, how the concept of noblesse oblige played an important role in increasing their concern for the welfare of their charges.⁷⁴¹ Through his service as a captain, Walter would have been aware of the responsibilities of officers towards their men and that these responsibilities were intended to serve the wider purpose of the regiment.

Walter's success in capitalising on this trend can be seen in the composition of the OEF and the growth in its funds. In 1864, officers provided 40% of the fund's subscriptions, but by 1895 this had risen to 90%.⁷⁴² This change in composition reflects the increased emphasis the army placed on paternalism aimed at men from the other ranks. Individual officers could donate any sum of money annually, but the most important donation was a subscription of £25, which would be made by individual regiments to benefit their former members. In return for this subscription, a regiment would acquire a perpetual governorship of the Corps, meaning their former members would have the 10s the Corps required as an entrance fee waived.⁷⁴³ These conditions had changed by 1895, and this further underlined how a

⁷³⁹ LMA/4777/B/02/001, *Monthly Circular*, July 1964, p. 6 and LMA /4777/B/02/002, *Annual Circular*, 1895, p. 10.

⁷⁴⁰ John Keegan, 'Regimental Ideology,' in *War Economy and the Military Mind*, ed. by Geoffrey Best and Andrew Wheatcroft (Taylor and Francis, 2010), pp. 3-18 (p. 9).

⁷⁴¹ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, pp. 113-14.

⁷⁴² LMA/4777/B/02/001, *Monthly Circular*, July 1964, p. 6 and LMA /4777/B/ 02/002, *Annual Circular*, 1895, p. 10.

⁷⁴³ LMA/4777/B/02/001, 1875 *Circular*, p. 6.

regiment's officers could benefit their former charges. In addition to the £25, an annual donation of £2 would also lead to the entrance fee for commissionaires being waived, which by this time had risen to £1.⁷⁴⁴ This opening section is based on an analysis of Walter's private correspondence. It shows how he rooted his appeals for these subscriptions to army officers in the traditions of military paternalism, as described by Keegan and Spiers, and it therefore provides an important extension to their studies.

This chapter's emphasis on examining military paternalism is driven by how Walter represented the OEF. As we have seen in earlier chapters, he was adamant that the Corps was not a charity, for it to be perceived as one would undermine the commissionaire brand by damaging the claims Walter made concerning the men's self-reliance. However, the Corps did rely on subscriptions from the army's regiments, so to all intents and purposes it was a charity. This study views the organisation as a hybrid, given this duality in its identity. Walter got around this contradiction in the way that he positioned the OEF to the army's officer class. His view was that supporting the army was the army's private responsibility and was independent of the War Office; the was looking after their own which allowed the Corps to be independent of other sources of support.

There is little scholarship for the period in question that focusses on the manner in which this paternalism manifested itself, and its benefits to the officers' former charge. French considers this upsurge in paternalism as part of his analysis of the development of the army's regimental system, and while he provides useful examples of this in practice – such as the formation of funds designed to assist former soldiers and their families – this consideration is brief.⁷⁴⁵ A detailed analysis of this dynamic and its outcomes for a later period is provided by Eleanor O'Keefe. Her recent study of the role of regimental charities in helping former members transition to civilian life after the First World War has shed important light on this topic.⁷⁴⁶ She demonstrates the motivations of these charities and how they were rooted in a 'paternalism [that] created both a moral imperative and a solution to veteran welfare'.⁷⁴⁷ By illuminating the role of military paternalism in funding the Corps, this chapter

⁷⁴⁴ LMA/4777/B/02/002, 1895 *Circular*, p. 6.

⁷⁴⁵ French, *Military Identities*, p. 80. Keegan observes that the army's regiments reminded him of the 'large, comfortable Victorian family, from which some of the officers came and to which the rest would have liked to belong'. Among the similarities, he points to the decoration of regimental churches with 'funeral monuments [...] [the building of] cottages for regimental pensioners [...] regimental charities and trust funds'. See Keegan, 'Regimental Ideology,' p. 11.

⁷⁴⁶ Eleanor O'Keefe, 'Paying the Debts of the "Economy of Sacrifice": Military Charities as Brokers in Veteran Care, 1919-1929', *War and Society*, 42.4 (2023), pp. 332-48.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

builds on French's analysis of this period and connects to O'Keefe's study of the interwar period.

The chapter then moves on to consider how Walter appealed to the army's self-interest in his fundraising efforts. As Spiers demonstrates, however important paternalistic sentiment was, the army's leadership was also motivated by pragmatic considerations connected to the perennial recruitment shortfalls it contended with during this period.⁷⁴⁸ The ideas put forward to the War Office by this group were conceived with the intention that they would improve the welfare of the ordinary ranks, with the expectation that this would make the army a more attractive career for young working class men.⁷⁴⁹ It had long been felt by some sections of parliament and the army's senior leadership, such as Lord General Frederick Roberts, that the state could improve the post-service employment prospects of veterans. Doing so would, it was hoped, help counter the perception that becoming a soldier could be a dead end in terms of the rank and file's later career prospects. Walter's beliefs were aligned with this; since the early days of the Corps, he had advocated that the government provide civil service jobs for veterans.⁷⁵⁰ Analysis of Walter's private correspondence with senior army figures, his letters to *The Times* and his interactions with politicians illustrates how he advanced these arguments. However, the government proved unwilling to address these issues until the end of the period of this study. The result, as this chapter demonstrates, was that Walter largely retreated from communicating with politicians.

Rather than making provision for the employment of veterans, successive governments focused on reforming the army to make becoming a soldier more attractive to its working class recruitment base. These reforms were centred on three areas: relaxing the recruitment criteria the army had to follow; improving the terms of engagement for these recruits; and localising the army's regiments to foster links with those communities from which the men were recruited from. The measures, which became known as the Cardwell-Childers reforms, were initiated across the period from 1868 to 1892 (they were named after Edward Cardwell and Hugh Childers, the Secretaries of War who devised them).⁷⁵¹ Hew Strachan illustrates how these measures met significant opposition from conservative elements of the army's leadership, which resulted in political machinations in a bid to derail them.⁷⁵² Strachan's analysis focuses on the high politics of the debate and, in examining how Walter used his

⁷⁴⁸ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 113.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷⁵⁰ 'A Good Suggestion,' *The Times*, 14 February 1859, p. 12.

⁷⁵¹ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, pp. 1-28, 119, 121, 170-'75; French also provides an analysis of the reforms; see French, *Military Identities*, pp. 10-30.

⁷⁵² Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, pp. 201-'04.

correspondence to communicate with these conservative voices and reflect their concerns, this chapter extends his scholarship.

Furthermore, this chapter indicates how these communications were predicated on the exceptionalism of the commissionaires and how the commercial success of the commissionaire brand, as measured by the regard the men were held in by employers, helped further the interests of the army by demonstrating the benefits of an army career. This was an appeal to the army's self-interest and, in much the same way that Walter appealed to employers, his appeal to the army provided a reason as to why the army should support the Corps through the OEF. It was a wholly rational argument.

The final section of the chapter examines how the Corps' relationships with the army's regiments were publicly represented, and how these representations aligned with the army's own sense of identity. It analyses the means by which this relationship was publicised across three media. The first is the organisation's own marketing materials, in the form of its annual newsletter, the *Circular*. In addition, contemporary newspapers and the army's own materials are analysed to examine how the relationship between the Corps and the regiments was reported outside of the organisation's own marketing materials. The reporting of the annual parade in contemporary newspapers underscores how well this relationship was understood by the press, and how the commissionaires themselves embodied its success. Furthermore, analysis of the army's publications indicates how the benefits of becoming a commissionaire were understood by the army's officers and how this was communicated by the army to its soon-to-be-discharged soldiers.

The materials this chapter analyses fall into two categories: those related to the governance of the Corps and those that publicised the organisation to military and public audiences. The first category encompasses Walter's correspondence, the *Rules and Regulations of the Corps of Commissionaires' Officers' Endowment Fund* and the general orders that were distributed to the commissionaires by Walter. Second, the *Guide to Obtaining Civil Employment* (hereafter the *Guide*), which was written by a senior army figure and featured the Corps, is analysed.⁷⁵³ In addition, coverage of the Corps in contemporary newspapers is analysed.⁷⁵⁴ Finally, a document titled *State Rewards for State Services*, which was

⁷⁵³ Edgar R. Hawks, *Guide to Obtaining Civil Employment* (Gale and Polden, 1887); it was the thirty-seventh volume in a series of instructional guides aimed at rank and file soldiers. This guide was the only one that did not focus on service life. The other volumes were designed to instruct soldiers in the skills necessary for succeeding in the army, including guides on drills, service in the field and how to obtain educational certificates. Each volume was priced at 6d to encourage sales.

⁷⁵⁴ Given the partiality that *The Times* displayed towards the Corps, it is not included in this analysis, so that a representative sample of coverage is considered.

published by Walter to further the cause of government employment for veterans, is considered.⁷⁵⁵

1. Paternalism

Walter shrewdly capitalised on the army's officers' sense of paternalism and his success in this area was an enduring source of pride for him. This is evident in an address he delivered to the commissionaires in February 1884 as part of the commemorations to mark the organisation's 25th anniversary.⁷⁵⁶ He asserted that there was a matter 'on which we may congratulate ourselves, namely the "independence of our position"'.⁷⁵⁷ He said the Corps' success could be attributed to the 'influence which the regimental system has exercised over officers and men'.⁷⁵⁸ He pointed to the importance of 'maintain[ing] those old traditions and habits which are the foundations of esprit de corps'.⁷⁵⁹ Walter also referred to his own experience of the system and having 'had the good fortune to serve with Officers[sic] who were fond of their profession and devoted to their men'.⁷⁶⁰ He had 'tried to practice what I was taught' and he expressed gratitude to the senior officers under which he served, 'who in their turn received their education from some of the best soldiers in English history'.

This continuum of army paternalism can be seen in Walter's private correspondence with two senior military figures who supported the Corps. These letters illustrate how these 'old traditions and habits' manifested themselves. General Sir John Burgoyne stated that 'as an old soldier I naturally take a very deep interest in any measure tending to improve the conditions of my old comrades'.⁷⁶¹ Lord General Frederick Roberts expressed similar sentiments when he referred to the 'many letters [...] [he received] from discharged soldiers' and how he wished to help them. He said he felt 'much for old soldiers and never like sending them a refusal'.⁷⁶²

Walter was being disingenuous in making this claim of independence to his men. After all, despite these claims, the Corps did rely on private donations and was, to all intents and purposes, a charity to the public. As a notice in the 1875 *Circular* informed its readers, the Corps 'earnestly trust[ed] that everyone who feels an interest in the Institution will second their efforts to augment its Endowment Fund'.⁷⁶³ However, he felt that by positioning the

⁷⁵⁵ LMA/4777/G/02/001.

⁷⁵⁶ LMA/4777/B/04/010, 'speech', 10 February 1884.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ LMA/4777/B/03/02/012, Burgoyne to EW, 8 February 1871.

⁷⁶² LMA/4777/B/03/02/020, Roberts to EW, 7 May 1881.

⁷⁶³ LMA/4777/B/02/001, 1875 *Circular*, 'SPECIAL NOTICE,' p. 3.

Corps as an expression of traditional army paternalism, the organisation was not a public charity. His view was that supporting the army was the army's 'private' responsibility and was independent of the War Office; the army was looking after their own, and in doing so they allowed it to be independent of other sources of support. As we will see, stressing this independence from the War Office reflected Walter's views on the limitations of this department in running the army. It also reflected the opinions of the more conservative elements of the army, such as Viscount Wolseley, and also those of Queen Victoria, who, as we saw in Chapter 1, wanted to maintain the Royal Prerogative and keep the army away from political control of the War Office.⁷⁶⁴

The language Walter used to affirm the Corps' independence and its non-charitable status was not always as benign as in his address to the men in 1884. In October 1885, he received a letter from Major Gildea, who had established the Soldiers and Sailors Family Association that year.⁷⁶⁵ The purpose of the letter was to request information on the Corps for inclusion in a book that would list the military charities providing services for existing and former servicemen, and their families.⁷⁶⁶ Walter's response was curt. He wrote that the Corps had 'nothing to do with Government, that we have no Patrons or the usual paraphernalia common to Societies in general and that we do not consider the institution a Charity [original emphasis] in any shape'. The Corps was 'in reality a business and the Founder has always disclaimed the role of Philanthropist'.⁷⁶⁷ This statement reflected how Walter wished to be perceived, in that it helped reaffirm the self-reliance of the men. However, as we have seen, the Corps relied on donations to the OEF. It was, as previously mentioned, a hybrid organisation.

Walter reinforced his claims that the Corps was not a charity, by emphasising that it was the responsibilities of the army's officers to support the OEF. In his correspondence with army officers, he was clear both on how supporting the Corps was a function of rank and a clear signal of the paternal solicitude expected of this group. In 1877, he corresponded with Colonel Smith, who had requested information on the endowment fund for his regiment. Walter asserted that if a regiment did not support the Corps, it did not reflect on its officers; rather, it indicated 'some want of sympathy for the object in view [the Corps] on the part of the Commanding Officer'.⁷⁶⁸ Indeed, so important was this link between a commanding

⁷⁶⁴ Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, pp. 64-'5 and pp. 102-'03. Wolseley would later become Commander-in-Chief of the army and was a keen supporter of the Corps.

⁷⁶⁵ Paul Huddie, 'Ex-servicemen and the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association, 1919-1921', in *Veterans of the First World War: Ex-Servicemen and Ex-Servicewomen in Post-War Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Oliver Wilkinson and David Swift, (Routledge, 2010), pp. 34-47, (p.35).

⁷⁶⁶ LMA/B/03/02/057, Major Gildea to EW, 25 October 1885.

⁷⁶⁷ LMA/B/03/02/057, EW to Major Gildea, 2 November 1885.

⁷⁶⁸ LMA/4777/B/03/03/056, EW to Colonel Smith, 10 May 1877.

officer and the veterans of his regiment, that he said he would refuse any money from a general regimental welfare fund. The money would only be acceptable if raised specifically for the Corps.⁷⁶⁹

The following year, Walter reiterated the importance of the link between the army's officers and the Corps. He stated that only money raised from officers could be placed in the endowment fund, in order to protect what he saw as its integrity. His justification was that it 'would be highly objectionable that the officers of our staff should be paid out of a fund to which the men over whom they were placed [original emphasis] had contributed in however remote a degree'.⁷⁷⁰ By 1883, he was expressing his views on this subject even more forcefully. He explained that he had only ever sought donations from 'those who are in the position of gentlemen. It would in my opinion have lowered the position of the officers if we had invited subscriptions in any manner from any sort of people, and for this reason I would not allow soldiers [the men below the level of officer] to subscribe.'⁷⁷¹

These sentiments were similarly expressed in his correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Tanner, CO of the 1st battalion, King's Liverpool Regiment, who at the time did not subscribe to the OEF.⁷⁷² Walter stated that if NCOs or other men from the ranks wished to support the Corps, then this should be through a subscription to the newly established Convalescent Hospital Fund, from which officers were barred from making donations.⁷⁷³ He said officers were only permitted to donate to the OEF, and that the sum of £25 would entitle 'the battalion to Perpetual Governorship and its corresponding advantages [...] [and] should the Officers of a Regt. [sic] decline to associate themselves with the Institution [...] [their men would forego] all the advantages other Regts [sic] have secured in the ordinary mode through their own Officers'. Indeed, where a regiment's officers 'did not think well enough of the Corps to take their share in its administration [...] they have only themselves to blame if they are unwilling to undergo the very slight self-denial which the collection of this sum of money would entail amongst themselves'.⁷⁷⁴ His message was blunt; he was stating that a lack of support from the battalion reflected badly on its officers, whose parsimony denied their ex-comrades the advantages open to veterans from other regiments.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁰ LMA/4777/B/03/03/048, EW to Captain Swinhoe, 4 June 1878.

⁷⁷¹ LMA/4777/B/03/03/056, EW to Colonel Lloyd, 22 December 1883.

⁷⁷² LMA/4777/B/03/03/056, EW to Lieutenant Colonel Tanner, 12 March 1883.

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

2. Pragmatism

Analysis of Walter's correspondence with army officers indicates how he appealed to the second driver of the army's concern for the welfare of its men, which was its pragmatism. This was predicated on two propositions put forward by Walter. First, that the Corps played an active role in helping the army to address its recruitment challenges by demonstrating what it claimed were the superior career options it offered veterans. Second, the commissionaires' identity reflected the values of Walter's correspondents, who were opposed to the Cardwell-Childers reforms of the army in this period. These factors combined to align the Corps with attitudes the senior leadership of the army, which, in turn, underpinned their support for the organisation.

As Spiers asserts, 'the sight of old soldiers begging in the streets hardly enhanced the appeal of service life'.⁷⁷⁵ The army was well aware of this.⁷⁷⁶ Within this context, the Corps was positively regarded by many of the army's leadership: the organisation, observed one officer, 'had done much to maintain the credit of the British soldier'; furthermore, if the commissionaire performed his duties 'faithfully and well [...] he could always count with certainty with being respected and held in favour'.⁷⁷⁷ In a debate on employment for ex-servicemen, another officer asserted that 'in the Corps [...] you will see what can be done in providing employment for the really deserving soldier'.⁷⁷⁸ Walter's correspondence with Colonel Smith in 1877 indicates how he sought to capitalise on this reputation.⁷⁷⁹ Walter expressed surprise that he needed to explain the working of the Corps 'after striving for nearly twenty years to get better and stronger recruits for the army by obtaining good employment for them on the completion of their service'.⁷⁸⁰ This, claimed Walter, had assisted 'Commanding Officers very materially'.⁷⁸¹

He substantiated these claims by inserting the identity of the commissionaire into the controversy surrounding a perceived decline in the physical and moral state of the army's recruits. He specifically focused on connecting the Corps' selection policies, as detailed in the *Rules*, with these debates, which allowed him to make these criteria tangible. These

⁷⁷⁵ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army, 1868-1902*, p. 147.

⁷⁷⁶ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 211.

⁷⁷⁷ Commander Wallace B. McHardy, 'A Scheme for Establishing a Royal Army Society for each County and Great City, in order to Improve the Status of the British Soldier on his Return to Civil Life', *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, 37 1893, pp. 361-'86 (p. 363).

⁷⁷⁸ General Sir William Cameron, 'On the Employment of Retired Bluejackets, Soldiers and Marines', *Royal United Service Journal*, 41 (1897), pp.125-166. (p.163).

⁷⁷⁹ LMA/4777/B/03/03/057, EW to Colonel Smith, 10 May 1877.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

debates centred on the Cardwell-Childers army reforms that were instituted by the British government from the 1870s onwards. The army received sustained attention from successive governments as these reforms sought to 'create a cheaper, yet more efficient and militarily effective army'.⁷⁸² The first tranche of reforms instituted under Edward Cardwell, Liberal Secretary of State for War, included the Army Enlistment Act of 1870.⁷⁸³

The army's opposition did not succeed. The measures went ahead, although, as Edward Gosling argues, their aim of making the army a more attractive employment option was only partially realised.⁷⁸⁴ He also underlines how the relaxation of the recruitment terms, in particular the physical criteria applicants to the army had to fulfil, resulted in significant debate around a perceived decline in the qualities of these recruits.⁷⁸⁵ Indeed, as Michael Brown has observed, they became linked to broader debates concerning the moral and physical state of the British working class male of this period, and the implications of this for the country's imperial project.⁷⁸⁶ Walter sought to capitalise on these concerns in his correspondence with army officers by claiming that they represented soldiers of an earlier period. He argues that the commissionaires embodied a superior form of masculinity that was in opposition to the perceived moral and physical weaknesses of the army's new cadre of recruits. Thus, this analysis builds on Gosling and Brown's work, by locating these debates within a highly specific context connected to the identity of the British soldier of the period.

As to Walter's view of this legislation, he was opposed to the Enlistment Act because he felt it would negatively affect the calibre of the army's recruits. The legislation was designed to address the army's perennial recruitment problems through a revision of the soldiers' terms and conditions.⁷⁸⁷ The intention was to make the army attractive to a wider group of men than those who usually enlisted. The act created the option of short service for recruits, whereby they could enlist for a period of six years, as opposed to the minimum of twelve years prior to the legislation.⁷⁸⁸ The introduction of short service, along with other reforms of this period, resulted in significant disquiet within the more conservative quarters of the army's leadership.⁷⁸⁹ As to Walter's own attitude, he viewed the short service system as being inimical to the creation of good relations between officers and their men, as he made

⁷⁸² French, *Military Identities*, p. 25.

⁷⁸³ Gosling, "Tommy Atkins", p. 42.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-124.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-174.

⁷⁸⁶ Brown, 'Cold Steel, Weak Flesh', p.158.

⁷⁸⁷ Gosling, "Tommy Atkins", p. 42-8.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷⁸⁹ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, pp. 8 and 32.

clear in 1882.⁷⁹⁰ He asserted that, 'the class and continuous ties which used to exist in the Army between the officers and men have changed with the altered conditions of service'.⁷⁹¹ In other words, Walter believed that the less time a man spent in the army, the weaker his relationship would be with his regiment, which would, ultimately, have a negative impact on the functioning of the army. This would happen through a weakening of esprit de corps, which, as we have already seen, was a characteristic of the army that Walter valued.

The Corps valued those applicants who did possess these continuous ties, which they could demonstrate through length of service. The criterion that was applied consistently through the *Rules* during this period was for 'every Candidate [sic] for the situation of Commissionaire [sic] [...] [must] be in receipt of a pension'.⁷⁹² This criterion acted as a proxy for either long service or a disability. Permanent pensions during this period were awarded for three reasons: if a man was discharged for medical reasons connected to his service; if a man was discharged for medical reasons unconnected to his service and had been in the army for a minimum of fourteen years; and, finally, to those men who had fulfilled their full term of service, which was twenty-one years.⁷⁹³

The final criterion, which was applied to men on temporary pensions (these could expire within one year of the man leaving the army), was that if their pension expired while they were a member of the Corps, they would be permitted to remain only if they had achieved the rank of a First Class commissionaire.⁷⁹⁴ These criteria illustrated Walter's commitment to the principle of long service, but this was to the detriment of the interests of those men who had not been able to fulfil them. The surcharges that were applied to them were imbued with Walter's conservatism. There was an implicit assumption that those men who had not elected for or been able to fulfil a long-service commitment to the army were deficient in some way.

A memorandum issued by Walter in 1892 titled 'Points for favourable consideration as regards Admission' further reinforced the benefits of an army background over a long period.⁷⁹⁵ This stressed the importance of familial connections, prefaced by Walter's assertion of the importance he attached to 'being the son of a soldier particularly if the father has served his full time'. He continued by opining that he had 'generally found the sons of soldiers excellent men [...] their companions and associations in early life have given them

⁷⁹⁰ LMA/4777/B/03/03/037, EW to Captain WF Mann RN, 26 October 1882

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

⁷⁹² LMA/4777/B/01/01/001, p. 2, LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 4, LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 1 and LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p.9.

⁷⁹³ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, pp. 206-07.

⁷⁹⁴ LMA/4777/B/01/01/002, p. 5, LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 2 and LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 10.

⁷⁹⁵ LMA/4777/B/04/010, general order 247, July 1895.

tone and habits which could not be acquired elsewhere'.⁷⁹⁶ Walter concluded by saying that he 'always discouraged good men from leaving H.M Service [sic] [...] all who can should remain for pensions and then join the Corps'.⁷⁹⁷

In addition to reducing the length of service in the army, the Enlistment Act led to the creation of the Army Reserve. A soldier who had signed up for six years' service would be required to become a Reservist, which meant that he was subject to mobilisation in the event of an emergency.⁷⁹⁸ The creation of this force proved its value in subsequent campaigns.⁷⁹⁹ Reservists often experienced difficulty in securing employment because some employers refused to take them on owing to concerns around their workforce being reduced in times of emergency, which, in turn, acted as a disincentive to some men to enlist.⁸⁰⁰ Therefore, admitting reservists to the Corps would have helped the army address a particular recruitment issue.

Despite this, the *Rules* levied financial surcharges on reservists. The 1883 edition made clear that, in addition to being required to deposit money into the Corps' Savings Bank, those reservists who were NCOs and who wished to retain their rank would be required to deposit additional funds to act as security.⁸⁰¹ No payment was expected of the applicant with a permanent pension who wished to retain his rank. The highest surcharge aimed at the reservist was £50, which was payable by those who were married.⁸⁰² This payment was designed to 'prove their ability to keep a wife in a proper manner by previously having saved fifty pounds.'⁸⁰³

Walter's prejudices against the reservists, and his claims surrounding the commissionaires' exceptionalism, were made clear in a letter to Major Boynton in 1889.⁸⁰⁴ The letter was concerned with the Reservist Society, which was established by the War Office to help these men secure civil employment.⁸⁰⁵ Walter explained that he considered the Society 'a "godsend"[...] when an inferior man comes to us, we can now pass him on to the Reservist Society who practically get our "leavings"'.⁸⁰⁶ He referred to the War Office as being 'very angry when I refused to join them, and much displeased when I told them that in place of

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁸ Gosling, 'Tommy Atkins', p. 42.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 42, Spiers *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 121.

⁸⁰⁰ Gosling, 'Tommy Atkins', p. 256.

⁸⁰¹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/005, p. 2.

⁸⁰² LMA/4777/B/04/010, general order 247, July 1895.

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ LMA/4777/B/03/054, EW to Major Boynton, 28 March 1889.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

being afraid of them, I would prefer giving them an annual subsidy'.⁸⁰⁷ The Corps would, Walter continued, 'always get the best men in the army' and, consequently, it was 'ridiculous to compare a 'Pensioner' [sic] or 'Reservist' [sic] with a commissionaire, the latter is well worth 20% more in the labour market, and he readily gets it in all our divisions'.⁸⁰⁸ Thus this wage premium the Corps could claim for the commissionaires was, according to Walter, a reflection of the long-service credentials of the commissionaire, even though, as we have seen, the Corps accepted men from a short-service background, albeit under less favourable terms.

Besides his objections to their reforms, Walter's antipathy to successive governments can be dated to the failure of a campaign he was involved with to secure unskilled civil service jobs for ex-servicemen. The materials from the campaign were collated in a pamphlet titled *State Rewards for State Services*, edited by Walter and published in 1871.⁸⁰⁹ The campaign argues that if ex-servicemen could be assured of unskilled employment within the civil service once they were discharged, that would help the army overcome its recruitment problem. The campaign was unsuccessful and Walter withdrew from engaging with politicians.

This was clear in his correspondence with Robertson Glasgow, a retired army officer, on 1 December 1881. Glasgow was seeking Walter's help in securing financial support for the newly opened division in Scotland.⁸¹⁰ On the subject of the employment, Walter compared the situation in Britain with that in Germany, where army veterans were guaranteed low level positions in the country's civil service. He stated that the situation in the latter country was a 'fitting and natural reward of [their] military service'.⁸¹¹ He claimed that given the 'deplorable and detestable strife of political partizans [sic] [...] one cannot expect to see a similar treatment of the English soldier'.⁸¹² The solution lay with 'those who prefer patriotism to party [they] can still take a share in giving [the soldier] the encouragement on the termination of his service which is not only the best for him to enlist, but at the same time serves as an important incentive for meretricious conduct'.⁸¹³ Indeed, he expressed his satisfaction that one of the Corps' senior officers had failed to secure any employment for his men with the Corporation of Manchester.⁸¹⁴ He claimed that government officials were, 'generally inflated

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁹ LMA/4777/G/02/001.

⁸¹⁰ LMA/4777/B/01/010, EW to Robertson Glasgow, 1 December 1881.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Ibid.

⁸¹³ Ibid.

⁸¹⁴ LMA/4777/B/03/02/058, EW to Colonel Brind, 3 October 1884.

with a sense of importance, and very deficient in good manners [...] we cannot work well together.’⁸¹⁵

Working with the army, then, was Walter’s preference. The perceived threat to the physical stature and morality of its recruits owing to the various reforms described above, provided him with the greatest opportunity to highlight what he saw as the superiority of the commissionaires’ identity compared with that of these new recruits. He viewed the commissionaire as being firmly of the ‘old stamp’, that is, a product of the army’s pre-reform recruitment system. This allowed him to claim a greater sense of morality and better physical prowess on behalf of the commissionaires, qualities he linked to the men’s positive employment prospects. Colonel Mure wrote to Walter in 1875 requesting his opinion on the ‘present moral and physical state of the army’.⁸¹⁶ Walter’s response provided a useful summation of his views on this topic, which, once more, used the language of commodification. He argues that officers currently ‘regard the different quality of the article with which they are now supplied in the same manner as the consumer does the adulteration of the articles of his daily consumption’.⁸¹⁷ He concluded by noting that if the Corps’ ‘business was conducted in the same manner, or with the same ‘material’ as the Army is administered in Pall Mall [the location of the War Office] it would come to a finish in three months’.⁸¹⁸ It was not just the commissionaires who were superior in his eyes. Walter also viewed himself and his officers as being superior to the politicians and civil servants running the War Office at the time.

The government hoped that the changes brought about by the Army Enlistment Act would encourage a ‘higher class of man [to enlist], particularly from the agricultural populations, [thus] improving the moral and operational health of the army’.⁸¹⁹ This did not prove to be the case. Spiers observes that, as its recruitment problems continued, the army ‘was forced to lower its standards and accept smaller and younger men’.⁸²⁰ In addition, Skelley notes the Ashanti campaign of 1874 provided the first meaningful test of the effectiveness of short service ‘and the results were far from satisfactory [...] young recruits were unable to bear the strength of the campaign’.⁸²¹

Michael Brown observes that some senior military figures viewed the issues surrounding the physicality of the army’s recruits as a consequence of ‘industrialisation and urbanisation

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

⁸¹⁶ LMA/4777/B/03/03/057, EW to Colonel Mure, 8 March 1875.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ Gosling, ‘Tomy Atkins’, p. 44.

⁸²⁰ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 123.

⁸²¹ Skelley, *The Victorian British Army*, p. 255.

[which] had produced an enfeebled race unsuited to the demands of empire'.⁸²² He points to a speech given by Surgeon-Major Dr Leith Adams in 1874, in which he bemoaned the declining physical state of the army's recruits since the introduction of short service. Adams described these men as being members of an 'unimprovable, stunted and stamina-less [sic] race [found] in crowded cities'.⁸²³ For Garnet Wolseley, future Commander-in-Chief of the British army, the process of industrialisation had produced the 'most miserable specimens of humanity: and what is most to be deplored is that they are going from bad to worse'.⁸²⁴ Another senior army figure, Field Marshal Frederick Roberts, expressed his views in terms of the threat that the introduction of short service posed to imperial security; he claimed that 'soldiers in India [...] needed the stamina and maturity acquired by long service'.⁸²⁵

Walter presented the physical identity of the commissionaire in opposition to these images. Writing to Colonel Henry in 1884, he stated his belief that 'men of decent physique have no difficulty in ordinary times in getting such work as they are really qualified for, but quite half of those who enlist have never done 12 months continuous labour of any useful kind [...] they enlist because they are practically useless to anyone who expects a decent return for his wage'.⁸²⁶ Walter felt that, for this type of man, 'the army is not a good school and when they leave it, the slight veneer of any good habits they may have acquired is rapidly worn off'.⁸²⁷ He argues that 'if the ranks of the army were again filled with raw material of the old stamp, the regimental system would again turn out a manufactured article which anyone would be glad to buy'.⁸²⁸ The commissionaires were firmly of the old stamp, meaning that the 'Corps has no difficulty in getting good wages for its members'. This was a reflection in his eyes of the commissionaires being the kind of 'manufactured article preferred by employers', and as a result of this 'we have never had so good a year for Business[sic] as the one about to close'.⁸²⁹

Walter further asserted the superior physical stature of the commissionaires in a general order that sought to clarify the Corps' admissions criteria. The order stated that 'if an Employer[sic] asks for a man of reasonable physique which, according to our standards means 5ft 7in and upwards, it would be useless for me to offer him something quite different'.⁸³⁰ This assertion was written three years after a government report had noted in

⁸²² Brown, 'Cold Steel, Weak Flesh', p. 161.

⁸²³ Ibid., p. 159.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., p. 161.

⁸²⁵ Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, p. 95.

⁸²⁶ LMA/4777/B/03/02/058, EW to Colonel Henry, 10 October 1884.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

⁸³⁰ LMA/4777/B/04/010, general order 247, July 1895.

1892 that an increasing number of army recruits did not meet the minimum height requirement of 5 feet 4 inches.⁸³¹ This reduction had led to public concern and, in some cases ridicule, through satirical cartoons that depicted this new breed of recruit as ‘toy soldiers’.⁸³²

However, this focus on the purely physical was the exception. When seeking support for the Corps, Walter typically combined his claims about the physical condition of the commissionaire with commentary on their morality. He stated in 1876 that ‘all [employers] want are servants who are honest, sober from morning to night, and willing to give a fair return for the wages they receive’.⁸³³ In correspondence with an army officer he pointed out that ‘every employer knows [...] how extremely difficult it is to meet with such men [...] [they] come to us because they believe they are more likely to find what they want amongst commissionaires than elsewhere’.⁸³⁴ The commissionaire, explained Walter two years later, benefited from the ‘advantages [...] derived from superior manners, education, or rank, all these are thoroughly appreciated by employers and receive their face value in wages’.⁸³⁵ This was a positive affirmation by Walter on the value of the commissionaire brand to employers.

Writing to Colonel Dunbar in 1880 in response to a query surrounding the establishment of a division in Edinburgh, he argues that the army’s recruits were ‘as a rule [...] very much below the standard morally and often physically which intelligent employers require, Our Secret [sic] – if it can be called one – lies in the fact that we can supply an article always very much in demand’.⁸³⁶ He continued by referencing the *Rules* and their influence in establishing standards of behaviour; the ‘commissionaire has gained his station and monetary value by constant observance of what might be called “rigid discipline”’.⁸³⁷ This discipline led to the commissionaire adopting ‘the habitual practice of civilised habits. He is sober in the strictest possible sense, he is industrious, perfectly honest, and devoted to the interests of his employer’.⁸³⁸ Walter was making it clear what he felt was the value of the commissionaire system to employers, once again emphasising the exceptionalism of the commissionaires he claimed on their behalf.

⁸³¹ Gosling, ‘Tommy Atkins,’ p. 114

⁸³² Ibid., p. 173.

⁸³³ LMA/4777/B/03/03/037, EW to Vice Admiral Right Honourable Sir JCD Hay, 19 June 1876.

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

⁸³⁵ LMA/4777/B/03/03/048, EW to Captain Swinhoe, 4 June 1878.

⁸³⁶ LMA/4777/B/03/03/057, EW to Colonel Dunbar, 10 November 1880.

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

⁸³⁸ Ibid.

To reinforce these claims, Walter relied on referencing the punitive framework he had constructed around the Corps' disciplinary code. He acknowledged the time it had taken to establish the Corps. It had 'taken twenty-two years and 4,000 men of good character according to War Office standards to make a thousand commissionaires'.⁸³⁹ Thus, he was able to reference the Corps' disciplinary code in language that Dunbar would have had sympathy with and which, once again, allowed Walter to state how he felt that the commissionaire system benefitted the army.

Roddy and others have observed how some charities of the late-nineteenth century relied on targeted marketing as part of their marketing strategy.⁸⁴⁰ The above analysis of Walter's correspondence builds on their work, as it demonstrates how effective Walter was at reflecting the needs (as he saw them) of the army's officer class. The impact this correspondence had on raising money for the OEF demonstrates how effectively Walter targeted his appeals to the regimental community. This success was based on appealing to the community's sense of paternalism and pragmatism. As a former army officer, he claimed to have an innate understanding of their concerns and his letters frequently referenced his experience. This undoubtedly lent a legitimacy to Walter's arguments. Furthermore, his assistance that only officers could donate to the OEF and men from the ranks could only contribute to the Convalescent Hospital Fund went beyond simply restating the importance of rank. It allowed him to broaden the Corps' subscriber base and, in doing so, maximise its donations. As Roddy and others have observed, this was a common tactic among some of the more successful and innovative charities of this period.⁸⁴¹ Once again, we see how Walter adopted pioneering techniques when it came to raising funds for the Corps

Innovation is also evident in how Walter publicised this subscriber base, which was a priority for the Corps. This publicity made its relationship with the various regiments and senior officers of the army tangible by detailing their financial contributions to the OEF. The vehicle for doing this was the *Circular*, whose importance increased in proportion to the fund's growth.⁸⁴² The publication listed the twenty-eight Corps' governors, who had been elected to serve as permanent trustees, those who sat on the organisation's administrative board and those who made up its executive committee.⁸⁴³ Of these men, twenty-four came from the army either as serving or former officers with a rank of major or above, two were from the Royal Navy, and there was one MP, the Honourable Percy Wyndham. The honours awarded

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ Roddy and others, *The Charity Market*, p. 11.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁸⁴² The pagination of the 1875 Circular was 7 pages, and the equivalent figure for the 1895 edition was 11 pages; see LMA/4777/B/02/001 and LMA/4777/B/02/002.

⁸⁴³ LMA/4777/B/02/001, *1875 Circular*, p. 1.

to some members, such as knighthoods, the Victoria Cross and Commander of the British Empire, were listed so that this prestige could be reflected back on to the Corps.⁸⁴⁴ In addition, the names of the Corps' perpetual governors were listed – 80 in 1875 and 183 in 1895.⁸⁴⁵ The names of the Corps' life governors were also listed, which included army regiments as well as civilians and institutions connected to the army: the Army and Navy Club, the Junior United Service Club, the Earl of Derby and Florence Nightingale.⁸⁴⁶ These listings underlined the Corps' prestige and legitimacy by demonstrating the elevated social status of its military supporters. As Roddy and others have noted, such listings were one of the best established ways for charities to communicate to potential donors that they were legitimate operations, and it had the potential to place those organisations with the most eminent boards at the 'summit of the respectability index'.⁸⁴⁷

3. Identity

The reporting of the Corps' annual parade and inspection by contemporary newspapers, provided further evidence of the Corps' links to the army, and demonstrated their shared identity. The importance Walter placed on this event is evident in the address he delivered to the commissionaires in June 1874.⁸⁴⁸ He reminded them that attendance was mandatory, and those men who were absent 'would be liable to a heavy fine, and the loss of their insurance for twelve months'.⁸⁴⁹ Walter continued by saying that he 'trust[ed] that the appearance of the men, their punctuality and steadiness on Parade [sic] will be equal, and if possible superior to what it has been on previous occasions'.⁸⁵⁰ The reason for this was that he was expecting 'an unusually large attendance of [serving] Officers [sic] many of whom never omit this opportunity of meeting their former colleagues, and trust [...] that this feeling of attachment will be reciprocated by the presence of every member of this Institution[sic]'.⁸⁵¹ He concluded with the hope that the men would do their best to attain a 'superiority [...]' so

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 7. The small number of naval officers reflected the relationship the Royal Navy had with the Corps; no perpetual governors came from this service and, consequently, only a small number of former sailors were commissionaires. This was an ongoing source of frustration for Walter, as his correspondence with the navy made clear; see LMA/4777/B/03/02/037 for examples.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 6. and LMA/4777/B/02/002, 1895 *Circular*, p. 6.

⁸⁴⁶ LMA/4777/B/02/001, 1875 *Circular*, p. 6, lists 80 life governors at 80; by 1895 there were 426, see LMA/4777/B/02/002, 1895 *Circular*, p. 5.

⁸⁴⁷ Roddy and others, *The Charity Market*, p. 110.

⁸⁴⁸ LMA/4777/B/04/010, Morning Orders, 1 June 1874.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

that each Officer [sic] attending the Parade [sic] may feel satisfied that his former comrades are still animated by their old and invincible spirit'.⁸⁵²

The nature of the press coverage this parade attracted was enhanced by the presence of Field Marshal His Royal Highness, Duke of Connaught. The *Daily Telegraph* published a detailed report of the Duke's inspection, which took place on 28 June in St James's Park.⁸⁵³ The article focused on the role played by the Duke and, in doing so, displayed a good understanding of the importance of the commissionaires' military identity, their value as civilian workers and their deservedness as former soldiers. It described the commissionaires as a 'most useful and meretricious body of men', and noted that 'His Royal Highness, attended by Captain Walter, the devoted founder, friend and Commandant of the Commissionaires, minutely inspected a battalion of veteran soldiers [...] speaking to many of their number especially those who wore service medals'.⁸⁵⁴ The report then observed that the Duke 'on parting expressed his gratification at the opportunity afforded him of making acquaintance with a body of men who won distinction as soldiers and were doing good work in private life'.⁸⁵⁵ Following these observations, the report focused on the character of the commissionaires and their respectability; it argues that there could be 'no doubt that the brave, willing, trustworthy fellows who do so many useful offices for us – who are always alert, civil and intelligent and among whom insolence and extortion seems to be unknown – felt highly flattered by [this] attention'. Furthermore, 'Prince Arthur [the Duke of Connaught] is indeed to be cordially congratulated on the grace and affability with which he performed his part.'⁸⁵⁶

This commentary provided a sharp contrast to how the attendance of other dignitaries was reported. The newspaper mused that it 'cannot help wondering whether, as the Secretary of State for War and First Lord of the Admiralty walked home to lunch it occurred to either of these honourable personages [...] that the British Government has not the slightest claim to indulge in any self-complacent feelings concerning the prosperity of the Corps of Commissionaires that the inception [...] and maintenance of the body was due not to the State [sic] but to private spirit and liberality'. Indeed, it observed that Britain had 'by no means done her duty to the heroic men who have shed blood in her defence, or have spent their lives in guarding her comforts'. It observed how some soldiers returned home 'shattered in health and frequently maimed in limb', yet these disabled soldiers received no more than

⁸⁵² Ibid.

⁸⁵³ *Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 1874, p. 5.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

‘a few pence per day’.⁸⁵⁷ Thus, the newspaper report praised the Duke of Connaught for the attention he gave the ‘useful and meretricious’ commissionaires, but it also provided a platform for it to deride the lack of government support for the country’s ex-servicemen. In doing so it encapsulated how Walter had striven to position the Corps.

Renowned army officers could also act as a catalyst for positive coverage of these parades, as the example of General Lord Frederick Roberts illustrates. He inspected the commissionaires in 1881, after he had recently returned from Afghanistan, where he had ‘won national celebrity as the successful commander of a three hundred and twenty mile march from Kabul to Kandahar’.⁸⁵⁸ He was a senior officer from the traditional wing of the army’s leadership, which was opposed to the reforms discussed above. He made this clear in his speech; he stated that ‘regiments are proud of their traditions [...] [especially if] it has made a conspicuous name [and soldiers] look forward to adding to its reputation. This is esprit de corps.’⁸⁵⁹ Furthermore, he had a keen interest in the welfare of the army’s rank and file, and consistently advocated for improvements in their conditions.⁸⁶⁰ His speech to the commissionaires reflected these sentiments and indicated how Walter’s consistent assertions surrounding the Corps’ importance to the army had resonated with him.⁸⁶¹ He demonstrated this in how he congratulated the men and their employers: the commissionaires for ‘proving by your example the soundness of the principles on which the Founder [sic] established this Corps – the principles of self-help and self-denial; and your employers for their good sense and patriotism in giving [you] the best places in their service’.⁸⁶²

Roberts was full of praise for the men, which he framed around their adherence to the army’s values: discipline, commitment to the service and their country. He had visited the barracks a few days before the inspection and informed the men that he ‘was much impressed by the simplicity of the arrangements [...] some of the men’s rooms are patterns of neatness [...] had I to choose or recommend a man for a responsible situation I would certainly give the preference to one who kept his room tidy, and who always turned out neat and clean himself’. He was honoured to have had the opportunity to inspect ‘such a fine, clean and well set up body of men’. Roberts asserted to the commissionaires that they ‘all know my predilection for seasoned soldiers. You are seasoned soldiers,’ he continued, ‘and

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸⁵⁸ Heather Streets, ‘Military Influence in Late Victorian and Edwardian Popular Media: The Case of Frederick Roberts’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 8.2 (2003), pp. 231-56 (p. 234).

⁸⁵⁹ LMA/4777/B/02/001, transcript of speech, supplement to the Annual Circular July 1881.

⁸⁶⁰ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 113;

⁸⁶¹ LMA/4777/B/02/001, transcript of speech, supplement to the Annual Circular July 1881.

⁸⁶² Ibid.

if the honour of inspecting the Corps was not of itself a sufficient reward, I am more than repaid today by seeing such a fine, clean and well set up body of men as we have present.’⁸⁶³

Looking around the parade, he said he was reminded of ‘the history of the British Army [sic] for the past thirty years or more. Among those present are men who have taken part in every campaign during that period [...] all [of you] have shewn [sic] how ready and willing [you] are to suffer for their Queen and country’. During the inspection, Roberts ‘paused for a moment to talk with everyone whose decorations recalled memories of campaigns in which they had served together, and especially with those who had shared his hardships of the great march from Carbul to Candahar [sic], when general and soldier learned to place implicit reliance on one another’.⁸⁶⁴ By supporting the Corps at the inspection, Roberts demonstrated that his former comrades could still rely on him and that the commissionaires displayed the martial qualities he valued.

Roberts also inspected the Corps in June 1893 and the report in the *Mail* on the 19th of that month made it clear that his opinion of the commissionaires remained as positive as it had been twelve years earlier.⁸⁶⁵ He praised the men for the fact the balance of the Corps’ savings bank had increased by £45,000, which he described as ‘practical proof of the [commissionaires’] good conduct, thrift and common sense’.⁸⁶⁶ He moved on to connect the commissionaires with the recent reforms of the army and expressed the hope that, in time, employers would come to ‘appreciate the fact that the man who has learnt habits of discipline, thrift and self-control in the Navy or Army [sic] is in all probability a better subordinate in civil life than one who has not had the advantage of such a special training’.⁸⁶⁷ Roberts expressed the belief that the Corps had already done much to advance this argument, as anyone who visited London could not ‘fail to notice the [commissionaires] were] [...] neatly dressed, smart looking, well turned out [and were] [...] prominent features of all the principal houses of business or places of recreation’. He continued by noting that once these visitors realised they were military veterans and ‘when they know their intelligence and unvarying courtesy, and when [they] hear that their integrity is proverbial [...] [the visitors] cannot fail to think well of the Navy or Army [sic]’.⁸⁶⁸ Roberts was not simply praising the commissionaires, but also communicating that he viewed their identity as exemplary, which could have a wider impact on how society viewed ex-servicemen. He was

⁸⁶³ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ ‘The Corps of Commissionaires’, *Morning Post*, 19 June 1893, , p. 4.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 4.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 4.

affirming the value of the commissioner brand by referencing the wider impact that it could have.

However, it was royal family who drove the highest levels of press coverage of the Corps' parades. Following the inspection by the Duke of Connaught, the commissioners were inspected by members of the royal family on five further occasions up to 1895.⁸⁶⁹ These parades received far more coverage than those not attended by royalty.⁸⁷⁰ A good example of this is how the newspapers covered the inspection by the Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge, who, as we have previously seen, was an early patron of the Corps. The Duke inspected the commissioners on 17 June 1883, an event that was covered by 78 newspapers.⁸⁷¹ This coverage included a detailed report on the address he delivered to the men in some newspapers, including the *Mail*.⁸⁷²

It reported that the Duke had begun his address by saying it 'had given me the greatest possible satisfaction and gratification to come here today to inspect this most splendid Corps, formed of men who really were the backbone of the army in previous years'.⁸⁷³ He was 'sure from their appearance, their conduct and that many of them [...] [possessed] good conduct medals that these are really the men who have helped to make the grand Army [sic] we have always been proud of and which has performed so well its duties to the Sovereign and the country'.⁸⁷⁴

However, his praise for the Corps went beyond this – he focused on the military discipline the men represented, which produced 'these grand old soldiers [...] [and are] now doing credit to this Corps as well as credit to the Army [sic] in which they were brought up and with which they are associated'.^[143] He continued by stressing how this continuity had resulted in the commissioners' 'feelings and their sentiment [...] are now just as military as when they were in the ranks'.^[144]

Furthermore, the Duke commented that he travelled 'into all parts of London', and in that time he 'never saw a man of the Corps who was not creditable to it or who did not do justice to the uniform he wore'. He continued by praising the men for their appearance; the Duke

⁸⁶⁹ The dates of these inspections and the member of the Royal Family in attendance were: the Prince of Wales in 1882, the Duke of Cambridge in 1883, the Duke of Edinburgh in 1885, Prince Albert in 1887, the Prince of Wales in 1889 and the Duke of Connaught in 1892; see LMA/B/04/011, p. 2.

⁸⁷⁰ Analysis of the reporting of the Corps' annual parade via the British Newspaper Archive indicates that the five parades listed above were covered by an average of 60 newspapers, compared with an average of 48 newspapers for the non-royal parades during this period.

⁸⁷¹ This is based on analysis of the British Newspaper Archive, using the keywords 'Corps of Commissioners', for the period from 17 to 25 June 1873.

⁸⁷² 'The Corps of Commissioners, *Mail*, 17 June 1883,' p. 6.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

could see the commissionaires 'were well looked after, and I am sure you are not only doing yourselves credit, but you are at the same time benefiting your families by being respectably and usefully employed'.⁸⁷⁵ He concluded his address by emphasising his close relationship with Walter, whom he described as 'gallant', and whom he complemented 'on the exertions he had made in bringing this fine establishment together'. These achievements, said the Duke, were 'highly creditable', and he also wanted to praise the support that the army's 'officers and non-commissioned officers [for] the men of the Corps'.⁸⁷⁶ Throughout his address, the Duke showed he was aware of the importance of the continuity between the commissionaires' identity and their former identity as soldiers, and that the closeness of the relationship between the army and the Corps was fundamental to this success.

The reporting of these four parades demonstrates not just their value in generating free publicity, but also how closely this publicity resonated with the identity of the commissionaires, as conceived by Walter. Furthermore, the newspaper coverage promoted the importance of the Corps' relationship with the army in a way that was aligned with how he positioned the organisation to its regiments. In addition, these reports underscore the importance of the Corps' relationship with the royal family. We saw in Chapter 1 how the organisation had secured royal patronage at its inception, and that this was a common tactic of contemporary charities to imbue them with prestige. However, this reporting of the parades set the Corps apart; it made their royal connection meaningful by demonstrating the active role royalty took in the Corps' affairs. The examples above are evidence of the importance of parades, through their role in generating free publicity for the Corps. Moreover, the Corps viewed its relationship with the royal family as strategically important, and the press coverage of royal attendance at the parades indicates how effective the organisation was at leveraging this relationship.

Towards the latter part of the period of this study, the Corps' parade started to benefit from visual representation in periodicals. These illustrations and photographs gave the editorial coverage an added dimension by displaying the visual identity of the commissionaires. The first of these was published in the *Graphic*, on 18 June 1887. A weekly periodical launched in 1872, it was, as Richard Altick notes, 'one of the first successful rivals to the *Illustrated London News*' and its weekly sales could reach 250,000.⁸⁷⁷ The text that described the parade emphasised the defining characteristics of the commissionaire brand.⁸⁷⁸ The article

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁷⁷ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, pp. 363 and 395; see also, Brian Maidment, 'William Luson Thomas', *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Academic Press and the British Library, 2009), p. 623.

⁸⁷⁸ 'The Corps of Commissionaires', *Graphic*, 18 June 1887, p. 638.

stated that the Corps 'constituted a trustworthy employment agency, through which at all times the services, either permanent or temporary, of sober, honest and intelligent men can be secured'. The report noted Walter had said at the Corps' recent annual meeting that the 'Corps could be greatly extended, but that the *materiel* [original emphasis], owing to admission to the Corps being confined to men of good character'.⁸⁷⁹ It was accompanied by an illustration of a group of commissionaires assembled before the parade. (Figure 4.1)



Figure 4.1 Before the Inspection – A Group of Men of the Corps of Commissionaires,'
The *Graphic*, 18 June 1887, p. 640.

The illustration is naturalistic and its unposed nature draws the viewer in, particularly to the image of the amputee commissionaire at the front. He is represented in a similar way to the images that have been discussed throughout this study. He is proud and his medals mark him as being brave. He is surrounded by his nondisabled colleagues, which emphasises two things: the Corps' commitment to finding work for men like him and the implied comradeship that is part of being a commissionaire. Overall, the image captures the identity of the men – their stature and smart appearance embody the visual identity of the commissionaire brand.

The second article under consideration, published in *The Army and Navy Illustrated* on 24 July 1896, covered the parade from earlier in that month.⁸⁸⁰ As its name suggests, it was

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 638.

⁸⁸⁰ *Navy and Army Illustrated*, 24 July 1896, pp. 54-55.

aimed at a military audience, both serving and former soldiers and sailors. The publication had been launched the previous year and had quickly built a reputation based on the quality of its photography. As Albert Tucker notes, it was 'the best illustrated of the [contemporary] military magazines'.⁸⁸¹ The magazine was noted for its photographic compositions and their 'vivid demonstrations of officers and men [...] and the patriotism invoked by the [images] captions'.⁸⁸² The coverage of the Corps ran across two pages, and benefitted from an extensive use of photography which showed the commissionaires in a favourable light. (Figures 4.2 and 4.3)

⁸⁸¹ Albert Tucker, 'Military', *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, ed. by J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Scolar Press, 1994), pp. 62-80 (p.73).

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 73.



Figure 4.3 *Navy and Army Illustrated*, 24 July 1896, p. 55.

The first page featured two images: the assembled commissionaires and the Corps' senior officers. The second page featured a range of images that portray small groups of men arranged according to their former regiments. This was standard practice at the parades so that visiting officers could identify their former charges. The significance of these illustrations is twofold. The first is that the images are indistinguishable from the other images in that

issue, which featured serving soldiers from the Indian Army, and the 8th Battalion of the Canadian Militia. This emphasised the shared identity between the Corps and the army, which the caption reinforced by noting that the parade had been held in the Royal Hospital Chelsea (home of the Chelsea Pensioners) and the men had been inspected by the Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge.⁸⁸³

The second area of note is the image titled 'Guard of Honour', at the top left of the page shown above, and which has been separated below. (Figure 4.4) This was the term given to the most senior commissionaires and those men who had lost a limb. They led the Corps at the parade or other ceremonial occasions.



Figure 4.4 *Navy and Army Illustrated*, 24 July 1896, p. 55.

This image features a cross section of these commissionaire 'types'. The commissionaire on the left, with the amputated arm and walking stick, is the most interesting of these figures because of what he represents. He is clearly older than the other commissionaires and his beard may have indicated he was a veteran of the Crimean War. As John Rumsby notes, this style of facial hair was a distinguishing feature of veterans from that war and many chose to retain it on their return home.⁸⁸⁴ But what is clear is that his age is older than his

⁸⁸³ *Navy and Army Illustrated*, 24 July 1896, p. 55.

⁸⁸⁴ John H. Rumsby, 'Of No Small Importance: a Social History of the Cavalry Moustache c. 1790 – c. 1860.', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 96.(2018), pp. 152-167 (p.165).

comrades. He is not simply a veteran he is an *aged* veteran. This context is important because the late 1890s saw an upsurge in public interest in elderly veterans as their numbers started to dwindle.⁸⁸⁵ This interest was focused on two types of aged veterans: those from the Crimean War or the Indian Rebellion, and the Chelsea Pensioners.

Lara Kriegel notes that press coverage of this first group 'vaulted the elderly mid-century warrior to a position of public curiosity and sympathy [...] [which] was quite a change from earlier accounts that had positioned him as gamester or huckster'.⁸⁸⁶ These sentiments manifested themselves in several ways. Kriegel describes how efforts were made to find the aged veterans in Bradford so they could take part in Edward VII's coronation celebrations, the philanthropic interest that a well-known missionary in Bristol took in the city's veterans of the Crimean War and Indian Rebellion, and how, in Nottingham, veterans and their families were 'rescued from the workhouse' and moved to almshouses.⁸⁸⁷ Furthermore, this group of veterans could, as Begiato and Brown note, find themselves co-opted to serve the agenda of others [...] through attending a celebratory dinner for veterans of the Indian Rebellion.⁸⁸⁸ They observe that the event was suffused with 'jingoistic discourse [...] [and] the aged veterans served not simply as memorial to their own past, but also as exemplars for current and future generations of imperialists'.⁸⁸⁹

The parallels with the disabled veterans discussed in Chapter 1 are all too clear. Once again, the welfare of the veteran had been appropriated for a cause that may not have suited his own interests. The aged commissioner in the 'Guard of Honour' image is apart from this. Although he is taking part in an event that has been staged to generate publicity, the publicity benefits him and his comrades. It presents them as the embodiment of the commissioner system, which is portrayed in the photographs as being vibrant and dedicated to veterans of all types.

However, it is the representations of the Chelsea Pensioner and his uniformed identity that hold the most relevance for this study. As Joan Hichberger observes, the Pensioner had long represented not just the 'ideal soldier, [he was] frequently seen as representative of all soldiers'.⁸⁹⁰ The cultural importance of the Pensioner is also noted by Begiato and Brown. They show the variety of uses this veteran's image was put to, from advertising to popular

⁸⁸⁵ Lara Kriegel, 'Living Links to History', p. 292.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 292.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 293 – '97.

⁸⁸⁸ Begiato and Brown, 'Visualising the Aged Veteran', pp. 130–'32.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁸⁹⁰ Joan Hichberger, *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815-1914* (Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 142.

illustrations.⁸⁹¹ The Pensioner, they argue, while only 'represent[ing] a very particular subset of military veterans', became one of the most recognised veteran identities in this period.⁸⁹² They continue by contending that 'in many instances, the veteran's body, though aged and often injured, was still seen as active and appealing', which they illustrate by detailing a fictional representation of a Chelsea Pensioner.⁸⁹³

The commissionaire of this period can be similarly viewed. However, where the aged commissionaire differed was through the consistent visual representation of the link between him and his younger comrades in the Corps. The 'Guard of Honour' image presents this in microcosm. The remaining images of the commissionaires on that page fulfil the same role against a broader cross section of men. This lent a vitality to the identity of the aged commissionaire in the photograph. The commissionaire's uniform connected him not just to his service career, but also his post-service work. It celebrated his discipline and underlined his self-reliance, and it showed him surrounded by his comrades. The uniform of the Chelsea Pensioner, while visually arresting, was historic and, as such, picturesque, but it was symbolic of his institutional life and the dependency that went with it.⁸⁹⁴ The photographs in *Navy and Army Illustrated*, on the other hand, symbolised the very real links between the commissionaires and serving soldiers. The similarity in the photographs of the commissionaires and the army in the periodical serve to underline the shared identity between these two groups of men.

This alignment between the identities of the Corps and the army was also evident in the *Guide* which was published in 1887 and which was 'compiled for the use of Soldiers [sic] about to be discharged or transferred to the Army Reserve [sic]'.⁸⁹⁵ The guide's author was a senior army figure, Edgar Hawks, the Chief of Staff of the Army Commissariat and Transport staff. The preface claimed that in response to the large numbers of men who were regularly returning to civilian life as a result of the introduction of short service, 'the employment of such men has naturally become a matter of much concern to those specifically interested in the soldier's welfare and indeed to the public generally'.⁸⁹⁶ It was certainly a concern for

⁸⁹¹ Brown and Begiato, 'Visualising the Aged Veteran', pp. 103' 04, 116-'17 and 127.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, a contemporary description of the Chelsea Pensioners' uniform is quoted by the authors; 'In 1830, *Bell's Life* observed that the "dress of your Chelsea Pensioner ... adds very materially to the veteran-like appearance of the man" With its long red coat and tricorne hat, it evoked the "Guardsmen's dress of 1745" and, "although somewhat antiquated" presented a "more warlike and martial appearance than your more dandyfied and bedizened one of the present"', p. 126.

⁸⁹⁵ Hawks, *Guide to Obtaining Civil Employment*, front cover.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Preface, unnumbered page.

those veterans returning to civilian life, some of whom, the guide acknowledged, may not have received helpful advice from their regiments on this topic.

The *Guide* was published independently of the War Office and so represented the army's opinions and not those of the government. It also closely reflected the interests of the Corps, which was acknowledged by Hawks. He stated that 'he was much indebted to Lieut-Colonel J. Wilkinson, Commanding [Officer of] the London Division of the Corps of Commissionaires, through whose courtesy I have been enabled to give the interesting details connected with that excellent institution.'⁸⁹⁷ The result was that the Corps received a preferential level of coverage in the guide; twenty nine pages were devoted to it, while the remainder of the organisations had an average of four. This was despite the *Guide*'s acknowledgment of the success the National Association had enjoyed in raising with the public the importance of the subject of employment for veterans.⁸⁹⁸ The preferential treatment given to the Corps is further evidence that Walter had successfully raised the profile of the organisation with the senior leadership of the army's regiments.⁸⁹⁹

The booklet provided an overview of the four organisations devoted to employing ex-servicemen: the Register for Civil Employment (Register), the National Association for Promoting the Civil Employment of Reserve and Discharged Soldiers, the Army and Navy Pensioners' Employment Society, and the Corps.⁹⁰⁰ The reader was informed that each of these would assist any veteran, provided the men were adjudged by their regiment to be of 'good character'.⁹⁰¹ In practice, this relied on the view of their commanding officer, who was required to provide information on the veterans through a commentary on their service career. The detail required by each organisation varied considerably, but it is clear that each relied on testimonials and evidence from the soldiers' former regiments, which were similar to the criteria the Corps used. The importance of this was stressed under a section titled 'Good Advice'.⁹⁰² There was an inherently moralistic tone to the advice offered on the dangers of being dismissed from a civilian role.⁹⁰³ This would not only reflect badly on the organisation that had secured the job for the veteran; it also had the potential to 'seriously affect other men seeking employment through the same channel and reflects upon the general character of the army at large'.⁹⁰⁴

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., Preface, unnumbered page.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., Preface, unnumbered page.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹⁰² Ibid., p. 49.

⁹⁰³ Ibid., p. 49.

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

The *Guide* described the Corps as an ‘admirable institution [...] founded by Captain Edward Walter [...] [which] now numbers some 1,700 men’.⁹⁰⁵ It went on to describe the organisation in terms that were similar to how he described it in his correspondence, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The guide stated that ‘so great is the reputation of the Corps and so high its state of efficiency, that the demand is often greater than [Walter] is able to supply’.⁹⁰⁶ The introduction to the Corps concluded with the view that ‘only men of irreproachable character are accepted’.⁹⁰⁷ What followed were subsections that dealt with a range of topics, including the selection criteria applied to applicants, the amounts that were deducted from the commissionaires’ wages for the various welfare funds and a list of the regiments that had paid to be one of the Corps’ Perpetual Governors.⁹⁰⁸ In addition, the *Guide* provided a particular focus on the types of roles the commissionaires performed, and the wages they received. It noted that these wages were dependent on a commissionaire’s appearance, character, education, the skills he had to offer and ‘bodily strength (with a will to work)’.⁹⁰⁹ In other words, it stressed the importance of the qualities veterans might have developed in the army and how these could be transferred for financial benefit in civilian life.

The content of this information indicates that it was lifted verbatim from the 1885 edition of the Corps’ *Rules*.⁹¹⁰ However, what was notably absent was any mention of the Corps’ disciplinary code and the sanctions attached to it. These would have been made clear to any applicant to the Corps as soon as he read the *Rules*, but it is clear the *Guide* provided a highly favourable view of the organisation. In addition, the latter presented an incomplete view of the Corps’ admissions statistics. By only mentioning the organisation’s strength of 1,700 men in 1887, and not the 106 men who were dismissed or discharged from the Corps (32% of the 328 men who joined that year), it provided a partial view of the organisation’s approach to its members. Nonetheless, despite this partiality, the *Guide* represented a true version of other aspects of life in the Corps, and the benefits to veterans of becoming a commissionaire. It therefore delivered a powerful affirmation of the value of the commissionaire brand to veterans, which, to return to the arguments put forward in Chapter 2, rested on illustrating the links between the habitus of the Corps and the army. It also demonstrated how veterans could transfer their capital into the organisation. The article

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 21–7, 36–48; for those men whose regiments were not listed, applicants were instructed that they would be required to pay an additional £1 entrance fee, and that in the previous twelve months this had been applied to twenty nine men.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁹¹⁰ LMA/4777/B/01/01/006.

emphasised the shared identity of the army and the Corps, and in doing so, demonstrated the value of the commissionaire brand to officers and future veterans alike.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Walter employed innovative marketing techniques to further his relationships with the army, as well as publicise the results of his efforts to the public. The success of this can be seen in the growth of the OEF as well as the positive press coverage the Corps benefited from in this period. It was predicated on the commissioners' usefulness to employers, which Walter attributed to the superior qualities he claimed on the men's behalf. Whether his appeals to the army's paternalism was more or less successful than his appeals to their pragmatism is unknowable. However, what is clear is the success he enjoyed in both aligning the interest of the Corps with the interests of the contemporary army, and this gave his appeals an immediacy and relevance that was undoubtedly of benefit to the commissionaires.

The needs of the military audience were different to those of employers, which were analysed in the preceding two chapters. Nonetheless, Walter transposed the civilian notions of respectability on to the commissionaires to make his successful appeals for financial support from the army. This chapter illustrates how he created a financial value to the commissionaires' identity for the army. It was as successful as his strategy for the other constituents of the Corps' tripartite relationship: employers and veterans. This underlines how skilful Walter was at moulding the masculinity of the commissionaires, depending on the needs of his audience.

The publicity that reacted to the events that Walter choreographed was significant, and was congruent with the principles of the Corps as he had envisioned them. However, this coverage represented only one element of the commissionaires' depiction in public. The following chapter considers how public representations of the men were informed not just by these ceremonial events, but by more regular interactions between the public and the commissionaires. These interactions took place in the workplace and were based on how the men performed their duties.

Chapter 5 – Representations

We Hence the Commissionaires: a useful race	It made these veterans, to whose well-bred care
Metropolitans know all about them;	We trust to shield our ladies in their shopping,
And, when we see some worn, true, fearless face,	Our letters, messages, nay cash to bear
Oft wonder how the deuce we did without them	Nor fear their fing'ring, dirtying, or dropping
They have fought and bled; and war's a noble trade	'Tis well that they whom battle's brunt and soil
When nobly waged beneath a hero's ken;	And discipline's hard test, prove worthy trust
And, though we wish that war were never made,	Should find retreats of honourable toil
Yet may we see by these that war makes men	Not in their evening lack a well-earned crust

The four verses above are taken from a poem published in *Punch* magazine in July 1876.⁹¹¹ The purpose of the poem was to praise Walter for the contribution he had made towards the welfare of former soldiers by forming the Corps, and to highlight the services the commissionaires offered. The tone of this praise is sycophantic in places; it notes that his work had added 'a lustre to the name of Walter' and argues that his rank should be promoted from captain to 'FIELD MARSHAL WALTER.' (Original emphasis.) In contrast, the description of the commissionaires is more grounded; it highlights some of the most important facets of the commissionaire brand. First, the reader is reminded that, as former soldiers, the commissionaires have 'fought and bled' and how they show that 'war makes men'. Furthermore, they are described as 'well-bred' men who can be relied on to 'shield our ladies in their shopping' and trusted to deliver letters, messages and money without fear of 'their fing'ring, dirtying, or dropping'. Thus, the men are depicted as a group to whom the public owes a debt of gratitude for their military service, and therefore the commissionaires should 'not in their evening lack a well-earned crust'.⁹¹² Alongside this, the men are portrayed as being disciplined, useful and honest – the poem, then, is fully aligned with the values of the commissionaire brand.

Punch was read by a middle class and upper class metropolitan audience, the very groups the commissionaires sought employment from.⁹¹³ This is an important consideration in interpreting this poem, as its significance also lies in the expectations of familiarity that seemingly lay behind the text. First, there would be little point in the poem unless the poet had an expectation that the magazine's readership would not just know who the commissionaires were, but that they would also have knowledge of the services the men offered. Indeed, if this expectation was at least not partially fulfilled, the poem would not

⁹¹¹ *Punch*, 1 July 1876, unnumbered page.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*

⁹¹³ The publication had estimated weekly sales of 40,000; see Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 394.

work. Furthermore, even if readers did not have sympathy with the portrayal of the men as deserving veterans, there is an apparent expectation by the poet that they would at least recognise the argument for the men's deservedness.

This portrayal was far from isolated; taking contemporary newspaper coverage as its source material, this chapter highlights how prevalent portrayals of working commissioners were. My analysis also illustrates how congruent these representations were with the commissioner brand. I argue that this congruity underscored the success of Walter's promotional strategies, which have been examined in the preceding chapters. Put simply, the content and form of these representations indicate that the commissioners were familiar figures, and that their collective identity was understood and valued by the public. This study has so far been focused on exploring the construction of the commissioner brand and the business impact it had with the Corps' three constituencies: veterans, employers and the officer class of the British army. This has been explored through analysing the role of the Corps' spectacle in communicating the brand's visual identity, and how the brand was codified by the *Rules*.

This chapter examines the power of the individual spectacle; that is, the single commissioner at work. Through this examination, we will see how each man's identity was represented in the press as being part of the commissioner brand, and how his actions or the reporting of them were deemed to have either upheld the brand, or undermined it. This chapter demonstrates that the individual was as constitutive of the group as the group was of the individual, and the value of the commissioner brand rested on this interdependency. Put simply, the representations under analysis in this chapter demonstrate how representations of the individual commissioner communicated the values of the institution he represented.

The newspaper coverage of the actions of individual commissioners that this chapter analyses have been grouped into two categories, according to the 'type' of commissioner being reported on: the respectable commissioner who upheld the Corps' regulations, and the disreputable commissioner who undermined them. Each of these categories of reports is based around court proceedings, where the commissioners appear either as witnesses, or as defendants facing criminal charges. While the legal status of these men was diametrically opposed, there is a commonality to their representations in the press. What unified these representations was the commissioner brand; the reporting of the actions of the respectable men depicted them as exemplars of the brand, while the behaviour of the disreputable men and the opinions expressed in court by the presiding magistrates were portrayed by the press as undermining the brand's commercial value.

This coverage has been sourced from the Corps' cuttings books, and the balance between coverage of the respectable and disreputable types of commissionaires in the cuttings books is broadly even; twenty nine commissionaires feature in this press coverage. However, despite this breadth, the potential for bias in the collation of these materials by the Corps is clear, so to overcome any partiality, online keyword searches have been conducted for each of the featured commissionaires in the *British Library Newspapers* database. These have brought to light a wider range of newspaper coverage, which has been analysed in conjunction with the reports from the cuttings books.⁹¹⁴ Each of these is based on court appearances that feature the men accused of criminal behaviour or acting as witnesses in the trials of individuals unrelated to the Corps.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse all twenty nine of the men in the coverage, and therefore three criteria have been applied so that the most illuminating representations are examined. First, the coverage had to reflect the actions of the men in their working environment.⁹¹⁵ Second, the men's employment as represented in these reports needed to reflect the range of services that the Corps offered, and not focus on any one role. Finally, the chosen representations had to reflect the expanding geographical base of the Corps. By applying these criteria, this chapter has assembled a richly impressionistic sample of newspaper coverage of working commissionaires during this period.

This sample is analysed through a close reading of each report to assess how the identity of these six men was understood by three audiences: those directly involved in the court case, the presiding magistrate or judge, and the journalist reporting on the case. This methodological approach builds on Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson's research.⁹¹⁶ Their work indicates that newspaper coverage during this period called on what they describe as 'easily recognised symbolic indicators [that were] used to transmit messages about the nature and behaviour of defendants and complainants, [and which] deliberately sought to influence public perceptions of types of incidents and participants in the courtroom drama'.⁹¹⁷ By taking such an approach, this chapter demonstrates how the symbolic

⁹¹⁴ While this produced a wider group of publications to analyse, for the most part it offered little additional detail to what was available in the cuttings books.

⁹¹⁵ Of these twenty nine reports, eight feature domestic crimes perpetrated by commissionaires; these have been discounted for this analysis. While the men are identified as commissionaires, their employment is mentioned only in passing and it is not central to how the men are represented.

⁹¹⁶ Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson, "'For Today in this Arena...'", *Legal Performativity and Dramatic Convention in the Victorian Criminal Justice System*, *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 14.2 (2007), p. 113-41.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

indicators of the commissioner brand were portrayed by the journalists involved in the reporting of the six cases under analysis.

These indicators recurred throughout the newspaper reports. By highlighting this, the chapter demonstrates that there was a dominant public representation of the working commissioner. These representations were rooted in the ideal commissioner, the figure represented in the *Punch* poem that opened this chapter; that is, the deserving veteran who could be relied on by his middle class clients to be disciplined, honest and useful.

Rowbotham and Stevenson argue that newspaper representations of defendants and offenders in court relied on that individual's 'conformity, or non-conformity with society's expected stereotypical norms based on class, gender, race or age'.⁹¹⁸ This chapter extends their argument by demonstrating that the same process is at play in the representations of the commissioners it analyses; the norm in this case being the ideal commissioner, against whom the behaviour of the respectable and disreputable men was assessed. Thus, the respectable commissioners are represented as fulfilling this ideal, which comprised notions of trust and character that had been forged by military service. In contrast, the behaviour of the disreputable commissioners was represented as being in opposition to this ideal. This leaves the reader with a strong sense of how these men *should* have behaved.

We will see how these representations reflected the symbolic power of the commissioners' uniform. As we saw in Chapter 2, the regulations connected to the uniform were designed to ensure that the men were as visible as possible to the public when they were performing their duties. As Walter explained to the newly appointed head of the Corps' outquarters in Glasgow in 1881: 'the wearing of uniform ensures a smart appearance at all times, it brings customers to the Corps, it brings thousands of eyes upon each individual Commissioner'.⁹¹⁹ Through an analysis of newspaper coverage this chapter demonstrates how the number of these 'eyes' increased.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the urban locations where the commissioners could be found and how these locations formed part of the Corps' surveillance network. My analysis of these locations extends Joyce's work on the morality of the nineteenth-century city. He argues that the transformation of these cities led to urban centres that were 'highly specialised but also highly transgressive [...] [it was] where people met [...] in greatly

⁹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 116.

⁹¹⁹ LMA/4777/B/03/02/043, EW to Major Boyd, 14 March 1881.

charged, greatly ordered, but also potentially disruptive city spaces'.⁹²⁰ I demonstrate that the role played by the commissionaires in these spaces was threefold: as bulwarks against transgressive behaviour, as magnets for transgressors who sought to exploit the public's trust in the commissionaire brand, and as transgressors themselves through theft from their clients.

Simon Gunn similarly talks of the moral role played by the Victorian city's architecture. He notes that many newly built commercial and civic buildings were inscribed with a 'plethora of symbols [...] exalting public and private virtues [that] made the[se] moral messages explicit and visible'.⁹²¹ Joyce argues that the new court buildings of this period played a particularly important role in this process; he describes them as being 'exemplifications of order and discipline'.⁹²² This moral architectural language also found expression in the way in which court proceedings were represented in the press; the textual form of these representations amplified the symbolic language of the buildings, or perhaps the architectural symbolism may have influenced the language used by the journalists reporting on these proceedings. The relationship between the textual and the symbolic could well have been interdependent. However, what is clear is that these reporters and their editors worked within the parameters of a set of journalistic conventions that shaped how court proceedings were represented in the Victorian press. As Rowbotham and Stevenson illustrate, this reporting relied on 'easily recognised symbolic indicators [that were] used to transmit messages about the nature and behaviour of defendants and complainants, [and which] deliberately sought to influence public perceptions of types of incidents and participants in the courtroom drama'.⁹²³ Engaging with their analysis is important for this study, as it provides the basis for decoding press reports involving the commissionaires. Consequently, Rowbotham and Stevenson's arguments inform this chapter's methodological approach.

The chapter then analyses these press reports of the commissionaires sequentially. The reports of the respectable commissionaires are analysed first, followed by the reports of the disreputable commissionaires. There are six of these reports, split evenly across these two 'types'. The reports also reflect the growing geographical spread of the Corps in this period: three reports focus on London and three on provincial cities. The newspaper representations of the working class commissionaires in London depict them coming into contact with a

⁹²⁰ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 151.

⁹²¹ Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester University Press, 2007) p. 42.

⁹²² Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 159.

⁹²³ Rowbotham and Stevenson, "'For Today in this Arena...'", *Legal Performativity and Dramatic Convention*, p. 116.

variety of middle and upper class men. These were men the commissionaires may not otherwise have encountered. Through these reports, we see the commissionaires interacting with their middle class clients, an upper class defendant, barristers and judges. Through analysing these interactions, we will see how they gave rise to scenarios where different masculine identities confronted one another. This occurred within what Judith Walkowitz describes as the 'contested terrain' of the West End in the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁹²⁴

In each case, the congruity of these representations with the ideal behaviour enshrined in the *Rules* is assessed. My analysis of these representations provides a gauge with which to measure the power of the commissionaire brand in two ways: first, by analysing the level of understanding of the brand in the newspaper reports; and second, the value that was placed on the brand within this press coverage. The period this chapter explores is 1881 to 1898. This end date broadly aligns with the period analysed in the preceding three chapters, and this alignment provides an understanding of the cumulative impact of Walter's promotional strategies on the commissionaire brand as represented in the press.

1. Locating the commissionaires

Through the newspaper reports under analysis, we find the commissionaires in a range of metropolitan and provincial urban settings. First is London, where the men are portrayed working in the centre of the city. This was a space that, as Walkowitz notes, constituted a 'modern landscape of [...] office buildings, shops, department stores [...] restaurants and hotels', and the purpose of this new landscape was 'to service not only the traditional rich of Mayfair, but a new middle class of civil servants and clerks'.⁹²⁵ This was the world of the commissionaire and the newspaper representations of the men in London reflected their presence in this environment back to their readers. The reports feature a messenger in Mayfair, a door attendant for a shopping arcade in Piccadilly and a night watchman for a commercial warehouse in the City. Walkowitz argues that these emerging public spaces 'produced new kinds of class and gender interactions'.⁹²⁶ The gendered interactions she focuses on are based on a range of feminine and masculine identities that 'rendered the streets of London an enigmatic and contested site'.⁹²⁷ This chapter demonstrates that the interactions of the commissionaires and their clients can be viewed in this way, and its focus

⁹²⁴ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Virago Press, 1992), p. 41.

⁹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

on masculinity extends her arguments; it takes them beyond the interaction of men and women, which is the focus of her study.

The centres of the provincial cities the Corps operated in were as transformed as London. As Simon Gunn observes of Manchester and other industrial cities of the period, they underwent a 'transformation [that] was at once architectural, spatial and representational; it involved nothing less than the remaking and reimagining of the city as a whole'.⁹²⁸ As Churchill notes, this remodelling meant that city centres experienced an increased 'spatial concentration of urban commercial property'.⁹²⁹ This concentration created opportunities for the Corps to provide services to the individuals and companies in these buildings, and by 1895 the organisation had eleven outquarters in cities outside of London.⁹³⁰ It also created an opportunity for theft for some commissionaires. Within the provincial newspapers this chapter analyses, we find the men in the banking halls of Liverpool, the warehouses of Nottingham and the pubs of Manchester. Joyce argues that the local press of this period was 'extraordinarily important in reconstituting the town and the city as a community'.⁹³¹ Furthermore, as Hobbs observes of the local press, 'as a cultural product [it was] particularly well suited to sustain and amplify local identities', through its focus on the 'minutiae of local life [that] mattered to most of the population'.⁹³² Representations of the commissionaires within local newspapers placed them within the communities that the publications represented. This chapter's analysis of these portrayals provides insight into how well the commissionaire system was understood in the Corps' new locations.

All of these urban locations formed part of the urban stage. As Joyce argues, 'city centres took on the quality of theatre, the people and the city themselves became like actors on the stage'.⁹³³ With their choreographed behaviour as part of the Corps' spectacle, the *Rules* as their script and the public nature of their roles, the commissionaires performed on this stage. Indeed, the commissionaire was a quintessentially urban actor of this period. To return to Otter, these urban spaces formed part of what he terms the 'bourgeois visual environment'. This constituted the Corps' surveillance network. It was within this environment that the commissionaires' respectability would be judged, either directly by the Corps' clients through

⁹²⁸ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 37.

⁹²⁹ Churchill, *Crime Control and Everyday Life*, p. 88.

⁹³⁰ LMA/B/02/003, Annual Circular 1904, p. 11; these cities were Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Nottingham.

⁹³¹ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 125.

⁹³² Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900* (Open Book Publishers, 2018), pp. 273.

⁹³³ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 148.

measures such as the commissionaire feedback form discussed in Chapter 2, or indirectly, through newspaper representations of the men to the wider public.

2. Respectable Commissionaires

The case that involved commissionaire Alfred Knight demonstrates that the commissionaires' uniform could act as a magnet for the transgressor who sought to exploit its 'symbolic properties' for financial reward. The defendant in this case was Alfred Andlau, whose character was portrayed in the newspaper coverage as being dubious in every respect – from his claims to be employed as a tutor to the contents of his pockets when he was told to empty them by the police. Andlau was charged with attempting to obtain £45 via a forged cheque, which he engaged Knight to cash for him at a bank in the West End. His stated profession in the court was received with a hint of suspicion by the journalists who reported on the case. The opening sentence of the report in the *Daily Chronicle* stated that 'Andrew Andlau, 45, who refused his address and was described as a tutor', while the *Standard* reported that Andlau 'gave no address'.⁹³⁴ As Rowbotham and Stevenson note, 'it is frequently easy to predict the outcome of a case from the first lines describing the prosecutors and defenders'.⁹³⁵ Certainly these hints of suspicion around Andlau would have established a point of reference for the reader, casting him as a fraud even before they had read the full account of the case.

If Andlau was not a tutor, in the eyes of the *Chronicle*, then what was he and how should their readers perceive him? The newspaper reports referenced his claims to have 'lately acted as a tutor to the grandson of Mr Justice Denham' and, at the time he was supposed to have approached Knight with the cheque, Andlau could prove he had been in another part of London – he 'was going to a gentleman's house in Craven Hill Gardens, where he was engaged'.⁹³⁶ The coverage in *Reynolds's* summarised Andlau's claims, which were that 'he had taught the sons of gentleman in high positions, who would certainly not employ him if he were a forger'.⁹³⁷ But the newspaper reports indicate that no evidence was offered by him to substantiate these claims. For the readers of these reports, Andlau's claimed links to the upper classes were presented as fake. Consequently, the reports' readers may have

⁹³⁴ 'Marlborough Street', *Daily Chronicle*, 16 December, p.7; 'Marlborough Street', *Standard* 16 December 1884, p.3.

⁹³⁵ Rowbotham and Stevenson, "'For Today in this Arena...'", *Legal Performativity and Dramatic Convention*, p. 124.

⁹³⁶ *Daily Chronicle*, 16 December, p.7.

⁹³⁷ 'Marlborough Street', *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, 28 December 1884, p.5.

recognised him as a 'gent', a type of man who, as Walkowitz notes, was known for his 'counterfeit status'.⁹³⁸

Whatever Andlau's 'true' identity, the reporting of the case would have left the reader in no doubt as to Knight's status. The description of Knight's actions affirmed his honesty and trustworthiness; he upheld the principles of the commissionaires' brand. The report made clear it was these qualities the fraudster had sought to exploit. Andlau approached the commissionaire, who would have been conspicuous in his uniform, while he 'had been on King Street, St James's, when the prisoner asked him if knew Scott's Bank'.⁹³⁹ He then asked the commissionaire to take a cheque for £45 to a local bank to get it cashed, and to then meet him at the Naval and Military Club in Piccadilly with the money. He stated that if he was not at the club when Knight got there, he would be waiting for him outside the Swan and Edgar department store in nearby Piccadilly Circus.

The cheque was refused by the bank and this 'aroused [Knight's] suspicions, and [he] communicated with the police. Detective sergeants Pugsley and Fox accordingly accompanied him to the appointed place.'⁹⁴⁰ Having waited for some time at the club, and learning that Andlau could not be located, the commissionaire walked to the department store with the detectives following him. When the commissionaire was approached by Andlau, who requested the money, the police arrested him and took him to a nearby police station. The *Daily Chronicle* reported that at that point he was told to empty his pockets, and 'he pulled out two handkerchiefs and other articles, and in doing so it was noticed that a piece of blotting paper had fallen at his feet'. It was then reported that the blotting paper corresponded to ink marks on the envelope that had previously contained the forged cheque, and that Andlau was 'remanded and refused bail' while he awaited trial.⁹⁴¹

Knight's trustworthiness and initiative are represented, and his role in preventing a significant fraud from taking place was made clear in the newspaper reports. The power of this representation lay not just in the account of the commissionaire's actions, but also how these actions were contextualised by the way Andlau was described. The reports were written in such a manner that doubt over his identity was immediately established for the reader, and his claims to an elevated social status undermined by the description of his empty pockets at the end of the report in the *Daily Chronicle*. The fraudster had been exposed, even if his guilt

⁹³⁸ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 43.

⁹³⁹ 'Marlborough Street', *Lloyd's Weekly News*, 21 December 1884, unnumbered page

⁹⁴⁰ *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, 28 December 1884, p. 5.

⁹⁴¹ 'A Tutor Charged with Forgery', *Daily Chronicle*, 22 December, p. 6.. There are no further newspaper reports regarding Andlau, so it is not possible to ascertain the outcome of his trial.

was yet to be established, while Knight's honesty was represented incontrovertibly, and his role in preventing fraud clearly communicated.

The representation of a similar contrast of identities is also present in the newspaper reporting of a claim for damages brought by the upper middle class George Farrant against commissionaire Sergeant Albert Wooton and his employer, Lord Chesham, in March 1895.⁹⁴² The ensuing court case was covered in detail by *The Times*, while a more abridged account was provided in *Reynolds's*. As we have seen, the readerships of these publications were as far apart as Farrant's and Wooton's social backgrounds. However, the coverage was unified by the way Farrant was portrayed, and this provided a positive editorial environment for the representation of Wooton's identity in both newspapers. Chesham was the owner of the Burlington Arcade in the West End, and he employed Wooton to patrol the premises to ensure it was a safe environment for its clientele. As Walkowitz observes of this period, 'male pests persistently dogged women who tried to experience the freedom of the city and enter the palaces of consumption organised for their pleasure'.⁹⁴³ The arcade was one such 'palace'; it was a fashionable shopping destination in London's West End and it was particularly popular with women, who were attracted not just by the shops that catered for them, but also the reputation that it had cultivated as a safe environment.⁹⁴⁴

The arcade had earned this reputation by creating a strict set of rules that governed the behaviour of its clientele.⁹⁴⁵ It was Wooton's role, in his commissionaires' uniform, to ensure these regulations were not just upheld, but that they were seen to be upheld by those who visited and shopped in the arcade. His uniformed identity delivered this visibility. However, the fact that the arcade employed commissionaires to patrol its space was an acknowledgment that it had a less respectable side; it had, as Rohan McWilliam notes become known as a shopping area that 'catered to the requirements of the *beau monde* in less respectable ways'.⁹⁴⁶

In addition, the arcade attracted men who were considered insalubrious. Walkowitz observes that it became a location for young lower middle class men to congregate in order to sexually

⁹⁴² 'Forbidden the Burlington Arcade', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 10 March 1895, p. 4.

⁹⁴³ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 51.

⁹⁴⁴ Vicki Howard and Jon Stobart, 'Arcades, Shopping Centres and Shopping Malls', in *The Routledge Companion to the History of Retailing*, ed. by Jon Stobart and Vicki Howard (Routledge, 2018), pp. 197-215 (p. 199), Rohan McWilliam, 'Fancy Repositories: The Arcades of London's West End in the Nineteenth Century', *The London Journal*, 44:2 (2019), pp. 93-112 (p. 101).

⁹⁴⁵ McWilliam notes the arcade was a 'controlled space, policed by beadles'; see McWilliam, 'Fancy Repositories', p. 102.

⁹⁴⁶ These 'ways' included a shop that sold French novels and prints whose content could be considered by some to be pornographic, *ibid.*, p. 102.

harass women.⁹⁴⁷ The arcade also attracted a certain type upper class man, which, as Jane Rendell illustrates, was due to its proximity to the gentleman's clubs of St James's and Pall Mall, but also the 'high class brothels and courtesans' residences of the area'.⁹⁴⁸ Rendell further notes that the 'arcade played an important part in the commerce of prostitution [...] it offered a covered place for prostitutes and their clients to promenade'.⁹⁴⁹ More broadly, the West End was also an area that had been exposed in 1885 as playing a key role in child prostitution, where young girls were sold to 'aristocratic old rakes'.⁹⁵⁰ The working class Wooton was employed to protect the arcade's female shoppers from these men – the lower middle class and upper class sexual predators.

Farrant stepped into this environment and his behaviour, as observed by Wooton, led to a disagreement between the pair. This resulted in an allegation by the former that the commissionaire had treated him unjustly. As a consequence, Farrant sought damages to recompense him for the 'assault and molestation' from the commissionaire and his employer.⁹⁵¹ In the ensuing court case, Farrant was described by his barrister as a 'gentleman of means' who had not worked for thirty-one years.⁹⁵² He claimed that his client had visited the arcade on 24 May 1894 legitimately, as he was in the habit of shopping at certain shops in the arcade. But it was also stated that Farrant had been there on that day between 6pm and 6.30 pm, which was a period that brought unrespectable individuals to the arcade. As McWilliam notes, 'respectable men often avoided the arcade in late afternoon for fear that it might be thought that they were looking for prostitutes'.⁹⁵³

Wooton's ejection of Farrant showed that the commissionaire believed he was one such man, and the latter's claim that he was a regular shopper at the arcade soon fell apart. Under cross-examination by the barrister appearing for Wooton and Chesham, Farrant admitted that despite visiting the arcade regularly, he could not recall buying more than a pair of gloves in the five months preceding the alleged assault. This professed interest in fashion could have undermined his barrister's claims around his client being a gentleman. As Tosh argues, men of Farrant's background were held to upholding a 'received picture of sober, dutiful earnestness' in this period; as a consequence, an overt interest in fashion was

⁹⁴⁷ Judith R Walkowitz, 'Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London,' *Representations*, 62 (1998), pp. 1-30 (p.7).

⁹⁴⁸ Jane Rendell, 'Subjective Space: A Feminist Architectural History of the Burlington Arcade,' in *Desiring Practices, Architecture, Gender, and the Interdisciplinary*, ed. by Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Rüedi and Sarah Wigglesworth, (Black Dog Publishing, 1996), pp. 217-233 (p. 225).

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 226.

⁹⁵⁰ Walkowitz, 'Going Public,' p. 8.

⁹⁵¹ 'Farrant v Lord Chesham and Another', *The Times*, 1 March 1895, p. 14.

⁹⁵² 'Excluded from the Arcade: Curious Action for Damages', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 3 March 1895, p. 3.

⁹⁵³ McWilliam, 'Fancy Repositories', p. 102.

not deemed appropriate.⁹⁵⁴ As Christopher Kent observes, 'whoever looked at a gentleman wasn't really supposed to see his clothes [...] one was to be aware of his presence through an aura that included his bearing [...] and above all a confidence that conveyed unconcern about what the world thought of him'.⁹⁵⁵ Yet in submitting his claim, Farrant clearly indicated that he was concerned about his image and what people thought of him, and these concerns would have further undermined his barrister's claims of his client's gentlemanly status.

Farrant claimed that on his visit to the arcade the previous May, he saw a woman he thought he had met previously. After walking alongside her, Farrant spoke to the woman and asked, 'Have I not met you before?' The woman replied that he must be mistaken, at which point Farrant was approached by Wooton, who accused him of following the woman and told him that he had to leave the arcade. As the commissioner stated to the court, he explained to Farrant 'that he had a duty to perform and must do it'.⁹⁵⁶ Wooton's barrister affirmed that 'certain rules were made for the purpose of preventing the arcade being used as a place of assignations by people like [Farrant] with plenty of time and money on their hands. Indeed, under cross-examination, the commissioner explained that 'half a dozen people were turned out daily [...] [and that] he would not turn people out merely because they were talking'.⁹⁵⁷

Farrant acknowledged that he used the arcade for more than talking to women, and that he had previously 'met ladies by appointment in the arcade'.⁹⁵⁸ This turn of phrase marked him as a man who had engaged prostitutes in the past. As Rowbotham and Stevenson note, 'Victorians were well equipped to interpret such codes through the nuances of [newspaper] reporting'.⁹⁵⁹ More code followed in the form of the judge's question to Farrant as to whether he thought the woman 'was a woman of light character'. Farrant replied after some hesitation that he did and that he thought she was 'a woman ready to make the acquaintance of a gentleman'. As mentioned above, the report in *Reynolds's* was brief, which made its decision to only report verbatim the above exchange all the more damning for Farrant. Through his language, he had revealed himself as a man who engaged

⁹⁵⁴ John Tosh, 'Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England,' in John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 83-102 (p. 83).

⁹⁵⁵ Christopher Kent, 'The Victorian Gentleman and the Pleasures of Dress', in *Sexing the Look in Popular Culture*, ed. by Kathy Justice Gentile (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 191-212 (p. 192).

⁹⁵⁶ 'Farrant v Lord Chesham', *The Times*, 1 March 1895, p. 14.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁵⁹ Rowbotham and Stevenson, "'For Today in this Arena...'", *Legal Performativity and Dramatic Convention*, p. 126.

prostitutes, which was the final factor that would have undermined his claim he was a gentleman.

Farrant's admissions in court around his sexual habits may have painted him as a 'cad' in the eyes of the judge and jury. Angus McLaren notes that a 'cad' was 'clearly an "outsider" and no gentleman', and that judges and juries of this period 'explicitly asserted that it was their task to defend both the law and a largely unwritten code of legal chivalry according to which virtuous women were to be protected from evil men'.⁹⁶⁰ However, in this particular case, the jury was not protecting a virtuous woman; rather, what was at stake was Wooton's professional integrity, which acted as a surrogate for the policing system that Chesham had established in the arcade. The role Wooton was employed to fulfil as part of this system inverted the 'expected' social relationship between him and Farrant in a public place, with the result that Farrant was treated not with deference, but with suspicion, by the commissioner. That was his job. The jury found in favour of Chesham and Wooton, and costs were granted by the judge.⁹⁶¹

Thus, the quiet and determined actions of the commissioner were vindicated. The jury's verdict stated that Farrant's behaviour 'fully justified the action of the Commissioner'.⁹⁶² The commissioner exercising his duty was enough to see off the threat from Farrant. In a legal clash between the latter's upper middle class masculinity and that of the working class Wooton, the latter was victorious. The cad had lost to the respectable commissioner.

The reasons for this victory were clear to the newspapers' readership, partly in the manner in which the characteristics of both men were set up in opposition to one another. The starting point for these juxtapositions was work, which, as Tosh notes, formed part of 'the common ground of manliness [...] [and] one vital element was a strong masculine investment in work'.⁹⁶³ But Farrant did not work, while Wooton was employed in a respectable position and trusted by his upper class employer. This trust was well placed. The report's readers were informed of the commissioner's determined effectiveness. When Farrant returned to the arcade some weeks after his first visit, the commissioner approached him and prevented him from entering. In response, Farrant then said, 'Just you push me,' to which Wooton replied, 'Oh no, I shall not.'⁹⁶⁴ The commissioner's response in the face of this taunting was

⁹⁶⁰ Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930* (University of Chicago, 2008), pp. 59-60.

⁹⁶¹ *The Times*, 1 March 1895, p. 14.

⁹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁶³ 'Farrant v Lord Chesham', *The Times*, 25 April 1895, p. 9.

⁹⁶⁴ Tosh, 'Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England', p. 95.

⁹⁶⁴ *The Times*, 1 March 1895, p. 14., p. 14.

measured and he suppressed any emotion he may have felt. The final juxtaposition, perhaps the most powerful of all, was left to the reader's imagination. Neither man's physical appearance was described in the three reports. But the reader was subconsciously invited to compare Farrant's clothes – this was a man with a confessed interest in shopping – with the commissioner's sober uniform.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this humiliation, Farrant lodged a rapid appeal against this judgement, as *The Times* reported on 25 April 1895.⁹⁶⁵ He had applied for a new trial of the action he had brought against Chesham the previous month. But as the paper noted, 'the COURT [sic], without calling on counsel for the defendant dismissed the application'.⁹⁶⁶ While Wooton was not mentioned in the report, this dismissal established that he had performed his duties correctly and in accordance with the way in which the Burlington Arcade was managed. Thus, the commissioner brand had shown itself to be more stable than the attributes of the gentlemanly masculinity that had been pivotal to Farrant's case.

Wooton's work identity, rooted as it was in a masculinity of duty and responsibility, was central to how he was represented. However, in the reporting of the court case involving Manchester commissioner Victor Mason in 1894, his work identity occupied a marginal position. Rather, it was Mason's status as a decorated veteran and the obvious aspect of his uniform that took centre stage.

This may seem counterintuitive, since all commissioners were veterans; however, it was not always emphasised in the reporting of the men and their actions. The case received extensive coverage in the Conservative-leaning *Manchester Courier* (hereafter the *Courier*), which reported on Mason's two court appearances, in January 1894, on five occasions.⁹⁶⁷ The political allegiance of the *Courier* informed the way Mason was represented to its readers, not just in the level of coverage his case received, but also in its sympathetic representation of his military service and how this informed his respectability. This was an identity that would have been valued by many of the newspaper's readership. However, this sympathy only materialised in the *Courier*'s final report, which focused on the commissioner's acquittal.

The newspaper's first report stated that the commissioner was accused of passing a counterfeit coin to Mary Walsh, who 'a refreshment house keeper,' testified that Mason

⁹⁶⁵ 'Farrant v Lord Chesham,' *The Times*, 25 April 1895, p. 14.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁶⁷ In contrast, its local rival, the pro-Liberal *Manchester Evening News*, carried two reports. These were solely related to Mason's first court case; it did not report on his second appearance in court.

ordered 'peas and fish. She at once saw it was bad.'⁹⁶⁸ Walsh had accused Mason of passing her a counterfeit shilling three weeks earlier and sent for the police; Mason was taken into custody and the commissioner was brought to trial at Salford Borough Police Court.⁹⁶⁹ The report of the trial revealed that the commissioner had lost a bet for 1s to a bookmaker called Mark Schofield in a local pub earlier that evening. Schofield testified he had seen that the coin he was offered by Mason to settle the bet was counterfeit, and told the commissioner to 'destroy it or he might get into trouble'.⁹⁷⁰ The commissioner informed Schofield he knew where he had been given the coin and left the pub.

The report stated that Mason later revealed to the police that he had visited a local Post Office earlier that day to withdraw £3 from his pension, and that he had received the coin as part of that payment. This information regarding his pension was the only detail of Mason's background the reader was provided with. The fact he had earned a pension through his military service would have indicated he had achieved a level of seniority in the army and, therefore, the reader was given a point of reference with which to gauge the commissioner's respectability.⁹⁷¹

However, a subsequent report in the *Courier* of Mason's appearance at the Police Court provided its readers with details that could have undermined any suggestions of respectability.⁹⁷² The report stated that the commissioner 'was charged with stealing two drinking glasses from a beer house'. Furthermore, Henry Walton who was the manager of the Post Office where Mason had withdrawn his pension, claimed that the commissioner had passed him a counterfeit coin as part of a payment for a postal order, and when this was pointed out, the commissioner 'grumbled and said that [the manager] had paid him the shilling', which Walton denied.⁹⁷³ Mason's court appearance concluded with a request from the police that he should be placed on remand to allow them enough time to 'communicate with the [Royal] Mint authorities'. The commissioner was released on bail, having provided financial sureties for £200, which he was able to provide, although the report did not indicate the source of these considerable funds.⁹⁷⁴

This level of bail, along with the police's reference to the Royal Mint, underlined the seriousness of the crime Mason was accused of. This was emphasised by the next report in

⁹⁶⁸ 'Serious charge against a Commissioner', *Manchester Courier*, 9 January 1894, p. 2.

⁹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁷¹ The commissioner's former rank in the army is not given in the report.

⁹⁷² 'The curious charge against a Commissioner', *Courier*, 19 January 1894., p. 6.

⁹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the *Courier*, on 29 January, which indicated that Mason's trial took place at a higher court, the Manchester Assizes, and that he was tried before a jury.⁹⁷⁵ The *Courier*'s report of the case was extensive and contained a detailed account of Mason's actions, which took up around half of the article's length. This account included the two occasions, when, according to Walsh, he attempted to pay with counterfeit coins at her shop, his visit to the post office, and the events that took place in the pub, which included placing his losing bet with the bookmaker.⁹⁷⁶

However, it was the way in which Mason's veteran status was reported that set the tone for the report. As with the piece on Andlau, the *Courier* relied on the convention of opening with a description of the defendant. This provided the context for Mason's eventual acquittal, which is detailed at the end of the report. The newspaper provided a rich description of Mason's physical appearance: the commissionaire 'aged 50 years of age who appeared in the dock in the uniform of the corps of commissionaires [sic], and wearing on his breast two medals, one awarded for good conduct and the other for gallant service as a soldier in New Zealand, and who it was stated had retired from the British Army after twenty five years' service'.⁹⁷⁷ This description affirmed that commissionaire had not only shown a dedication to serving his country through his long military career, but had done so bravely. These were qualities that, as we have seen, the Corps valued through its admissions criteria.

Furthermore, as one of his former senior officers testified in court, Mason had achieved a high level of responsibility as his regiment's mess sergeant. This was a local regiment, the Lancashire Fusiliers, and it would probably have been familiar to the jury and the working class readership of the *Courier*. This, along with the detailed descriptions of Mason's actions, placed the commissionaire firmly in the locale in which he worked and lived; he was 'one of their own'. The newspaper reported that 'Captain Riggs, of the 3rd battalion Lancashire Fusiliers [...] said that [Mason had occupied this position] from 1874 to 1878 [...] and bore a high character for honesty [...] he had charge of large sums of money and quantities of valuable property'.⁹⁷⁸ This responsibility had been extended to his civilian role as a timekeeper for the firm of Roberts Dale and Company, and Mr Roberts 'gave him an excellent character'. This evidence was given far less weight in the newspaper's report, which focused on Captain Riggs, and which once again emphasised Mason's status as a respectable and deserving veteran.⁹⁷⁹

⁹⁷⁵ 'Serious charge against a Commissionaire', *Courier*, 29 January 1894, p.3

⁹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

While the account of Mason's actions was detailed, the evidence was far from conclusive, as the lawyer appearing for the Royal Mint acknowledged. This was followed by direction from the presiding judge who advised 'it would be very unsafe to convict the prisoner [...] and that [they] could only safely find a verdict of acquittal'. The report noted that, 'after a lapse of a minute', Mason was acquitted and that the foreman of the jury stated that the commissioner could 'leave without a stain on his character'. This verdict, noted the *Courier*, was 'received with some applause which was promptly suppressed'.⁹⁸⁰

Before being told that he could step down from the dock, Mason was admonished by the judge. He informed the commissioner that he 'almost believe[d] that you are entirely innocent of the crimes charged against you, but let it be a warning to you not to go tipping after the business of the day'. He continued by acknowledging that the commissioner 'had got into a good situation [...] and the evidence which has been called shows that you have always borne a good character'. However, he concluded that 'mark my words, you will lose that good character, if you go tipping in public-houses with betting men until such time as the houses are closed'.⁹⁸¹

The significance of this report is twofold: first, it demonstrated how potent the identity of the commissioners as storied army veterans could be with the public, and the positive associations that went with this. Second, the words of the judge were evocative of the kind of moralistic language that, as we have seen, Walter used when he was expounding on the perils of drinking to the commissioners. Indeed, the reporting of the case represented the recurring conflict between the commissioners' military identity and the Corps' ongoing battle to banish the one aspect of this identity that was not welcome in the organisation, namely the army's drinking culture. According to the judge, Mason had fallen foul of this culture and, through his drinking, had laid himself open to suspicion of a serious crime. However, as the reporting of the *Courier* made clear, it was the commissioner's identity as a decorated veteran that won out. The emphasis the newspaper placed on this was opportunistic, given that the reports of his first court appearance made no mention of his career in the army. In the way it chose to focus on his former career, the *Courier* clearly communicated to its readers why they should value Mason's status and how it underscored his respectability. His appearance, which the newspaper reported in detail, exemplified the visual identity of the commissioner brand, although, as the judge's comments indicate, Mason's actions had threatened his status as a member of the Corps.

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 3.

The cases discussed above underline the symbolic importance of the men's uniform to the commissionaire brand, and how it acted as a signifier of the three commissionaires' respectability.

3. Disreputable Commissionaires

The role played by the uniforms of the three disreputable commissionaires that are now analysed was very different – the men's appearance, and what it symbolised, provided the means for them to steal from the clients whose property they were entrusted with. This level of trust, and the value of the property they were responsible for, indicates the degree to which the commissionaire brand had developed into a security brand. This aspect of the commissionaires' services can be located within what Churchill describes as the 'political economy of modern security'.⁹⁸² In his analysis of this market from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, he illustrates how branded manufacturers of physical products such as locks and safe boxes became the dominant providers.⁹⁸³ As part of this dynamic, Churchill contends that these providers came to exploit the 'symbolic properties of [their] products' to help in differentiating themselves from their competitors, thereby driving sales.⁹⁸⁴

The symbolic property of the Corps in this respect was the commissionaires' uniform, while the *Rules* underlined the probity of the men and detailed the financial bonds available to its clients to indemnify them against loss. Unlike the physical commodities in Churchill's analysis, the commissionaires were a human security commodity. We saw in Chapter 2 how the demand for nightwatchmen by businesses increased during this period and, alongside this, how the Corps capitalised on the demand to place more commissionaires in this type of role. However despite its success, the Corps had to deal with constant risk in this market. The human form of the Corps' security commodity opened it to threats whereby it could fail the buyer: dishonesty, carelessness, indiscretion and so on. Of course, the financial bonds offered by the Corps was a tacit acceptance of this, but the increased value of these bonds also underlined its confidence in the probity of the men, and therefore why its clients should invest the same level of trust in the commissionaires. As we saw in Chapter 2, the 1883 edition of the *Rules* laid out the value of these bonds, which started at £15 for a private commissionaire and went up to £50 for a sergeant major, though employers could apply to

⁹⁸² David Churchill, 'The Spectacle of Security: Lock-Picking Competitions and the Security Industry in Mid-Victorian Britain,' *History Workshop Journal*, 80 (2015), pp. 52-74 (p. 53).

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 53 and 65.

⁹⁸⁴ David Churchill, 'Security and Visions of the Criminal: Technology, Professional Criminality and Social Change in Victorian and Edwardian Britain,' *British Journal of Criminology*, 56 (2016), pp. 857-876 (p. 863).

have these sums increased to suit their needs.⁹⁸⁵ These bonds, along with the Corps' system of discipline, formed part of its surveillance network. However, this was fallible, as the cases below demonstrate.

The newspaper reporting of the actions of these three men underlines this fallibility and illustrate the threat they posed to the commissionaire brand; there are clear parallels between these cases and that of the imposter discussed in Chapter 1. Both groups of men exploited the power of their uniform in order to steal. Furthermore, the comments of the magistrates in these three cases are similar to those in the earlier case. The similarities illustrate how well the courts understood the commissionaire brand, and the level of threat the men's actions posed to the business value of the brand. This was underlined in the newspaper reporting of these court cases.

These three cases support Jennifer Davis's observation that, following the passing of the Criminal Justice Act of 1855, employee theft was the most prosecuted category in the English legal system.⁹⁸⁶ However, it was by no means certain that this type of crime would always be brought to court by employers. In some instances, internal sanctions might have been preferred; they would set an example to the rest of the workforce and warn them of the dangers of stealing in the workplace.⁹⁸⁷ She observes that these sanctions could involve dismissal, a fine or, in some industries, such as docks or transportation, banning the individual from working in that employment sector. Discretion was used by many employers, with the result that workplace theft was 'underrepresented in the criminal records compared to its actual incidence, but also that casual or unskilled employees tended to dominate the ranks of those who were prosecuted.'⁹⁸⁸

In his analysis of embezzlement (or white collar-employee theft) in the railway industry during this period, John Locker argues that, while discretion undoubtedly played a part, employers were faced with logistical challenges in bringing a case to court, as obtaining the necessary legal proof may have been challenging. He contends that this challenge would have suppressed prosecution rates, even in industries such as the railways, where employers were very keen to bring cases to court.⁹⁸⁹ The reason for this keenness was the

⁹⁸⁵ To benefit from this insurance the 1895 *Rules* stated that employers were required to pay an annual subscription of 10s; see LMA/4777/B/01/01/006, p. 60.

⁹⁸⁶ Jennifer S Davis, 'Prosecutions and Their Context, The Use of Criminal Law in Later Nineteenth Century London,' in *Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750-1850*, ed. by Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 397-426 (p. 401).

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁹⁸⁹ John P. Locker, "'Quiet Thieves, Quiet Punishments': Private Responses to the "Respectable" Offender, c. 1850-1930', *Crime, History and Societies*, 9.1 (2005), pp. 9-31 (pp. 14 and 20).

belief that no matter how small the pecuniary loss had been for the company, there was an important principle at stake. This was that the embezzler had ‘broken the bond of trust placed in them by an employer, and was therefore perceived to deserve the maximum censure available without mitigation on financial grounds’.⁹⁹⁰

Prosecutions could also play an important role in safeguarding the public’s trust in the nascent businesses – such as the railways – of this period. These businesses relied on a workforce that was overwhelmingly working class to deliver a service to a predominantly middle and upper class customer base. Mike Savage has illuminated the challenges faced by the Great Western Railway in this regard.⁹⁹¹ He argues that safety played a crucial role in promoting the railway, and that this safety ‘was partly physical – the poor safety record of Victorian trains being well known – but also social. The public needed to trust the new type of proletarian worker who found employment on the railways.’⁹⁹² The experiences of Post Office employees is also relevant here. As Joyce has shown, the postman’s behaviour was ‘highly regulated [and] long prison sentences were given for stealing letters, and [even a] suspicion of theft might also result in imprisonment’.⁹⁹³

It has not been possible to determine if it was the police or the commissionaires’ employers who took the decision to prosecute, or if the Corps was involved informally by giving its blessing; it would certainly be consistent with its transparent approach to discipline that we saw in Chapter 2. What is evident, though, is how the reporting of these cases represented the commissionaires’ brand in a positive light. The criminal behaviour of the individual involved was often represented through reference to the law-abiding majority in the Corps. As such, these representations helped emphasise the Corps’ reputation for providing trustworthy and honest men to employers. These prosecutions were the ultimate demonstration of the importance of the organisation’s disciplinary code, which was the cornerstone of Walter’s marketing strategy when it came to promoting the commissionaire brand. The analysis of the representations below highlights a willingness on the part of the magistrates involved to publicly uphold the commissionaires’ brand either explicitly or implicitly.

This willingness was explicitly present in the reporting of the case of commissionaire Richard Baxter. He was based at the Corps’ outquarters in Liverpool, and was brought before the

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

⁹⁹¹ Savage, ‘Discipline, Surveillance and the “Career”’, pp. 65-92.

⁹⁹² Ibid., p. 76.

⁹⁹³ Joyce, *The State of Freedom*, p. 132.

city's police court in January 1888, accused of stealing £64 16s 11d from the Union Bank.⁹⁹⁴ The bank's cashier had handed the commissionaire a number of bills, which he was to collect the payment for and return with the money to the branch. These bills were payable by a number of other banks, all of which were located in the city's commercial district; a newspaper report said Mason 'went away with the bills but did not return'.⁹⁹⁵ Once it had been determined by the cashier that the money had been collected by Baxter, the police were called. They apprehended the commissionaire in Paisley, Scotland, some 200 miles from Liverpool.⁹⁹⁶ The court heard that he had travelled to Manchester, where he bought a new suit of clothes and paid a boy 1s to destroy his uniform. In other words, the commissionaires' uniform had passed from being an asset that had facilitated his theft, to a liability that made his capture and arrest more likely. Baxter pleaded guilty and said he was 'extremely sorry for what had happened. It was all through drink'.⁹⁹⁷

The *Liverpool Echo* reported that the magistrate said the commissionaire's 'conduct would lead people to think that they could not trust these men [the commissionaires], whom he knew had a very high character for trustworthiness'. The magistrate continued by observing that 'it was a great pity that when one man belonging to a body committed himself in this way, it should bring disrepute to the whole body'. As a consequence, the magistrate said 'he should punish [Baxter] severely as this sort of thing must be stopped'. The sentence was intended to be exemplary, in order to warn other commissionaires of the consequences of criminal activities, and the magistrate accordingly passed a sentence of six months' hard labour.⁹⁹⁸

The significance of this case is how, in admonishing Baxter, the magistrate showed himself willing to explicitly uphold the integrity of the commissionaires' brand. This is evident in his reference to how the commissionaire's actions would 'lead people to think that they could not trust these men'.⁹⁹⁹ His comments sought to provide reassurance to the public that the commissionaires could be trusted and, in doing so, he indicated that he understood the value of the Corps to the businesses of Liverpool. It is clear the magistrate felt Baxter's actions threatened this and he was willing to call upon the characteristics of the ideal commissionaire, with his 'high character for trustworthiness', to underline that.

⁹⁹⁴ 'Extensive Robberies by a Commissionaire,' *Liverpool Echo*, 17 January 1888, p.2

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

The same sentence was given to George Fulbrook in November 1890. The commissionaire was imprisoned for six months with hard labour, which, the *Nottingham Daily Express* noted, was the maximum sentence he could have been given.¹⁰⁰⁰ The accused had been employed as a nightwatchman by Richard Dexter, a cigar manufacturer in Nottingham, and he was found guilty of stealing £9 10s worth of stock from his employers. He had sold them to a local tobacconist, William Claridge, whose shop had been searched by detectives, who found 'about 540 [cigars] and he admitted that Fulbrook had told him he had been a nightwatchman at Dexter's factory'.¹⁰⁰¹ Fulbrook had claimed to Claridge that the cigars had been given to him by his employer, which was why he was in a position to offer them for sale. Claridge appeared alongside the commissionaire and was charged with receiving stolen goods.

Fulbrook pleaded guilty and his solicitor invoked the commissionaire's military service as part of his appeal for leniency in sentencing. The solicitor stated that Fulbrook had been in the army for twenty-three years, 'had been nearly all over the world, and hitherto had borne an irreproachable character [...] he was a Nottingham man, and had a pension, which has been seriously menaced'.¹⁰⁰² Furthermore, Fulbrook had 'four times been in active service, and was [recently] discharged as a corporal with a good conduct medal'.¹⁰⁰³ Based on this description, Fulbrook had many of the qualities the Corps' favoured in its selection process.

But, as with other men whose behaviour fell afoul of the Corps' disciplinary code, Fulbrook's drinking was an issue. Indeed, it was highlighted as a problem by his solicitor, which he offered in mitigation of his client's crime. He argued that owing to experiencing sunstroke while serving in India, Fulbrook had 'during the last few month[s] taken somewhat unduly to drink'. As a consequence of this, he argued that, when under the influence of alcohol, the commissionaire 'was rendered even less conscious of his actions than would ordinarily be the case'.¹⁰⁰⁴ This appeal for leniency was unsuccessful and, in passing sentence on Fulbrook, the magistrate stated that 'he had committed a great crime and had wilfully forfeited a position of high trust and he must be severely punished'.¹⁰⁰⁵

The level of trust that had been conferred on Fulbrook featured in Claridge's defence. His solicitor 'submitted that there was no case against his client' and the basis for this argument

¹⁰⁰⁰ 'Theft of Cigars', *Nottingham Daily Express*, 12 November 1890, unnumbered page.

¹⁰⁰¹ *Ibid.*, unnumbered page.

¹⁰⁰² *Ibid.*, unnumbered page.

¹⁰⁰³ 'Wholesale Theft of Cigars', *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 15 November 1890, p. 5

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Nottingham Daily Express*, 12 November 1890, unnumbered page.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, unnumbered page.

was that Fulbrook was a commissioner.¹⁰⁰⁶ The *Nottingham Daily Express* noted that when examined by his solicitor he stated that ‘there was every appearance of truth about [Fulbrook’s] story, and its effect was enhanced by the prisoner’s occupation and uniform, and by the character that he was assumed to bear on account of the trustworthy situation he had held’.¹⁰⁰⁷ In making these claims, the solicitor was demonstrating an understanding of the value of the commissioner system to plead his client’s innocence. The magistrates agreed with this argument, and Claridge was discharged by the court.

The case of an unnamed commissioner who was found guilty of theft from his employer provides an additional example of how a commissioner’s identity as a veteran becoming central to how his actions were represented. The parallels with the reporting of Mason’s court case in Manchester are striking. The court case took place in December 1898 at Worship Street magistrates’ court in London. It was only reported on by the *Daily Telegraph* (hereafter the *Telegraph*), which, as Judith Rowbotham and Samantha Pegg observe, typically employed a sensationalist approach to its crime reporting to drive circulation.¹⁰⁰⁸ The report of this case avoided such sensationalism, but was suffused with moralistic attitudes.

The report reflected the tone of the magistrate’s comments. These comments included the assertion that the commissioner’s crime had shattered his former respectability as a deserving veteran and hard-working father of ten children, and the magistrate’s regret at having to imprison him. The newspaper demonstrated some sensitivity by choosing to omit the commissioner’s name from its report, which was significant. The reporting of the summary sentences handed down by these types of court could, as Rowbotham and Stevenson observe, ‘have durable effects on the social status of an affected individual’.¹⁰⁰⁹ This was especially true of those individuals who were ‘labelled as incorrigible or unredeemable’.¹⁰¹⁰ The magistrate did not use such terms, and the *Telegraph*’s readers did not know the man’s identity; therefore, the commissioner’s crime was not broadcast to a wider audience.

The report opened with the observation that ‘men are capable of almost wantonly wrecking a reputation and character it has taken them half a lifetime of steadiness and perseverance to

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid., unnumbered page.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., unnumbered page.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Judith Rowbotham and Samantha Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain – Press Reporting and Responsibility, 1820-2010* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 39.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Rowbotham and Stevenson, “‘For Today in this Arena...’, Legal Performativity and Dramatic Convention’, p. 122.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid., p.122.

build up'.¹⁰¹¹ Indeed, the newspaper mused that the 'last person so to commit himself, it might well be supposed, would be a soldier who had steadfastly stuck to his duty through full length of service'. Yet, this was exactly what the commissioner had done despite being entitled to the 'useful pension of 17s 6d per week'.¹⁰¹² As we saw above with Mason, this mention of the commissioner's pension would have communicated to the *Telegraph's* readership his dedication in serving his country.

In addition to the reference to the commissioner's pension, the man's respectability was further underscored by the paper through an account of how hard he worked. He was described as an 'industrious fellow' who worked on a Sunday to augment his weekly wage. The commissioner's Sunday job was watchman for the confectionary manufacturer Tom Smith and Co. at its premises in the London district of Finsbury. The accused was one of four commissioners employed on a Sunday and it had become apparent that one or more of them was involved in stealing the company's stock. However, the report noted that 'such confidence was reposed in [the accused] that he, for a time escaped suspicion'.

Nonetheless, his son was apprehended by a police constable leaving the company's warehouse with a parcel and bag that contained 8lb of sweets and a quantity of sugar. The boy denied any knowledge of what he was carrying. The police immediately went to the premises and arrested the accused commissioner. He had betrayed his client's trust. He had also failed to live up to his role as moral exemplar to his family, which, as we saw in Chapter 3, was integral to how the Corps evaluated the behaviour of commissioners with families. Therefore, the accused had shown he had not fulfilled the workplace and domestic disciplinary standards the *Rules* prescribed for the commissioners.

The accused's solicitor stated it was his client's first offence and that imprisonment 'would be his utter and complete ruin, and that of his wife and family'. The solicitor went on to note that, of these children, 'only one [...] was of an age to be of any assistance'. Furthermore, the accused had 'served his country for twenty-one years and attained the position of colour sergeant [and if] branded a felon would have his [pension] taken from him'.¹⁰¹³ The magistrate committed to taking the accused's military service into account and said 'nothing is more painful to a magistrate than to convict and send to gaol a man who for a long period has served his country'. He noted the man's excellent service record, before observing that the commissioner had been 'placed in the position of trust that you abused'.¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰¹¹ 'A Forfeited Future', *Daily Telegraph*, 6 December 1898, p. 5.

¹⁰¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Alongside this moralistic tone, the magistrate also demonstrated sympathy with the commissioner's predicament. First, he said he had contacted the Home Secretary regarding the implications for a veteran's pension following a conviction for theft. The magistrate told the commissioner that he been advised that 'in exceptional circumstances, and backed by strong recommendation [...] [the pension] is sometimes restored to him'. The magistrate passed a sentence of five weeks, which took into 'consideration the week that [the commissioner] had already passed in prison'. ¹⁰¹⁵

Despite this, the effect of such a sentence on the commissioner and his family would probably have been devastating. Unless they had sufficient savings, they may well have been forced to enter the workhouse while the man was in prison. He would certainly have been dismissed by the Corps, and the lack of a reference from the organisation would probably have hindered his ability to secure the kind of well-paid position he had previously held. As Locker observes, 'one black mark against an employee's reputation could have disastrous consequences for their standing in the community and for future work prospects'. ¹⁰¹⁶ The readers of the *Telegraph* may not have known the commissioner's identity, but those in his community who read the coverage may have been able to work out his identity. The unnamed commissioner had violated the most commercially valuable and fundamental aspect of the commissioners' collective identity – their honesty – and had, accordingly, paid a high price.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the commissioner system could uphold and undermine the moral aspect of the Victorian city. Through its analysis of representations of the working commissioner, we have seen the positions of trust the men occupied and how these positions led some commissioners to act as bulwarks against transgressive behaviour. However, these positions also opened up criminal opportunities, which some took advantage of; in doing, so they became the transgressors. Through newspaper representations of their actions, it is clear their readers were presented with this dichotomy of the respectable and disreputable commissioner.

However, as I have illustrated, even when a newspaper report concerned a disreputable commissioner, the representation could still demonstrate the positives of the commissioner brand. This was achieved by the men's disreputable behaviour being compared with how they should have behaved given that they were commissioners. That

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid., p. 5

¹⁰¹⁶ Locker, "“Quiet Thieves, Quiet punishments”", p. 25.

these comments were made by magistrates and then reported, is significant; there is a suggestion of an implied official approval of the commissionaire system in these comments. Even if readers did not make that inference, they would have been clear that the Corps had received approval from highly respected members of the criminal justice system, namely magistrates.

As we saw in Chapter 2, the men's behaviour in the workplace, and their appearance, was prescribed by the *Rules*. Their behaviour was choreographed and this level of choreography was comparable to how Walter directed the men to behave at the annual inspection and parade. Highlighting this comparability enhances our understanding of his promotional strategies. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, these annual events played a crucial role in generating publicity in the form a compelling shop window from which to promote itself to the public. But it was an annual event, whereas the spectacle of the commissionaires working was a daily occurrence. This chapter had shown that the behaviour of individual commissionaires was as effective at generating newspaper coverage as the collective behaviour at the parades.

However, there are two crucial differences between these types of representation, based on their content and reception. First, the portrayals of the men parading were directly influenced by the Corps, whereas the representations of individual commissionaires were indirectly influenced by the Corps. Second, newspaper reports concerning individual commissionaires were more relevant for readers; this would particularly be the case for middle class readers. Indeed, this relevance was central to the power of these representations for this group: they were rooted in the everyday, they depicted the men at work, delivering services that the readers would, in some cases, need themselves, and in locations they would recognise. Above all, these representations showed that the men could be trusted as service providers.

No matter how attractive the spectacle of the parade, and how interesting newspaper accounts were, it was at a remove from the reality of these readers' lives. It represented the men's identity collectively, and so in the abstract, whereas representations of individual commissionaires were rooted in the everyday, which the readers would recognise from their own lives. Figuratively, the working commissionaires were closer to these readers than they were in newspaper reports of parades, where their identity as veterans, rather than as workers, was to the fore.

There is considerable variety in the six newspaper representations this chapter has analysed: the reports featured metropolitan and provincial commissionaires; the coverage featured in the local and national press, in publications that had working class and middle

class readers; and the commissionaires concerned had different types of job, from messenger to door attendant and nightwatchman. Yet there is a consistency across these representations, which, when viewed in totality, portray key characteristics of the commissionaire brand: probity, reliability, dedication to their employers, trust and a deservedness rooted in the men's status as veterans. This consistency is compelling qualitative evidence of the success of the marketing and promotional techniques employed by the Corps to promote the commissionaire brand. It demonstrates that the commissionaire's visual identity was recognised and that the qualities embodied in the men's uniform and their daily spectacle were understood and valued by the public.

Conclusion

Walter died on 26 February 1904 at the family home in Hampshire, following a protracted illness.¹⁰¹⁷ The tributes which were paid to him, provide an important postscript to this thesis's analysis of his leadership of the Corps. His obituary appeared in *The Times* three days later; it contained extensive biographical information that emphasised his upper middle class status, his connections with royalty, a glowing account of his leadership of the Corps and his contribution to the welfare of the country's ex-servicemen.¹⁰¹⁸ The newspaper noted that his memory would 'long be cherished, not only by the members of the Corps, but by a large circle of friends, and [Walter's] great achievement has won for him the gratitude of the Army and Navy and [provided] a lasting service to the English people'.¹⁰¹⁹ A letter to *The Times* from General Colonel C.C. Shute agreed with this; he claimed 'without any doubt, that no man in the kingdom did more than the late Sir E. Walter for the benefit of the British Army soldier when discharged from the service'.¹⁰²⁰ This was all to be expected from the newspaper that was still controlled by the Walter family. However, other newspapers and periodicals amplified these sentiments. The *ILN* claimed that, to many 'maimed soldier[s] he [Walter] was an active friend'.¹⁰²¹ In addition to this coverage, another 65 national and local newspapers carried news of his death that featured positive accounts of Walter's leadership of the Corps.¹⁰²²

The most distinctive tribute to Walter's achievements was in the *Daily Illustrated Mirror* (hereafter the *Mirror*), which featured coverage across two days. The first article was on 29 February and the content was similar to what had appeared in the newspapers mentioned above. It noted how Walter had established the Corps and it provided a chronology of the organisation's development.¹⁰²³ However, the coverage on 1 March was unique.¹⁰²⁴ This report stood out for the manner in which it championed the commissionaires themselves, which it did through the use of illustrations depicting three uniformed and bemedalled members of the Corps. This affirmed the most important characteristics of the

¹⁰¹⁷ H. M. Vibart, revised by Mark Clement, 'Walter, Sir Edward (1823-1904)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 28 September 2006, <<https://www.oxforddnb.com>>, [accessed 28 November 2025], doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/36717

¹⁰¹⁸ 'Death of Sir Edward Walter,' *The Times*, 29 February 1904, p. 8

¹⁰¹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰²⁰ General Colonel C.C. Shute, 'The Late Sir Edward Walter', *The Times*, 4 March 1904, p.6.

¹⁰²¹ 'The World's News' *ILN*, 5 March 1904, p. 330.

¹⁰²² Data based on a keyword search using the terms 'Edward Walter,' and 'Corps of Commissionaires' through the British Newspaper Archive, [accessed 28 November 2025]

¹⁰²³ 'Founder of the Commissionaires,' *Daily Illustrated Mirror*, 29 Feb 1904, p. 3.

¹⁰²⁴ 'The Commissionaire,' *Daily Illustrated Mirror*, 1 March 1904, p. 4.

commissionaire brand and the strength of its visual identity. (Figure 5.1) Due to the *Mirror's* growing success in the newspaper marketplace, this coverage would have been seen by a large audience.¹⁰²⁵



Figure 6.1 *Daily Illustrated Mirror*, p. 4, 1 March 1904

Each illustration represented the 'types' of commissionaires, which, as we have seen, were central to the positive media depictions of the commissionaire system that had been engineered by Walter since 1859. First, there is an image of a founding disabled member of the Corps, which appears to have been copied from one of the publicity photographs

¹⁰²⁵ The *Mirror* relaunched at the beginning of 1904; as part of the relaunch, it pioneered the use of illustrations to drive sales, which resulted in a burgeoning circulation in this period. See Adam Twycross, 'The Birth of the *Daily Mirror* and the Arrival of the Newspaper Strip,' in Adam Twycross, *British Newspaper Strips: A Contextual History* (Springer International Publishing, 2024), pp. 43-56.

analysed in Chapter 1. Second, there is Sergeant H Paulson, who is described as the 'oldest active commissioner'; his dignity is emphasised by his distinguished appearance, which includes the chevrons of a sergeant on his arm, and the accompanying caption, which indicates that he is employed in a position of trust by a London bank. Finally, the reader is presented with a middle-aged commissioner attending to a wealthy client, with the former's military bearing emphasised by his upright stance and an unmistakeable army moustache.¹⁰²⁶ When viewed together, the illustrations of these men formed an attractive tableau that would certainly have appealed to the newspaper's readership.

The extent and nature of this coverage underscored just how renowned the Corps had become – this reputation underscored its success. By the time of Walter's death, the organisation's average monthly strength for the preceding year was 2,864 commissioners, with 423 men having joined in that period, the third-highest number of recruits since 1859.¹⁰²⁷ The Corps had generated an income of £927 15s from the men's employers which reflected not just how the numbers of the latter had increased, but also the variety of jobs that the commissioners undertook for them. Furthermore, in that same period, it had raised £487 5s from the army's regiments.¹⁰²⁸ The innovative tripartite relationship upon which the Corps was predicated had proved itself to be of value to each of its parties. This had been achieved against a backdrop of the British public and successive governments largely ignoring the welfare of the country's ex-servicemen. Indeed, despite some initiatives being taken by the government in the latter period of this study, the post-service lives of some veterans followed a depressing pattern.¹⁰²⁹ The similarities between their post-service experiences and that of former soldier William Grayham, whom we met in the Introduction, were all too familiar.

As previously discussed, the experiences of veterans in this period have hitherto been underexplored. Indeed, the analysis undertaken by Skelley and Spiers of this group's experiences was brief, owing to their studies' broader focus on the British army. Moreover, they were published in 1977 and 1992, respectively. The historiographical opportunity to deliver a dedicated study of the Victorian veteran, and update these seminal works, was therefore significant. This thesis has realised that opportunity through engaging with the work of both historians, and through this it has advanced our understanding of the issues

¹⁰²⁶ Alice White, 'Whiskers at War: Moustaches, Masculinity and the Military in Twentieth-Century Britain,' in *New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair: Framing the Face*, ed. by Jennifer Evans and Alun Whitley, (Springer International Publishing, 2018), pp. 169-185 (pp. 169-170).

¹⁰²⁷ LMA/4777/B/03/03, *Annual Circular and Illustrated Advertiser of the Corps of Commissioners 1904*, p. 12.

¹⁰²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹⁰²⁹ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 147.

that they were concerned with. This has been based on an analysis of how the Corps was conceived to provide employment for veterans, the means by which it countered the negative perceptions many employers held towards these men, and this study has also delivered a rich examination of the experiences of the commissionaires themselves. Furthermore, through its focus on how Walter corralled the paternalistic spirit of the British army, this study has extended French's work on the development of the British regimental system.¹⁰³⁰ All three authors focus on the debates at the time surrounding the paucity of veteran welfare, and the claim made by senior army figures that this contributed to the perennial recruitment challenges they faced. This study has extended their work by analysing how Walter placed the Corps into this debate. This analysis has examined his contention that the opportunities it afforded veterans provided evidence to counter the view that a career in the army's rank and file was a dead-end prospect. As we have seen, this contention was fundamental to his successful appeals for subscriptions from the army's leadership. This thesis then has shed important light on a previously neglected area of British veterancy studies, and its contribution in this area is clear.

It also delivers a significant intervention in the fields of cultural, business and social history for this period, and in doing so it has formed a bridge between these historiographical traditions. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity has been fundamental to this study, and this thesis provides an important case study to historians on the usefulness of adopting her ideas. The approach that I have taken suggests a sequential process that can help shape how scholars engage with her model, and how this can challenge the objections to her concept which were outlined in the Introduction. The first stage of this process is to gather evidence of the exercise of gendered power, and determine if its expression can be considered hegemonic.

The second stage is to isolate the means by which this power operated and within what social groups. At this point we are looking for groups that are bound together; they should be what Griffin describes as 'social formations characterised by people who share sets of norms because they participate in the same networks, institutions and practices that generate these norms'.¹⁰³¹ There is also a need to understand what each group gets out of this participation, that is what factors motivate them to come together. Griffin argues that isolating discrete groups such as this, counters some of the criticisms of Connell's model that have been put forward by various historians. As outlined previously, the workplace offers such an

¹⁰³⁰ French, *Military Identities*.

¹⁰³¹ Griffin, 'Perceptions of Crisis in the History of Masculinity', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, p. 161.

opportunity, it takes the gender historian away from what French and Rothery describe as the conflation of 'transient and changeable social stereotypes with deep-seated and enduring forms of hegemony'.¹⁰³² In order to not fall into that trap, I am in agreement on the importance of the everyday as outlined by Smith. Indeed, her assertion that historians should find space in their analysis to understand the 'everyday' is affirmed by my work.

However, her call for a theoretical approach that can reconfigure Connell's model of hegemonic masculinities is perhaps overdone. She asserts that the model 'needs rethinking to take into account the intersectionality of gender with other identities, and the myriad ways in which men actually experienced and performed their masculinity on a daily basis'.¹⁰³³ This thesis demonstrates that Connell's model can deliver an analysis of the everyday, and consequently Smith is in danger of setting up a false distinction as far as methodology is concerned; she argues that 'The study of masculinity through the lens of work, and region, allows for "ordinary" masculinity to be mapped and understood alongside moments of crisis, conflict, and theories about flights to and from domesticity, and the changing meanings of hegemony'.¹⁰³⁴ The implication of this is clear – one methodology for the 'micro', and Connell for the 'big picture'.

This thesis demonstrates that the model of hegemonic masculinity can work at the everyday level, and that the distinction between the 'micro' and the 'big picture' is not always helpful in this context. The methodological challenge for gender historians if they are to deliver the focus on the everyday - such as this study – that Smith calls for, is to identify what social groups or formations are relevant for their work, find evidence of their participation in the 'everyday', how this process is managed, and then determine the role that this process plays in upholding the hegemonic masculinity they have identified in the first stage.

The third stage is to demonstrate the results of this participation, in order to understand why a hegemony endures within this formation by highlighting its successes, or conversely its failures if the hegemony is unstable. These results should be, as far as is possible, quantifiable, although that is not to say that 'softer' qualitative measures do not have a role to play. Historians should engage with Mandler's concept of the 'throw' of cultural ideas and

¹⁰³² French and Rothery, 'Hegemonic Masculinities?', in *What is Masculinity?*, p. 142.

¹⁰³³ Smith, 'Reimagining Working-class Masculinities in the Twentieth Century,' in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, p.138.

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid., p. 150.

representations; this allows them to respond to Tosh's call to focus on 'behaviour and agency', and to 'reconnect with [their] earlier curiosity about experience and subjectivity'.¹⁰³⁵ To deal with these stages in turn, starting with the evidence of the exercise of power. There can be little doubt that Walter's creation of the commissionaire occupied a hegemonic position within the Corps. We have seen this throughout this study in the way he communicated this ideal, its advantages to employers and the army, and how he dealt with dissent and transgression. This is similarly evident in the way he communicated his importance as the Corps' founder to the senior officers in the organisation who would succeed him. Writing to this group in 1902, Walter stated that, as the Corps' founder, he had 'never permitted any interference with his own administration, and when he thus resigned his complete authority to this Committee [sic], [he did so] on the condition that they should continue the management of the Corps on precisely the same system and under the same principles as those on which he had formed and maintained it during its first period of five years'.¹⁰³⁶

Furthermore, he made clear his view that 'to admit directly or indirectly the claim of any member or members of the Corps to interfere with its management, or to offer unsolicited advice thereon, would not only contravene the Fundamental [sic] principles laid down by the Founder [sic] and accepted by those to whom he entrusted his original authority, but would instantly ruin the Institution [sic]'.¹⁰³⁷ To reinforce this point, he pointed out that the 'Commissionaires [sic] either individually or Collectively [sic] cannot call in question the rules or Principles [sic] to which they [agreed] when applying for admission'.¹⁰³⁸ Walter's successors upheld these views, which is evident in the form commissionaires were required to sign on joining the Corps. Up to the 1946 edition of the *Rules*, the first sentence of the form stated the signatory 'agree[d] to engage myself as a Commissionaire [sic] in the Corps founded in 1859 by CAPTAIN EDWARD WALTER [original emphasis] [...] and to conform to the Rules and Regulations made by the Commanding Officer [sic] [...] for the maintenance of discipline and order in said Corps [sic]'.¹⁰³⁹

The second stage was predicated on viewing the commissionaires' collective identity as a gendered brand. Successful brands rely on their owners exercising tight control over them to

¹⁰³⁵ Tosh, 'The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?' pp. 18 and 31.

¹⁰³⁶ LMA/4777/B/03/03/035, 'Memorandum on the Position of the Commanding Officer of the Corps with Respect to the Executive Committee of the Officers Endowment Fund and also as regards to the members of the Corps generally,' 23 May 1902.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁹ LMA/4777/B/01/01/014, p. 1.

maintain their value. Taking the example of consumer food products, this control runs across ingredients, packaging, advertising and so on. The commissionaire brand was a human one, and therefore its human elements required control; this is what Walter's unsettling language of commodification pointed towards. This control was codified in the *Rules*, which as this thesis has demonstrated, was fundamentally a marketing document. This bound the tripartite relationship of commissionaires, employers and the army's officer class together. To use Griffin's terminology, this was a social formation, and the Corps' regulations communicated the advantages of the commissionaire system to the members of this formation: the *Rules* booklet promoted the advantages of becoming a commissionaire to future veterans; it substantiated Walter's claims around the men's probity to employers and it demonstrated to the army's officer class how supporting the Corps allowed them to support their former charges, and address the perennial recruitment challenges they faced.

The *Rules* were an 'everyday' document, and the Corps' regulations have been carefully analysed to recreate how they controlled the lives of the commissionaires, and managed the relationship between them and their employers. To give some examples of the regulations that were part of this analysis; starting with the men, the rules concerning the barracks, the wearing of the commissionaires' uniform and their mandatory attendance at church on a Sunday have been examined; for employers their requirement to fill in feedback forms on the commissionaires in their employment, their role in the Corps' surveillance network, and the bonds they were expected to pay have been analysed. Finally, the selection criteria of the *Rules*, the importance these criteria placed on long army service, and the jobs that were available to commissionaires as detailed in the Corps' regulations, were consistently called on by Walter in his appeals for the army's financial support. These were the constitutive elements of the commissionaire brand that operated at the 'everyday' level. They combined to support the hegemonic position it occupied in the Corps through providing the means for Walter to exert his control.

The third stage delivered evidence of the success of the brand against each of these groups using quantifiable indicators: the number of men the Corps recruited; the types of roles and the value of the wages the organisation secured for the men from employers; and the money it raised from the army. In addition, the analysis of press representations throughout this study, has provided a qualitative assessment of the brand's strength through demonstrating how congruent these representations were with the ideals codified in the *Rules*.

Thus, Connell's model can be usefully applied to the 'everyday' and, as such, the distinction that Smith posits needs to be reconsidered. Furthermore, Griffin suggests that 'hegemonic

masculinity is an ideal that does not necessarily describe any actual men'.¹⁰⁴⁰ This study has demonstrated this isn't necessarily the case. The commissionaire were real men, and they became a valued part of the Victorian service economy. Moreover, the hegemony of the commissionaire brand has been demonstrated and analysed through a close analysis of the everyday operations of a successful business. These methods underline how a gendered approach to business history can produce powerful insights around the role played by masculinity in the formation of a successful brand. The adoption of a gendered lens by business historians remains limited. Indeed, recent anthologies on masculinity scholarship do not cover business as a subject area; as Houlbrook and others note, the emphasis by historians of masculinity has tended to focus on overarching themes such as war, religion, empire and politics.¹⁰⁴¹ This thesis delivers a case study that illuminates why gender should be more widely adopted by business historians, and how the study of business as a producer of masculinity can provide insights that are of interest to cultural and social historians.

From a class perspective, the hegemony of the commissionaire brand and the means by which it was maintained, resulted in the subjugation of a group of working class men to the middle class ideology of respectability. As we have seen throughout this study, Walter believed that the legitimacy of the Corps as a service provider, rested on his ability to control his conception of the respectable working-class commissionaire. The *Rules* were central to this, and the regulations codified an ever-growing number of seemingly absolute behavioural standards, that the men were expected to conform to.¹⁰⁴² The respectability which Walter claimed on their behalf relied on this conformity, and this in turn determined their career progress in the Corps. However, it is evident that the reality was more complex; for example, some commissionaires were dealt with more leniently than others for the same breach of the regulations concerning drunkenness. Furthermore, some men benefitted from Walter's generosity to help them through difficult domestic situations, whilst others were penalised for the way in which they brought up their families. These penalties as we saw in Chapter 3, could strike at the core of the man's identity as a father. As such they went beyond workplace sanctions, and demonstrated the coercive control that the Corps exerted over the

¹⁰⁴⁰ Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem', p.387.

¹⁰⁴¹ Houlbrook and others, 'Histories for the Present,' in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴² The enduring emphasis on the cult of respectability within the Corps is evident in the 1946 edition of the *Rules*, which employed language that was consistent with Walter's emphasis on the importance of the commissionaires' living arrangements. The echoes of his correspondence with the COS were all too clear. The regulations reduced the importance of the barracks as a guarantee of respectability for single men stating that: a 'man who joins the Corps now is a *highly respectable and respected member of the community* [original emphasis], and the fact of his living in barracks makes no difference at all to his moral make up'. See LMA/4777/B/01/01/014, p. 41.

commissionaires in all aspects of their lives. These types of decisions were as likely to be informed by Walter's morality as they were the *Rules*; his subjectivity could overcome the supposed objectivity of the Corps' regulations, and thus the control that the men submitted themselves could be far from consistent.

In many respects this level of control was similar to the way in which other organisations of the period sought legitimacy for their workforces, and the services that they provided to their middle-class customers. Indeed, the stability of a range of emerging occupational identities of this time was predicated on the exercise of social control by employers of their workforces. The most notable examples of this were the railway companies, the Royal Mail and the police forces of the period. As previously discussed, these three organisations developed their own cultures of respectability which their workforces had to adhere to. In return for this, these workers received a level of job security, wages and welfare provision that was not available to many other working class occupational groups. This had every appearance of a transactional relationship, however the benefits of working for these organisations went beyond the financial. These workers also benefitted from a level of kudos; to be a railwayman or postman conferred a certain level of status on these individuals within their communities.

Given the suspicion held by some elements of the Victorian working class to the police forces of this period, the situation for policemen was more complex. As Shpayer-Makov notes, the police were subject to a 'continuing animosity on the part of large segments of the working class who resented the intrusion of the police into their public and private lives'.¹⁰⁴³ Nonetheless being a policeman did come with a wider public recognition of the valuable role that the men performed, which benefited the whole of society, and allowed the force to slowly shed the previously unrespectable reputation of its workforce.¹⁰⁴⁴ This recognition was a benefit that some working class policeman accepted, knowing that sectors of their own community would resent them.¹⁰⁴⁵

¹⁰⁴³ Shpayer-Makov, *The Making of a Policeman*, p.73.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 73 and 123.

¹⁰⁴⁵ This resentment could lead to violence as Francis Dodsworth observes, there was a 'perception that a central element of the policeman's role was to face violence and danger on a regular basis,' Francis Dodsworth, 'Men on a mission', *A History of Police and Masculinities, 1700-2100*, ed. by David G. Barrie and Susan Broomhall, (Routledge, 2012), pp. 123-140, (p. 133), see also: David Churchill "'I am just the man for Upsetting you Bloody Bobbies": popular animosity towards the police in late nineteenth-century Leeds', *Social History*, 39.2 (2014), pp.248-266, doi:10.1080/03071022.2014.912424

To be a commissioner offered the prospect of a similar level of positive recognition. However, as Griffin reminds us it is not simply a matter of a particular type of masculinity being recognised; the group or individual performing this masculinity must be recognised as being authentic, meaning they must be adjudged to be 'performing that model correctly'.¹⁰⁴⁶ Put simply, a lack of authenticity undermines the value of a performance. The commissioner brand was authentic, because the quasi-military spectacle that was crucial to communicating it was performed by former soldiers, who in turn were managed by former army officers. This authenticity at an individual and organisational level was a crucial factor in underscoring the legitimacy of the commissioner brand. This authenticity had a commercial value for employers, and a transactional value for the commissioners as was explained above. It also offered the men an intangible, but no less valuable benefit; it affirmed their value as veterans, and the Corps provided them with an environment that allowed them to express their military identity, and be rewarded for carrying that identity into civilian life. At a time when ex-servicemen could find themselves socially marginalised that mattered, and it was undoubtedly part of the symbolic appeal that brought men into the Corps.

This benefit would have acted as a counter balance to the levels of coercion that the men submitted themselves to on becoming commissioners. The positive recognition that the men received was evident in the press coverage which Walter engineered for the Corps. This can be seen in the multiple newspaper representations that have been analysed throughout this thesis: from the illustrations of the founding commissioners, the accounts of the annual parades, through to the coverage of the welfare which aged commissioners enjoyed. It was also evident in the accounts of the men at work which were analysed in the preceding chapter. However, this was not coverage that Walter had engineered, rather it reported on the actions of individual men. This highlights an inherent paradox in the working lives of the commissioners; the Corps was a highly coercive organisation that controlled all aspects of the commissioners' lives, yet the men also had the opportunity to display initiative in their working lives, and to be rewarded for that. The recognition in the newspaper reports of the role played by Alfred Knight in apprehending a forger, and the account of how Albert Wooton successfully took on a cad in the Burlington Arcade, are testament to this.

Whilst coercive, the Corps' culture of respectability conferred an advantage on another group of commissioners, those with disabilities. Although as we saw with the petition in

¹⁰⁴⁶ Griffin, 'Perceptions of crisis in the history of masculinity', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, p.168.

Chapter 2, this was not always felt by disabled commissionaires themselves. These men were offered a radical equality of opportunity with their nondisabled colleagues. This was evident in the way in which Walter responded to this petition as previously discussed. What mattered to him, was not the bodily difference between both groups, but their respective ability to uphold his conception of respectability. His views on equality underlines how his approach to disabled commissionaires was out of step with the prevailing negative attitudes of the nondisabled towards people with disabilities during this period.

As we have seen, these attitudes could render those with disabilities both socially and economically marginalised. In the face of these prejudices, Walter's championing of disabled commissionaires, based on his belief that they belonged in the mainstream workplace, means he deserves to be recognised as a disability activist. This however was an activism of its time and should not be viewed in the way in which contemporary disability activism is understood. As Turner and Blackie argue in their analysis of the factory reform movement of the first half of the nineteenth century, 'It is anachronistic to view the factory reform campaign as "disability activism" in the modern sense, as it was never a movement led *by* disabled people *for* disabled people [original emphases]'.¹⁰⁴⁷

Walter's activism was not political in the sense that he was seeking to inform legislation; rather, it was pragmatic and rooted in a spirit of entrepreneurship on behalf of the disabled veteran. We saw in Chapter 1 how Walter alighted on the role of messenger, as it was a job a disabled man could perform as effectively as one who was nondisabled. This entrepreneurial spirit was also evident at the time of the Boer War (1899-1902). Like the Crimean War, it resulted in significant numbers of disabled veterans returning to Britain, and the plight of those men led to an outpouring of public sympathy. and an upsurge in charitable donations to support them.¹⁰⁴⁸ Walter's reaction to this was to explain the advantages of the commissionaire system for disabled veterans, and the role employers could play in taking on these men. In a letter to *The Times*, he argued that, with the right training, disabled veterans could operate 'the telegraph, telephone [and undertake] type-writing and many other occupations useful in daily life'.¹⁰⁴⁹ Once again, Walter was publicly demonstrating how disability did not have to be equated with economic inactivity, but this time it was based on the idea of allowing men to benefit from recent advances in technology. The way in which he made the argument around the usefulness of the disabled body in the modern office was innovative. It underlined his belief that disabled commissionaires belonged in the

¹⁰⁴⁷ Turner and Blackie, , 'Disability and political activism in industrialising Britain', p. 120.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, p. 217.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Edward Walter, 'Disabled Soldiers and Sailors', *The Times*, 2 April 1900, p 14.

mainstream economy, and that they had the right to compete for wages alongside the nondisabled.

This did not mean these men could perform only office-based duties, as he went on to illustrate by focussing on the role of nightwatchman. He wrote in the same letter of ‘two cases of one armed men who captured burglars entering their employer’s premises, one of whom will have good reason to remember the blow he received from the iron hook on the arm of the commissioner who took him prisoner’.¹⁰⁵⁰ The letter made clear Walter’s view that becoming a commissioner offered not just the prospect of economic security through employment – as we have seen the position of nightwatchman was one of the best paid roles open to commissioners –but also an opportunity for valorisation and the chance of reclaiming a physical masculinity for the disabled veteran. Walter’s commitment to disabled men, and the value he placed on work providing them with the means to be self-reliant, offered a strong corrective to the prevailing employment practices of the time. Indeed, his initiatives foreshadowed the emphasis placed by campaigners during the First World War on the importance of work as a means of reintegrating disabled veterans into society. A speech made by the campaigner John Galsworthy in May 1918 to an international conference on the welfare of disabled veterans, emphasised the rehabilitative role employment could play for these men, and thus it echoed the sentiments expressed by Walter in his first letter to *The Times* in February 1859.¹⁰⁵¹

However, the rehabilitative employment schemes this emphasis gave rise to often did little to allow the men to reclaim their economic independence. As Jeffrey S. Reznick notes, these men ‘ultimately found themselves being swept out of the labour market’.¹⁰⁵² Furthermore, successful schemes such as the St Dunstan’s workshops for blind ex-servicemen, and the British Legion’s poppy factory for disabled veterans, could be reliant on effacing the identities of their most acutely disabled workers in their publicity. Both organisations felt that the appearance of some of their members was too shocking for the public, and it was feared that this could have a detrimental effect on the institutions they were part of.¹⁰⁵³

¹⁰⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰⁵¹ Galsworthy claimed that, with the right support, a disabled veteran could ‘become once more a workman with pride in his work, a stake in the country, and the consciousness that, handicapped though he be, he runs the race level with his fellows’. For an account of this speech, see Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁵² Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁰⁵³ Anderson, ‘Stoics, Creating Identities at St Dunstan’s, 1914-1920’, p.88; Bartlett, ‘Reassembling Disabled Identities: Employment, Ex-servicemen and the Poppy Factory’, p.223.

The contrast with the disabled men of the Corps could not be greater. These men were central to the way in which the organisation promoted itself and, provided they were willing to uphold the organisation's regulations, Walter strove to offer them the same employment opportunities as their nondisabled comrades. He achieved this through establishing a positive masculinity that foregrounded the disabled commissioner in the Corps' marketing and publicity. The evidence of this has been demonstrated throughout this thesis: from the iconography of the Corps' crest and the position occupied by the two amputee commissioners, the publicity photographs that placed disabled and nondisabled commissioners together, through to the role played by the disabled aged veterans in the press coverage of the 1896 annual parade detailed in Chapter 4.

The promise of these images was substantiated through an approach that was based on Walter's belief that disabled veterans should be judged on what they could do in the workplace, not what they were unable to do. Through analysing Walter's interventions, I have illuminated the prejudicial attitudes that disabled individuals faced in the employment market of this period, and how he sought to overcome them. Based on this analysis, a useful comparison can be made with US industrialist Henry Ford's policy of promoting the interests of disabled workers in his car factories in the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁵⁴ As Sarah F. Rose notes of him, he 'challenged the simple equation of disabled people with inefficiency, demonstrating that workers with a broad array of disabilities could in fact be productive'.¹⁰⁵⁵

By demonstrating how progressive Walter's attitudes were, and how innovative his approach was, this study's analysis will be of benefit to disability scholars, which will extend it beyond the historiography of British veterancy. This type of extension is not always achieved by studies of disabled ex-servicemen. As David A. Gerber observes 'Disabled veterans are largely outside the emerging narratives of disability history, and their history, identity, and group formation have contributed little to theory-making in disability studies about body/mind norms and the identities of those with disabilities'.¹⁰⁵⁶ It is hoped that this study can overcome this, due the contribution that it offers towards existing disability scholarship of this period. It has shed important light on a previously ignored source of employment for disabled men in the mainstream employment market; this work fell outside of what Borsay describes,

¹⁰⁵⁴ Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s – 1930s*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), pp. 111-136.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁵⁶ David A. Gerber, 'Disabled Veterans and the Wounds of War', in *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*, ed. by Michael Rembis, Catherine Kudlick and Kim E. Nielsen, (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 477-502, (p. 477), doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190234959.001.0001

as the 'stereotyped spectrum of economic activities'.¹⁰⁵⁷ In doing so it builds on Turner and Blackie's study of the reintegration of disabled coal miners into their local economies. Furthermore, it extends the analysis of disability activism by these two historians, through its focus on the way in which Walter publicly promoted the interests of disabled commissioners, and his claim of equality for them alongside their nondisabled colleagues. Finally, through its analysis of amputee commissioners, this thesis demonstrates that there was an opportunity for veteran amputees to regain their masculinity through becoming a commissioner. The amputee commissioner as depicted in the Corp's publicity, or as encountered by the public in his place of work, demonstrates that employment had the potential to act as a kind of economic prosthetic through the way in which it reintegrated the men back into society. As such, this study's analysis of these men extends O'Connor's work on prosthetics, through demonstrating that there was a counter narrative to the contemporary discourses she has illuminated.

In delivering this thesis, I have become aware of additional opportunities to explore the commissioner brand and the role it played during this period. For the reasons detailed above, this is certainly the case with the analysis of disabled commissioners. The Corps' archive has provided exceptionally valuable material. However, as I discussed in the Introduction, because it is a business archive, the collation of information around individual commissioners was necessarily limited. Where personnel records for this period exist, they offer little detail on individual men, as we saw in Chapter 2. Consequently, save for Chapter 5, actual commissioners have appeared only fleetingly throughout this study: through analysing Walter's letters to the lady adjutant, and in his correspondence with the COS and the Corps' clients, I have sought to create an impressionistic sample of disabled men, but there is an opportunity to follow some of these men out of the Corps' archive and conduct life-course analysis.

This analysis would be based on the out-pensioner records of the Chelsea Hospital to deliver a deeper analysis of their lives. That would be supplemented by a range of sources, such as census records for men who lived outside of the barracks; and for those who were prosecuted, such as the commissioners in Chapter 5, criminal justice records could be used to assemble information about their lives, once they had been dismissed from the Corps. Furthermore, there is the potential to explore the memoir collection of the National Army Museum to see if it contains any materials from commissioners of this period. The same process would be undertaken for a group of nondisabled men, with the resulting

¹⁰⁵⁷ Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy*, p.123

analysis being integrated with work relating to the disabled commissionaires. Each of these 'types' of men would benefit from additional study, and this has the potential to open a rich vein of future scholarship that would determine the impact the commissionaire brand had in shaping the post-service lives of these veterans.

There is also an opportunity to extend the cultural analysis of this project, which would deliver additional insight into public perceptions of the Corps' brand. As well as the men who feature in the press cuttings books, there was another group of exemplary commissionaires – fictional members of the Corps. I have found these men in the stories of Sherlock Holmes, a children's book, adventure stories for boys, and the satirical cartoons in publications such as *Punch*. A closer analysis of the form these portrayals took, and the role the characters played in the wider narratives they were part of, would complement this study. When viewed together, these representations may have reached a far wider audience than the press coverage of the annual parade. This would certainly have been the case with the Holmes stories that were serialised in the *Strand Magazine*. As was the case with the newspaper reports analysed in Chapter 5, these narratives were not constructed by Walter, but they were influenced by the commissionaire brand. Therefore, analysing them would indicate the powerful cultural influence of the commissionaires, and how congruent this impact was with the brand values Walter created for the men.

Furthermore, there is an opportunity to illuminate a previously unexplored link between the veterans of the Victorian period and those of the First World War. The studies of this latter period represent the overwhelming majority of scholarship on the experiences of British veterancy, and the commissionaire brand contained powerful antecedents of the veteran identities that emerged after 1918. These – often related – identities were constructed around disability, ex-servicemen's associations, employment and charity.¹⁰⁵⁸ The links between these identities and the commissionaire brand could be explored by considering a

¹⁰⁵⁸ In addition to the works of Anderson, Bartlett, Cohen and Reznick cited earlier, other notable examples of this work include: Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946*, (Berg, 1994), Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male, Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, (Reaktion, 1996), Jessica Meyer, 'Not Septimus Now': wives of disabled veterans and Cultural Memory of the First World War in Britain', *Women's History Review*, 13.1(2004), pp.117-138, Wendy Gagen, 'Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during the First World War, the Case of J. B. Middlebrook', *European Review of History*, 14.4 (2007), pp.525-541, Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921-1939* (Praeger: 2005), Meaghan Kowalsky, 'This Honourable Obligation': The King's National Roll Scheme for Disabled Ex-Servicemen, 1915-1944, *European Review of History*, 14.4 (2007), pp.567-584, Julie Anderson, *War, disability and rehabilitation in Britain: 'soul of a nation'*, (Manchester University Press, 2011), Fiona Reid, *Broken Men, Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-1930*, (Continuum, 2012), Eleanor O'Keefe, 'Paying the Debts of the "Economy of Sacrifice": Military Charities as Brokers in Veteran Care, 1919-1929, *War and Society*, 42.4 (2023), pp.332-348

range of thematic questions: how did the experiences of disabled commissionaires compare with those of nondisabled ex-servicemen? What jobs were available to veterans – disabled and nondisabled – in the depressed employment market of the period?¹⁰⁵⁹ How did the Corps adapt to the changing workplace of this period? And how did these factors affect the organisation's commercial performance?

There is evidence that within this changing environment, the visual identity of the commissionaire brand was constant, and its promotional strategy was consistent with the marketing principles that had been established by Walter in its formative years. This is evident in the press coverage of the Corps' 75th anniversary on 10 June 1934. The *Daily Mirror* devoted the best part of a page to the parade that took place at Buckingham Palace. The photographs feature the ranks of the commissionaires being inspected by King George V, and another image of him standing alongside his wife, Queen Mary, acknowledging the commissionaires' salute.¹⁰⁶⁰ (Figure 5.2)

¹⁰⁵⁹ These conditions could have been especially challenging for members of the Corps in this period, when the problem of unemployment was particularly pronounced for older unskilled Men, see Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures 1918-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 113-114.

¹⁰⁶⁰ '1,500 Commissionaires at the Palace', *Daily Mirror* 11 June 1934, p.32.

THE DAILY MIRROR, Monday, June 11, 1935.

Daily Mirror



CHILVERN COTTAGE
51A, New CHEESE, 100, White Horse,
COMMON, DRY, CO. LTD., KILBURN, ROAD.

TO-DAY'S WEATHER
Fair and warm.
London and the South—Light
easterly wind; fair and rather warm.
Local coast fog.



FURTHER OUTLOOK
Continuing fair and warm.
Sea breezes—light winds, sun
shiny.
Airmen—Foggy in the fore-
noon. Light wind.
Light up—18.30 pm.

GOOD NEWS
Daily Mirror
with good news
for
your
friend abroad
Geraldine Henson, Fetter Lane, E.C.4

1,500 COMMISSIONAIRES AT THE PALACE



V.C.s ON PARADE

"Proud To Be Chief Life Governor"—The King

The King, who was accompanied by the Queen, inspected the Corps of Commissioners at a parade of some 1,500 members of the corps at Buckingham Palace yesterday.

Addressing the men, the King said:—
"This is the third time I have had the pleasure in inspecting your splendid Corps. The first occasion was in 1906 and since then the Corps has continued to flourish so that it is really three times as strong today."
A few years ago, as soldiers, sailors and airmen, you were loyally serving your country; now as civilians you are rendering like service. Your distinctive badge inspires confidence and commands universal respect.

Chat with the Men

"I am indeed proud to be your Chief Life Governor, and the Queen and I are very glad to have had this opportunity of seeing you." The men, in their dark uniforms with their bayonets and white caps, were drawn up in three lines of a square. When the King and Queen came out they gave a rousing salute, while the band played the National Anthem.

The King, with Lord Londonderry, General Watson, Commander of the Corps, and Major W. Oswald, M.C., London Division, began the inspection with the Royal Division.

The selected members of the Corps were presented by the King with the Silver Cross after he had awarded the long and faithful service.

Two V.C.s were on parade—Sergeant Rawley, who won his decoration in the Great War, and Sergeant Smith, a hero of the South African War.

The visit was with the longest service in the Corps was presented to his Majesty, who said a few words with each.

The King inspecting the Corps of Commissioners in the grounds of Buckingham Palace yesterday.



Miss Evelyn Mary Burrow, of Margate, a Cheshire magistrate, is engaged to Mr. R. F. Young.



The King talking to one of the men on parade.



The King, with whom is seen the Queen, taking the salute at the march-past.

LATEST NEWS



TRIPLE COLLISION.—One of three cars which were involved in a collision just outside Exeter, Devon, yesterday. Eight people were taken to Exeter Hospital in a serious condition.

Printed and Published by THE DAILY MIRROR NEWSPAPERS, LTD., at CHILVERN HOUSE, 51A, NEW CHEESE, 100, WHITE HORSE, COMMON, DRY, CO. LTD., KILBURN, ROAD, LONDON, E.C.4.—Monday, June 11, 1935. Tel. BILBORN 5253.

Figure 6.2 Daily Mirror, 11 June 1935, p. 32

The report featured the king's address to the commissioners, in which he stated that 'a few years ago, as soldiers, sailors and airmen you were loyally serving your country; now as civilians you are rendering like service. Your distinctive badge inspires confidence and

commands universal respect'. The king was, he informed the men, 'proud to be your Chief Life Governor, and the Queen and I are very glad to have had this opportunity of seeing you'. The report concluded by highlighting that there were two holders of the Victoria Cross present: 'Sergeant Kenny, who won his decoration in the Great War, and Sergeant Smith, a hero of the South African War.'¹⁰⁶¹ A direct connection can be made between the valour of these two men and the two commissionaires in the *ILN* in March 1859; this demonstrates that both the commissionaires' masculinity and the brand that supported it were remarkably stable. This stability indicates the enduring appeal of the brand for ex-servicemen, its relevancy for employers and its ability to generate positive press coverage for the Corps. That the Corps' strength was 4,550 men at the time of the anniversary parade underlines this. It also illustrates the continuing power of the organisation's marketing strategy and its ability to drive positive publicity for the commissionaires. The appeal of the ceremonial spectacle of the men had endured from the aftermath of the Crimean War to the mid-1930s.

¹⁰⁶¹ Ibid., p. 32; see also 'The King at Veteran's Parade,' *Daily Mail*, 11 June 1934, p. 24, 'The Corps of Commissionaires,' *The Times*, 11 June, p. 13.

Appendix – Ethics Approval

Dear Nicholas Bailey,

0429 - 'Loyalty, integrity and service': military masculinities and civilian transitions in the British Corps of Commissionaires, 1900-1945

NB: All approvals/comments are subject to compliance with current University of Leeds and UK Government advice regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am pleased to inform you that the above research ethics application has been reviewed by the Business, Environment, Social Sciences (AREA FREC) Committee and on behalf of the Chair, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion based on the documentation received at date of this email.

Please retain this email as evidence of approval in your study file.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted and approved to date. This includes recruitment methodology; all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. Please see <https://ris.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics-and-integrity/applying-for-an-amendment/> or contact the Research Ethics Administrator for further information () if required.

Ethics approval does not infer you have the right of access to any member of staff or student or documents and the premises of the University of Leeds. Nor does it imply any right of access to the premises of any other organisation, including clinical areas. The committee takes no responsibility for you gaining access to staff, students and/or premises prior to, during or following your research activities.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, risk assessments and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited.

It is our policy to remind everyone that it is your responsibility to comply with Health and Safety, Data Protection and any other legal and/or professional guidelines there may be.

I hope the study goes well.

Best wishes

Ms Taylor Haworth, Research Ethics Administrator, Secretariat

On behalf of Dr Judith Hanks, AREA FREC, Chair

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Daily Telegraph

Englishwoman's Review

Evening Mail

Graphic

Illustrated London News

Illustrated Times

Liverpool Echo

Lloyd's Weekly News

London Standard

Mail

Manchester Courier

Manchester Evening News

Morning Advertiser

Morning Chronicle

Morning Herald

Nottingham Daily Express

Nottingham Guardian

Navy and Army Illustrated

Penny Illustrated Paper

Punch

Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper

St James's Chronicle

Standard

Saturday Review

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