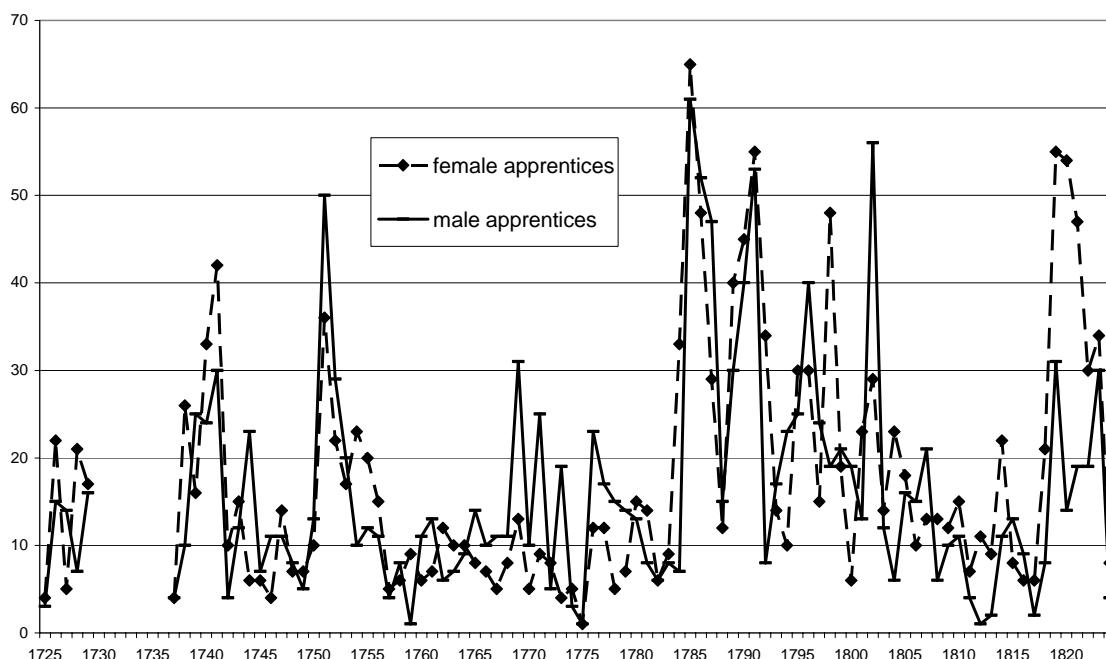


Parish apprenticeship in eighteenth century and early nineteenth-century London.¹

Leonard Schwarz (University of Birmingham) and Jeremy Boulton (University of Newcastle)

St Martin-in-the-Fields was a large Westminster parish, with a population of c.30,000 for most of the eighteenth century. By the 1770s the poor rates about £10,000 a year were being collected in poor rates. Its workhouse was one of the largest in London: from the 1770s it had a capacity of over 700 with an annual throughput often exceeding 1,000. The workhouse kept good records and between 1725 and 1824 it apprenticed over 3,000 children from the workhouse.²

Figure 1. Annual Numbers of discharges to apprenticeships from workhouse

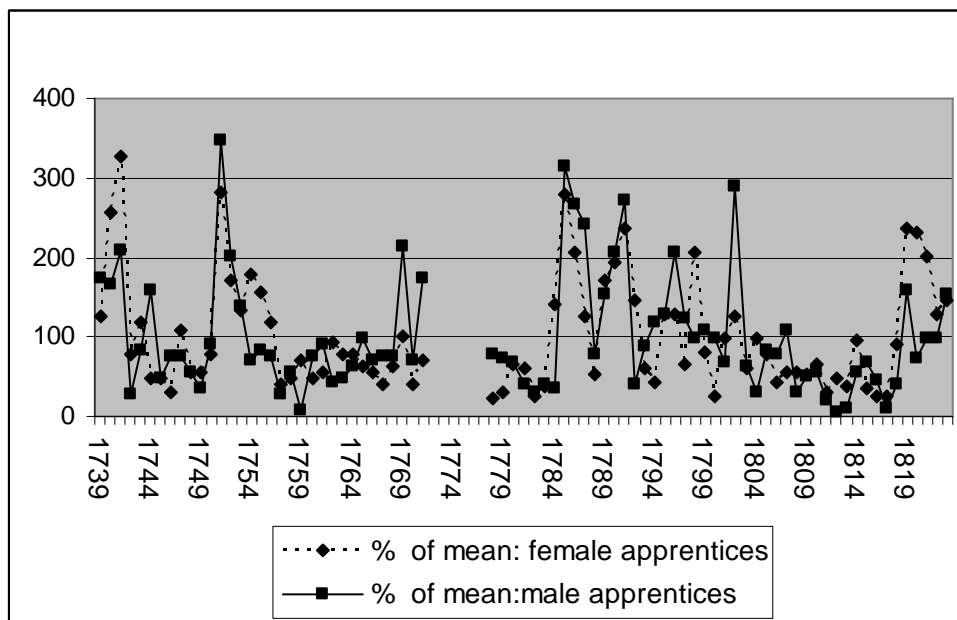


The workhouse was rebuilt and enlarged in the 1770s. Figure 2 takes into account variations around the mean before and after the rebuilding.

¹ This is based on 'The Lives of the Poor in the West End of London', project, funded by the ESRC: RES-000-23-0250.

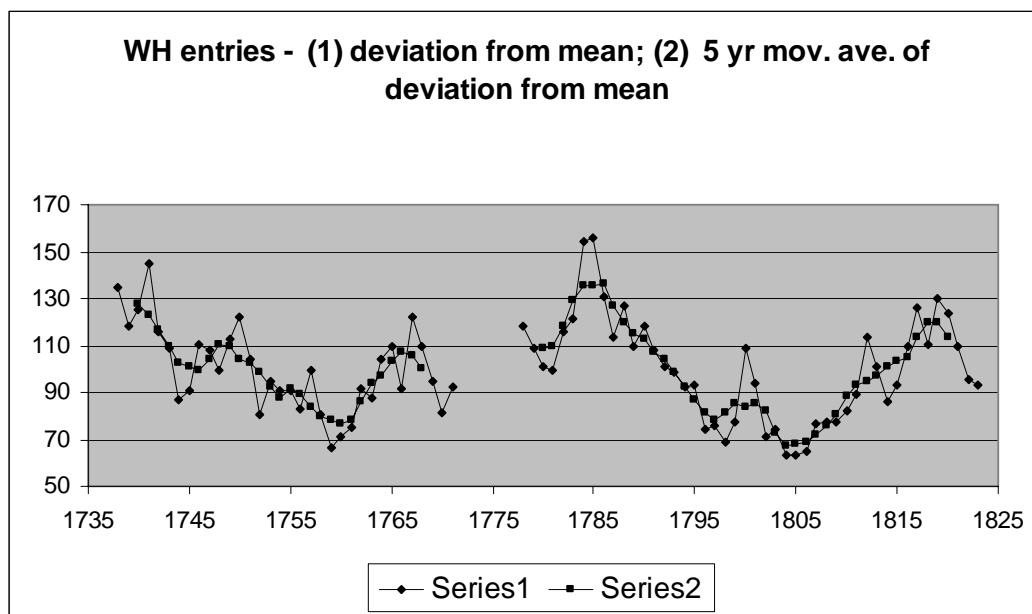
² With a complex relational database of over 100,000 entries and a succession of workhouse clerks data cleaning is an ongoing process. The database of workhouse entries is complete, but sufficiently large to bear analysis and there is no reason to anticipate that the missing sources will produce systematic bias.

Figure 2. Workhouse entry by sex: % of means 1739-71 (=100), 1779-1823(=100)



The mid-eighteenth century figures fluctuated quite extensively before stabilizing. Later, the figures showed a tendency towards decline during the Napoleonic wars, to rise with peace, despite the abolition of the apprenticeship clause of the Statute of Artificers in 1814. However, the figures need to be adjusted to take into account the rebuilding of the workhouse in the 1770s and figure 4 shows the annual totals, given as percentages of the mean before and after the rebuilding. Like Figure 2 they show a decline in the 1750s and 1780s and a steady rise from 1805.

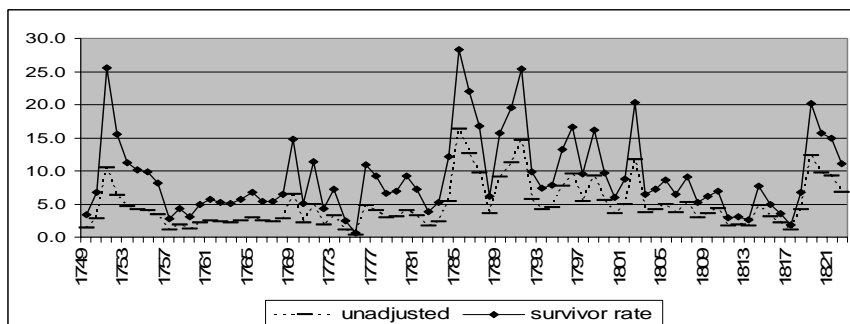
Figure 3. Workhouse entries: annual deviations from mean, 1739-71, 1779-1823



As Figure 4 demonstrates, parish apprenticeship was an important aspect of the labour market.

Figure 4. Parish apprenticeship as % of births³

Parish apprenticeship as % of births (=unadjusted) and survivors to age 9 (=adjusted), lagged 10 years from date of birth, 5 yr moving averages



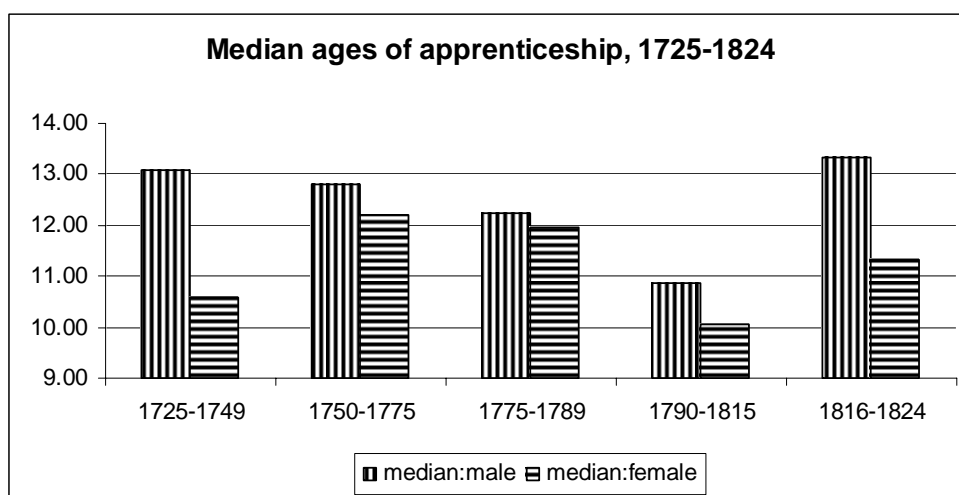
'Unadjusted' births give parish apprenticeship as a percentage of Anglican births, lagged by ten years. Usually they formed about five per cent of such births, but were

³ The adjustments (survivors to age 9) are derived from J. Landers, *Mortality and Metropolis*, pp. 64. Five- year moving averages centred on date of birth; births lagged by 10 years.

sometimes much higher. The ‘survivor rate’ is more significant, being based on the best information available of survivals to the age of 10.. Even though inexact, it is at the least indicative of the importance of pauper apprenticeship. On occasion these could be as much as half the births – obviously a misleading figure as apprenticeship could be delayed – but commonly around ten to twenty per cent of births. The peaks centred around 1750, 1785-1801 and 1820, when parish apprentices formed at least 15% of births, on occasion 20%. This had an obvious significance on labour market architecture, at least as far as apprenticeship was concerned.

To analyse this further involves a further breakdown of the apprenticeship data. Figure 5 gives the median age of apprenticeship binding:

Figure 5. Median age of apprenticeship binding



The median rather than the mean has been chosen, but even the median biases the results. This is because less than four per cent of parish apprentices were born in the parish workhouse and had remained in the care of the parish until apprenticeship. The rest entered the workhouse at various ages and – as Katrina Honeyman shows – a parent was often alive, two parents less frequently.⁴ The parish sought to apprentice girls from about the age of seven and boys from about the age of ten. However, as the parish was constantly having to accept children older than this, it sought to place them out as soon as possible. The workhouse was in fact receiving continual complements of children aged 13-16 whom it sought to apprentice as fast as it could. The proportion of males increased considerably after the Napoleonic wars.

Table 1. Percentage of apprenticeships from workhouse entries, age 13-16.

⁴ And of course might be in receipt of outdoor relief, occasionally or regularly. We do not currently have sufficient processed information to make confident distinctions between illegitimate children and others so as to compare the rate of apprenticeship as in P. Sharpe, ‘Poor children as apprentices in Colyton’, *Continuity and Change* 6 (1991), p. 257.

	1725-50	1751-92	1793-1815	1816-24
Males	20.8	21.8	14.7	36.8
Females	11.6	21.3	18.8	19.3

Average ages of apprenticeship were therefore a reflection of the pattern of entry.⁵

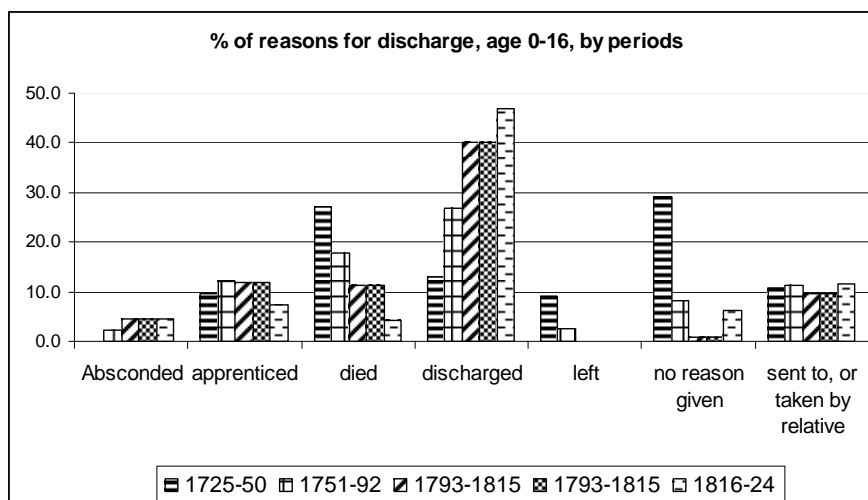
This pattern was to some extent a reflection of policy, but to a large extent it was a reflection of supply. We would argue that on the whole policy did not change much for most of this period, at least not sufficiently to change the basic trends. There were significant short-term swings, particularly at the end of wars but over the medium and long run policy changes the policy towards indoor and outdoor relief that had been laid down when the workhouse was built in the 1720s did not fundamentally alter - surviving even the workhouse rebuilding – until 1818, when faced with looked like runaway poor law expenditure the parish sought to make its regime harsher.

⁵ Our figures are, however, very different from those reported to the House of Commons for 1802-11: *Report on the number... and.. state of parish apprentices bound into the country*, reprinted in Dorothy George, *London life in the eighteenth century* (2nd ed. 1965), Appendix V, p.423:

age of binding		1793-1815	
George, 1802-11		St. Martins, 1793-1815	
under 8	0.4		
8-11	13.2	5-8	27.7
11-12	12.9	9-10	33.9
12-14	44.2	11-12	20.3
14-18	29.4	13-16	18.1
N	3749		310

This consistency shows itself in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Reasons for discharge, entry aged 0-16, 1725-1824



Notice the level of apprenticeship was roughly equal to the numbers of those released to relatives. The workhouse was consistently used as a place where children could be deposited for a period of time.

Until the age of ten or eleven relatives had a tendency to remove children from the workhouse, or the parish was often able to persuade them to take the children. Tables 2 and 3 give the number of apprentices divided by the number taken out of the workhouse by relatives. So during 1725-50 for every three males apprenticed up to the age of eight, ten males had been removed from the workhouse by that age. For the age group 9-10 the ratio was equal and for ages 11-16 there were 3.8 parish apprenticeships for every male inmate taken out by a relative.

Table 2 Ratio of apprenticeship to taken out by relatives, by age. Males

	1725-50	1751-92	1793-1815	1816-24
0-8	0.3	0.6	0.8	0.2
9-10	1.0	2.1	2.5	0.8
11-16	3.8	4.9	3.1	2.0

Table 3 Ratio of apprenticeship to taken out by relatives, by age . Females

	1725-50	1751-92	1793-1815	1816-24
0-8	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.4
9-10	1.0	0.7	0.1	3.3
11-16	4.0	2.1	1.7	3.2

It is tempting to analyse this further, notably the differing ratios between male and female, and how these changed over time, but it would be unwise to do this in detail until the characteristics of those taken out by relatives has been further investigated.

What is clear is the inverse relationship between those who died and those who were discharged. The more the death rate fell, the more young persons were discharged. Figure 6 shows that discharges were consistently higher than apprenticeships. A fifth of those aged 9-10 and a quarter aged 13-16 were discharged.

Once bound as apprentices, they did not necessarily stay bound. They went 'upon liking' and the parish registers are inconsistent about this, so cannot be relied upon for sampling purposes. The prospective employer might return the apprentice, notwithstanding the law that gave magistrates the right to bind apprentices, or the apprentice might reject the employer. The parish seems to have been accepted the former and to have been fairly tolerant of the latter, if this occurred soon.

Conclusion

This is clearly a preliminary survey of a complex set of data. Parish apprenticeship was clearly an important aspect of the labour market but it was variegated not only by gender but by the age of those for whom the parish found itself responsible. Much remains to be done analysing the characteristics of apprentices and their parents. The criteria for discharge without apprenticeship clear and more work needs to be done on the characteristics of those who entered the workhouse in their teens. There is the intriguing possibility of some synchronicity between parish apprenticeships and fluctuations in the birth rate, and more particularly in the adult death rate, lagged or unlagged. These and much else remain to be explored.