Canal Boat People, 1840 - 1970.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Work

It is well known that industrialisation brought about changes in industry, such as large-scale ownership and mechanisation, which fundamentally changed the experience of work for many ordinary people. Not only the organisation of work but its very pace and rhythm were radically altered.

This was not the experience of everyone, however, indeed, not even of the majority. Benson[1] has shown that, even within the mining and manufacturing sectors of the economy between 1850 and 1939, a surprisingly large number of small "technologically primitive and organisationally unsophisticated enterprises" remained. This same contrast can be found within the transport industry. While the railways moved towards large-scale ownership and military-style discipline of its labour force, working conditions within the canal carrying trade retained many features of work in the pre-industrial age.

D.C.Coleman[2] characterized pre-industrial work in seventeenth-century England in the following ways. Firstly, it was extremely irregular. The vagaries of natural phenomena such as the weather and the changing seasons meant that the regularity, intensity and consistency of work in the modern industrial economy was unknown. Secondly it was labour intensive. Labour was easily the most important

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factor of production and productivity was low with little chance of improvement through capital investment in cost-reducing and labour-saving devices. Visible underemployment, both voluntary and involuntary, was persistent. The former arose from the preference, in a society where the volume and variety of consumer goods was low, for leisure over high wages - a phenomenon known as the backward-sloping supply curve for labour. Involuntary underemployment resulted in mixed employment and was also thought likely by Coleman to give rise to another feature of pre-industrial working life, namely, a high degree of labour mobility.

It will be shown in this chapter that canal boat work, although itself a product of industrialization, exhibited all of the features described above. Coleman's explanation for the existence of such features in labour in seventeenth-century England, the limitation of man's control over natural forces and the absence of fixed capital equipment capable of operating independently of the immediate interference of nature, is also relevant to the case of the canal carrying trade.

In a later essay on a related theme, E.P.Thompson[3] also discussed the irregular nature of pre-industrial work and identified further characteristic features of it. He characterized such work as largely task-orientated, the length of the working day being dictated by the amount of

time required to complete a particular task. A pattern of alternate bouts of intense labour and idleness occurred wherever men were in control of their own working lives, working with little supervision at their own pace.

Again, this chapter will show that such features were also characteristic of canal boat work, not only during the early nineteenth century but persisting even into the second half of the twentieth century. Some explanation for the durability of this pattern of work will then be offered.

5.1 The nature of canal boat work

By far the most striking and significant feature of canal boat work was its irregularity. Whether because of alternating periods of slack and brisk trade, the influence of natural phenomena, such as weather and the seasons, or because of the way in which the work was organised, irregularity was as characteristic of canal boat work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as it was of work in general in pre-industrial England. Furthermore, this irregularity was equally a feature of the working day, the working week and, indeed, the working year.

Of the three possible causes of this phenomenon, the trade cycle was probably the least significant. Cyclical changes in trade were generally too long-term to effect anything

shorter than the working year, and, up to the First World War, changes in the volume of trade were not dramatic. In addition, the practice of hiring and sub-contracting boats and boatmen at times of brisk trade reduced the need for boats and men to lie idle when trade was slack. Turnbull[4] comments on the inability of fly-boat operators to carry sufficient spare capacity during slack or normal times to enable them to take advantage of sudden booms.

Of more significance, in an industry where technological innovation was fairly primitive, was the influence of natural phenomena. The most serious disruptions were due to ice in winter when the trade might be completely halted for several days and, on occasion, several weeks. Because of the difficulties of maintaining water supplies to a man-made, still waterway, severe drought could force boats to be light loaded or might close a section of canal completely and floods could also cause serious delays.

By far the most important cause of irregular work patterns, however, was the way in which the work was organised. With few exceptions, canal boat work was task-orientated. A boat crew would be given orders to load and deliver a particular consignment and then left largely unsupervised to carry out the task. Once loaded, the length and intensity of the working day was, in theory at any rate, entirely up to the captain. Methods of payment were complex and will be

discussed more fully in the next sub-section but in general terms, the captain was paid a fixed rate for every ton delivered. There was, therefore, a financial incentive to deliver goods as quickly as possible which resulted in long working days and, in the case of a long journey, a long working week once a boat was underway.

Once the consignment had been unloaded at its destination, the boat crew would hope to receive new orders straight away but all too often this did not happen. There might be a delay of a day or more before the boat could be unloaded. The boat, and its crew, might then have to lie idle for a day or more before another load could be found or it might have to travel empty for several days to pick up a fresh cargo from elsewhere. Delays might also occur at bottle-necks such as tunnels and locks and more time could be lost waiting for repairs.

The irregularity of the boatman's working life is well illustrated by table 5.1 which is based on the diary of a hard-working boatman in 1960. It might be argued that the diary of one boatman, during a year when narrow boat carrying was nearly at an end, is not very representative, but it will be noted that most of the delays were not directly due to lack of trade. Only the days spent waiting for orders could be attributed partly to this and they amount to only 37½ days for the whole year.

Table 5.1. Employment of one boatman during the year 1960.

Days spent working and earning.			
trips with loaded boats	109½	days	
trips with empty boats	63	days	
emptying and loading boats	27	days	
TOTAL	199½	days	54,66% of year.
Days of enforced idleness - not earning.			
awaiting orders	37½	days	
engine repairs	17	days	
awaiting loading	16½	days	
awaiting discharge	47½	days	
miscellaneous (floods, ice etc)	19	days	
TOTAL	137½	days	37,67% of year.
Leave			
days off and sick	28	days	7,67% of year.

Source; Based on information in D,D,Gladwin "The Waterways of Britain; A Social Panorama", 1976, p.199.

The table shows that the boatman spent only 54.66% of the year actually working. If he was not paid for running his boat empty, as was usually the case until the inter-war period, an even smaller percentage of his time was spent engaged in remunerative employment. This compares with approximately 75% of the year spent in remunerative employment for the average industrial worker if one allows for every Sunday and every half Saturday off, one week annual holiday and perhaps one week sick leave. Although the boatman worked less time than the worker in manufacturing industry, his official rest-days were far fewer. Moreover, while the average worker laboured for eight or nine hours per day, with working days spread evenly throughout the twelve months, the boatman's time was divided into periods of intense labour of perhaps twelve to fifteen hours per day, alternated with periods of enforced idleness.

Other features of task-orientated work identified by Thompson are clearly present in canal boat work. Firstly, the tendency to work extremely long hours once a task was in hand. Fly-boat crews worked day and night in shifts. In theory two men should have been resting while two worked the boat which should have afforded the crew a reasonable period of rest. In practice, it was often necessary for the whole crew to be at work to get the boat underway or to speed it through a flight of locks. Witnesses at the Royal Commission on labour in 1892 testified that fly-boatmen regularly

worked 100 hours per week and that up to 70 hours might be worked without any proper rest.[5] Sixteen and eighteen hour shifts were common and periods of rest were said never to exceed two hours.[6]

Slow-boat crews did not work night shifts as such, but they often started work between three and five o' clock in the morning and carried on till eight or nine o' clock at night. In 1841, slow-boatmen were said to work fourteen or fifteen hours out of twenty four.[7]

State regulation of the employment of women and young persons gradually shortened the hours of employment and improved the working conditions of workers in many other industries. Beginning with textiles, by 1878 legislative control had been extended to mines, metal-working, printing, paper-making trades and small workshops, but, no legislation ever attempted to regulate hours and working conditions in the canal carrying trade.

In addition to long shifts, it seems to have been common throughout the nineteenth century for boatmen to work seven days a week at times, although periods of enforced idleness were also inevitable. John Crowley, a fly-boat operator, saw no necessity for a rest-day at all. He told the *Select Committee on Sunday Trading* in 1841 that the over-night stoppage of the boat should provide boatmen with sufficient

rest from their labours.[8] Even in the twentieth century there was no fixed rest-day for narrow-boat men. They usually carried on until a particular trip was finished and would continue to work for as long as work was available. This could mean several weeks without an official day off, although the frequent delays on the canal meant that the work was not entirely relentless.

Not until 1919 did the reduction of hours in other industries begin to effect the canal carrying trade. In that year the Canal Control Committee, a Board of Trade body which had governed the canals since they came under government control in 1917, ratified an agreement which laid down a 48 hour week for most canal employees. It was felt, however, that the nature of the work would make this impossible for narrow-boatmen who were granted a 33$^{1}/_{3}$% increase in wages in lieu.[9]

Sometimes, conditions in outside industries had a more direct effect on the working hours in the carrying trade. Following a dispute in May 1920, some Midlands boatmen carrying coal, brick, stone, lime, slag, ashes and pig iron between collieries, works and power stations, secured an agreement which stipulated a 54 hour week (9 hour day) with some payment for over time.[10] However, it seems unlikely that this agreement would have resulted in a real reduction of hours if the depression of trade and disputes in the coal

industry had not substantially reduced traffic. An industrial court heard the following year that the average number of hours worked by these boatmen in October 1920 was 55.2 per week, yet the men were employed on average only for about three quarters of their time.[11] On the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in Lancashire, the introduction of a five day week in the coal industry meant that only two boat trips per week were possible instead of five per fortnight.[12]

On the Shropshire Union Canal, which was owned by the London and North Western Railway Company, pressure from the National Union of Railwaymen to bring canal workers into line with rail-men led to a 48 hour week being introduced on an experimental basis for flatmen and boatmen in July 1920.[13] Boatmen were said to dislike this arrangement as it had the effect of reducing their wages, but before the issue could be finally settled the company decided to close its carrying department.

By 1945 there were still no set hours for long-distance narrow-boatmen. By this time even the unions seem to have recognized the impossibility of trying to implement a fixed working week without a radical re-organization of the industry.[14] A boatman interviewed for the British Waterways staff magazine *Waterways* in August 1959, claimed that he still often worked eighteen hours a day. Although this is possibly an exaggeration, other boatmen interviewed around

this time confirm that a twelve hour day was normal and a longer one not unusual.[15] However, one has to take into account that such hours were not worked *every* day.

Another feature of task-orientated work which is also one of the most well-known and noticeable features of canal boat work is the tendency for the demarcation between "work" and "life" to be diminished. In the case of canal boat work this often took the form of the boatman and his family or crew actually living at work, i.e. on the boat.

As has already been shown, not all boatmen lived on board. Initially, none did so. In the second half of the eighteenth century, before the canal network was complete, canal boats did not have cabins at all as journeys were necessarily short and boatmen could return home at night. As the network enlarged, it became necessary on most canals for boatmen to spend at least some nights away from home, either on board the boat or in canal-side accommodation.

Not only longer journeys but more valuable cargoes also made this necessary. Josiah Hayes, the General Agent on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal stated in 1841 that boatmen were obliged to sleep on board to take care of the cargo.[16] In the fly-boat trade there was also the speed of the operation to take into account and men remained on board in order to keep the boat going night and day. However, it

was when men took their families to live on board, either permanently or at least for significant periods that this particular feature of task-orientated work became most marked.

Coleman[17] identifies labour as the most important factor of production in the pre-industrial economy with little chance of increasing productivity or reducing costs, working hours or the arduous nature of the work by means of capital investment. This was partly true of canal boat work. Narrow-gauge locks on the main trunk routes meant that only boats of relatively small carrying capacity could be used on most journeys and productivity was consequently low. Manually operated locks, primitive cargo handling techniques and poor management meant that the work was arduous, slow and inefficient.

Some wharves had mechanical aids such as cranes or chutes but much of the work had to be done with shovel and wheel-barrow. As trade declined and canals became more delapidated, wharf facilities often deteriorated too, making cargo handling more laborious. David Blagrove, who worked a pair of narrow-boats in the early 1960s complained of[18]

> the ludicrous comparison of an articulated lorry with timber in packed lengths being unloaded in minutes with fork lift truck while we puffed and grunted in the traditional manner,[3]

Blagrove also complained about the time-consuming and wasteful loading of grain at Brentford where'[9]

> boats had to hang about at the depôt until lighters were available. Then the operation was both labour-intensive and slow and finally a fair amount of grain was wasted or spoiled. Had a couple of hundred ton silos been built, the grain could have been sucked into them, stored and released into boats as required and all with the minimum of time and grain wasted. However, such plans were repeatedly frustrated by lack of capital and obstruction from unions who claimed that the men would lose jobs.

Both Blagrove and Wilkinson complained of the frustrations of loading or discharging at large ports where the restrictive practices of dock workers caused more hindrance than help. Both came across works depôts where it was the rule that railway wagons and lorries had preference over canal boats when it came to loading and unloading. Looking at the work with the eyes of out-siders, they both felt that cargo handling was one of the most frustrating and inefficient aspects of the job and one where much improvement could have been made.

However, the greatest increase in productivity could have been made by enlarging the canals of the Midlands known as "The Cross". This would have enabled boats of 100 tons or even 300 tons carrying capacity to link the manufacturing districts of the interior with the four main estuaries and their sea-ports and thus made inland water carriage far less labour-intensive costly and inefficient. Such a modernisation programme was advocated from the 1880s onwards by representatives of trade and commerce and was the main

recommendation of the Royal Commission on Canals of 1906. However, the conservatism and insularity of canal companies, the strong railway lobby in Parliament and the government philosophy of the day, which was strongly against public spending on such schemes, ensured that there was never any likelihood of this becoming a reality.

Thus, canal boat worked differed from that described by Coleman in this way. Although it was labour-intensive and inefficient, cost-reducing and labour-saving technology and techniques were available and much improvement could have been made had capital investment been made available.

Given the irregular nature of the work described above, and the reasons for it, together with the failure to improve efficiency through capital investment, it is obvious that a great deal of involuntary underemployment, both concealed and visible, existed.

What is more interesting, if more difficult to determine is to what degree voluntary underemployment existed. Here, the backward sloping supply curve for labour is of significance. Having clothed and fed his family as well as he might and earned enough to supply himself with sufficient beer and tobacco, there was little else on which a boatman might spend his money. This was particularly the case if he and his family lived wholly or mainly on the boat and continued

to be so at a time when consumer goods were proliferating and becoming easily available to other sectors of the working class. To what extent boatmen chose leisure instead of high earnings is difficult to ascertain but there was certainly some tendency for this to happen when wages were high. During the First World War, when pay rates were raised significantly, some employers reported that the men tied up their boats after two or three days work, having in that time earned what they would formerly have done in a week.[18]

Mixed occupations did exist to some extent. The membership of the Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters' Association consisted solely of boatmen. The title of the association bears witness to the fact that boatmen in the area often took work as porters when there was no boat work available.[21] The Census returns for Braunston indicate that boatmen sometimes worked as boat leggers and vice versa.

Although established boat captains were said to stay with the same employer for many years,[22] there seems to have been a fair amount of labour mobility among certain categories of boatman as might well be expected in such an itinerant occupation. Boat hands were hired by the captain on a casual basis and, up to the middle of the nineteenth century at least, it seems to have been common for them to congregate at various places along the canal waiting to be taken on.

In both Shardlow and Braunston the Census returns for 1841 show a number of boatmen without families sleeping in canal-side taverns and other accommodation. The Arkwright Society guide to Shardlow mentions sleeping accommodation for boatmen being provided in an iron warehouse.[23] They may have been day boatmen temporarily away from home but were more likely hired hands between trips, waiting to be taken on by passing captains. The latter theory is supported by the fact that many of these men were in the younger age groups and they seem to have more or less disappeared by the time of the 1851 Census when the decline in canal carrying would have meant fewer opportunities for such casual labour.

Several witnesses appearing before the *Select Committee on Sunday Trading on Canals* in 1841 testified to the bad character of hired hands who were employed by boat captains on a casual basis.[24] The casual nature of the employment and the poor remuneration compared to that of a captain probably did attract the more shiftless and unreliable worker. Payment was a matter of private arrangement between the captain and the hand but Richard Heath felt that the latter could expect to receive 7/- a week from a captain who was himself netting four times as much.[25] Hanson[26] also feels that many boat hands were unsavoury characters and in support of this quotes a fly-boat hand of some fourteen

years standing who, in 1839, admitted that he passed his time

> lurking in fields where game lay, sometimes in beer-shops, public houses, and bawdy houses,

and who maintained himself, when not on the boat, by poaching and stealing.

The contrast between captains and hands is stark. The latter conformed more closely to the contemporary popular image of the boatman as a degraded, half-vagrant figure on the fringe of society but the former appears to have been very different. Well-paid, loyal and trust-worthy, possibly even a little educated, boat-captains seem to have constituted a form of labour aristocracy. However, it should be remembered that what is being discussed here is the fly-boat captain. The status of other narrow-boat captains on family boats and day boats seems to have been lower and with the decline of fly-boating from the mid nineteenth century, the status of all boatmen probably declined.

Thompson[25] remarks that in pre-industrial economies, contract and sub-contract systems of employment were more common than day-wages. He gives the example[26] of skilled potters in the 1820s and 1830s who, although themselves employees, hired children to assist them and worked with little supervision. Early nineteenth-century operative

spinners in cotton mills were also allowed to hire their own assistants[27] and in collieries the butty system, although on a larger scale, was based on the same principle.[28] Such systems were also a prominent and significant feature of canal boat work but, unlike other industries, the narrow-boat carrying trade retained this system until its demise in the 1970s.

On larger inland boats, operating mainly on rivers and canals, the captain and crew were all employed and paid directly by the boat owner. In the narrow-boat trade, however, and on some wide canal boats, only the captain or steerer was employed by the carrying company and from the remuneration he received he was expected to hire and pay the crew. In many cases he had to provide a horse and in all cases it seems he had to provide his own ropes. In a few cases a boatman might be paid a fixed daily or weekly rate but in most cases he was paid on a trip or tonnage basis and sometimes on a combination of both.

Such a system had its advantages and disadvantages for the employee although the latter tended to outweigh the former. It raised the status of the steerer above that of a wage-earner and indeed a boat captain was given a great deal more responsibility than a factory hand or an agricultural labourer. Not only was he expected to work largely without supervision, but he was responsible for the cargo whilst in

transit and held accountable for any damage or loss. Richard Heath, a Stourport carrier, testified to the fact that only men of good character and a little education were employed as captains, men who could be trusted not to pilfer the cargo, could read way-bills and give proper receipts for goods delivered.[29]

Among the draw-backs was the fact that it allowed employers to avoid taking full responsibility for members of their work-force and allowed leading employees to exploit their assistants, be they hired hands or members of their own family. It had largely died out in the mining industry by 1850 and was not used for the crews of larger boats on rivers and wide canals, yet in narrow-boat carrying it continued to be widely used. In the twentieth century, the captain, being the only official company employee, was the only member of the crew entitled to any cover or benefit under the workmen's compensation and National Insurance legislation. Despite this, only on the route between Birmingham and the Severn did it ever become the custom for the carrying company to employ crew members and pay them a separate wage.[30] Such a system was fiercely resisted in other areas where the old sub-contracting continued until the end of narrow-boat carrying and along with the delapidated condition of the canals themselves, appears to have been one of the main obstacles to the reform of working conditions.

5.2 Income

The methods of remunerating boatmen were so various and elaborate that it is very difficult to get an accurate idea of the average level of income. Some boat owners paid their men a fixed amount per trip with payment varying according to length of trip and destination. Instead of paying so much per mile, account was taken of particular difficulties on each journey which meant that a separate rate was worked out for every possible trip. Some idea of the complexity of this system can be seen from table 5.2 which shows the schedule of trip rates laid down for Midlands Boatmen in 1922.

Other companies paid their men per ton of cargo carried, but again, account had to be taken of the length of the trip and the value of the cargo. Where the trip incorporated rivers or canalized rivers, payments varied according to whether the boat was going up or down stream. On up stream journeys the boatman was sometimes paid for a guaranteed minimum of cargo whereas downstream payment was for the actual amount carried. In order to show the complexities this involved an example of wages rates paid under this system is given here at table 5.3 Some companies, particularly those running larger craft, paid a combination of trip and tonnage. In the twentieth century, on larger boats, a fixed apportionment was made to the captain and each member of the crew. .

Table 5.2. Midland Canal Boatmen's Wages, 1922.

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE
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MIDLAND CANAL BOATMEN'S WAGES BOARD.

Schedule of Consolidated and Reduced Trip Rates PER MAN between certain Collieries and Places adopted by the Board for the Period ending 31st March 1922, and until further notice.

These Rates, which it is understood have been arranged between Wolverhampton Coal Merchants' Association and the Men's Union, are given for information only.

	B'ham.	Aston.	Smethwick.	Spon Ln.	Oldbury & Tividale.	West Bromwich Top of Ryders Gn.	Tipton.	Wednesbury.	Walsall.	Darlaston.	Bilston.	Wolverhampton.
Hednesford.	23/-	21/-	21/6	20/6	21/-	17/-		15/-	11/-	12/-	18/11	16/-
Mid.Cannock.	22/6	20/6	21/-	20/-	20/6	16/6		14/6	10/6	11/6		
Leacroft.	22/-	20/-	20/6	19/6	20/-	16/-		14/-	10/-	11/-		14/6
Churchbridge (Top Lock)	22/-	20/-	20/6	19/6	20/-	16/-		14/-	10/-	11/-		14/8
Hawkins Colliery	24/6	22/6	23/-	22/-	22/6	18/6		16/6	12/6	13/6		
Gt. Wyrley	23/-	21/-	21/6	20/6	21/-	17/-		15/-	11/-	12/-		
Conduit	21/-	19/-	19/6	18/6	19/-	15/-		13/-	10/-	11/-	17/2	14/2
Coppice	21/-	19/-	19/6	18/6	19/-	15/-		13/-	10/-	11/-	17/7	14/8
Brownhills	20/-	18/-	18/6	17/6	18/-	14/-		12/-	9/-	10/-	17/2	14/2
Littleton	26/-	26/-	24/6	23/6	24/-	20/-		20/-			17/2	14/1
Holly Bank	17/-	17/-	15/6	14/6	15/-	11/-		11/-	8/6	9/6	8/7	6/-
Chase Anglesey	20/-	18/-	18/6	17/6	18/-	14/-		13/- x	11/-	12/-	18/8	15/9
Walsall Wood	17/6	15/6	16/-	15/-	15/6	11/6		11/- x	9/-	10/-	17/2	14/2
Aldridge	16/6	14/6	15/-	14/-	14/6	10/6		10/- xx	10/-	11/-	18/8	15/9
Pooley (to Hospital Pound).	22/-	20/-										
Birch Coppice	22/-	20/-										
Amington to Summer Lane)	21/-	19/-										
Baddesley	27/-	25/-	31/-									
Hamstead to			10/6	10/-	10/6	(2/- extra to	Warrens Hall					
Gravelly Hill	8/-						Twin Pit	Mid Cannock 14/6				
Top of 11 Locks	10/-		Broad Lane 18/6		Sandwell 3/6	(Ridgacre (Arm	Knowle	Hamstead 5/-				
Bordesley St.	10/-											
Fazeley Bar	10/-				Double Boating (i.e. 2 Boats & 3 Men) 1/9th per man extra.		Hamstead					
Old Wharf (Top Road)	12/-		Bentley 13/-									
Sandwell to							These Rates not yet fixed.					
Summer Lane	9/-											
Aston Manor	11/-		Netherton 9/-									
Bordesley	11/-		Windmill End 8/-									
Spon Lane Coll'y.												
to Summer Lane	13/-											
Aston Manor	15/-											
Bordesley	15/-											

x 1/- extra via. Walsall. Top of Locks 1/- less.

xx 5/- extra via. Walsall.

West Cannock. 18/11 16/-

East Cannock. 18/11 16/-

Cannock and Rugeley 18/11 16/-

Mid. Cannock 18/8 15/9

Broad Lane 15/5 12/5

Birmingham Extra - 2/- to B.S.A. and Latch & Batchelor. 4/- to Selly Oak and Yardley.

THOS. POTTER. Employer's Secretary.

GEO. SHAW. Employees Secretary.

January 18th 1922.

Table 5.3 Agreement on trip and tonnage rates for canal boatmen employed by the Severn and Canal Carrying Company 1927.

BETWEEN GLOUCESTER AND BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT (including Birmingham, Wolverhampton and other places in south Staffs. and also places on the Stourbridge Canal) EITHER VIA WORCESTER OR STOURPORT

UP CARGOES — 2/4½ per ton, minimum 25 tons, Walsall extra payment - 2/6

DOWN CARGOES (to Gloucester) — 2/- per ton on actual weight carried

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded, 16/-

BETWEEN GLOUCESTER AND STOURPORT

UP CARGOES — 1/9 per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

DOWN CARGOES (except red sand) — 1/9 per ton on actual weight carried
red sand 1/- per ton

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded, 10/-

BETWEEN STOURPORT DISTRICT AND BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT

UP CARGOES — 1/64 per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

DOWN CARGOES — 1/64 per ton on actual weight carried
coal allowance 10/-

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded 10/-

BETWEEN GLOUCESTER AND WORCESTER

UP CARGOES — 1/6 per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

DOWN CARGOES — 1/6 per ton on actual weight carried

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded 8/-
If empty from Worcester to Stoke Works for salt, extra trip allowance 4/-

BETWEEN WORCESTER AND BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT

UP CARGOES — 1/64 per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

DOWN CARGOES — 1/64 per ton on actual weight carried

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded, 12/-

GLOUCESTER AND BLACKPOLE

UP CARGOES 1/8½ per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

DOWN CARGOES 1/8½ per ton on actual weight carried

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded 9/-

If empty from Blackpole to Stoke Works for salt, extra trip allowance 3/-

BETWEEN GLOUCESTER AND DROITWICH

UP CARGOES 1/10 per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

DOWN CARGOES 1/10 per ton on actual weight carried

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded, 11/-

If empty Droitwich to Stoke WOrks for salt, extra allowance, 1/-

GLOUCESTER AND TARDEBIGGE

UP CARGOES 2/1½ per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

DOWN CARGOES 1/11 per ton on actual weight carried

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded 14/-

GLOUCESTER AND STRATFORD OR WARWICK

UP CARGOES 3/0¼ per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded 27/-

GLOUCESTER AND ATHERSTONE

UP CARGOES 3/1 per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded, 23/-

GLOUCESTER AND COVENTRY

UP CARGOES 3/2½ per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded 27/-

GLOUCESTER AND KNIGHTON

UP CARGOES 3/1¼ per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

TRIP ALLOWANCE whether boat returns empty or loaded 22/-

KNIGHTON AND BOURNVILLE

ALL CARGOES 1/6 per ton, minimum cargo 25 tons

GLOUCESTER AND SHARPNESS

Trip allowance each way 13/2½

Any cargo loaded and discharged locally between Gloucester and Sharpness at the rate of 6d per ton,
If loaded both ways with through traffic, extra 12/-

BETWEEN GLOUCESTER AND FRAMPTON

Trip allowance both ways, 10/-

Any cargo loaded and discharged locally between Gloucester and Frampton, 6d per ton
If loaded both ways with through traffic, 10/- extra,

EXCEPTIONAL PAYMENTS

Salt from Stoke Works to Gloucester, 1/2 per ton,
Birmingham to Gloucester - empty pipes 3d each
empty barrels 1½d each

Boats loaded up with Grain bring back 300 empty sacks FREE,
Canal lines and straps to be provided by steerers,
Any arrangement as to working on 2 levels cancelled,
The Company to pay all stabling and tunnelling charges,
Demurrage after lying 48hrs under load with up traffic at point of discharge, 5/- per day or part of a day, Sunday and Bank Holidays excepted,

Starting money £3 per trough trip will be paid up to July 31st next after that date the starting money will be £2,15s,0d, up to August 31st, 1927,
On and after 1st September 1927 the starting money will be £(torn off) 10s,0d,

Signed on behalf of TGWU and Severn and Canal Carrying Co, 14,6,27,

Source; Ministry of Labour file, PRO ref, LAB 83/2506,

There were also various bonuses and additional payments. Sometimes boats were paid nothing for running empty but at other times an allowance was made for this. Some companies paying on a trip basis paid a bonus for boats completing more than a given number of trips per week. Loading and unloading attracted extra payment and by 1916 some boatmen were being paid demurrage for unavoidable delays. In trying to assess the boatman's income there is also the difficulty of differentiating between net and gross payment and making allowance for periods of unemployment and loss of income due to delays and stoppages.

Much of the information on boatmen's wages in the nineteenth century comes from witnesses at Parliamentary enquiries. Some of these seem to be based on guess-work and hearsay evidence. The boat owners themselves were presumably in a position to give reliable information although whether they actually did or not is questionable as they were often trying to present government officials with a picture of the boatman as a prosperous individual. Furthermore, some witnesses do not always make it clear whether the figure quoted takes into account expenses for the horse or for paying hired hands.

Table 5.4. EXAMPLES OF EARNINGS OF BOATMEN IN POUNDS, SHILLINGS AND PENCE, 1771 - 1914. (Amount shown is weekly income unless otherwise stated.)

	FLYBOAT TRADE		SLOW TRADE		
Year	Captain	Hand	Captain	Hand	Source
	£. s. d.	£. s. d.	£. s. d.	£. s. d.	
1771			2. 1.10.(G)		B'ham Canal Co.
			1. 3. 0.(N)		Estimate based on above
1778			3. 6. 9½.(G)		B'ham Canal Co.
1780			2. 0. per day[1]		*Household Words* p.203
1787			10. 0. 0. per annum		PRO 30/8/283 (considered low)
1791			2. 8. per day		*Birmingham Canal Bill*, 1791
1799			lightermen;- 50. 0. 0. per annum (sic)		PRO 30/8/281
1839			15. 0. per day		*Birmingham Canal Bill*, 1839
			4.10. 0. (G)		*Birmingham Canal Bill*, 1839
			6d. per mile		Ditto, Crowley's slow boats
			2. 5. 0. (G)		Ditto.
1841			1.10. 0. (G but excluding expense of horse)		
					S.C. Sunday trading q.217.
	8. 0. 0.(G)				Ditto q.1053
	9. 0. 0.(G)	8 or 9 shillings			Ditto qq.626-629
	1.10. 0.(N)				Ditto
	5. 5. 0.(G but horse provided)				Ditto q.1163
1853			12. 0.(N)[2]	8. 0.	Oxford Canal Co.
1859			1. 0. 0.(N, Scotland)		Canal Association Minutes
1875			1. 9. 6. (G but		*Factory and*
			1.12. 6. excluding		*Workshop Commission*
			1.13. 6. expense of		1876.
			1. 7. 6 horse)		qq.11274-82
	4.17.6.(G)	1. 0. 0.(N)			Ditto App.C.p123.
	1.17.6.(N)				Ditto
1884			1.10. 0.(N)		*S.C. on Canal Boats Bill*,
			1. 0. 0.(N)		1884, q.1136.
			2. 0. 0.(G)		Ditto q.542-543
			1.15. 0.(N)		Ditto
1890	1.16. 0.(N)	1. 4. 0.			*R.C. on Labour* q.13,643
	1.19. 0.(N)[3]				Ditto
1892	1.11. 8.(N)	1. 3.10.(N)			Ditto, q.17,246.
	1.10. 9.(N)	1. 5. 9.(N)			Ditto, q.15,149
	1. 2. 9.(N)				My estimate based on q.15,475 of *RC on Labour* 1892.
	1.13. 6.(N)[4]				*RC on Labour* q.15,504.
			1. 1. 0.(N)		Ditto, q.17,152
			1. 2. 0.(N)		Ditto
			1. 5. 0.(N)		Ditto, q.17,158.
1905			2.10. 0.(G)		M.O.H. Birmingham.
1906			1.10. 0.(N)		Ditto
1906			1. 5. 9.(N time rate)		1906 *Enquiry*
			1. 9. 2 (N piece rate)		Ditto
1914			1.15. 0.(N)		Vernon Harcourt Lectures

Notes on table 5.4

1. Examples of other wages paid by the same company in the 1780s; carpenter 2/- to 2/8, mason 2/- to 2/6, blacksmith 1/6 to 1/9, labourer 1/2 to 1/6.

2. Examples of other wages paid by the same company in 1853; carpenter 20/- to 24/-, mason 18/-, labourer 12/- to 15/-.

3. Trent Navigation Co. Estimate based on the assumption that trip money of £1 to £1,15s, was divided on a 3/5;2/5 basis between captain and mate.

4. Steam boat captains.

N = net G = gross

Table 5.5. SOME EXAMPLES OF BOATMEN'S WEEKLY EARNINGS IN POUNDS SHILLINGS AND PENCE DURING THE PERIOD 1914 - 1962.

Year	Captain	Hand	Remarks	Source
1914	1,15, 0,(N?)			Vernon Harcourt Lectures
1914	1,15, 0,(N?)			Midland Canal Boatmen's Wages Board
1920	5, 2, 3,(N?)			Midland Canal Boatmen's Wages Board
1920	2,16,10,(N?)			Vernon Harcourt Lectures
1920	3, 4, 5,(N?)			ditto
1921	3, 5, 0,(N?)			Midland Canal Boatmen's Wages Board
1921	12, 0, 0,(G)		family pair	Committee on Living-in
1923	10,15, 0,(G)		FMC motor pair before 5% reduction after 1923 strike	Industrial Court Minutes
1923	5, 3, 9,(G)		FMC single horse boat before 5% reduction after 1923 strike	Industrial Court Minutes
1926	Between £2 and £4 1,10, 0,		Paddington refuse boats for women working alone on same	Chief Canal Boat Inspector, HLG 52/140
1927	2,11, 0,(N)		Aire and Calder[1]	Letter from company to Min
	3, 1, 0,(N)		Aire and Calder[1]	of Labour, LAB 83/2480
1930	4, 0, 0,(N)		Alfred Buck wide boats, Brentford	Alfred Buck and Samuel Smith interview
1930	4, 0, 0,(N)		Emmanuel Smith narrow and wide boats	by Canal Boat inspector, HLG 52/135.
1930	4,10, 0,(N)		ditto	
1936	3, 0, 9,(N)	2, 8, 5,	Boats on the upper Trent	Trent Navigation Co.
1938	8, 0, 0,(G)		family pair for 7 days	Grand Union Canal Carrying Co.
1944	7, 0, 0,(N?)		for 7 days	London Regional Joint Council LAB 83/24
1948	11,15, 7,(N?)			Tim Wilkinson
1956	12, 0, 0,(N)			*Lock and Quay*, June 1956.
1956	14, 0, 0,(N)			ditto
1960	10, 0, 0,(N)			*Lock and Quay*, May 1960.
1962	16, 0, 0,(G)		for half a week	D.Blagrove
	36, 0, 0,(G)		per pair, full week	D.Blagrove

Notes on table 5.5

1. In the same year the same company was paying the following rates (per week) to other employees:
   Porters between 48/- and 57/- Draymen between 48/- and 49/-
   Warehousemen between 48/- and 51/6d, Lock-keepers between 40/2 and 40/3 plus cotton uniform.

N = net G = Gross

Table 5.6 EXAMPLES OF WAGE AGREEMENTS FOR BOATMEN ON LARGER BOATS, 1913 - 1946

Type of vessel	Weekly payment in pounds shillings and pence less tonnage where applicable						
	1913	1920	1923	1927	1932	1936	1946
Large Steamers							
Captain		4. 5. 0.+T	2.15. 0.+T	4.19. 6.	3.10. 0.		5. 5. 0.
Engineer		4. 0. 0.+T	2.11. 0.+T	4. 4. 6.	3. 3. 0.		
Mate		4. 0. 0.+T	2. 4. 0.+T	3.14. 6.	2.15. 0.		4. 0. 0.
Hand over 18 years old				2.19. 6.			3. 5. 0.
Hand under 18 years old							2. 7. 6.
Small Steamers							
Captain	1. 4. 0.+T	4. 5. 0.+T	2.15. 0.+T	4. 4. 0.	3.10. 0.		4.13. 0.
Engineer	1. 5. 0.+T	4. 0. 0.+T	2.11. 0.+T	3.10. 6.	3. 3. 0.		4. 3. 0.
Mate	1. 1. 0.		1. 8. 0.+T	3. 7. 0.	2.15. 0.		3.18. 0.
Dumb boat							
Captain		4. 5. 0.+T			3. 6. 0.+T	3. 3. 3.	4. 3. 0.
Mate		4. 0. 0.+T			2.15. 0.+T	2. 6. 2.	3.18. 0.
Motor Boats							
Captain		2. 0. 0.+T		4. 4. 0.		4. 9. 0.	4. 3. 0.
Engineer		2. 0. 0.+T		3.10. 6.		3.16. 6.	3.18. 0.
Mate		1.10. 0.+T		3. 2. 0.		3. 0. 9.	
Hand		1. 0. 0.+T					
Barges							
Captain	1.16. 0.		3. 9. 0	4. 4. 6.+trip money			
Mate	1.11. 0.		3. 4. 0	3. 4. 6.+trip money			

T = Tonnage allowance e.g. ¼d per ton delivered on top of trip rate.

Source; Ministry of Labour, Wages Board, Collective Agreements, PRO LAB 83,
Companies selected;
1913; Salt Manufacturers, Chester, J.J.Abbott Ltd., Salford and Liverpool,
1920; Lever Brothers, Port Sunlight, John Summers & Sons, Shotton,
1923; Lever Brothers, Port Sunlight, J.J.Abbott Ltd., Salford and Liverpool,
1927; J.Crosfield & Sons, Warrington, W. Gossage & Sons, Widnes,
1932; W.Gossage Ltd., J.Crosfield & Sons,
1936; Trent Navigation Co,
1946; Olympia Oil and Cake Co,Ltd,

It is important to remember that these tables give only random examples of boatmen's wages over a long period and that because of widely differing systems of payment and conditions of trade on different canals there would be large discrepencies between the earnings of one boatman and another in different regions and at different times of the year. The indices on pages 331-2 have been drawn up in order to gain some idea of the movement of money and real wages in the carrying trade during the period covered by this study, and to compare this movement with the movement of average real wages.The scanty evidence available on boatmen's average earnings means that the indices are extremely approximate and do not show the many possible fluctuations which may have been taken place between the dates when data is available. However, a general trend can be discerned.

The tables suggest that many boatmen were relatively prosperous in the 19th century. Money and real wages rose for the first seven or eight decades of the nineteenth century. The fly-trade did less well but in the slow trade, up to 1885, the rise was above the national average. Furthermore, if one compares the above figures with those given by Benson in *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939*,[31] (table 5.11) one sees that boatmen's money wages compared very favourably with those of cotton spinners and coal miners - two of the most well-paid sectors of the working-class. Nevertheless, the wages paid by the Oxford

Fig 5.7 Indices of money and real wages in the canal carrying trade 1840-1940

Flyboat Captains

	1840 = 100		1850 = 100	
Date	Money wages boat captains	Money wages national average	Real wages boat captains	Real wages national average
1840	100	100	100	100
1845		98		
1850		100	100	100
1855		117		95
1860		115		103
1865		126		117
1870		133		118
1875	125	154	111	135
1880	125	147	117	134
1885		149		148
1890	103	163	113	166

Slowboat Captains

	1840 = 100		1850 = 100	
Date	Money wages boat captains	Money wages national average	Real wages boat captains	Real wages national average
1840	100	100		
1845		98		
1850	100	100	100	100
1855		117		95
1860		115		103
1865		126		117
1870		133		118
1875	125	154	111	135
1880		147		134
1885	150	149	156	148
1890	115	163	126	166
1895		162		158
1900		179		180
1905	150			
1900	175			

Slowboat captains

	1914 = 100		1914 = 100	
Date	Money wages boat captains	Money wages national average	Real wages boat captains	Real wages national average
1905	86	89	93	97
1910		94		98
1914	100	100	100	100
1920	172			
1925	163	196	93	112
1930	228	191	145	122
1935	163	185	114	130

Source; boatmen's index compiled from tables 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 above,
National average figures from Mitchel, Wages and the Standard of Living 1 and 2
pp 343-347

Table 5.8 Movement of weekly wage rates in certain industries 1914 - 1920

1914 = 100

	Agricultural labour	coal industry	engineering labour	cotton operative	docker	railmen	Canal boat captains
1914	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1920	270	260	309	259	266	288	171

Source; Mitchel, Labour Force 26,

Table 5.9 Movement of boat captains' weekly earnings 1923 - 1938.

Based on an estimate of an FMC captain's net earnings of £3, 2, 0, in 1923, (Gross earnings for a single horse boat - £5, 3, 9, divided on a 3/5 2/5 basis between captain and mate)

1923 = 100

Date	Boat captains' weekly net earnings	Boat captains' gross earnings for single boat
1923	100	100
1927	90	
1930	129	
1936	98	
1938	77 (based on an estimate)	74

Source; calculated from tables 5,4 and 5,5, above,

Table 5.10 Movement of weekly earnings in certain other industries 1924 - 1938.
1924 = 100

Date	Agricultural labour	coal industry	engineering labour	cotton operatives	railmen
1924	100	100	100	100	100
1930	113	87	104	94	98
1938	123	97.5	113	92	99

Source: *Mitchel, Labour Force 26,*

Table 5.11 "Normal" full-time money wage earnings in selected occupations 1850-1935

Year	Cotton Spinning	Engineering	Coalmining	Agricultural labouring	canal boat captains
1850	23		20	10	20
1880	19	25	21	18	30
1906		28	32	18	29
1924/6	77	51	53	32	80
1935		55	45	35	60

Source; John Benson, "The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939", London, 1989, p.41,

Canal Company in 1853 show that not all boatmen were so well off.

Despite differences of opinion as to the cause of the interruption in the upward trend of Victorian prosperity which occurred around 1890,[32] it is generally agreed that such an interruption did take place. The data contained in the tables above show that boatmen experienced the same downturn in money wages around this time. Between 1900 and 1914 boatmen's earnings seem to have increased by something in the region of 14 per cent but rising retail prices meant that the real increase was only half as much.

It is well known that during the First World War, most industrial workers enjoyed significant increases in money wages. At first, canal labour was left far behind and there was much discontent in the industry. After 1917 however, when inland waterways came under government control, wages rose in what one member of the Canal Association described as "the most reckless fashion".[33] By 1920 they stood, according to R.B.Dunwoody,[34] at 100% above pre-war levels although table 5.7 suggests a lower percentage gain. In any case, the increase enjoyed by boatmen was significantly lower than that in certain other industries and significantly below the increase in retail prices, resulting in a net loss.

During the inter-war period, an initial boom was quickly followed by wage-cuts in the early 1920s. In 1921 an industrial court ruling removed the advances granted to Midlands boatmen in 1920 and a 5% decrease was imposed on Fellows Morton and Clayton boatmen in 1923.[35] However, retail prices were falling so sharply at this time that real wage levels were maintained and even increased between 1921 and 1923. After that wages gradually increased reaching a peak around 1930. Falling retail prices again helped to augment this gain.

Between the mid 1930s and the outbreak of the Second World War, the canal carrying industry experienced something of an upturn. Both the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company and Fellows Morton and Clayton embarked on fairly bold expansion programmes at this time with many new boats being built. However, this burst of optimism was not reflected in boatmen's earnings which fell during the decade by something in the region of 30 per cent. Their money wages continued, on the face of it, to compare favourably with some other industrial workers. For example, the figures given by Benson for cotton spinners, engineering workers and coal miners, (reproduced as table 5.10 above) suggest that even in the mid 1930s, boatmen were still earning a very fair wage. However, one should also bear in mind that the boatman would have worked a considerably longer week than the average worker's 48.9 hours and the irregularity of his

working patterns might mean that some men were significantly worse off than the average figures suggest.

Boatmen on larger boats on rivers and large canals in the North could expect a more regular income. Table 5.6 above shows the weekly minimum each crew member would receive. In many cases a tonnage rate was paid on top of this. The figures show that on all types of boat, both the captain and crew were paid money wages which compared very favourably indeed with other industrial workers and were considerably better than those paid to agricultural workers.

During the Second World War, canals again came under government control. Wage levels rose slightly at this time but some boatmen also benefited from the introduction of a minimum guaranteed weekly wage.[36] During the war, women crews were trained in order to try to remedy the labour shortage. Some of these women complained of the low wage levels. One claimed that the able-bodied would not work for so little but she admitted that an experienced crew could earn a lot more than novices and that when lodging, travelling and incidental expenses were taken into account the wages were probably not very different to those earned in munitions factories.[37]

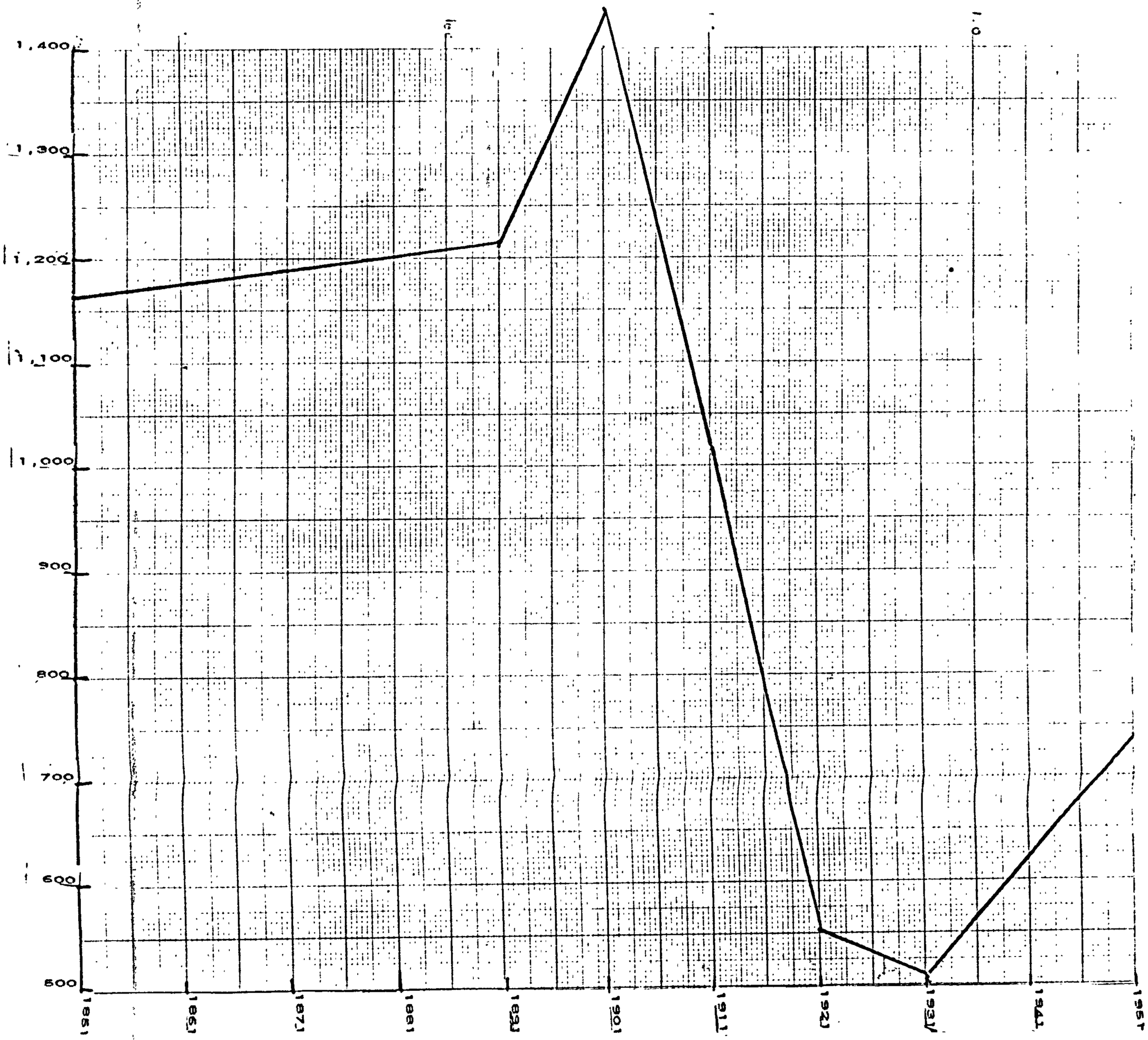
Even in the 1950s and 1960s it was possible, at times, to earn weekly wages far in excess of average industrial

incomes. For example, Blagrove claimed that in 1962, with a pair of boats carrying 40 tons, he and a mate could earn £18 per week each.[38] However, the average industrial weekly wage was earned in about 48 hours and could more or less be relied upon throughout the year. The boatman, on the other hand was still working 70 to 80 hours a week and, despite the introduction during the Second World War of a minimum weekly wage, had to allow for the possibility of earning very little during stoppages which, in winter, could extend to several weeks.

Any assessment of a boatman's standard of living also has to take account of the fact that those who lived permanently on board had no rent, fuel or travelling expenses to find. It is difficult to know how much allowance should be made for such things as poaching from canal-side fields, fishing from the canal itself and "perks" from the cargo which might be used by the boat family themselves or exchanged at locks for other goods. Documentary evidence relating to such income supplements does not exist but boatmen readily admit that it took place.[39]

Given that canal transport is generally thought of as an industry in decline from 1840s onwards, it will no doubt come as something of a surprise to find that many of its employees were relatively well-paid throughout this declining period. Part of the explanation lies in the

Figure 5.1 Productivity in the Canal Carrying Trade, 1851 - 1941.



fact that despite the lack of capital investment and technological innovation, productivity appears to have increased enormously during the nineteenth century. Figure 5.1 is very approximate, being based on tonnage figures used to compile fig 1.2 in chapter 1 above and the figures given in the Census for men employed in the whole of the inland waterways industry. Nevertheless, the general trend can be discerned. It will be noted that up to 1901, productivity increased. Thus it seems that although canal carrying was a declining industry, in the nineteenth century at least, the rate of decrease of tonnage was more than matched by the number of men leaving the industry resulting in a relatively larger amount of income to be spread over an ever diminishing work-force.

5.3 Recruitment and training

The popular picture of the boat community is one of a closed and self perpetuating society which did not attract outsiders. Witnesses at the *Select Committee on Sunday Trading* in 1841 stated that that there was little outside recruitment and that boatmen usually came from boating families.[40] This was also the general opinion of other witnesses at later enquiries.[41]

However, with the great expansion of the carrying trade which took place up to the 1840s, it is obvious that some recruitment of labour outside the industry must have taken

place. Hanson found evidence of agricultural labourers and disenchanted apprentices taking to boating.[42] Two witnesses in 1841 claimed that runaways and petty criminals often went to become boatmen[43] but these opinions may have been influenced by popular prejudice against boatmen.

The Census enumerators' books for Shardlow and Braunston also show that the sons of agricultural labourers, boatwrights and other manual workers sometimes became boatmen. As the labour force, especially in the younger age ranges, contracted, however, outside recruitment may have become negligible. By 1937, labour shortages were again forcing some carrying companies to employ men unused to canal life but they appear to have found it difficult to adapt to the work and way of life. They were described by regular boatmen as a danger to navigation and by Sanitary Inspectors as having proved themselves quite unable to become adapted to the unusual conditions of life on the canal boats.44

Carrying companies had always argued that one reason why the removal of families from the boats would destroy the industry was the impossibility of recruiting labour from outside sources. This seemed to be confirmed during the Second World War when an intensive recruitment drive through the Labour Exchanges failed to produce new boatmen. Against this it should be noted that one Labour Exchange sent twenty

five new recruits to the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company, only two of whom were accepted because the others had been sent singly instead of as complete crew units.[45]

A training scheme for women produced a few crews for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company and the Severn and Canal Carrying Company during the Second World War, and after nationalisation in 1948 the government continued trying to attract new labour and regional canal committees were required to submit recruitment and training schemes. Tim Wilkinson[46] remembered several recruits who were trained by experienced boatmen under these schemes but, he claims, none stayed on beyond the initial few weeks and in the early 1950s the nationalized carrying industry was again complaining of crew shortages. But the arduous nature of the work, the peculiar living conditions, the exclusiveness of the traditional boat people and the dubious future of the canals must all have conduced to make boating a rather unattractive proposition to outside labour.

5.4 Conclusion

Working conditions changed little during the two centuries for which narrow-boat carrying lasted. Irregular, task-orientated work patterns, long hours interspersed with periods of enforced idleness, uncertain pay and arduous manual labour persisted with few concessions to modern technology. Not only the physical conditions, but the whole

organisation and pattern of working remained essentially pre-industrial in form and untouched either by the new work discipline of large manufacturing industry or by the reforming legislation of the period.

Lack of capital investment in modern technology was partly responsible for the failure to modernise and re-organise working practices. Had it been possible to attract capital to the canal system, larger more economically viable boats might have allowed the sub-contracting system to be done away with as it had been on large rivers and estuaries. The work might also have been organised so that men worked a fixed length and were able to return each night to their own homes. But resistance to change came from boatmen and boat-owners alike. Boat-owners saw the old sub-contracting system as the only economically viable way of operating the increasingly out-moded canal system. They also disliked the idea of men working in lengths as no-one would have overall responsibility for the cargo for the entire journey. The attachment each boatman was said to feel for his particular boat together with the tonnage and trip rate system of payment was felt to be the best system of keeping control over a largely unsupervised work-force. The boatmen too, clung to their traditional way of life and work and opposed attempts to introduce legislation aimed at modernising the social conditions within the industry.

Although, as has been shown in the previous chapter, most boatmen retained some link with the shore-based community and were not, therefore, as physically isolated as is usually supposed, this analysis of their working patterns has revealed one way in which the demarcation between them and their fellow workers was very clear. Given the contrast between the boatman's manner of working and the time-discipline of the factory, it is not surprising that many boatmen, especially those of the older generation found it difficult to break away and find alternative employment or to accept change within their own industry. It explains why some who left felt compelled to return to the boats and why the poor working conditions were tolerated for so long and reform resisted. The following comment by an old boatman is a good illustration of this:[47]

> ...you get a good many who can't settle down on the land, I mean a boatman don't like regular work and another thing, if a boatman was to go over to the factory to work they have a foreman over them, which they have never been used to, I mean they have always been used to their own life and their own tinpot way of going about and they won't be told.

Similarly, outsiders found it difficult to adapt to the very different mode of life and work on the canals which left the carrying trade very short of labour at times making it impossible to expand and modernize even when the opportunity arose.

Although the boatman's income remained good throughout the nineteenth century, his status greatly declined. From a

well-paid, trust-worthy and respectable individual in the early nineteenth century, by the 1880s he had come to be regarded by many as something of an outcast. The pre-industrial nature of his work is probably one of the main reasons for this. Thompson[48] claimed that with the introduction of "time-thrift" and factory discipline, workers in occupations where the old pre-industrial rhythms persisted were increasingly seen as time-wasters. Their irregular work pattern was associated with absenteeism, idleness, profligacy and drunkenness and they were ultimately viewed as naturally inferior and lacking in respectability. Most of these accusations were levelled at boatmen at one time or another.

The sub-contracting system, itself a pre-industrial system of work organisation, was fiercely defended by boatmen and canal companies alike until the end of narrow boat carrying. Although it increased the status of the boatman above that of an ordinary wage-earner, something which was noted by the Ministry of War Transport as late as 1943.[49] it made it impossible to impose modern working conditions on the industry.

Although the standard of living for boat people declined after 1930, those who were prepared to work long hours could still earn more than other industrial workers and if they were living on board with no rent, fuel bills or transport

costs to pay they must have found themselves with a comfortable income. This is hard to reconcile with the picture of poverty painted by some observers and indeed by the boat people themselves at times. Perhaps it reflects the ignorance and prejudice which has always surrounded boat people and the claims of the boat people themselves to be too poor to live ashore seem to have been motivated by their desire to keep their families together and preserve their traditional way of life. At any rate, Frank Pick too seems to have noticed this curious anomaly when he commented in his report on canals to the Ministry of War Transport in 1941:[50]

> The Ministry of Labour appear to hold the view that the wages and conditions of employment of boat crews are so unsatisfactory that the employment should not be protected or encouraged until they are set right. Yet practically all staff are paid under agreements between the employers and the T.G.W.U.....the demand for change does not come from the staff engaged but from the extraneous observers in the Ministry of Labour itself.

When asked to define more precisely their objections it appears that what the Ministry of Labour really wanted was an end to the system of living-in and some specific wage apportionment to crew members.

It seems then that the peculiarly anachronistic way of life of the boat people gave the impression to outsiders that their level of income was considerably lower than was actually the case. One descendant of a narrow-boat family has claimed that many boatmen managed to save prodigious

amounts during their working lives and that it was certainly not poverty which kept them from living ashore.[51] However, it is important to keep in mind that boatmen only managed to maintain a reasonable level of income by working hours which were very long indeed compared to those of other industrial workers and by accepting social conditions which would not have been acceptable to those living ashore.

NOTES Work

1. John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939*, London, 1989.

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3. E.P.Thompson, "Time, Work-discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", *Past and Present*, 1967.

4. G.L.Turnbull,"Pickfords and the Canal Carrying Trade, 1780-1850", *Transport History*, VOl 6, Number 1, March 1973.

5. *RC on Labour*, 1892,
   Michael Maloney, q.17284,
   William Speed, q.12109-12111,
   Thomas Fawcett, qq. 15153-15157,
   Joseph Billam, q.15389-15392,
   William Turner, qq.15466-15468,
   William Hough, qq.15587-15595,
   William Chadwick, qq.15697-15699,

6. *Ibid*, q.15469 and q.15473.

7. *S.C. on Sunday Trading*, q.556-7.

8. *S.C. on Sunday Trading*, q.516.

9. Report on the proceedings of the Canal Control Committee - undated, circa July 1919, PRO ref, MT 52/2.

10.Midland Canal Boatmen's Wages Board, terms of settlement with boatmen, 28.5.1920, PRO ref, LAB 83/2494.

11.Industrial Court Minutes, 27.4.1921, PRO ref, LAB 83/2494.

12.Blackburn and District Coal Owners Association, Boatowners Section, 11.8.1947, PRO ref, LAB 83/2483.

13.Shropshire Union Canal and Railway Company, Executive Committee Minutes, minute no.25454, 28.7.1920, PRO ref, RAIL 623/28.

14.North East Regional Joint Council for the Canal Industry, meeting 27.7.45, PRO ref, LAB 83/2479.

15.*Waterways*, staff magazine of British Transport Waterways, May 1960.

16.*S.C. on Sunday Trading*, q.335.

17.D.C.Coleman, "Labour in the English Economy of the 17th Century", *Economic History Review*, VIII, 1956, p.287.

18.David Blagrove, *Bread Upon the Waters*, p.39.

19.*Ibid*, p.23.

20.Committee of Enquiry on Inland Waterways,1920, Minutes of Evidence, q.644, PRO ref. MT 52/12

21.*R.C.on Labour*, 1892, Group B, Vol II, q.15,579.

22.*S.C.on Sunday Trading*, 1841, q.83.

23.The Arkwright Society and Derbyshire County Council, Local History No. 18, Shardlow, 1976. p.12.

24.*S.C. on Sunday Trading*, 1841, q. 22, 84, 109, 740, 577-578.

25.*Ibid*, q.628-629.

26.H.Hanson, *Canal Boatmen, 1760 - 1914*, p.53.

27.Neil Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution*, London, 1959, pp188-9.

28.John Benson, *British Coalminers in the 19th Century; A Social History*, Dublin, 1980, p.72.

29.*S.C. on Sunday Trading*, 1841, q.612-161, 624, see also q.503.

30.South West Region Joint Council for the Inland Waterways Industry, meeting 7.12.1943. PRO ref. LAB 83/2501.

31.John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939*, London, 1989, pp.40-41.

32.For a summary of the various explanations see Charles Feinstein, "What really happened to real wages?; trends in wages, prices and productivity in the United Kingdom, 1880-1913", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., XLIII, 3 (1990), pp.329-355, especially section III.

33.Transcript of a conference between Ministry of Transport and representatives of the Canal Association, 22.7.1920. PRO ref. MT 52/5.

34.R.B.Dunwoody, Vernon Harcourt Lecture, 1920. p.40.

35.Industrial Court Settlement, 853, 20.11.1923. PRO ref. Lab 83/2496.

36.West Midlands Regional Joint Council, agreement of 16.12.1941, referred to in the minutes of a meeting held 22.5.46. PRO ref. LAB 83/2493.

37.Letter to Sir Osborne Mance form Mrs Butson, 22.12.1942. Minute on Ministry of War Transport file re. meeting between Sir Osborne Mance and Mrs Trail, 23.3.1943. PRO ref. MT 52/102.

38.David Blagrove, *Bread Upon the Waters*, p.39.

39.Nigel Jackson, informal interview by W.Freer, 4.5.89.

40.*S.C. on Sunday Trading*, 1841, q.620

41.Written evidence of E.Manning Lewis, General Manager of the Sharpness New Docks and Gloucester and Birmingham Navigation Company to the *Committee on Living-in on Canal Boats*, 1921, PRO ref. ED 11/89.

42.H.Hanson, *Canal Boatmen*, p.52.

43.*S.C. on Sunday Trading*, q.22, q.954.

44.Report by Dr.W.S.Craig to Canal Boat Regulations Committee, Ministry of Health, 3.1.1937, para 4, PRO ref. HLG 52/141.

45.Letter to Sir Osborne Mance, Director of Canals, Ministry of War Transport from J Walley, Ministry of Labour and National Service, 8.3.1943, PRO ref, MT 52/115.

46.Tim Wilkinson, interviewed by W. Freer, 11.8.1988.

47.George Harris, boatman, quoted in D.D.Gladwin, *The Canals of Britain*, 1973, p.112.

48.E.P.Thompson, "Time, Work-discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", *Past and Present*, 1967, pp60, 91 and 95.

49.Unsigned minute to the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of War Transport, 11.5.1943, PRO ref. MT 52/134.

50.Frank Pick report to the Ministry of War Transport, 1941, PRO ref. MT 52/109.

51.Nigel Jackson, informal interview by W.Freer, 4.5.89.

CHAPTER SIX

The Labour Movement and the Canal Boat Community

In recent years there has been a shift of emphasis in labour history away from the efforts of activists within the two main strands of the labour movement, the trade union movement and the labour party. Of more concern currently is a consideration of the failure of the movement to significantly influence the everyday lives of the vast majority of working people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The significance of this shift for the present study is that the vast majority of boat people were to be found within the unorganised sector of the labour force. The main thrust of this chapter, therefore, will be to examine the extent to which unionism had any significant influence on the lives of boat people and to try to ascertain the reasons for its failure to take root within the canal carrying trade.

Not all boatmen remained unorganised, even in the nineteenth century, and it will, therefore, be necessary to trace the development of those organisations to which they did belong, to examine their characteristics and to determine how they fit into the general pattern of union development as delineated by the current state of research in this field.

For some years now, labour historians have been questioning some of the assumptions and interpretations of their

earlier colleagues. A.E.Musson,[1] whilst acknowledging the unique contribution of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *History of Trade Unionism*, criticized its emphasis on the significance of revolutionary Owenitism, and socialist ideology in general, in the development of trade unionism in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. He felt that they exaggerated the contrast between the militancy of that period and the pacifism of the "New Model Unions" which emerged during the third quarter of the century. The classic view that the permanent and continuous unionization of the mass of unskilled labour stemmed from the late 1880s has also been questioned by Musson, together with Hobsbawm, Pelling, John Lovell and H.A.Turner.[2] They stressed that the new mass unionism of the late 1880s had been developing from around the middle of the century and certainly from the early 1870s and was only interrupted by the trade depression which took place in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

Whereas earlier left-wing historians criticized the New Model Unions of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, accusing them of deflecting the labour movement from its path towards political and social revolution by their elitism and concern with purely trade issues, later research has emphasized that such characteristics were nothing new.[3] Emphasis is now placed on the continuing and significant division between craft unions and the rest of the labour he movement. H.A.Turner[4] sought to explain the failure of

unionism to spread to the unskilled and semi-skilled sectors of the labour force in terms of the stultifying affect of the exclusive craft unions or "closed unions" as he dubbed them.

In considering the influence of other factors on the success or failure of trade unionism, the more recent tendency of historians has been to point to the importance of fluctuating trade cycles rather than ideologically determined swings,[5] and to the importance of government support and the relations between employers and unions, rather than the development of an homogenous working-class consciousness.[6]

6.1 The development of trade unions within the inland waterways industry.

Despite the appearance of some attempts at general unionism in the early part of the nineteenth century, the main pattern of trade union development up to 1870 was that of the old established craft unions. Such organisations were concerned with purely trade matters such as wages and conditions of employment. They consisted of the better paid, skilled members of any particular trade and were highly sectional and exclusive. Their bargaining power came not from their numbers but from their insistence on the enforcement of strict apprenticeship regulations and the exclusion of outside labour.

Where trade organisations existed at all within the inland waterways industry before the 1870s, they can be seen to adhere strictly to this pattern. The earliest known trade organisation for inland boatmen is that of the Master Lightermen on the Thames which had existed since 1350. Working Thames watermen had had highly exclusive trade associations since 1789.[7] What little evidence there is of organisation elsewhere within the industry indicates that it existed only among the more highly skilled and highly paid flatmen and watermen of the larger rivers and tideways such as the Mersey, the Weaver and possibly the Humber.

Canal boatmen proper, in this context, fall into the category of semi-skilled or even unskilled labour and so it is not surprising that, along with the great mass of general labour throughout the country, they remained completely unorganised for the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. Indeed, canal boatmen seem never to have had a proper trade organisation of their own. When the goods and canal manager of the North Staffordshire Railway Company, owners of the Trent and Mersey Canal, was asked by the Factory Commissioners in 1876 whether the canal boat "drivers" had any organisation like a trades union, he replied that they had not.[8] Sidney and Beatrice Webb found that at the time of the London Dock Strike in 1889, there had been a society among canal boatmen but that it had no rules or balance sheet. The members were said to have been

disheartened and joined "the new union", presumably the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers Union.[9]

Labour historians such as Hobsbawm, Lovell and H.A.Turner have been keen to stress the development of general unionism from the 1870s onwards, and even from the mid-nineteenth century, but there is no evidence of such a trend amongst canal boatmen. A protection society was formed in 1872 amongst boatmen working between Hull and Nottingham but this seems to have involved only lightermen operating open boats with no cabin accommodation. The original aim of the society was to resist the downward pressure on wages but it evolved into a mere sickness benefit society.[10] Along with many of the new, more general unions formed in other industries in the early 1870s, with the onset of trade depression towards the end of the decade, this lightermen's society collapsed and was not replaced until the formation of the Union of Lightermen and Watermen of the Humber in 1890.[11]

It is well known that the late 1880s form a watershed in labour history with a great move towards mass unionism of the unskilled labour force taking place at this time. Earlier labour historians also stressed the change of tone in unionism from this time with socialism, rather than sectional trade issues, being the key-note among the new general unions. Clegg, Fox and Thompson disagreed,[12] arguing that there was no set pattern among the new unions and that

while some were set up by socialists, some were not and others became socialist unintentionally.

Certainly among canal boatmen, what little unionisation did take place in the nineteenth century dated from this time, and in particular, from the London Dock Strike of 1889. This famous dispute, which began amongst dock labourers in the South-West India Dock, spread rapidly, paralysing the London docks for more than four weeks. It won tremendous popular support and all lightermen, watermen and canal boatmen in the metropolis came out in sympathy. As a result, a number of trade organisations came into existence among boatmen in all the large ports, estuaries and main rivers throughout the country. As can be seen from table 6.1, all of these societies dated from within one or two years of 1889.

The data in this table show that, by the time of the *Royal Commission on Labour* in 1892, over 13,000 men belonged to the various watermen's associations. This figure should be even higher as the table does not show the number of men belonging to the Weaver Watermen's Association and the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourer's Union. Using the 1891 Census figure of 30,848 men employed as inland boatmen, lightermen and watermen, the proportion of inland boatmen unionised at this time appears to be in the region of fifty per cent. This is surprisingly high for the period. It is well known that the official estimate of union membership of

Table 6.1
Unions,Trade Associations and Societies of Boatmen, Lightermen, Flatmen and Watermen

NAME OF ASSOCIATION	DISTRICT COVERED	DATE ESTABLISHED	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP IN 1892
1, Thames Steamship Workers' Union	Thames, London		900
2, Amalgamated Society of Thames Watermen and Lightermen	Thames, London	1872*	6,000
3, Amalgamated Society of Foremen Lightermen of the River Thames	Thames, London	1889	300
4, Non-freemen of the River Thames, Wharf, Dock and Canal Boatmen's Labour Protection Society	Thames, London	1889*	900*
5, United Watermen's Society*	Thames, London		100 members ceded from Non-freemen's Society
6, Non-freemen of the River Thames, Accident and Benefit Society.*	Thames, London	1876*, disbanded 1878*	300*
7, United Bargemen and Watermen's Protection Society	Medway, Kent and Essex	1889	800
8, Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters' Association	Manchester, Runcorn, Liverpool, Rochdale	1889*	1,035
9, Mersey Flatmen's Society	River Mersey	1889	1,100
10,Weaver Watermen's Association	River Weaver	pre-1892	
11,Amalgamated Society of Lightermen and Watermen of the River Humber	Rivers Humber and Trent and parts of Lincolnshire	1890	1,600
12,Watermen and Riverside Labourers' Union	Leeds	1892	120
13,Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union	National	1887	

*Source; Information marked * is from the Webb Collection, Section A, Vol 41, Item 5,*
All other information is from The Royal Commission on Labour, 1892, Volume II Group B, Volume III Group B, except for information on the Weaver Watermen's Association which is from "Weaver Watermen's Association, Working Rules and Rates," PRO ref LAB 83/2508,

1.5 million in 1892 represents less than ten per cent of the employed male population.[13] However, a closer examination of the figures in table 6.1 shows that over 11,000 of the 13,000 plus members were watermen and lightermen, mainly on the Thames, and some on the Mersey and Humber. Thus, just as throughout industry in general, where the craft unions, particularly in engineering, mining and cotton, formed the main bastions of trade unionism during the last decade of the nineteenth century, it was elitist associations of skilled river boatmen which developed and expanded within the inland waterways industry after 1889.

The vast majority of canal boatmen still remained outside the labour movement. Of those that did join, the majority were fly-boatmen on the northern canals and it has already pointed out that such men also formed a sort of elite within the boating trade. Of the men working on slow-boats, very few joined a union or remained in one for long. Ellis Gatley, representing the Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters' Association, whose membership covered the Bridgewater, Rochdale, Leeds and Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire canals, as well as the Mersey itself, told the *Royal Commission on Labour* in 1892 that very few of the family boatmen were members of his union.[14] Joseph Billam of the same union admitted that he knew little of the slow-boat men which indicates that few were members.[15] William Turner, however, also of the same union, did know about the hours of

work and pay on the slow boats, many of which he said were worked by family labour and he claimed to represent them as well as the men on steamers and fly-boats.[16] John Noble, president of the Watermen and Riverside Labourer's Union in Leeds, stated that none of the boatmen who took their wives and children on board to work the boat were members of his union but he indicated that they had been for a short while:[17]

> but after the dispute was over and the men had got the advance, there were many of them who had never belonged to any organisation in their lives before, chiefly of the ignorant class, they left it [the union], I am almost ashamed to own it, we are next to the gipsies, or supposed to be, are the watermen - and these men did not really know what organisation is.

How influential was socialist ideology within any of the watermen's associations which formed after the London Dock Strike? The answer, in the case of most of them, seems to have been not at all. Most were exclusive and desired to be more so, calling for the banning of women from boats and for certificates of competency to exclude outside labour. Only the Watermen and Riverside Labourers' Union in Leeds and the Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters Association appeared to be actively recruiting members from the semi-skilled or unskilled sector of the canal labour force. One would have expected the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union to conform more closely to the image of a general socialist organisation rather than a craft union, but the Goole branch represented only fly-boatmen on the Aire and Calder, the elite of boatmen in that area. Its representative was one of those calling for certificates of

competency for boatmen. He declared himself to be against strikes, a statement which does not seem to have been made merely to gain favour with the members of the Royal Commission who interviewed him since he was also a member of a board of conciliation.[18]

The Watermen and Riverside Labourers' Union seems to have been the only organisation of boatmen which could in any way be described as a general union. Its members included slow boatmen and general labourers working on the quay. Its representative, John Noble, showed some awareness of the idea of working men combining together for the common good of their class rather than for their individual materialist interests. He showed an interest in the education of boatmen's children and speaking of the family boatmen, whose loss to the union he regretted, he said:[19]

> we would try to get the men out of the mire they are in and try to induce them to elevate themselves a little. I think if they were to mix with society it would tend to help them out of their present condition whereas they scarcely ever come in contact with anything that is likely to help them either socially or morally.

But how far was this inspired by socialist ideology and how far mere imitation of middle-class philanthropy? When it came to confronting the employers, Noble showed signs of favouring conciliation rather than revolution. In a previous dispute, he and his executive committee felt that the men had asked for too much and persuaded them to settle for less. Whatever the views of the union executive, the members do not seem to have been inspired by socialist ideology.

Many stayed long enough to claim relief from a distress fund during the worst of the winter and then left. Noble complained that[20]

> when they had bled the society of all they could get when they were in want, then it seems they took no interest in anything and could hardly be coaxed back,

Most of these unions did not survive very long. Those that did, apart from the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union, were of the traditional craft type and consisted of river watermen. The survivors joined the Transport Workers' Federation when it was formed in 1910 (for a full list of affiliated associations see Appendix 5) and were eventually absorbed into the Transport and General Workers' Union.

After the significant expansion of unionism at the end of the 1880s, the onset of trade depression in the 1890s marked a decline in trade union fortunes with employers apparently regaining the upper hand. The first decade of the twentieth century was also a relatively pacific period in industrial relations. It was not until the years following 1910, coinciding with rapidly increasing prices with no accompanying rise in wages,[21] and also with the return of higher employment, that union activity began again to rapidly increase.

Having failed to become significantly involved during the first phase of mass union expansion, there was, once again,

little development in this direction among canal boatmen between 1892 and 1910. Information given by the Transport and General Workers Union to the Ministry of Labour in 1926[22] stated that the union had no record of collective agreements for canal workers prior to 1910 and that the workers were particularly unorganised.[22] From 1912, it stated, workers started to become organised, mainly in the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union, but even then, the strongest membership was amongst maintenance workers and lock-keepers rather than boatmen. The National Union of Railwaymen contained a few canal workers on railway-owned canals[23] but this organisation itself was not formed until 1913.

With the labour unrest caused by deteriorating conditions in the inland waterways industry during the early part of the First World War, the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers Union gained a great deal of influence on the canals. By April 1918 the Canal Control Committee reported that it was the only union representing boatmen[24] and it is clear from the fact that Ernest Bevin represented the canal boatmen at the first meeting of the Midlands Canal Boatmen's Wages Board in May 1920[25] that it now represented the slow boatmen of the narrow canals as well as river boatmen. The comment of a Braunston school headmaster in 1920 that[26]

> since the boatmen have become unionists there has been a marked improvement in the lot of the boat people,

indicates an expanding union influence amongst the men of the long-distance narrow-boat carrying trade by this time. In fact, three years later, the newly formed Transport and General Workers Union were able to bring to a complete halt, for three months, the activities of Fellows Morton and Clayton, the Midland and Coast Canal Company and the Chester & Liverpool Lighterage Company Ltd., thus demonstrating the extent of their influence over the whole of the canal network between London, the Midlands and north-west England.

The Transport and General Workers Union maintained its interest in the canal carrying trade and claimed that membership remained firm. Yet, in some areas, that the men remained largely unorganised even as late as the Second World War can be inferred from a letter from the Airedale Boat Owners Association which complained that[27]

> very few, if any, of the men are in a Union which makes it more difficult to carry out negotiations.

The Transport and General Workers Union represented the interests of all boatmen throughout the country on the Second World War Canal Control Committee and continued to put forward claims for improved pay and conditions on behalf of its members.

Table 6.2

Some Strikes and Lockouts Involving Canal Boatmen, Lightermen, Flatmen and Watermen 1792 - 1938

YEAR	DISTRICT	TYPE OF WORKERS	NO. OF MEN	NO. OF FIRMS	DURATION OF STRIKE	CAUSE	RESULT
1792		salt flatmen			not known		
1796	Manchester	flatmen		1 (Old Quay Co.)	not known	advance of pay	advance granted
1822	London	boatmen		1 (Pickfords)		poor pay	rioters dispersed
1840	Manchester	flatmen		1 (Old Quay Co.)	not known	advance of pay	
1860		boatmen		1 (Shropshire Union)		pay	
1864	Ellesmere Port, Wolverhampton	boatmen		1 (Shropshire Union)		travelling light	rates revised
1871	Staffs.	boatmen		1 (Shropshire Union)	not known	pay	rates revised
1872		boatmen		1 (Shropshire Union)	9 days	reduction of pay	reduction reduced
1873		slow boatmen		1 (Shropshire Union)	strike threatened,		result not known
1876		slow boatmen		1 (Shropshire Union)	not known		
1884	Upper Mersey	steam boatmen			not known	reduction of 4/-	result not known
1889	Thames	lightermen			not known	in sympathy with dockers	
1889	Thames	lightermen			not known	employers not complying with Brassey Award	
1889	Thames	lightermen			3 weeks	in sympathy with wharf dispute	
1890	Trent	lightermen		1 (Trent Navigation Co.)	5 days	pay?	demands acceded to
1890	Trent	lightermen		1 (Trent Navigation Co.)	17 weeks	pay, hours and conditions	men locked out
1890	Kent, Essex	lightermen			8 weeks	against decrease of pay	granted 10% increase and other advances
1890	Kent, Essex	lightermen			2 weeks	conditions of loading	company gave way
1890	Mersey	flatmen			1 day	pay	employers conceded
1891	Mersey	flatmen			1 day	pay	employers conceded
1891	Aire & Calder	boatmen		1 (Aire & Calder Navigation Co.)	4 weeks	pay and manning	demands partially met
1892	Leeds	boatmen			2 weeks	pay	increase conceded
1901	Liverpool	flatmen	300		1 day	pay	revised scale agreed
1902	Runcorn	canal boatmen	70	1	2 days	declined to load boats to capacity	work resumed on employer's terms
1903	Liverpool	flatmen	130	1	3 weeks	advance of wages	strikers replaced
1904	Glasgow	canal boatmen & labourers	180		7 weeks	advance in piece work rates	advance granted
1905	Liverpool	flatmen	200	1	10 weeks	refusal to work with non-union foremen	work resumed unconditionally
1906	Gloucester	watermen	10	1	3 weeks	claim for extra men	2 extra men granted
1907	Tees	tugmen	72	4	13 weeks	uniformity of wages	some men replaced others returned on employers' terms
1908							
1909							
1910							

1911	Port of London	dock workers				pay	increase granted
1912	Port of London	lightermen dockers & other transport workers	9,000		3 months		
	Bowness		13	1	1 week	pay	advance granted
	Swansea	tug-boat mates drivers firemen	25	7	2 weeks	pay	
1913	Liverpool Birkenhead	flatmen bargemen hobblers	500		1 day	increased pay pay for night work	advance of 7½% and other concession agreed
	Tyne	tugboatmen	300	30	5 weeks	overtime pay	modified advance granted
	Liverpool	canal boatmen & porters	930	1	2 weeks	overtime pay	work resumed on on employer's terms
1914	Stourbridge	canal boatmen	40	6	7 weeks	advance in wages	certain advances granted
1915	Clydeside	tugboatmen	168	3	2 days	war bonus and extra pay on Sunday	Modified bonus agreed Sunday pay referred to Board of Trade
1917	Midlands	canal boatmen				pay	award granted
	Preston	canal boatmen dischargers coal tippers	43	5	2 weeks	advance in wages	certain advances granted
	Bridgewater Runcorn Leeds & Liverpool	flatmen			3 days	pay	advance awarded
1918	Tipton	canal boatmen	20		3 days	increased pay	4/6d per week granted
1919	Shropshire	canal boatmen			11 days		
1920	Shropshire	flatmen					
	Port Talbot	tugmen	20		1 day	adjustment of wages to compensate for loss of overtime	modification in hours and allocation of work
	Tyne	tugmen	300		10 weeks	advance in wages	modified advance granted
	Tees	lightermen coal heavers	100		2 weeks	lock out following embargo on firm involved in Tyne dispute	amicable settlement
	Midlands	canal boatmen				pay	increase agreed
1921	Midlands	canal boatmen				against pay reduction	reduction imposed
	Liverpool	flatmen	75	1 (J.Crosfield)	5 days	for reinstatement of inspector dismissed for inefficiency	dismissal suspended for three months
1922	Preston & Kendal	canal boatmen	30			against wage reduction	
	Mersey	tugmen	500		2 weeks	against reduced wages and increased hours	wages reduced hours unchanged
	Hull	tugmen	150	1	11 days	recognition of union	work resumed on employer's terms union not recognized

1923	all narrow canals	canal boatmen	617	3		14 weeks	against reduction of pay	modified reduction imposed
1924								
1925								
1926	G E N E R A L			S T R I K E				
1927	Gloucester	canal boatmen	100	1 (Severn & Canal Carrying Co.)		3 weeks	against change from trip to tonnage pay	tonnage rates established with 25 ton minimum
	Gloucester	canal boatmen	100	1 (as above)		4 weeks	dissatisfaction with above agreement	amicable settlement
1928	Liverpool	bargemen	200			9 weeks	employers refuse to change from daily to weekly pay	arbitrator ruled daily pay to continue but with gradual decasualization
	Thames	lightermen	250	1		1 day	against dismissal of one man and other grievances	work resumed, grievance to receive consideration
1929								
1930	Gloucester	lightermen	20			3 days	against wage reduction	certain reductions imposed
1931								
1932	Gloucester	lightermen	14	1		19 days	against wage reduction	referred to National Joint Council
1933	Swansea	tugboat mates	26			4 days	for operation of full time work	full time work granted
1934	Swansea	tugboat crews	50	3		14 weeks	union recognition	employers agreed to meet union reps
1935	Southend	bargemen	72	4		1 week	increased rate on ballast	demand agreed to
1936	Nottingham Hull, Yorks N, & W, Mids	canal & river transport workers	150	1		19 days	against unfair dismissal, union recognition improved wages & conditions	employee reinstated certain wage improvements granted
	Leeds	canal boatmen	14	1 (Canal Transport Ltd.)		1 week	payment for returning empty	min weekly wage & tonnage agreed
	Swansea	tugmen	17	1		1 day	against return to daily pay instead of weekly	proposal to return withdrawn
	Avon & Severn Ports	bargemen	21	1		2 days	against reductions of pay	work resumed at former rates
	Port of London	lightermen	35	1		1 week	improved working conditions	work resumed unconditionally
	Tilbury	lightermen	40	1		9 days	overtime working	work resumed unconditionally
	Swansea	tugmen	25	2		3 weeks	wages and conditions	agreement reached
	Cardiff	tugmen	35	3		10 weeks	union recognition	union recognized
1937	Port of London	lightermen	22	1		1 day	suspension of 2 men	work resumed on advise of union
	Port of London	lightermen	1000			2 days	refusal to operate barges in above dispute	work resumed on advise of union
	Hull	tugmen	160	2		4 weeks	alleged refusal of employers to meet union	employers agreed to meet union

1938	Birmingham canal boatmen	6	1 (Grand Union Canal Carrying Co.)	1 week	extra pay for new route due to water shortage	work resumed on employer's terms
	Thames lightermen	105		1 day	working rules	work resumed unconditionally
	Thames lightermen	35	1	1 day	dismissal of employee for excessive meal break	employee reinstated but later dismissed

Sources:
1. For disputes between 1792 and 1876, H Hanson, *Canal Boatmen* pp.96-97 and *Canal People*, pp.158-159,
2. For disputes between 1884 and 1892, *Royal Commission on Labour*, 1892, Group B Vol II,
3. For disputes between 1901 and 1938, Ministry of Labour files on strikes and lock outs in the PRO LAB 34 series,

The lack of formal organisation did not prevent the Airedale boatmen mentioned above from tying up their boats in supports of a pay claim and this was generally true of boatmen throughout their history. As early as 1822, a group of Pickfords men caused a disturbance at the City Road Basin in support of a wage claim[28] and in 1864 a group of steerers working for the Shropshire Union Canal and Railway Company struck over a rates agreement.[29] The Trent and Mersey Canal official referred to on page 342 above stated that although there was no trade association among the boat men they had shown some inclination to strike for higher wages. Table 6.2 details all of the strikes and lockouts involving boatmen between 1900 and 1938 and all known disputes during the period 1792 to 1900.

Although most of the disputes concern lightermen, flatmen and boatmen on larger river craft, an increasing tendency for canal boatmen to become involved in strikes can be discerned. Table 6.3 analyses the above data in order to show this tendency more clearly. The divisions within the overall time span have been chosen for their special significance for general trade union history.

Table 6.3
Analysis of Disputes within the Inland Waterways Industry, 1792 - 1938.

Period	Significance of Period in Trade Union History	Number of known disputes Concerning all Boatmen	Number of known disputes Canal Boatmen	Number of disputes Concerning Midlands canal boatmen
1792-1870	Mainly craft unionism	6	3	
1871-1876	Period of union expansion	4	4 (all Shropshire Union Canal)	
1877-1883	Unionism in recession	0		
1884-1892	Great expansion of mass and craft unionism	12	3 (all on northern canals)	0
1893-1899	Unionism in recession	not known		
1900-1910	Pacifist period	7	2	0
1911-1920	Period of great union expansion	19	6	4
1921-1933	Unionism in stagnation or relative decline	14	6	5
1934-1938	Revival of unionism	16	3	2

Source; Table 6,2 above,

It will be noticed that disputes involving canal boatmen started to become more common during the period 1911 to 1938, a period when the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union, The Federation of Transport Workers and later, the Transport and General Workers' Union were turning their attention more and more towards the ordinary canal boatmen. The number of men concerned in these disputes was usually small, that is less than a hundred. Even so, a strike sometimes affected several firms and was quite protracted as in the case of the Stourbridge dispute of 1914 which involved 40 men in six different firms and lasted seven weeks. Such a dispute suggests formal trade union organisation and support rather than a spontaneous conflict of the type more usually found among boatmen in the nineteenth century.

6.2 Union recognition and the development of collective bargaining.

In order to ensure survival and to extend some influence over the everyday life of the labour force, it was essential for the new unions to gain the recognition of the employers. Apart from the Thames, where the situation was somewhat unique because of the existence of The Lightermen's Company, the earliest successes seem to have been on the Aire and Calder Navigation. When John Noble gave evidence to the Royal Commission in 1892, his Watermen and Riverside Labourer's Union at Leeds had been in existence for only a few months but had already been involved in two disputes,

one resulting in a two week strike. Clearly the union executive committee had been involved in negotiating a settlement in the latter because it had persuaded the men and the employers to accept a compromise. The union had also managed to achieve for its members a rate of pay which was higher than that of non-union men indicating recognition of the union by the employers.30

Michael Maloney, in his evidence, gave a clear description of the events which took place during a strike over pay involving his branch of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union at Goole in 1891.[31] The employers obviously preferred to deal with the labour force directly but were not entirely hostile to the union and even offered to allow them to have the Company books examined by any competent accountant. Maloney describes how the employers called their own meeting of the fly-boatmen and balloted them on the question of whether or not to strike, but they did not exclude the union. Union representatives were allowed to speak for the men at the meeting, although there is a suggestion that this was only granted because of pressure from the men:[32]

> I and one of my colleagues went there and the Aire and Calder people allowed us to go and see the men but the men refused to see the employers unless their representatives were there, and we got in along with the representatives of the Aire and Calder people.

The dispute was eventually settled in the men's favour with the union naturally claiming that the men could not have done it without them.[33]

The Trent Navigation Company took a hostile stand towards the union during a dispute in December 1890.[34] It refused to negotiate with either union representatives or the Nottingham Trades Council and locked the men out for 17 weeks. However, a previous protection society formed in 1872, claimed to have had some success in the past in resisting the downwards pressure on wages[35] which implies some sort of inter-action between labour representatives and employers.

In north-west England, relations between employers and unions were more difficult. At Runcorn, it was reported in 1892 that the employers had never amicably met representatives of the Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters' Union and refused to allow union leaders onto the boats to see men who were members.[36] This was also the experience of members of the same union on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.[37]

The data in table 6.2 indicates that labour relations in the Mersey area remained strained in the early part of the twentieth century. Although a dispute involving 300 Liverpool flatmen was successful in achieving a revised pay

scale after only one day, 130 Liverpool flatmen striking for increased pay in 1903 were replaced and in two other disputes involving flatmen and canal boatmen in the area, work resumed on the employers' terms, the employers in one case successfully resisting the men's refusal to work with non-union labour.

Two great shows of strength by The Transport Workers' Federation in the London dock strikes of 1911 and 1912, despite the ultimate failure of the latter, did much to force union recognition onto reluctant employers. In some areas, however, as table 6.2. shows, the struggle was to continue for several decades with some employers in Hull still allegedly refusing to meet union representatives in 1937. When the Ministry of Transport set up a Committee in 1939 to regulate the use of inland waterways during war-time, it was accepted at an early stage that the Transport and General Workers Union was the principal representative of canal labour.[38]

The data in table 6.4 has been compiled from Ministry of Labour files to show the development of collective bargaining in the inland waterways industry. Only the earliest agreement with any particular employer is shown and those agreements with employers of canal labour other than boatmen have been excluded.

Table 6.4

Earliest Collective Agreements with Boatmen in the Inland Waterways Industry, 1912-1943*

YEAR	DISTRICT	EMPLOYER	UNION	LAB 83 PIECE NUMBER
1912	Aire & Calder	Aire & Calder Nav,Co,	None mentioned	2480
1913	Northwich & Winsford	Various salt traders	Weaver Watermen's Association	2508
1919	Weaver	Brunner Mond & Co, Ltd,	Weaver Watermen's Association	2507
1920	Midlands	coal merchants & others represented by the Midlands Canal Boatmen's Wages Board	National Transport Workers' Federation	2494
	Port Sunlight	Lever Bros, Ltd,	None mentioned	2488
	Shotton	John Summers & Sons	None mentioned	2490
	Mersey	United Alkali Co,Ltd,	Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers Union	2487
1923	Port Sunlight	Lever Bros,Ltd,	Transport and General Workers' Union, (TGWU)	2488
	All narrow canals	Fellows, Morton & Clayton,	TGWU	2496
	Manchester	J,J,Abbott Ltd,	TGWU	2505
1924	Liverpool, Ellesmere Port,	Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Co,	None mentioned	2486
1924	Chester	Chester & Liverpool Lighterage Co,	TGWU	2489
		Harris Ltd,	None mentioned	2489
1925	Manchester	C,T,Faulkner Ltd,	TGWU	2505
	Weaver	Salt Manufacturers' Association, Craft Owners' Committee	Weaver Watermen's Association	2509
1926	Railway owned canals	various railway companies	National Union of Railwaymen	2502
1927	Severn and S,W,Midlands	Severn & Canal Carrying Co,	TGWU	2506
	Warrington	J,Crosfield & Sons	TGWU	2484
	Widnes	W,Gossage & Sons	TGWU	2485
1936	Leeds & Liverpool Canal	Canal Transport Ltd,	TGWU	2481
	Trent	Trent Navigation Co,	TGWU	2492
1943	Formation of Joint National Council for the Inland Waterways Industry,			

Source; Notice of collective agreements sent to the Ministry of Labour, PRO ref LAB 83 (for piece numbers see column 5 above)

The table shows that once again, the earliest progress was made on the Aire Calder Navigation. The agreement reached was a fairly simple one, concerned with little other than rates of pay, and seems to have been made directly with the men, no union representation being mentioned.[39]

From this data, one can discern that by the time collective bargaining began to be effective in the industry, the smaller regional associations had largely disappeared or amalgamated with the larger general labour unions. The one exception is the The Weaver Watermen's Association which continued to be influential in the salt producing district of Cheshire. According to Ministry of Labour records, this Association, which had been in existence since before the dock strike of 1889, was the first trade organisation in the inland waterways industry to negotiate a formal collective agreement. The agreement was quite complex and covered not only pay but such things as restrictions on the number of consecutive nights a crew might be required to work, regulations and instructions for loading and discharging cargoes, and the provision of a meal break. Fines were imposed on any members colluding with employers and others in the evasion of these provisions. The Association did become affiliated to the National Transport Workers' Federation but continued to be the leading union force in the area even after formation of the Transport and General

Workers' Union in 1923. In 1926 it amalgamated with the TGWU and lost its independent identity.[40] The agreement made between the Association and the Craft Owners' Committee in 1925 remained in force but was superseded in 1930 by a new agreement negotiated by the TGWU.[41]

The growing influence and success of the Transport and General Workers' Union as a negotiating body for canal labour can be traced through the number of agreements it made with employers throughout the 1920s in all the important canal carrying districts of England. The Trent Navigation Company seem to have been one of the last canal employers to hold out against it with a collective agreement not being reached until 1936 and then only after independent arbitration.

Between 1917 and 1920, growing discontent among Midlands boatmen produced several short strikes and eventually resulted in the formation of the Midlands Canal Boatmen's Wages Board. This body, which was formed on 21st May 1920 in order to settle a pay dispute, consisted of 12 representatives of ironmasters, coal merchants and other traders using the canal, and 12 labour representatives led by Ernest Bevin of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union. Its decisions covered 1,300 men employed on horse-drawn barges engaged in the carrying of coal from collieries to works and power stations and the carriage of

brick, stone, lime, slag ashes and pig iron.[42] It continued to meet to negotiate agreements on pay and working conditions throughout the inter-war years and its representatives formed part of the West Midland Joint Council for the Inland Waterways Industry which was formed in 1943.[43]

The trend within industry in general was for collective bargaining over substantive agreements to be conducted on a local or district basis for the first two decades of the twentieth century. The First World War, largely as a result of government control of key industries, brought about a widening of agreements and a move towards nation-wide collective bargaining. In the inland waterways industry, however, collective agreements remained very much local affairs until as late as the Second World War.

Table 6.4 shows that the Transport and General Workers' Union negotiated separate agreements with each individual employer and there was little progress towards national or even regional negotiations and agreements. For example, in 1927, agreements on pay were reached with two companies in the Mersey area, J. Crosfield & Sons of Warrington and W.Gossage & Sons of Widnes.[44] Both these companies employed steamer captains but the weekly pay agreed for these men with the former company was £4 19s 6d., whereas with the latter it was £4 4s 0d.

One of the obstacles to uniformity was, of course, the variety in size and type of vessel and the difficulty of the waterway to be negotiated, but even in the narrow-boat carrying trade, where boats of a similar size and tonnage were employed, pay agreements between different companies varied. In 1924, the Chester and Liverpool Lighterage Company were paying narrow boatmen 2/1¾d. per ton plus trip money for the journey between Ellesmere Port and Wolverhampton, whereas Fellows Morton and Clayton were paying only 2/1d per ton plus the same amount of trip money for the same journey. Both these companies had negotiated their rates of pay with the TGWU.[45]

The Canal Control Committee, set up by the Board of Trade in March 1917 to take control of the inland waterways during war time, brought a degree of standardization to the canals but it had jurisdiction only over the canal companies themselves and later over seven of the major carrying companies. Many carriers and the boatmen employed by them remained outside its control. Although it did concern itself with labour questions such as recruitment and food shortages for canal employees,[46] it initially avoided getting involved in the question of boatmen's pay and an application made to it by the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourer's Union in 1917 for a pay increase for flatmen and narrow boatmen was ignored.[47] The Committee members did consult Harry Gosling on other labour questions but there was no

union representation on the Committee, although regional sub-committees did include labour representatives.[48] Eventually the pressure to settle pay questions became irresistible and in 1919 an agreement on hours and pay for all canal employees under the jurisdiction of the Committee came into effect. Hours for narrow-boatmen remained unaffected but they were granted an increase of thirty three and a third per cent over pre-war net wages.[49]

The Whitley Report, in 1917, recommended the setting up of joint industrial councils made up of representatives of employers and workers on a national or regional basis to resolve labour questions. A few councils were founded but the inland waterways industry did not take up this opportunity, probably because the Canal Control Committee was already in existence. When the Committee was dissolved in 1920, however, no national or regional negotiating body took its place and it was not until the setting up of the National Joint Council for the Inland Waterways Industry in 1943 that negotiations were conducted on anything broader than a company by company basis. Regional joint councils were also set up at this time and the TGWU was fully represented. Labour questions were still negotiated on a regional basis but there was close national co-ordination of agreements on hours, pay and other conditions of employment for long and short distance boatmen.[50]

6.3 The effect of union activity on the everyday life of boat people

Before 1889, trade organisations had little effect on the lives of most canal boatmen other than to perpetuate the deep division between them and the flatmen and watermen of the main rivers and estuaries.

From the late 1880s, a few were able to obtain friendly benefits from some of the unions. John Noble's Watermen and Riverside Labourers' Union offered relief to members from a distress fund during the harsh winter of 1890/91. This seems to have been exceptional however. Information collected for the *Royal Commission on Labour* in 1892 lists no dock or watermen's organisations offering distress benefits. None had funds for superannuation or unemployment benefit either but one watermen's organisation offered sickness benefit. Most held funds for dispute and funeral benefits and three had accident benefit funds. Most canal boatmen, however, would not have been affected by any such benefits.

From the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, some unions were successful in resisting the downward pressure on wages. This too, however, affected mainly lightermen and fly-boatmen. Indeed, to judge from John Noble's evidence, many slow-boatmen were indifferent to the effect union membership could have on their money wages. He claimed that his members received a higher rate of pay than

non-union members, yet this fact had failed to keep slow-boatmen and family boatmen in the union. Not until the inter-war years of the twentieth century did trade unionism begin to have an effect on the incomes of a significant number of boatmen through collective agreements.

One form of union activity could have a dramatic, if intermittant, effect on the lives of boat people whether they were union members or not. This was the industrial dispute, especially where this resulted in a strike. However, before the First World War, strikes of canal boatmen seem to have been infrequent. Although there were more from 1914 onwards, most involved only a small number of men. The amount of disruption caused throughout the canal carrying trade as a whole was, therefore, small, although it is worth noting that most strikes were at least partially successful, resulting in improved wages or conditions for the men.

The biggest dispute organised by a trade union and concerning only canal boatmen was the strike of 1923. This strike broke out on August 13th, 1923 and lasted for fourteen weeks involving 684 men working mainly for Fellows Morton and Clayton Ltd., but The Chester and Liverpool Lighterage Company, and The Midlands and Coast Canal Carrying Company also became involved. The dispute arose when Fellows Morton and Clayton proposed a reduction in

boatmen's rates of pay averaging 6.47 per cent. The resulting strike brought to a halt virtually all long-distance traffic on the canals between London, the Midlands and north-east England. Eventually, the dispute was taken to arbitration and the Industrial Court imposed an adjusted reduction of 5 per cent to take effect in two equal instalments on 19th November and 18th December 1923.[51] The union claimed this as a victory since they had succeeded in sustaining a lengthy strike involving a significant number of men by canal boat standards, they had won recognition, arbitration and a revision of the employers' proposals. Nevertheless, the families involved must have seen it as rather a hollow victory.

From the time of the First World War onwards, another form of union activity was more influential in the everyday life of boat people. This was the development of collective bargaining within the industry which gradually brought about improvements such as increased pay in lieu of a reduced working week, demurrage payment, a minimum weekly income and the recognition by employers of crew members other than the captain.

One other event involving the Transport Workers' Federation and later the Transport and General Workers' Union cannot be ignored in this context. This was the launching, in 1919, of a National Programme for Canal Workers and a campaign to

abolish the practice of living-in on canal boats. The National Programme contained six major proposals[52] concerned with the agreement of pay rates, minimum guaranteed weekly rates for captains and mates with tonnage rates added on, a forty eight hour working week and the introduction of all-male crews on all boats. This programme made little headway but the campaign to abolish living-in, although ultimately unsuccessful, had a major impact on the canal world.

The campaign was opened in November 1919 with a deputation to the government from the Transport Workers' Federation, headed by Ernest Bevin and Harry Gosling.[53] The government was represented by the President of the Board of Education and officials of the Ministries of Transport and Health. Following this, an inter-departmental committee of enquiry was set up with Neville Chamberlain in the chair. The result was a major investigation into the social conditions of canal boat life with many of the disadvantages thereof being brought to public attention for the first time. The committee's recommendations, which included that children should be prohibited from living on the boats, were not implemented. The union did not, however, give up. Its officials continued to harangue central government departments about the plight of the boat people and in 1929, its leader, Harry Gosling, by then a Labour M.P., introduced a Private Members' Bill which proposed to remove children from the boats during school term time.[54]

By 1931, the Bill had foundered, Harry Gosling was dead and canal boat life began to return to the oblivion from which it had emerged. For over a decade, however, it had been subjected to unprecedented official scrutiny and the issue had stirred up strong emotions among the boat people themselves. The initiative to try to improve the social conditions on the canals by destroying the traditional way of life of the boat people was one which the union took without the support of the people involved. Although Gosling at first claimed to have the support of the boat people for his campaign, he was eventually forced to admit that this was not so. When the Private Members' Bill reached the committee stage, a group of Paddington boat women took the opportunity of letting committee members know directly, and in no uncertain terms, that they were strongly opposed to it. Thus, in this instance, although the union had a definite impact on the lives of boat people over a period of some twelve years, it was an influence which was unwelcomed by the people concerned and one which was imposed upon them from outside.

6.4 Reasons for the failure of unionism among boat people

John Benson has categorized the reasons for the failure of unionism to organise unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the nineteenth century as follows:[55]

1. Union policy - i.e. the exclusiveness of craft type

organisations.

2. The hostility of employers - i.e the power exercised by employers over a poorly-paid and deferential work-force.
3. Economic and social factors in traditional sectors of industry, for example, the resilience of casual employment, the persistence of small units of production, the strength of kinship, neighbourhood and community ties and the absence of class consciousness.

The apparent reasons for the failure of unionism among boat people fit very well into this categorization.

Firstly, most of the unions which did exist for boatmen in the nineteenth century had policies which deliberately excluded canal boatmen. Those organisations which did admit them confined themselves to the more highly regarded, if not more highly skilled, sector of the industry, the fly-boatmen, and most of them wished to make boating more exclusive.

Because of the pattern of ownership within the industry, i.e. a large number of small boat-owners, less is known about the attitude of employers within the carrying trade to the unions. However, this pattern of ownership in itself probably militated against union organisation. With the labour force dispersed over a wide geographical area and over a number of different employers each with their own rates of pay and conditions, the difficulties of uniting the

men in significant numbers to fight for improvements can easily be imagined.

Furthermore, the relationship between employer and employee in this connection is crucial. In small family carrying concerns, good labour relations could be fostered through close personal interest and long association. John Griffith and Samuel Barlow were two such firms where the employers themselves had been boatmen and could relate more easily to the needs of the labour force. The Grand Union Canal Carrying Company was said in 1943 to have an official who "travelled up and down the cut and understood the men's point of view".[56]

A strong element of paternalism can be detected in the relations between employer and employee in some carrying companies. Richard Heath, the Stourport carrier, told the *Select Committee on Sunday Trading* in 1841 that where he found the boat-hands to be men of good character he helped them to advance themselves by making them a loan for the purchase of horses (boat-captains were often responsible for providing their own horse at this time) and by promoting them to captain.[57] The men of the Severn and Canal Carrying Company were said, in 1920, to look upon their general manager Mr Danks "as a father" because he took such a personal interest in them.[58] This statement, made albeit by a relatively independent witness, was nevertheless meant to

convince a government enquiry of the benevolence of canal employers and may not be entirely reliable.

Long service and loyalty to an employer, both signs of good labour relations, are said to have been common amongst boating people. Although there is little evidence relating to individually named employers, two witnesses to the 1841 *Select Committee on Sunday Trading*[59] testified to the fact that boat captains often served the same company for twenty years or more. Rundle, the captain of a Grand Junction Canal Company fly-boat in which Hollingshead travelled in 1858 claimed to have served Pickfords for most of his fifty years on the canal[60] and references to the retirement of elderly boatmen after whole lifetimes of service to the company are quite common in the minute books of the Shropshire Union Canal Company.[61] Given the minimal recruitment of outside labour - many boat families having been in the trade for several generations - the exclusiveness of the boating community and the attitude of the general population towards them, one would expect strong loyalties to develop between the boat people themselves and between them and any reasonable employer.

Carrying companies were not known for their generous provision of employee welfare but something about the nature of the relationship between employer and employee can be discerned from the treatment of the latter by the former at

times of hardship. In 1879, the Shropshire Union Canal Company made advances of pay to its boatmen during frost, although these had to be repaid out of future earnings,[62] and by the 1880s the Trent Navigation Company was paying its boatmen one pound a week during frost stoppages.[63] By the twentieth century, such provision was common. Even the owners of the Paddington refuse boats, who were frequently berated during the 1920s by the Chief Canal Boat Inspector for completely neglecting the welfare of their labour force, were said to help boatmen over hard times such as frost and drought.[64] There are also frequent references in the Shropshire Union Canal Company Board minutes to elderly and infirm boatmen being granted a small pension at a time when no pension scheme existed.[65]

Even where good industrial relations did exist, disputes arose, but it is significant that the boatmen were not treated as harshly as they might have been. When a strike of Shropshire Union Canal Company employees broke among railwaymen, shore staff and canal boatmen on 26th September 1919, the Company did not turn the strikers out of their boats where these were also family homes but instead brought in open railway boats to try to keep traffic moving. Horses were fed and looked after during the strike, sometimes by the strikers, which suggests relations between employer and employee were not too bitter even during dispute.[66]

The Grand Union Canal Carrying Company, founded in the early 1930s, appears to have been a model employer. John Miller, the chairman of the parent company, The Grand Union Canal Company, had a very enterprising and progressive approach towards management. The Company set up its own industrial relations machinery in the form of a Conciliation Board during the 1930s[67] although this became redundant when National and Regional Joint Councils for the Inland Waterways Industry were established. As far as is known, the Grand Union was the only private carrying company to try to incorporate improvements to the cabin accommodation in the design of new boats or to envisage the end of the family labour system.[68]

The Company took a particular interest in the welfare of the boat people during the Second World War and this was noted and commended by officials of the Ministry of Health.[69] The Company were the only carriers to introduce schemes to supplement boatmen's rations with "packed foods"[70] and extra tea and sugar was supplied free of charge.[71] Dried milk and vitamin supplements were distributed through their depôts[72] and the Company helped employees obtain travellers' vouchers for medical treatment and other welfare entitlements.[73] The Company paid a small honorarium to Sister Mary Ward at Braunston for her medical services to boat people, the only carrier to do so, and contributed between 50 and 100 per cent to the men's Hospital Fund subscriptions.[74]

On the face of it, relations between boatmen and employers were worse in the larger companies employing men on large boats and fly-boats and it was among such companies that the majority of unionised men were to found. Witnesses before the *Royal Commission on Labour* in 1892 complained about Sunday working without extra pay and the length of hours which men were required to work without rest. Several labour representatives testified that it was a common thing for such boatmen to work 100 hours per week and up to 70 hours without proper rest.[75] Boatmen, particularly in the Mersey district, had asked employers to grant the men 6 hours rest after every period of 36 hours work, but most had refused to do so.[76] Employers were said to regard the men as being entirely at their disposal day and night, for 364 days a year.[77]

Other employers exploited boatmen in ways similar to those of the butties in the mining industry as this account from a Lincolnshire Keelman shows:[78]

> It is a common thing for the keeper of a public-house to combine with his business of publican that of a broker for canal boats and other river craft, with the result that the waterman who can empty the greatest number of pint pots down his throat in a given time, or who is the most successful in running up a score at the brokers' swipe shop, is also the most successful in obtaining a remunerative cargo; and it sometimes happens that if the broker is not a publican himself, he is in league with someone else who is and there is an understanding between them to fleece the keelman as long as he has a shot left in his locker. Now I believe there is a law prohibiting the payment of wages in a public house; why not also make it illegal to pay freight in a public house?

There were also accounts of bad employers who tried to avoid complying with the requirements of the Canal Boats Acts.

This same witness claimed that some firms used to[79]

> blackmail their men on every opportunity and told the men openly that if the sanitary authorities compelled them to cause their cabins to be painted as required by the Canal Boat Act, the firm would deduct the cost of painting from the men's share of freight.

Llewellyn, the Chief Canal Boat Inspector alleged in 1929 that some refuse boat-owners, realizing that there was no Canal Boat Inspector in the Kensington District, had sent their worst boats to Harrow Road instead of Paddington to avoid prosecution.[80]

Michael Maloney, representing the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers Union in the Goole district[81] claimed that boatmen were unfairly treated by employers over cargo handling. He complained that men were held to account for goods but could not keep a proper tally while they were being loaded as they had themselves to work. If they were a bag or two short when they got to Leeds they were made to pay for it, whereas if they were a bag or two over, the Company took the extra and did not allow it to compensate for the times when they were short. He quoted the case of a boatman, who, finding himself one bag over had kept the extra to make up the cargo on some future occasion when he found himself short. This came to the notice of his employers and he was accused of stealing it.

One should, however, guard against drawing the conclusion from this evidence that boatmen in the slow trade were relatively content whilst their colleagues in the fly-trade and on larger boats suffered harsh and unfair conditions imposed by tyrannical employers. To some extent it must be the case that the latter complained more simply because, by belonging to a trade organisation, they had the means to do so.

Two of the factors working against union organisation identified by A. Fox amongst outworkers in the boot and show trade are particularly relevant to boatmen:[82]

> isolation and low bargaining power,[and]...addiction...to the redeeming factor of independence and freedom from authority and discipline;

To this must be added ignorance. Pelling has drawn attention to the fact that socialist ideas were more likely to appeal to members of craft type unions because they were more literate.[83] Boat people who lived wholly or mainly on board were particularly disadvantaged educationally. This was increasingly so from the end of the nineteenth century when more and more working class people were receiving at least some elementary education. Furthermore, although the tendency now is to emphasize other factors such as government support and employer relations in the development of trade unionism, it has been common to draw a connection between unionisation and the fostering of class-

consciousness, a phenomenon which would obviously be more likely to develop among the literate and the articulate. Their pre-industrial way of life and work and the close-knit community which they formed all militated against the growth of a more general working-class consciousness among boat people.

During the general turmoil of industrial unrest which arose during the First World War, the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union did gain increasing support from canal boatmen. Given the deteriorating state of the trade on the canals at this time and the resulting affect on pay and conditions it is not surprising that more of the men were attracted to an organisation which offered to help. However, although this union and its successor, the Transport and General Workers' Union continued to recruit boatmen and represent them in negotiations with employers, few if any boatmen became activists within the union. One of the reasons for this must surely have been the unions' policy on family labour. One cannot expect boatmen, who wanted to preserve their old traditional way of life and work, to feel much enthusiasm for an organisation whose aims appeared to be at direct odds with what they saw as their own interests.

6.5 Conclusion

Although craft-type unions developed among men working on the larger vessels of the northern canals, trade unionism

was unable to gain much of a foothold among the boat people of the slow-trade until the second or third decade of the twentieth century. As in other aspects of their life and work, boat people remained isolated from the developments which encouraged the unionisation of other sectors of the working classes. Indeed, in some ways, the aims and interests of the unions and those of the boat people seemed to be at odds with each other with the former wishing to abolish a way of life to which many boat people clung tenaciously. The union campaign to abolish living-in may even have strengthened the determination of the boating community to preserve it. A few positive things may have come indirectly from this campaign. The official attention paid to boating life at this time and the fear of the employers that family boating was indeed about to be abolished did bring about a few minor improvements such as the floating school set up by the Grand Junction Canal Company in conjunction with the London City Mission.

However, on the whole, the insistence of the boat people on maintaining their traditional pre-industrial working practices made it difficult for the unions (or anyone else) to bring about much improvement in the lives of these people. They were unable to effect any improvements in living conditions or educational opportunity and did little to improve or modernise working conditions. Pay seems to have been the only area in which they were able to achieve

any measure of success. Whilst the boatmen no doubt welcomed this, high-pay was less relevant to boat people than it was to other working class people whose lives in the twentieth century were becoming more materialistic and acquisitive. In short, the aims and activities of trade unionism seem to have been largely irrelevant to the everyday lives of boat people.

NOTES The Labour Movement and the Canal Boat Community

1. A.E.Musson, *British Trade Unions, 1800-1875,* (1972), pp.29-35 and
   A.E.Musson, *Trade Union and Social History,* (1974), pp. 15-21.

2. A.E.Musson, *Trade Union and Social History,* (1974), p.64.
   E.J.Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men,* (1964), Chs. 10-11.
   H.M.Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism,* (1963) pp. 72-7.
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30, *R.C. on Labour*, 1892, Group B, Vol, II, qq.17152-17160, See especially q.17160, "they receive the old rate of wages [now] that was in existence before the Society got them the advance."

31, *Ibid*, qq.17226-17233.

32, *Ibid*,q.17233.

33, *Ibid*,q.17261.

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40,Information given by Mr, Wood, organiser for watermen and riverside workers, TGWU, to the Ministry of Labour, 16,12,1926, PRO ref LAB83/2509,

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43,West Midlands Joint Council for the Inland Waterways Industry, minutes of the first meeting, 21,4,1943, PRO ref LAB83/2493,

44,PRO ref LAB 83/2484 and LAB 83/2485,

45,Chester & Liverpool Lighterage Company agreement dated 8,1,1924, PRO ref LAB 83/2489,
Fellows Morton and Clayton agreement dated 23,1,1923, PRO ref LAB 83/2496,

46,For example, Canal Control Committee meeting minutes, 8,6,1917, 15,6,1917, 22,2,1918, PRO ref MT 52/1,

47,Canal Control Committee meeting minutes, 26,10,1917, PRO ref MT52/1,

48,Meeting held at the Ministry of Shipping re recruitment of labour, 8,6,1917, PRO ref MT 52/1,

49,Weekly report to the Board of Trade by the Canal Control Committee, 13,8,1919, PRO ref MT 52/3,
Report on proceedings of the Canal Control Committee since its last meeting on 15,11,1918, PRO ref MT 52/2,

50, Some minutes of the Regional Joint Councils can be found under the following references;

West Midlands	LAB 83/2493
London	LAB 83/2498
North West	LAB 83/2483
North East	LAB 83/2479
South West	LAB 83/2501

51,Industrial Court Ruling, 853, 23,11,1923, PRO ref, LAB 83/2496,

52, *The Record II*, June 1923,

53,Minutes of the Deputation, Board of Education, 12,11,1919, PRO ref, ED 11/88,

54.For a fuller discussion of this campaign and the Private Members Bill, see Chapter 8 of this thesis.

55.John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939*,(1989) p.190.

56.Interview between Mrs Trail and the Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of War Transport, 10.6.1943, PRO ref MT 52/134.

57.*S.C. on Sunday Trading*, 1841, q.624.

58.Committee of Enquiry into the Practice of Living-in on Canal Boats, 1921 qq.1730-1731.

59.*S.C. on Sunday Trading*, 1841, qq.83 and 503.

60.John Hollingshead, "On the Canal", *Household Words*, 18 Sept 1858, reprinted 1973, pp. 28-29.

61.For example, William Rush aged 74, in the employment of the Company for 57 years, Officers Conference Minutes 23204, 28.7.1920, PRO ref RAIL 623/28.

62.Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company, Executive Committee Minute Book, 1879, minutes 12669, 12731, PRO ref RAIL 623

63.*R.C. on Labour*,1892, Group B Vol II, q.13,644.

64.Memo from Llewellyn to Ross of the Ministry of Health 5.6.1929, PRO ref HLG 52/140.

65.See for example note 61 above.

66.Shropshire Union Railways and Canal Company, Executive Minutes, 25301, 8.10.1919, PRO ref 623/28.

67.London Regional Joint Council for the Inland Waterways Industry, minutes of a meeting held 23.4.1945, PRO ref LAB 83/2498.

68.Report by R.F.Evans, Ministry of Health, on an inspection of new boats being built for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company, 17.1.1935, PRO ref HLG 52/141.

69.Report by N.B.Battenbury, Ministry of Health, on visits to various canal carrying company depôts, 31.1.1944, PRO ref HLG 52/1094.

70.*Ibid.*

71.Minute on Ministry of Health file dated 26.10.1944, PRO ref HLG 52/1094.

72.Report of Borough of Heston and Isleworth Public Health Department, 3.7.1946, PRO ref HLG 52/1094.

73,Letter from Grand Union Canal Carrying Company to Ministry of Health, 31.1.1944, PRO ref HLG 52/1094.

74,Report by N.B.Battenbury, Ministry of Health, on a visit to various canal carrying company depôts, 31.1.1944, and a letter dated 18.4.1944 to Battenbury from J Saunders, Regional Commissioner of Civil Defence, Birmingham (who accompanied Battenbury on his visit), PRO ref HLG 52/1094.

75,*RC on Labour*,1892,
Michael Maloney, Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers Union, Goole, q.17284,
William Speed, Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters Association, qq.12109-12111,
Thomas Fawcett, Amalgamated Society of Lightermen and Watermen of the River Humber, qq.15153-15157,
Joseph Billam, Amalgamated Society of Lightermen and Watermen of the River Humber, qq.15389-15392,
William Turner, Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters Association qq.115466-15468,
William Hough, Watermen's Association, Cheshire, qq.15587-15595,
William Chadwick, Mersey Flatmen's Association, qq.15697-15699.

76,Ellis Gatley, Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters Association, q.15206,
William Speed,Upper Mersey Watermen and Porters Association, q.12141,
William Chadwick, Mersey Flatmen's Association, q.15704.

77,William Speed, qq.12150-12151.

78,*Ibid*, q.15042.

79,*Ibid*.

80,Memo from Llewellyn to Ross, Ministry of Health, 1.10.1929, PRO ref HLG 52/140.

81,*RC on Labour*, 1892, qqq.15282-15283.

82,A Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives*, (1958), p.26, (quoted in John Lovell, *British Trade Unions, 1875-1933*, (1877), p.19.)

83,H.Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, (1968), p.18.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Welfare Provision - State Intervention and the Contribution of Employers and Voluntary Agencies. Part 1. 1840-1914.

The subject matter of this chapter falls within the field of social policy history and the history of administrative development. Debate about the latter dates from 1905 and A.V. Dicey's *Law and Opinion*, the classic exposition of the relationship between political thought and public opinion and between the competing notions of individualism and collectivism. Although Dicey's work was highly respected, a widely felt need for a systematic historical approach led in the 1950s to several new attempts to tackle the subject, notably that of Oliver MacDonagh in his article *The Nineteenth-century Revolution in Government: a reappraisal.*[1]

MacDonagh constructed a model which pointed to the exogenous origins of social reform - a sudden calamity or the exposure of an evil by a private philanthropist. Once a particular evil was brought to public notice in this way and, more particularly, once it was widely felt to have become "intolerable" then "the ensuing demand for remedy at any price set an irresistible engine of change in motion". Resistance to the demand for remedy from vested interests resulted in a compromise and legislation which was far less comprehensive than originally envisaged. At a later stage, revelation that the new legislation had left the original evil almost unchanged led to the provision of summary processes at law, officers to enforce the legislation and

the establishment of a central authority. The penultimate stage in this model consisted of a change of attitude on the part of the administrators who saw that improvement would come through a series of gradual changes rather than through a single piece of rigid legislation. This resulted finally in government adopting a more dynamic and flexible approach to administration with more room for delegation, discretion and experimentation.

MacDonagh's model was criticized[2] on the grounds that it made the transformation process appear, if not entirely inevitable, then at least unpremeditated, the result of "historical processes" or "blind forces" . One such process was held to be the increasingly humanitarian tendency of public opinion which meant that social evils were bound to be attacked once people felt them to be "intolerable". Such a view declined to attribute much significance to the role of individuals in bringing about reforming legislation or to the influence of ideas such as Benthamism.

One critic, Jenifer Hart, pointed out that far from increasing humanitarianism, the nineteenth century saw the continued existence of wide-spread callousness and indifference to the suffering of others especially among employers. There was, she asserted, no wide-spread agreement about what constituted intolerable conditions and no guarantee that "intolerability" would bring about a remedy.

Christianity, often held to be the motivating force behind social reform, was shown by Hart to have often had the opposite effect with the church acting as a barrier to social change and often even opposing the alleviation of poverty and suffering on the grounds that such things were tests sent by God. Above all, both Parris and Hart criticised their colleagues refusal to admit the significant influence of Benthamism on the development of collectivist social policy. They pointed out that much confusion had arisen from the misconception that Benthamism was practically synonymous with individualism and *laissez-faire*. They argued that the governing principal of Benthamism - the effect on human happiness - led to extensions of both *laissez-faire* and state intervention.

Since the mid-1960s, the trend in thinking about the history of welfare provision has been away from the purely linear progressive paradigm of the earliest historians of the British Welfare State towards a more critical approach. As Pat Thane has pointed out in a recent essay,[3] the principal aim during the first phase of this new development was to explain the failures as well as the successes of the Welfare State, but the underlying assumption remained that a growing welfare role for the state was desirable. During the 1980s, a further shift of emphasis has resulted in work which focuses less exclusively on the state as provider of welfare

and more on the shifting relationships between the state and alternative sources of welfare.

Some of these alternative sources, the family and the labour movement for example, have already been examined in earlier chapters of this thesis. In this and the chapter which follows, the roles and relationships between the state, voluntary bodies and employers as providers of welfare will be examined.

7.1 The response of the state to the condition of the boating population before 1873.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the predominant middle and upper class view of poverty and social distress was that these were necessary evils and that without hunger, men would become idle. There was a growing feeling amongst some members of the middle class that there were minimum social conditions below which individuals should not have to fall. Yet, as Jenifer Hart[4] has pointed out, humanitarianism was by no means the norm and many of those social reformers who considered themselves humanitarians were in fact merely moralists, concerned not so much with the hardships and sufferings of the poor but with their immorality. Even those who advocated state intervention to eliminate the worst social evils intended that collectivist social policy should supplement and reinforce the principles of self-help and other more traditional sources of relief rather than replace them. The voluntarist principle remained

strong and there was little idea that the state had either a right or a duty to interfere with industry or in the private domestic lives of its citizens in order to impose minimum humane conditions.

Despite the passing of the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act in 1802, and its extension to some other factory children in 1819, central government did not begin to take a direct part in the formation or administration of social policy in Britain until after the election of the first Reform Parliament of 1832. By this time, very bad conditions existed in some industrial work-places and urban centres and government policy developed through a series of *ad hoc* responses to the worst of these evils as they came to light.

Significant progress had been made by the middle of the nineteenth century in the areas of worker protection and public health and a tentative start had been made in public education. By 1870 attempts had been made to relieve the worst effects of urban living and to control conditions of work in many industries but, up to this time, very little official attention had been directed towards the condition of the boating population.

One reason for this is that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, social conditions on the canals were not really bad enough to merit state intervention. Earnings,

although variable, were on average relatively good; living conditions, even on board the boats, were better than those in many urban tenements. Although hours were long and child labour common, the pre-industrial nature of the work made it appear familiar and relatively harmless compared to the unhealthy and dangerous conditions and the relentless pace of the new industrial work places.

There was, however, one aspect of boating life which did give cause for dissatisfaction, both amongst the establishment as represented by the state, the church and other members of respectable society, and among the boatmen themselves. This was the seven-day working week. From the establishment point of view, the cause for concern to which this gave rise was not the hardship of having no day of rest,[5] but the fact that it denied boatmen the opportunity of attending a place of worship. The belief that improving the moral standing of the working classes was at least as important as the redistribution of resources in order to eliminate poverty was common throughout the nineteenth century. Concern about the moral standing of the boat population led to the appointment of a House of Lords Select Committee in 1841 "to enquire into the expediency of restraining the practice of carrying goods and merchandise on Canals, Navigable Rivers and Railways on Sundays". Despite this title, the main concern of the committee was the canal boat population. Of the twenty one witnesses

called, only one was connected with the railways and there was only passing reference to navigable rivers where they connected with the canal system.

It is clear from the evidence taken by the committee that contemporaries saw the effects of moral instruction as having clear connections with physical and social well-being. Several of the witnesses described some sections of the boating population as "demoralized"[6] (not in the modern sense but meaning immoral or amoral) and "degraded"[7] and the clergyman at the Boatmen's Bethel in Oxford was said to have "never seen anything to equal the dreadful State they [the boatmen] [were] in".[8] This was attributed to their "want of little education" and "want of proper moral and religious training".[9] Such degradation was said to lead to profanity, profligacy and drunkenness, this latter vice in particular being held responsible for the descent into poverty, wretchedness and criminality.[10] It is clear from the exchanges between committee members and witnesses that both sides believed the relief of such social evils would come not from state or voluntary provision but from the moral improvement of the individuals concerned which would enable them to exercise the self-discipline and self-help for which the Victorian age has come to be known.

Historians have put forward various explanations to account for the increasing involvement of the state in social reform

during this period, but whether one favours the pressure of public opinion, the influence of ideas such as Benthamism or the role of individual philanthropists, it is generally agreed that there was little pressure from below for social reform at this time. The *Select Committee on Sunday Trading* however, contains evidence of what appears to be a rare example of working-class pressure for improvements.

The Committee had been presented with a petition which was said to have been signed by six hundred boatmen on the Birmingham, Staffordshire and Worcestershire, Trent and Mersey canals and the River Severn.[11] The petition called for the abolition of Sunday working but there was some scepticism among the witnesses that it represented the real views of the men concerned. John Wheeley Lea, a salt shipper of Droitwich, found it surprising that men would support a measure which would result in a loss of income.[12] However, it has been pointed out in an earlier chapter[13] that a preference for leisure over high income was a common feature of pre-industrial work. Joseph Baxendale of Pickfords believed eight out of ten boatmen to be indifferent to the issue but alleged that he would have had no difficulty persuading all of his men to sign a petition whether it was for Sunday trading or against it.[14]

However, this was not the first example of a group of boatmen petitioning employers for improved conditions.

Edward Atherton, agent to the Old Quay Company, showed their Lordships a petition from the boatmen of the Mersey and Irwell Canal asking that a "Privilege of Rest" be granted on Sundays.[15] This petition, which had been presented to the company some time previously, succeeded in its purpose as it resulted in a partial ban on Sunday working by the company. Furthermore, the possibility of a resumption of Sunday work had resulted in a second petition.

Two things emerge quite clearly from an examination of this Select Committee enquiry. Firstly, the preoccupation with morality and the idea that other social improvements would flow from this. The enquiry is much more concerned with social stability and control than with the hardships and distress of individual human beings.

Secondly, it clearly shows the role that government saw for itself at the time in the amelioration of poor social conditions. There was no question that the state should provide for the needs of the work-force or bear any part of the cost of such provision. The duty of the state was merely to legislate in order to compel employers to do so. With this in mind, there was much concern on the part of the committee with the effect on canal carrying that a mandatory Sunday stoppage would have. Four of the carriers examined by the committee were adamantly against it on the grounds that it would drive even more trade onto the railways at a

time when the canals were already being badly effected by this new rival.[16] This view seems to have weighed most heavily with the committee, despite the fact that several other carriers already prohibited the movement of boats on Sunday.[17] The result was that the evidence of the enquiry was submitted without report, observation or recommendation from their Lordships and no action on the matter was ever taken.

Concern with morality and the benefits ensuing from the moral uplifting of the working classes was not confined to the state. It was a common attitude amongst society in general. What little attention was directed at the boating population during this period by voluntary agencies and by employers also reflected this. There was no attempt to provide facilities for the physical necessities of everyday life, such as drinking water or latrines, nor to alleviate the burdens of working life even for young children. But from the 1840s, some canal companies, Christian missions and private individuals helped to establish special mission rooms and chapels for boat people on the canal banks.(see pages 244-248 above)

7.2 The Canal Boats Acts of 1877 and 1844

More than thirty years were to pass before the condition of the boat people was to be brought to official attention again. In 1873, an obscure Methodist "enthusiast" turned

social reformer opened his campaign on behalf of the canal boat people. George Smith'[18] was born in 1831, the son of a Staffordshire brick maker. He was said to have received a little formal education at the hands of a Primitive Methodist but, as he began work in the brick yards at the age of seven, he was mainly self-educated. Inspired by a peculiarly extreme brand of religious motivation - it was said that even his friends could not take both the man and his enthusiasm - Smith believed himself to be "marked out by Divine Providence for special work". This he began in 1871 on behalf of the children who worked in the brick yards and his agitations resulted in the passage of the Factory (Brick and Tile Yards Extension) Act later the same year.

In October 1873, he turned his attention to the canal boat population. Motivated by his Christian faith, the supposed immorality of the boaters was Smith's main concern. Their lack of religious instruction, their foul language, coarse manners, drunkenness and the fact that they were said to live together as man and wife outside marriage, caused him much anxiety but he also drew attention to their insanitary accommodation, the harshness of their labours and the labouring of their children.'[19]

Smith's agitation led the *Factory and Workshops Acts Commission* in 1875 to turn its attention to canal boat labour. Some supplementary questions for inspectors, which

asked the extent to which women and children were employed on boats and what provision was made for the children's education, were included in Appendix C of its evidence and report. Some witnesses were also examined on this issue and on this occasion, in addition to the canal proprietors and clergy, one actual boatman and a former boatman were examined.[20] Although reference was still made to the morals and manners of the boaters, the commissioners seemed to be primarily concerned with the reality of social conditions on the canals. They asked about child labour and education, about the organisation of the trade and the need for family labour; they asked about the men's wage levels and provision for seasonal unemployment, the size of the cabin accommodation and about health, diet and sanitary conditions.

The contrast between this and the tone of the earlier enquiry is quite marked, yet reference to "decency" and "respectability" indicate the persistence of the distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor which characterized much of the nineteenth century attitude to social policy from the 1834 Poor Law reforms onwards.

From the evidence of one witness, the Reverend Dr. Bell[21] of Goole, emerges the signs of a paradox which was to prove one of the main obstacles to social reform on the canals, causing government officials to draw back from recommending

or endorsing effective measures and dividing opinion among those voluntary agencies who wished to help. On the one hand, the only way in which social conditions could really be improved for boating families, the only solution to the problem of education, social isolation and poor accommodation, was for children, and perhaps women also, to be prohibited from living on canal boats. Yet it seemed that if such a prohibition were to be brought about by law, it would go against one of the main aims of social legislation in the period which was to inculcate such norms as respectability and family cohesion.

Smith, motivated by strong Methodist beliefs, wanted to see children removed from the supposed demoralizing influence of the over-crowded and insanitary boat cabins. Others felt that if the women and children were forced to live on shore, immorality would increase since, as the Reverend Dr Bell put it, "you do not know what the husbands may be doing, and you do not know what the wives may be doing at home". This latter position was maintained by canal boat missionaries throughout the history of family boating. It led the Incorporated Seaman and Boatmen's Friend Society and the London City Mission to oppose any proposal to remove children from canal boats, even in the mid-twentieth century. They preferred instead to provide special canal-side facilities to meet the social and spiritual needs of the boating population.

The Factory Commissioners in their report of 1876 felt that canal boat work was so far removed from anything like the work of a factory or workshop that it could not be included in an extension to the existing factory legislation. They did feel, however, that the social deprivation of the boating population merited government intervention. They recommended that children over three years of age and young females be excluded from the boats but their recommendations were not taken up.

Smith continued to urge reform. He called for a prohibition of boys under 13 and girls under 18 and regulations for the registering of boats with stipulations as to the minimum cubic foot of air space required in the cabin, the number, age and sex of the occupants and the requirement for canal boat children to reach a certain standard of education before being allowed to take up employment.[22]

Gradually, he began to succeed in interesting others in his cause. Eventually, in May 1877, a Bill was introduced to provide for the regulation of canal boats used as dwellings. The Act was passed in August 1877 and became law the following year. Regulations drawn up under the Act laid down a minimum standard of accommodation on board, and regulated the number, age and sex of persons permitted to inhabit the cabin. There was nothing, however, to prohibit or limit child labour or to ensure even a minimum of education for

children resident on board. Furthermore, there was no provision in the Act for its enforcement. No inspectorate was created and no penalties fixed for violation of its provisions. Implementation was left to local authorities and they did so with varying degrees of enthusiasm. In Birmingham, the Chief Constable of Police was given the responsibility of registering boats. In other districts it was the local surveyor or sanitary inspector. Some were paid nothing for these extra duties whilst others received from a flat rate of £2, £10 or £25 to a rate per boat ranging from 2/6d to one guinea per boat. In some areas the nuisance or sanitary inspectors were appointed to inspect the boats after registration, usually for no extra pay, but in many places there was no one to perform this duty at all.[23]

Not surprisingly, when Smith returned to the canals a short time after the passing of the Act he found little improvement. Further agitation on his part brought an amendment Bill in 1881 but it was blocked at the second reading by the opposition of the canal companies.[24] A second amendment Bill in 1883 was more successful and the matter was referred to a Select Committee. Smith, in his evidence before this committee complained of continuing immorality (co-habitation of unwed members of the opposite sex) and also of inordinately harsh conditions of employment for children, lack of education, overcrowded cabins and the spread of infectious disease.[25] Despite his concern with the

physical needs of the boaters, Smith left the committee in no doubt that in his opinion it was in their moral condition that the real need lay. When asked to compare the moral and physical condition of the floating population with that of the same class on land he replied unhesitatingly that the boat people were the moral inferiors of their shore-bound fellows. When pressed on their physical condition he was hard put to specify any way in which they were actually inferior, although he predicted that physical weaknesses would begin to show in future years if their present moral state remained unattended to.[26]

His call for the enforcement of the Act by regular inspection was not supported by the President of the Local Government Board, nor indeed by the other witnesses. Nevertheless, the Bill, its more radical clauses excluded, passed into law in August 1884, providing for inspection of canal boats by sanitary authorities under a centrally appointed Chief Canal Boat Inspector. It allowed for penalties to be imposed on violations of the Act and the regulations drawn up under it defined the class of boats to come under its jurisdiction more precisely and gave regulation-making powers to the Education Department.

The Local Government Board accepted responsibility for the Canal Boat Acts only with extreme reluctance. The first Chief Canal Boat Inspector, John Brydone, a businessman from

the salt manufacturing district of Droitwich, took up his new duties with enthusiasm. This further irritated the officials at the Board. Their attitude can be clearly discerned in the correspondence between the Board and Brydone.[27] They drastically edited his reports and insisted that he confine himself to "actual facts of inspections". They discouraged his recommendations for change and improvement in the law and deplored his observations on its shortcomings. They made unreasonable demands about the timing of his reports and refused to make simple common-sense adjustments to their administrative practices which would have helped in this regard. They even made unwarranted incursions into Brydone's private business and addressed him in a tone befitting a junior clerk rather than a senior member of the inspectorate. Gradually Brydone was alienated from the central administration and his untimely death in 1899 was hardly mourned by the Board.

Given the late date of these Acts, and Hart's assertion that[28]

> more and more, men did not wait to learn slowly from experience in each field, but appointed enforcement officers simultaneously with the first legislative incursion into a new field,

it is rather surprising that in the case of the Canal Boat Acts, the creation of an inspectorate was neglected and resisted. Other paradoxes were noticed by Roy MacLeod when he analysed the passing of the Canal Boat Acts and their administration in 1966.[29]

Writing during a period when the accepted view of the history of social policy was that it was largely a story of steady progress, MacLeod was puzzled by the attitude of the Local Government Board and at something of a loss to explain it. As he said:[30]

> it appears paradoxical that, in this era of increasing governmental intervention, efforts to extend State services met with such apathy from the government itself. Equipped with far-reaching legislation and granted the general blessing of the canal associations, the Local Government Board took almost no steps to exploit its potential.

In an attempt to explain the paradox, MacLeod cites "the preoccupation of Victorian departments with legal convenience and the conciliation of private interests at the cost of effective social policy". He blames "the unassertiveness and intellectual lassitude" of the Board and affirms that "the concept of "social welfare" had not yet become a national reality".[31]

Yet MacLeod was not entirely satisfied with his own explanation and felt that the "apparent paradox may only reveal an inadequacy in our current interpretations of Victorian administration".[32] More than two decades later, a radically different interpretation can be made, based on ideas put forward recently by David Thomson.[33] Using his research into the treatment of elderly dependants during the nineteenth century, Thomson has come to the conclusion that

> the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw not some temporary slowing along the road to the Welfare State, but an aggressive and for a time successful attempt to steer society in another direction altogether.

This new direction taken by social policy makers was

characterized by a deliberate attempt to shift responsibility for welfare provision away from the community and back towards the family and the individual. If one accepts this interpretation of government and official thinking on social policy, the reluctance of the Local Government Board to take responsibility for a new group of able-bodied, contributing members of society and their dependants becomes more understandable.

7.3 Central and Local Government attitudes to the canal boat population 1900 - 1914.

With the death in 1899 of John Brydone, the post of Chief Canal Boat Inspector passed to Owen J. Llewellyn. Llewellyn conformed much more to the image of a professional public servant than Brydone. Whilst he carried out his duties conscientiously, he seems to have distanced himself more from the human aspects of the job and become less emotionally involved than Brydone who at times seemed to feel he had embarked on a personal crusade to raise the boat people out their social wretchedness. In some of his later reports, Llewellyn noted with satisfaction the increasing departure of "the old-fashioned type of official" who was being replaced by a "better, more conscientious and abler class of inspector" "one who has been educated to be an inspector...and studied his profession."[35] No doubt Llewellyn placed himself in this new class of professionals.

There is evidence, however, that even Llewellyn required some degree of re-education before his views conformed to the requirements of the Local Government Board. In his report for 1902-1903, he drew attention to the disadvantages attending the regular presence of a large number of women and children on board canal boats and declared that no hardship would result if they were prohibited from residing on board. He repeated this assertion the following year and added that the educational clauses of the Canal Boats Acts were inadequate to the task of ensuring the attendance of canal boat children at school.

In his report for 1905-1906, the contrast in tone and attitude is quite remarkable. Speaking at length on the condition of the canal boat children he claimed

> the boat child is morally and physically,,,,superior to the land child in a similar station of life,,,Its open air life inures it to all weathers and its familiarity with its work from a very early age makes its reliant and strong and brings out its best qualities. The sense of responsibility from early youth which makes the British naval officer the type of a perfect public servant has a similar effect on the boat children in the performance of their work. On the boats, boys and girls (whose contemporaries ashore are, in their hobbledehoyhood, a source of worry and anxiety to their parents,) can be found doing their duty in a quiet matter-of-fact way and taking a pride in its successful accomplishment. Undoubtedly those ashore are more fully equipped in the matter of learning but in the application of it I do not think most of them have any advantage over the boat children.

Remarking that he would have liked to see canal boat children have educational opportunities more equal to those of other children he reported that this would have been impossible unless they were prohibited from living on board and his comment "even if this were desirable" implies that

he had now turned against such a prohibition. That such was in fact the case is made clear in his subsequent reports.

One can only speculate on the cause of this about-face on the part of the Chief Inspector. Perhaps greater familiarity with the canals had persuaded him of the desirability of preserving this traditional way of life but it seems unlikely. His concluding remarks, "I have written fully on this subject as there seems to be an enormous amount of ignorance, exaggeration and misplaced sympathy now prevalent." suggest that it was a closing of ranks on the part of the Local Government Board in the face of growing criticism and the possibility of having to take direct action to remedy the deteriorating social position of the boating population.

Chester Town Council had that same year passed a resolution declaring:[36]

> that in the opinion of this council life on canal boats is detrimental to the moral, mental and physical development of children and it is desirable that the Canal Boats Acts and the Education Acts be amended, prohibiting the use of canal boats as dwelling places for children in order that such children may be brought under the effective operation of the compulsory attendance clauses of the Education Acts,

Other municipal authorities passed similar resolutions in the same year. In February 1905, the Northwich Rural District Council passed a motion prohibiting school aged children from travelling on boats.[37] It is doubtful whether they had the legal power to actually do this and certain

that they found it impossible to put into action. The mover of the motion, J.A.Johnson, stated in a report forwarded to the Board of Education that he considered the education of canal boat children to be "a farce". Referring to Llewellyn's estimate in his annual report for 1904, that there would not be more than 400 children with no other home than the boat he commented;

> My point is that though a man has a home, he takes his wife and children with him on the boat,
> I therefore cannot accept Mr Llewellyn's statement when he infers that there are only 400 boat children in England and Wales who have no other home than the boat and that, therefore, it is only these children who do not go to school, I think it would be more correct to say that most of the 7,000 boats used as dwellings take the children with them, if not always, very often, I can state from my own observation of five years on the banks of the canal at Lostock, that there are children on nearly every boat that passes our works,

There is little doubt that Llewellyn's change of heart was provoked by these attacks. The following year he was still condemning the "great deal of misplaced sympathy and exaggeration ..[which]..still exists in various places on the subject of the occupation by children of canal boats."[38] Certainly his own sympathies were never thus misplaced again. In the same report his assertion that boat children

> are superior [to land children], and grow up to be better citizens by reason of their training to face hard work and to fight life's battles on their own account,

shows that ideas of "social justice" and "social rights" were still unknown to some government officials. The view expressed here is closer to nineteenth century notions of hierarchical society, social immobility and self-help than to ideas of lessening inequalities in life chances, said to

be one of the main trends in social policy during this period.[39]

An opportunity to bring about the legislation necessary to improve conditions for canal boat children did present itself around this time with the drafting of the Bill leading to the Children's Act of 1908. Section 118 of this Act provided that a person habitually wandering from place to place and taking with him any child above the age of 5 years old, must provide for the proper attendance of such a child at school. Defalters could be fined and the children sent to industrial school. However, canal boat children were specifically excluded from this provision on the grounds that the Canal Boats Acts already provided for their education.

Richard Parr of the N.S.P.C.C. in his book *Canal Boat Children*, published in 1910, claimed that a strong plea had been made to include clauses relating to canal boat children in this Act but the attempt had run into difficulties owing to the fact that the Bill was in the hands of the Home Office who had no responsibility for canals.[40] Probably of greater significance was the attitude of the Local Government Board who apparently had no desire to see such a measure brought in. In his next report, that of 1907 - 1908, Llewellyn declared:

> My views with regard to the presence of children on the boats have undergone no change, and I rejoice to see that the Children's Bill, which

> has been brought in by the Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs will not operate to exclude them from the surroundings of their hereditary calling and the good effects of never-ceasing parental supervision.

Around this period, apathy seems to have turned to complacency at the Board. In its report for 1909-1910 it declared itself gratified "to note that the condition of the children is not unsatisfactory from either an educational or a moral point of view". It is noticeable that the reports of the Chief Canal Boat Inspector were becoming shorter and more stereotyped during this period. Indeed, his reports for 1910-1911 and 1911-1912 are almost exact reproductions of his report for 1909-1910 with only the figures up-dated.

The Board of Education seem to have been less complacent about the condition of the boat children but no more willing to act on their behalf.

Section 6 of the Canal Boats Act, 1884, had brought canal boat children under the jurisdiction of the Education Acts by deeming them to be resident in the district where their boat was registered and therefore governed by any regulations laid down by the education authorities of that district. In June 1887, the Department of Education, (from 1899 the Board of Education) began to circulate their inspectors asking them to report on the availability of educational facilities for canal boat children and the attendance of such children. Circulars were sent out in 1887, 1891, 1893, 1905 and thence annually. Despite some

optimistic reports from the Birmingham School Board in the early years,[41] many authorities complained year after year that the difficulties of enforcing the attendance of canal boat children at school were such that they had more or less abandoned the attempt.

In August 1883, H.M.I. Turnbull complained to the Department:[42]

> So long as the child lives <u>on</u> the boat and moves about <u>with</u> the boat, he must have a poor chance of getting anything like a proper education. Inquiry will not remedy this. Legislation, properly enforced is the right remedy.

Seven years later he was still making the same complaint:[43]

> As you will doubtless recollect, the Board have more than once memorialised the Department, praying their Lordships to make it illegal for children of school age to dwell on boats but as yet no action has been taken in that direction.

Such pleas did not fall on completely deaf ears. Year after year, from 1900 to 1914, the Board of Education complained in its annual report of the difficulty of enforcing the school attendance of canal boat children, of the inadequacy of the present law and they continually affirmed their belief that children should be prohibited from living on board boats. Yet clearly they believed that to bring about such a prohibition lay outside their jurisdiction.

This, and the failure to bring canal boat children under the jurisdiction of the Children's Act of 1908, highlight one of the difficulties which frustrated attempts to reform social conditions on the canals throughout the twentieth

century. The Local Government Board and, from 1919, the Ministry of Health, had been given the responsibility of canal boat supervision. Education was the responsibility of the Board of Education, but, because the Canal Boats Acts included educational clauses, there was some overlap of interests. Furthermore, the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Transport and later the Ministry of Labour, were also involved with some aspects of canal life. This multiplicity of departmental responsibilities, some overlapping, with ill-defined borders, and poor inter-departmental co-operation led to confusion and gave some departments, whose outlook was in any case minimalist, the excuse to avoid getting involved with reform.

The degree to which central departments began to lose touch not only with the reality of life on the canals but also with the experience of each other is demonstrated in 1904/5 when, in his annual report, Llewellyn stated that the number of women and children living on board was unaltered while the Board of Education in its annual report for the same year remarked

> It is, however, satisfactory to find that, in most districts, it is becoming unusual for either women or children to live permanently on the boats.

Criticism of conditions on the canals and the ineffectiveness of current legislation had been reaching the Board of Education for some years, but in 1906, the year of Llewellyn's change of outlook, it reached something of a

crescendo. In that year, the Assistant Medical Officer of Health for Birmingham wrote a lengthy report on the conditions under which canal boat children were reared[44] in his district in which he condemned the current legislation for not enforcing adequate standards of space and ventilation in boat cabins. He commented favourably on the cleanliness of the cabins and the health of the occupants but criticized the lack of privacy in the living quarters which he felt led to immorality, immodesty and the neglect of personal cleanliness. His most depressing observations were on the education of the children and their future prospects:

> Parents almost invariably stated as a result of enquiry that their children would follow their lives on the canals, Such was almost the only prospect before them and the parents desired nothing better,...,hence their training in the management of canal boats was considered of greater importance than schooling,

In his concluding remarks he stated:

> There is no doubt that the Canal Boat Acts, properly enforced, have greatly altered for the better during the last twenty years, the conditions of life on the canals for both adults and children, but it is quite evident that further powers are necessary before this section of the community can benefit equally with others in the advantages offered by modern legislation, It seems that nothing short of compulsory legal measures keeping the children during school ages either entirely off the boats, or at least for a good part of each year, will enable the canal boat population to come into line with the rest of our industrial community,
>
> The compulsory Education Act seems to be almost a dead letter so far as it applies to canal boat children and this remedy, while making it impossible for such a state of things to exist would give opportunities for amending in almost every other way the moral and social condition of no inconsiderable section of our industrial population,

These sentiments were endorsed by James Broscomb, District Inspector of Schools for the City of Birmingham Education Committee who added:[45]

> The educational condition of these children is deplorable. With few exceptions they cannot read the simplest book used in an ordinary infants school; they cannot write, their knowledge of number is meagre and a good many do not know the value of coins except bronze...
>
> ...The educational opportunities of these children are few; if every opportunity were taken advantage of, they could not learn much....The only hope for them in my opinion is by legislation in the direction of making them live ashore.

This swingeing attack produced no noticeable effect at the Board of Education whose annual paragraph relating to canal boat children became harder and harder to distinguish from that of the previous year.

Several problems lay in the way of reform as far as the Board of Education was concerned. Firstly, as has already been noted, there was the difficulty of defining clearly where the responsibility for these children lay as far as the central administration was concerned. Secondly, there was the fact that school provision and attendance was clearly the responsibility of the local authority but, in the case of children who moved about from place to place, local control was impossible in practice, even though the law theoretically made provision for it. This difficulty was recognized by the Board as early as 1902 but their reaction was merely to hope that this would be remedied by the widening of authority of the County Councils under the Act of that year.[46] When this turned out not to be the case, the Board could offer nothing better.

The Board of Education, as much as the Local Government Board it seems, preferred to take no action in the hope that the problem would go away or be solved by someone else. Again the shifting of responsibility away from the central department, the preference for persuasion rather than regulation, and the conciliation of private interests can be seen, but the philosophy of persuasion had failed. Some means of compelling canal boat children to attend school was needed, and constantly cried out for by several local authorities, and indeed by the Board itself. No-one, however, in central government was prepared to take this upon themselves.

Disappointed by the failure of central government to introduce effective legislation to secure a reasonable education for these children, the N.S.P.C.C. drafted its own Bill in 1910 which sought to ban all children under the age of 14 years from canal boats. Parr said of the Bill at the time, "Its provisions are simple and should not arouse any active opposition."[47] However, the Society was unable to get anyone to introduce the Bill until after the First World War and, in the light of subsequent events, Parr's optimism seems ill-founded and even naïve.

7.4 The effect of social policy of the boating population.

Social policy did not begin to touch the boat people until the last quarter of the nineteenth century which, compared

to other areas of society, was late. Having come about, the Canal Boat Acts were heavily criticized, by some who thought they were an unwarranted intrusion into privacy,[48] but mainly by those who felt that they did not go far enough. However, it would be wrong to suppose that they were a total failure, at least in their early years. They went some way to reducing overcrowding and they did set a certain standard of accommodation and sanitation which was enforced by fairly regular inspection. Even critics of the Acts acknowledged that some improvement in the social condition of the boat people had been brought about as a result. More importantly, the condition of a particularly little known and obscure section of the population was opened up, through the work of the canal boat inspectors, to public view.

This last point is worth further comment. For public opinion to demand or government departments to react, knowledge of the particular evil in view was essential. For as Jenifer Hart has pointed out[49]

> actual conditions alone constitute no problem; before there can be a problem, there must be an attitude to actual conditions, People must be dissatisfied with actual conditions.

The lives and experiences of boat people, especially on canals rather than rivers, have always been little known or ignored. In any survey of incomes or living standards, canal boatmen are rarely if ever found, even in the most comprehensive. Sir Robert Peel, in his enquiries connected with revenue raising[50] included lightermen on the river

Thames, but not canal boatmen. Similarly, Thames lightermen are included in the great social surveys of Mayhew and Booth but not canal boatmen, who, despite the large congregations of boats at Paddington and City Road Basins as well as in a myriad of smaller basins and wharves do not seem to have been regarded as part of the permanent population. It is as if the transient nature of their work rendered them invisible, always regarded as belonging elsewhere, the responsibility of someone else.

If the Canal Boat Acts were all very well in the closing years of the nineteenth century, even by the early years of the twentieth century they were no longer adequate for ensuring that boat people were adequately housed and educated and this was becoming increasingly obvious to those whose duties and responsibilities placed them in the position of having to try to make good the deficiencies. Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that boat people were the only section of the population not to benefit fully from the new era of social welfare provision. In the period leading up to the First World War, housing legislation remained ineffective and large sections of the working classes continued to be poorly housed. Most adult males were still untouched by protective legislation and in 1900, the Board of Education published in its annual report, complaints of "excessive employment of school children" and poor school attendance with many children attending school

for the first time at the age of eight, twelve or even thirteen.[51] .

7.5 Conclusion

The once generally accepted view of the period 1832 to 1914 was that it was one of growing intervention on the part of the state in welfare provision and acceptance by it of responsibility for the weak, the poor and the disadvantaged and for ameliorating the worst social evils in cities and industries once they were felt to have become "intolerable".

Viewed against this background, the case of the canal boat population is puzzling. On the one hand, canal boat people moved from complete obscurity and neglect as far as social legislation was concerned to being, in theory at least, the first section of the population to have their private domestic arrangements completely regulated by legislation and subjected to inquisitorial interference by government officials. Yet, although the legislation went some way to reducing over crowding and ensuring a minimum standard of accommodation, there were many ways in which it was inadequate, and felt to be so even by contemporaries. The need for government intervention had been officially recognized since the 1870s and the inadequacy of the Canal Boats Acts was frequently brought to the attention of the central authorities by the Chief Canal Boat Inspector and others. Yet, there was a continuing and indeed an

increasing reluctance on the part of that authority to effectively address the problem. MacDonagh's model and other older interpretations of the development of social policy do not seem to fit the case of the canal boat people.

As long ago as 1958, Richard Titmuss[52] warned that the process of government involvement in social reform should not be seen as an ascending road of social betterment and that we should expect to find areas of neglect and slow progress. Pat Thane[53] has also warned against misinterpreting the reasons why government began to take more responsibility for the well-being of its citizens, pointing out that if one sees it simply as an altruistic desire to remove poverty and other social evils one can never understand why some of these evils were never properly addressed. Thane asserts that questions of social and political order and national efficiency were at least as important as the desire to relieve misery and redress social injustice and such motives must surely lie behind the shift in direction noted by David Thomson in the social policy of the late nineteenth century. Where officialdom thought of the boating population at all, it viewed it as a possible threat to social stability, a peculiar community on the fringes of "normal" society, outside normal social controls and also a possible threat to public health.[54] Their social deprivations were of little concern.

Similarly, the period 1906 to 1914 is usually seen as one of major social reform. As T.H.Marshall put it:[55]

> By 1906, the question was no longer whether the State was responsible for the welfare of the masses, instead of merely for the relief of the destitute...The problem was to decide on the extent of the responsibility and above all on the means by which it should be discharged.

It could, therefore, be rather puzzling to discover that the first fifteen years of the twentieth century were, as far as canal boat social policy is concerned, a period of growing apathy and even complacency. However, if one accepts Thomson's new perspective on the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it is reasonable to assume that such powerful legacies were not easily shaken off and that the beliefs and attitudes of the late Victorian period had a lasting influence on the administrators of the twentieth century.

Valuable as this insight of Thomson's is, consideration must also be given to other reasons for the limited effectiveness of state social policy with regard to canal boat people and to the contribution of other welfare agencies.

The administrative difficulties of regulating a population which continually moved from place to place, particularly for a government who favoured the devolution of power to local authorities were enormous. Although the Local Government Board did provide a central co-ordinating

authority in the form of the Chief Canal Boat Inspector, the Board of Education offered no help in co-ordinating the efforts of local education authorities. The multiplicity of government departments involved, their lack of co-operation with one another and the tendency to assume or hope that certain responsibilities would rest with someone else exacerbated the situation.

The role of outside agencies, particularly christian missionaries, is enormously significant in the case of canal boat people. Firstly, boat people formed a clearly defined social group whose life-style made them easy to identify and to locate in fairly large congregations at all the main canal basins. The generally held belief that boat people were addicted to immorality in the form of drunkenness, violence, foul language and unmarried cohabitation as well as the fact that their work largely denied them the opportunity to attend a place of worship made them obvious targets for missionary zeal. There is no doubt that without the efforts of the religiously motivated George Smith, the Canal Boat Acts would never have become a reality.

Smith's campaign should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a long non-conformist christian, tradition with roots stretching back beyond the nineteenth century. Smith was not the first, nor indeed the last christian missionary to take an interest in boat people yet

his wish to remove families from canal boats was at odds with the norms of family cohesion held by more conventional missionaries. Rather than radical sweeping reforms, these missionaries attempted to relieve distress through a series of smaller and more gradual measures, providing facilities which helped relieve the difficulties of canal boat life without breaking up the traditional family boating system. In this way, one of the main thrusts of voluntary effort on behalf of the canal population had the effect of perpetuating the very thing which caused the main social deprivations to which boat people were subject. The other voluntary agency to concern itself with canal life, the N.S.P.C.C. took little active part in events until after the First World War.

Employers had little to offer the work force during this period. There was never any attempt to provide any facilities other than a few contributions to boatmen's missions and the few concessions to distress-relief referred to in Chapter 6 above. Pressure from the boat owners led to the more radical provisions of the Canal Boat Bills of 1877 and 1884 being dropped. It is not surprising that boat owners were against radical social reform. The removal of the main social evil on the canals, family labour, would have resulted in major re-organisation of the industry. This might have been the saving of the carrying trade in the long

run but the boat owners could only see it in terms of rising costs.

In spite of all this, improvements might have been more effectively brought about if there had been any indication that the boatmen themselves desired it. Many of the union representatives interviewed by the *Royal Commission on Labour* in 1892 called for women to be prohibited from working on boats.[56] They claimed that this was on the grounds of the unsuitability of the work, although their real motive seems to have been to narrow the labour market and raise wage rates. Nevertheless, few if any of the unions involved represented family boatmen to any degree (see chapter 6 above) and none of the men who spoke were family boatmen themselves. This demand could hardly be said, then, to come from the people involved. There is no other evidence that family boatmen ever pressed demands for the removal of families from boats or the amelioration of social conditions on board. They were said to have resented George Smith's efforts on their behalf and later evidence (i.e. post 1918) suggests that they clung tenaciously to their traditional way of life and fought all attempts to break it up. Given the heavy work load of officials during a period when a great deal of new social legislation was coming into force, perhaps it is not surprising that one of the least known and least vociferous sectors of society was given such a low priority.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Social Policy and the Boating Population 1914 - 1960.

Early attempts by social historians to interpret the development of social policy in the twentieth century pointed to the continuing expansion of state collectivism and the ever-broadening acceptance of the idea that the state had a major responsibility for the improvement of social conditions. This interpretation rests on the assumption that the period was one of growing altruism with politicians, civil servants and social reformers striving to eliminate poverty and social injustice, or at least to reduce it to a minimum. Such an interpretation makes many aspects of the reality of social conditions in the twentieth century hard to explain. Why were some pockets of seemingly glaring deprivation allowed to remain? Why did those in most need appear to receive the least?

Canal boat people themselves formed such a socially deprived group. Although their numbers were relatively small and diminishing, some of their social deprivations, and particularly those of their children were extreme and apparently deserving of urgent attention. In the light of the above interpretation, it is hard to understand why such condition were allowed to continue.

In attempting to explain such anomalies, historians' have pointed to the continuing influence of older ideas of

laissez-faire evident in the reluctance to interfere with the competitive economic system and the continuing distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" seen in the way in which social benefits were administered. Concern with the cost of social welfare provision at a time of financial orthodoxy and economic depression has also been cited as a possible explanation.

It has also been suggested that another obstacle to social reform in the immediate post-war period lay in the attitude of both public and government. It has been argued[2] that Lloyd George's programme of reform was essentially traditional and nostalgic and inappropriate for the nation which emerged after the war. Worse still, even those social reforms which were envisaged were eclipsed by the end of the war by a change in public mood from one of reconciliation to one of revenge. The Parliament which was elected in December 1918 was one of "hard-faced men",[3] not interested in social policy but in protecting their own business interests and exacting the largest possible reparations from Germany. They were said to resemble more closely the men of eighteenth century parliaments who took it for granted that they served the interest which had put them there rather than their immediate predecessors of Victorian and Edwardian days who served party and public welfare as they conceived it.[4]

These observations are valid, but a new perspective offered by Pat Thane is much more helpful in explaining the motivation behind social policy during the period. Thane argues for the primacy of economic and closely related political imperatives over altruism and aspirations for redistribution. In her view, social policy rested on a consensus which sought to maximize the economy and promote economic, political and social stability. Measures aimed at increasing the efficiency of the work-force by improving their health, education, social security etc were therefore aimed at the most essential workers, not at the poorest or those most in need.[5]

It will be argued in this chapter that there are many aspects of boat people's circumstances and of government response to their needs which support Thane's view. The continuing importance of voluntary agencies and their relationship with the central administration will also be examined.

8.1 The First World War.

Great importance is often attached to the role of war in generating social policy. However, the high degree of collectivism achieved during the First World War acted not only as a catalyst, but also as an obstacle to social reform. The Defence of the Realm Act 1914 and its subsequent amendments, and the creation of the Ministry of Munitions

which, under Lloyd George, came to take on wide-ranging responsibilities for society and the economy, showed what could be achieved by government intervention. However, the restrictions this placed on everyday life and the huge wastage resulting from the war itself created in some circles, a strong resistance to reform brought about by a nostalgia for the pre-war era and a desire to conserve what was left of it.

One of the main priorities of the government at the outbreak of war was to gain control of the most important sectors of industry in order to maximize efficient use of labour and material resources in support of the war effort. This resulted in, among other things, immediate government control of the railways. Canals were considered to be no longer of sufficient importance and at first were left alone. Railway-owned canals did technically come under government control with the control of the railways but this was incidental and of no significance. By 1917, the railways were severely overburdened with traffic, but the canal system lay idle and neglected. In an apparent attempt to relieve the situation, the government decided to take control of the inland waterways in March of that year. The real reason behind this decision, however, appears to have been the fear of social instability.

Industrial unrest was a particular feature throughout industry in 1917. Unofficial strikes, fears about labour taking "direct action" and later, events in Russia fuelled fear of social upheaval and even revolution. In June of that year, Lloyd George appointed eight commissions to enquire into and report on industrial unrest. Particular working-class grievances were rising prices, particularly food prices, restrictions on personal liberty, bad housing, fatigue due to long hours and the increased tempo of production and the dilution of skilled labour through the recruitment of unskilled workers.

Some of these grievances affected boat people to an extent, although they had long been accustomed to poor and overcrowded living conditions and long hours. Dilution of labour, a major source of unrest in some industries was of marginal concern to boaters. There was some attempt to recruit outside unskilled labour which was resented by traditional boatmen[6] but, on the whole, war-time conditions tended to enhance the boatman's status rather than diminish it.[7] Possibly for the first time, the real value of his skills were recognized as it was found impossible to replace him with men not born and bred to the trade and in some areas, experienced men were said to be commanding double wages.[8]

It was over the question of income, however, that the greatest unrest arose on the canals. Railway companies, with their profits guaranteed by the government, were able to pay war bonuses to their employees whilst independent canal carriers struggled to stay in business with rising running costs and diminishing trade. Finally, with strikes threatened on various waterways and boat owners complaining that they could no longer carry on, the government felt compelled to take control. The canals were brought under the jurisdiction of the Board of Trade with the setting up of a canal control committee which met for the first time on the 28th February 1917.[9] A few months later, the necessity of giving financial guarantees to the major carrying companies was also accepted.[10]

For the first time in their history, the opportunity was created to run the canals in a fully co-ordinated way, although, as with the railways, the day-to-day running was left to individual companies as before. Nevertheless, government intervention did effect conditions on the canals in some important ways.

Of primary importance was that for the first time, central control allowed some measure of standardization on the question of wages and hours. Allied to this was the fact that the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union was given official recognition and a small part to play in

the management of the waterways. Although the union never succeeded in getting a labour representative onto the central control committee, three regional sub-committees were set up in June 1917 to which labour representatives were appointed.[11] Although early applications by the union on behalf of boatmen for increased wages were ignored by the central committee, later proposals met with more success and by August 1919, all boatmen affected by government control were being paid 33½ per cent over pre-war net wages in lieu of a forty eight hour week. Canals were closed on Sundays and at night. Proposals for holidays with pay were, however, never agreed by the central body.[12]

The canal control committee was also of some help in relieving problems arising directly out of the conditions of war. When it was reported, in February 1918, that boatmen were experiencing difficulty in obtaining food supplies, the Chairman was able to approach the Food Controller and arrangements were made to issue Travellers' Tickets to boatmen in order to obtain supplies at various points on the canal routes.[13]

As a result of the efforts of the committee to meet labour shortages created by the war, a new initiative in training was set up with the establishment of a training school for boatmen on the Kennet and Avon Canal at Devizes.[14] Between September 1917 and September 1918, one hundred and thirty

five men from the Labour Battalions were trained as boatmen and sent to work, mainly on the canals of the Midlands. The Rochdale Canal Company also trained thirty men from the Transport Workers' Battalion as boatmen and horse drivers. As there had never been an apprentice scheme on the canals, (there were schemes on some rivers, notably the Thames) this was the first attempt in the history of canal transport to establish a proper training programme for outside recruits. However, due to union resistance to the use of Labour Battalions,[15] the insular nature of the traditional boaters and the unpopularity of the work with outsiders, it was not particularly successful and was not continued in peace-time.

Other benefits of state control enjoyed by workers in industry were little felt by boating people. Hurwitz[16] points out that although industrial welfare did not start with the war, the war forced an extension of welfare provision on a very large scale, not only in government plants but in outside industries too. Welfare supervisors were appointed, rest-rooms, industrial canteens and recreational facilities provided and recreation schemes created in an effort to enable each individual worker to do his or her best. This he attributes in large measure to the influx of women and children into munitions work. An influx of women and children was also a feature of canal boat work in many areas during the war but, as this was an industry which had traditionally relied on family labour, extra

welfare provision was not thought necessary. Furthermore, it was one thing to provide facilities where workers were gathered together in large numbers, quite another to provide for a labour force which was scattered, itinerant and, in some cases, employed by a myriad of small boat owners.

Of more significance than short-term solutions to purely war-time problems was the long-term affect of this brief experiment in state collectivism. On the face of it, the long-term benefits to the boating population were few. August 1919 saw the return of the inland waterways to private ownership. During the period of control, there had been no real attempt to make proper efficient use of the canals and certainly the reorganisation and modernisation of the system - a move which could have solved many of the economic and social problems of the industry - had never been contemplated. Unrest amongst the work force had been temporarily quelled through war bonuses but nothing really radical was achieved or even attempted.

The most serious social problems affecting canal boat people, namely education and the use of child and family labour were completely unaffected and in fact actually worsened during the period of the war. One reason for this was that paradoxically, while central government control increased in some areas of of the canal industry, in others it diminished. The Chief Canal Boat Inspector was absent on

military service and although local inspection continued in some places, the Local Government Board had no direct contact with canal boat administration for the duration of the war and ceased to include any reference to it in its annual report.

The Board of Education continued to receive returns from its local authorities concerning the attendance of canal boat children at school. Table 8.1 below giving details of these returns for the war years shows that, if anything, school attendance declined. In some districts, particularly the West Midlands and South Staffordshire, the number of children residing on canal boats increased considerably as the war progressed although in Gloucester and Yorkshire the reverse was the case.

Given that regulations restricting child labour were relaxed before the end of the first month of the war,[17] this is hardly surprising and was echoed in other sectors of society. The fact that child labour on the canals seems to have increased in some areas and decreased in others is a reflection of the different regional responses to the loss of boatmen to the armed forces. In Gloucester, it was stated by the school authorities that where the father had gone to the war, the rest of the family tended to remain at home and the children attended school.[18] This was probably the case in parts of Yorkshire also but, in most areas traditionally

Table 8.1

Summary of returns to the Board of Education from local education authorities concerning the education of canal boat children 1914 - 1918.

	Number of children found on board canal boats by attendance officers			
District*	1914	1916	1917	1918
Banbury	18 R if res,	32 R if res,	35 R if res,	18 IR
Birmingham	114 IR	185 IR	193 IR	176 R
Coventry	38 R	38 R	54 IR	41 IR
Doncaster	38 R		5 R	
Gloucester	75 Improved	50 FR	45 IR	50 FR
Goole	21 R if res,	23 R	8 R	
Hull	196 IR	152 IR	84 IR	74 IR
Leeds	7 R	3 R	7 R	
Liverpool	8 FR	6 IR	4 R	
Paddington	13 IR	12 IR	7	51 IR
Port of London	14 IR	12 IR	2	1 nil
Runcorn	71 IR	66 IR	67	77 IR
Sheffield	132 IR	123 IR	91 IR	76 IR
Swinton	30 R	29 FR	25 FR	9 FR
Stoke on Trent & Wolverhampton	130 R	115 R	120 R	339 R
Thorne & Stainforth	200 R if res,	150 R	103 R	88 R
Wakefield	10 R	6 R	7 R	4 R
York	11 R	4 R	1 R	1 R

R = regular attendance
IR = irregular attendance
FR fairly regular attendance
R if res, = regular attendance when resident in the district but often long absences on boats,
nil = did not attend at all,

* Districts where returns for the war period are not sufficiently complete not included, See table 2,7 page 93 for a full list,

Source; Board of Education files PRO ref, ED 11/87 and 88,

dependent on family labour, the reverse was true with women and children taking the place of their absent men folk. A deliberate effort on the part of the government to relieve labour shortages by recruiting female labour whenever unions would allow it'[9] obviously increased this tendency. Thus, given that the heavy dependence on family labour and in particular on child labour, lay at the root of most social evils on the canals, this was one respect in which government intervention as a result of the war actually acted as an obstacle to the improvement of social conditions for this sector of the population.

Given that, with the exception of travellers' children, canal boat children were the most educationally deprived in the country, it is a further irony that one of the few pieces of social legislation to come into existence during the war, the Fisher Education Act of 1918, completely ignored the problem of canal boat children. This was despite the annual complaint of the Board of Education regarding the difficulties attending the education of these children. In September 1919, the Second Secretary to the Board, Sir Edmund Phipps, in a minute to his Chief Inspector, Richards, wondered how this could have come about. He was told that although the matter had been mentioned during the course of discussions on the Bill, the view was taken that compulsory boarding out was felt to be the only solution to the problem. It was felt that, in view of other controversial

matters in the Bill, a measure which would result in the compulsory separation of children from their parents was too radical to be given serious consideration.[20]

Checkland, summing up the position at the end of the war said, " the Government had gained a new sense of what could be done by centralized power but had no real desire to use it."[21] In the canal carrying industry, as in other spheres of economic and social life, the Government had intervened only in the most exceptional circumstances and was anxious to divest itself of these responsibilities as quickly as possible. This caused consternation among the canal companies and carriers who felt that they had been abandoned and left to cope with an impossible financial position which was largely of the Government's making.[22]

During the era of social reconstruction (1917 -1921), as far as society as large was concerned, such areas of social need as health, housing, education, pensions and unemployment were addressed and some progress was made. Notably, the the Addison Housing Act and the Fisher Education Act were passed and Ministries for Health, Pensions, Labour and Agriculture and Fisheries were created. Little of this directly affected the boating population beyond the fact that responsibility for the administration of the Canal Boats Acts passed to the new Ministry of Health. The main obstacle was that, although real and urgent needs existed in all these areas, the

problems associated with them were inextricably tied up with the organisation of the industry. However, the volatile mood of labour and the consequent threat to the very foundations of society meant that radical change, such as the restructuring of industry and changes in wage determination and control of industry, issues which had been high on the pre-war agenda, could now only be approached with extreme caution.

The primacy of such aims as economic and social stability can be seen behind the response of the state to the needs of the canal boat people during this period. Both economic and social factors (the over burdening of the railway system and the threat of labour unrest) led to the setting up of the Canal Control Committee. Yet in economic terms, the canals came a poor second to the railways and their labour force was seen as less than essential to national economic efficiency. Furthermore, an uneducated, unsophisticated, conservative work-force in a highly traditional industry, almost completely unorganised and with relatively small and diminishing numbers could hardly be seen as a threat to political or social stability.

8.2 The inter-war years.

The history of this period does not lead one to expect much in the way of radical reform through legislation for the

boat people. Both T.H.Marshall and Bentley Gilbert agree that the inter-war years were not a period of innovative legislation[23] but one of consolidation and adjustment. Yet both agree that important progress took place and that the scene at the end of the period was very different from that at the beginning. Gilbert describes this progress in terms of a search for a new political consensus on what had become a central issue of parliamentary contest, social policy.

Thane[24] too speaks of the need to balance conflicting political forces in the attempt to reach a consensus on social policy. This resulted in a compromise which often fell short of what radical reformers wanted and gave little to the least powerful. Canal boat people, few in number, unorganised and employed in an almost obsolete industry had less power than most. Furthermore, any really effective reform of social conditions on the canals would have necessitated an unprecedented extension of state power and state intervention into the family life of ordinary citizens. Despite general agreement on the undesirability of the family boat system, no government of the period was prepared to take responsibility for such a drastic extension of state regulation.

In 1919, responsibility for the administration of the Canal Boats Acts passed to the newly created Ministry of Health. T.H. Marshall has described the story of the health services

during this period as one of growing dissatisfaction with the state of affairs and tentative proposals for reforms on which no action was taken.[25] This was also very much the story of canal boat social policy during the 1920's and 1930's.

The year 1919 marked the beginning of a twelve year period of activity on behalf of canal boat people and, in particular, their children. Educational provision for children resident on boats was the main thrust of this activity although there was some concern that living conditions on board canal boats were generally unacceptable. The exact number of boat people involved was never satisfactorily established, and in deed became the subject of much controversy between interested parties.[26] The Registrar General's Office, drawing on the 1921 Census put the number of people living on inland boats at 5,306 made up of 3,254 men and and 2,052 women.[27] The Board of Education gave the number of children between the ages of 5 and 14 years as approximately 1,000 in 1919, rising to between 1,500 and 1,700 by the middle years of the period.28

In May 1919, the Birmingham Conference of Superintendent School Attendance Officers tabled resolutions dealing with canal boat children calling it "a national scandal that a large body of children should be denied a reasonable existence, morally, physically and educationally".[29] Such

expressions of dissatisfaction by local authorities were not new but they were now starting to reach a wider audience through articles in the press. More importantly, the conditions under which canal boat people were living had caught the attention of the Transport Workers' Federation who seized upon this as a suitable issue on which to base a major campaign for social reform.

When the Federation passed a resolution in August 1919, calling for the abolition of living-in on canal boats, both the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education appeared to welcome it. Bosworth-Smith of the Health Ministry called it "a good sign" and Richards of the Board of Education thought there was "no doubt whatever that we ought to take part in this campaign...to get rid of the present damnable system".[30]

Accordingly, on the 12th November, a deputation from the Federation was received by the President of the Board of Education, H.A.L. Fisher, Sir George Newman of the Ministry of Health and other officials from both departments and from the Ministry of Transport. As a result, the Minister of Health, Christopher Addison appointed a committee to enquire into the practice of living-in on canal boats under the chairmanship of Neville Chamberlain. The committee was not, however, appointed for another nine months and did not begin its work until November 1920. This delay may have reflected

the political and personal difficulties being experienced at the time by Addison who was finding it increasingly difficult to find support in Cabinet for any radical social reforms. Lloyd George, who, it was noted, had lost much of his reformist zeal to the extent that it was said he favoured capitalists over workers, tried to replace Addison in the spring of 1920 and actually succeeded in doing so twelve months later. It was against this background of hostility and uncertainty, therefore, that the enquiry took place.

During November and December 1920, the Committee heard evidence from twenty witnesses. Several canal carriers, missionaries, educationalists, inspectors, a midwife and a boatmen were called. The unions, whose campaign had instigated the enquiry, declined to give evidence as a protest over the fact that no union representative was appointed to the Committee itself. Committee members also examined written evidence from witnesses and visited canal boat wharves at Brentford and Paddington. Special surveys were commissioned at most of the main canal boat depôts throughout the country to find out the number of people living on canal boats, whether they had other homes ashore, how many school children were involved, whether they attended school and their degree of literacy.[31]

An analysis of this evidence is given in table 8.2 below. It shows that the main point of agreement arising from the evidence is that children living on canal boats did suffer educationally as a result. On the remedy, however, no such general agreement could be reached. Many of the witnesses were against prohibiting children from residing on board, the carriers on the grounds that it would lead to the abolition of the system of living-in and consequently the ruin of the industry, the missionaries on the grounds that it would break up family life. There was no clear evidence that the system of living-in was undesirable in other ways, for example on grounds of health, cleanliness, morality or the safety of children and many of the witnesses felt that the presence of women on board was beneficial. They believed that the men were better fed, more sober and hard-working as a result.

Despite the fact that several of the witnesses had a vested interest in denying the practice of child labour, the evidence points clearly to its widespread existence. Even those who denied it admitted that children did help by steering and driving the horse to a greater or lesser extent. The assertion made by carriers[32] that boatmen would have to engage an extra hand if school-aged children were removed from the boats gives the lie to the claim that such children did not contribute materially to the operation of the trade.

Table 8.2 Analysis of evidence given to the Committee on Living-in in Canal Boats,1920-21

	Response of witnesses - see below for identity.																				
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	Total
In favour of children being prohibited?	/	/					X	/	/		/			/				/			yes 7 no 1
If children went would women follow?				/		/			X	/						/				/	yes 5 no 1
If women and children left the boats would trade be adversely affected?			/	/			/			/				/		/			/	/	yes 8
If school children were prohibited would trade be adversely affected?	X			/			/			/	/			m	/	/			X	/	yes 7 no 2 maybe 1
Are children healthy?	X	X	/	/			/		/	/											yes 5 no 2
Are children more prone to accidents?	/													/	X					X	yes 2 no 2
Is morality better than towns-people?				/																	yes 1
Is cleanliness better than towns-people?		X																/			yes 1 no 1
Does presence of women on boats conduce to morality?			/			/	/	/			/	/		/	/						yes 8
Is child labour practised?	/	/	X	/	X	X	/		/	/	/	X		/	/	/				X	yes 10 no 5
Do confinements take place on board to any great extent?	/		/	/							X			/			/				yes 5 no 1
Do boat people want their children to leave the boats?		/				X			X	X		X									no 5
Do boatmen want their wives to leave the boats?	/	X				X				X		X									yes 1 no 4
Do the women themselves want to leave the boats?	/															/					yes 2
Should children be allowed to stay with their parents?	/																				yes 1
Are hostels or boarding out a good idea?	X				/	/	/								/			/			yes 5 no 1
Do most boatmen have homes ashore?				/				/		/	/				/					/	yes 6
Are children educationally disadvantaged by living on the boat?	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/		/	/				/	/	/	yes 16
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	Total

/ = yes X = no m = maybe

Source; compiled from the evidence of the Departmental Enquiry into the Practice of Living-in on Canal Boats, 1920/21.

Committee on Living-in in Canal Boats 1920-21. List of witnesses.

A John Watts, Director of Brunner Mond and benefactor of N,S,P,C,C,

B Selina Dix, Head teacher, Wheatley Street Elementary School, Coventry,

C C,F,Jones, Director and manager of Fellows Morton and Clayton, canal carriers,

D Forester Clayton, Managing Director of Thomas Clayton (Oldbury) Ltd,, canal carriers,

E R,A,Knight, London City Missionary, Brentford and Paddington,

F Rev, W, Ward, Secretary, Incorporated Seamen and Boatmen's Friend Society,

G Leonard Hills, Pastor of Zion Baptist Church, London,

H W,G,E,Childs, Inspector of Canal Boats, Birmingham,

I Thomas Amos, J,P, and resident of Stoke Bruerne, (canal-side village)

J John Griffiths, canal carrier,

K Alfred Colwell, school teacher, Gloucester,

L Ernest John Lelliott, Visiting Missionary, Worcester Wharf, Birmingham,

M C,J,Phillips, Board of Education,

N W,H,Hackett, N,S,P,C,C, special inspector,

O E,Manning Lewis, General Manager, Sharpness New Docks and Gloucester and Birmingham Navigation Company,

P J,T,Shaw, Inspector of canal boats, Runcorn,

Q Nurse C, Jones, Nurse and Midwife, Brentford,

R R,T,Hawkins, President of the National Association of Superintendents of School Attendance Departments for England and Wales,

S Donald Fraser, Clerk to Runcorn Education Committee,

T William Bagnall, canal boatman, current employer Thomas Clayton,

The Committee reported early in 1921. Whilst pointing to the difficulties they had experienced in obtaining reliable statistics, they drew conclusions broadly in agreement with the summary above. They regretted the need to separate children from their parents but nevertheless recommended that children between the ages of 5 and 14 years should be prohibited from residing on board during term time.

Two members of the Committee, H.J.R.Murray and Mrs Eleanor Barton, disagreed so strongly with the main report that they produced an addendum in which they condemned the whole practice of living-in in the strongest terms on grounds of health, and the general unsuitability of conditions on board for the rearing of young children.[33] They declared it to be their belief that young children were commonly forced to do work which was excessive and even cruel and they regretted the fact that insufficient weight had been given to the woman's point of view where living conditions on board were concerned.

This element of dissent greatly upset Chamberlain who felt that it reflected badly on his personal role as chairman and that anything less than a united front would weaken the effect of the report.[34] As a result, Murray and Barton were obliged to greatly modify the tone of their addendum but they still made it clear that they felt the main report did

not condemn the practice of living-in on canal boats strongly enough.

Following the publication of the report, the Board of Education was asked for its views on the main recommendation, i.e. that school aged children should be prohibited from living on canal boats during term time. The Minister of State, Herbert Lewis, privately expressed reservations:[35]

> I cannot understand how children could be accommodated in houses which are kept locked up and only used at irregular intervals as suggested at A above. Persons might be induced to live in the house and take care of the children but it would necessarily mean expense to the parents and if they were placed with relatives of other persons living on shore that would also mean cost to the parents. I am not aware of any precedent for compelling any class of parent not only to send the child to school but also to incur the expense of maintenance.
> I raise the point because although the class affected is a small one, the principle involved is not unimportant, and its adoption may in the present state of public feeling cause trouble.

However, on the grounds that nothing short of prohibition would secure an education for canal boat children, the Board reluctantly concurred with the Committee's recommendations.

No further action on the report was taken however. By this time, Christopher Addison had been forced to resign from the Ministry of Health following difficulties over the cost of his housing policies and loss of personal power and support within the Cabinet. He had been replaced by Alfred Mond, a wealthy businessman who had no inclination to initiate innovative radical social policies of the type envisaged by

the Living-in Committee's report. Furthermore, financial crisis developing over the winter of 1920/1921 had removed social reform from the Parliamentary agenda for the foreseeable future. In a departmental minute in October 1921, Mond wrote:[36]

> Whatever the merits of the Committee's recommendations, the present time is clearly not opportune for imposing fresh legislative burdens on any branch of industry or for condemning any class of accommodation for children which affords decent shelter.

He replied in similar vein to a question in the Commons from Neville Chamberlain on 15th February 1922 and the same reply was given by Shortt in July 1922, by the new Health Minister, Sir Arthur Boscawen, in December 1922, by Lord Eustace Percy, President of the Board of Education in 1923 and by Sir Arthur Robinson in 1926.[37] Chamberlain himself became Minister of Health briefly in 1923 but even he found it politic not to resurrect the recommendations of his own committee. Housing shortages, political instability and financial crisis had ensured that no legislative solution would be immediately forthcoming.

Consequently, it fell to the civil servants to find an administrative solution. This again was typical of a period when politicians preferred to devote themselves to traditional questions such as defence rather than get involved in social reform debate. Critical decisions in this field, although of a highly political nature, were made by administrators and public policy evolved almost unnoticed by Parliament.[38] The actions and attitudes of administrators in

the central departments, therefore, were crucial to the progress, or lack of it, of social policy on canal boat people.

Between 1925 and 1930, the Ministry of Health toyed with the idea of making an Order under Section 2 of the Canal Boat Act 1877 to prohibit children from living on refuse boats in Paddington. This series of events provides a useful insight into the attitude of Health Ministry officials towards initiating reforms and reveals the outlook and suggestibility of the Chief Canal Boat Inspector, Owen Llewellyn.

The boats in question were mainly wide boats, some owned by private contractors and some by various West London local councils. They carried house and street refuse from Paddington Basin to the refuse tips at West Drayton, a distance of some seventeen miles by canal. Investigations carried out in 1926 and 1930 showed that just over a hundred children were resident on board.[39] As most of the boats were towed in trains by a steam tug, and as there were no locks on the journey, there appeared to be no necessity for family labour. Furthermore, as the journey was short, the men could have returned home each night thus removing the only other excuse for having families resident on board. Nevertheless, it was a long-standing custom for families to reside on these refuse boats. The situation appears to have been

unique. In other cities, Birmingham and Manchester for example, refuse was transported by canal but only open boats were used and thus no-one lived on board.

The campaign to remove children from Paddington boats was instigated by the Board of Education in a letter to the Ministry of Health in June 1925. They questioned the risk to health from the practice of children living on such boats and asked whether the Ministry could use its powers to prohibit it.[40]

On being asked to investigate, Llewellyn declared himself against such a prohibition on the grounds that the contractors and boat people would object and the housing shortage in Paddington would not allow them to find accommodation ashore. He himself appeared to see nothing wrong with the practice at this time. The children were able to attend a special canal boat school when at Paddington and although they were surrounded by filth and completely lacked any washing facilities, their health did not appear to suffer. His advice was "to let sleeping dogs lie" and to try to persuade the local authorities to provide washing facilities on the wharf.[41]

When consulted again in March 1926, he reported his position unchanged.[42] Yet in the space of only a week he was to undergo a dramatic change of heart. On the 23rd March he

wrote to the Ministry of Health stating that the situation at Paddington was "little short of a scandal" and enclosed a draft Order which would prohibit women and children from living on refuse boats.[43] LLewellyn's action seems to have been prompted by fear of criticism from outside sources rather than genuine concern for the welfare of the boat families. In the same report to the Ministry he wrote "we should have no proper defence if by any chance the question of their being allowed on the boats was raised."

Ministry of Health officials found themselves in a difficult position. Their instinct was to avoid any radical new departure but they must also have been wary of ignoring their Chief Inspectors' warning of possible criticism. A call for more information[44] could not delay the need to act for long and in April the draft Order was referred to the Solicitors' Department for approval. Both Dawes and Ross, two Ministry of Health officials, seemed to be hoping for a legal objection. Ross himself suggested to the Solicitors' Department that the order might be *intra vires* as "it seems to go beyond anything done before" and his colleague Dawes added:[45]

> Unless we can say that the occupation of such boats is likely to cause the spread of infectious disease, I do not see how we can justify the making of a regulation under Section 2 [of the Canal Boats Act 1877]

He also expressed doubt on the possibility of applying any new order retrospectively to boats already registered under the Act.

Unfortunately for Ross and Dawes, the Solicitors' Department were not able to find the hoped for legal obstacles. Gwyer opined that the desired result could probably be achieved by restricting the occupants of refuse boats to nil and that any such order could be applied to boats already registered. The only difficulty he foresaw was that of defining exactly the category of boat to which it was to apply. He nevertheless felt that the Ministry of Health had little to fear in going ahead, pointing out that:[46]

> even if the legality of the regulation were subsequently challenged in the courts (which is not very probable) the Ministry would be unlikely to incur criticism of substance in view of the fact that the regulation has to lie in draft on the Table of both Houses for forty days before it can be made and if no objection is taken to it during this prolonged period it can at any rate be assumed that it is made with the full approval of Parliament.

Despite this reassurance, Ross wrote to Llewellyn on 14th May saying:[47]

> The legal position not being absolutely free from doubt we should require a strong case to justify the making of an order and I doubt whether we could proceed in the face of opposition.

Bowing to the inclinations of his administrative superiors, Llewellyn quietly let the matter rest for the time being. During the summer of 1926, however, he received several letters from the various local councils involved in the refuse boat trade expressing their belief that the presence of children on the boats was both unnecessary and

undesirable. Spurred on by this support, Llewellyn wrote again to the Ministry on 8th October stating that he had no hesitation in asking for an Order to have the children removed.[48] However, while the Ministry prevaricated and suggested writing to the councils concerned to point out their duty to make proper arrangements for refuse disposal, Llewellyn again allowed himself to be swayed from his intended path. In a letter to the Ministry dated 28th October, he reported on a meeting with Henry Boyer, the principal contractor involved, whom he described as "a very nice and sensible fellow". He rather credulously reported Boyer's claim that he continued to carry refuse by canal boat, even though he could transport it more cheaply by road, out of concern for the welfare of the boat people who would otherwise be thrown out of employment and recommended once again that the Order be dropped.

By March 1927, Llewellyn had once again grown concerned that the possibility of conditions at Paddington being exposed as a public scandal might bring down criticism upon the head of the department. He wrote:[49]

> As the condition of the children on the boats is so easily available to anyone who may care to enquire,,,I am convinced that the only way to get rid of the matter and any possible scandal arising out of it, is for the Ministry to make an Order removing the children, operative as soon as possible and consequently to remove the possibility of any "press stunt" that may easily arise and for which we at present could have no satisfactory answer.

The Ministry responded characteristically by requesting more information[50] and in June Llewellyn wrote again stating:[51]

> My main object is to prevent a newspaper "stunt" concerning their presence on these filthy craft which would reflect no credit either on the Minister or the Inspector and might be the cause of "panic" legislation resulting in the abolition of children from all boats which would be a pity.

In July, an Order was once again put before the Solicitors' Department who this time decided that it could not be applied retrospectively.[52] The question of enforcement was also raised in view of the fact that the only penalty for infringement would be a fine not exceeding twenty shillings. Once again, the idea of an Order was dropped and Llewellyn was left to try and press for washing facilities on the wharf.

In October 1927 he organised a meeting of interested parties.[53] All agreed that the provision of washing facilities would be an excellent thing but when it came to the question of who was to provide for the cost of erection and up keep, no progress could be made. In a passage which could easily have been written of the cotton mill owners of a hundred years earlier, Llewellyn reported:[54]

> The boat owners pointed out, quite correctly, that the health of these children could not be proved to suffer, that disease was scarce, that a certain and growing amount of education was received, that the children were learning a trade, that their parents were so well paid and lived in such circumstances that they were able to feed their children properly and probably to save money, as well as always being able to supervise them,
> The Medical Officers of Health did not seem to care much what happened and declared themselves content whether the children remained on or were taken off the boats, It was suggested and declared an excellent suggestion on all sides that the canal wharf owner [who was not present] should build and maintain the wash houses,

Predictably, Llewellyn had no more success persuading the wharf owners, the Grand Union Canal Company, to provide washing facilities[55] and the whole issue fell into abeyance. In September 1928, Llewellyn warned that conditions at Paddington were deteriorating, that the number of children on the boats appeared to be increasing and that the *Daily Mail* had now discovered the existence of the refuse tips at the West Drayton end of the canal and could not long be kept away from Paddington.[56] He was ignored by the Ministry of Health who seem to have resigned themselves to the idea that nothing more could be done by them to remedy the situation.

In February 1930, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Miss Susan Lawrence, visited Paddington Basin herself.[57] Disgusted by what she saw, she urged Llewellyn to send written recommendations to the Department for remedying the situation. Llewellyn put forward six suggestions ranging from urging the boat owners or local authorities to remedy the problem to amending the Canal Boat Regulations in order to make it impossible for children to be accommodated on board. However, by this time a Private Members Bill aimed at prohibiting children from living on any canal boat had begun its progress through Parliament and the Ministry saw no reason, for the present, to take action.

During the period in question, the Board of Education gave consideration to various ways in which the educational

difficulties of canal boat children might have been ameliorated by administrative means.

Up to 1926 there was no suggestion that the Board itself should take any direct action and it was able to confine itself to encouraging local education authorities to do what they could to improve the attendance of these children at school by sending attendance officers to the canal-side. During these years, Middlesex Education Authority and the London County Council assumed responsibility for the special canal boat classes at Brentford and Paddington and attached them to existing nearby elementary schools.[58]

In 1926, A.I.Dakin, the Inspector of schools for the Cheshire area made certain recommendations regarding canal boat children, some of which concerned the Board directly and which show that the response of the Board to taking direct action was as cautious and conservative as that of the Ministry of Health.[59] The episode also suggests a curious and significant antagonism between some local and central government officers.

Dakin's first four recommendations concerned the organisation and teaching of the children and were not directly of concern to the Board but his fifth and sixth points involved the making of regulations under the Education Act 1921 for the issuing of attendance books to

the children. One official at the Board, D. Davidson, whilst agreeing that the power to issue such regulations existed, felt that it should not be done on the grounds that it had never been done before and added criptically:[60]

> If these recommendations,,,are communicated to the Authority, it is quite possible that Mr Potter [Director of the Cheshire County Council Education Committee] would seize upon the opportunity for a little self-advertisement in his present position as President of the Association of Directors and Secretaries and try to raise the whole problem, This consideration might, indeed, be held to make it doubtful whether the Report, valuable as it is, should be communicated at all.

Davidson's superiors, Richards and Sir Edmund Phipps felt that something less drastic would suffice and the report, with the exception of the recommendations on attendance books, was forwarded to the Cheshire Education Authority on 21st March 1927.

The failure of the Board and the local authorities to co-operate and co-ordinate their efforts had a serious affect on later attempts to solve the problem of education for canal boat children. In 1930, the London County Council made the seemingly sensible and harmless suggestion that education authorities concerned with the schooling of these children should confer and attempt to produce a common programme so that the children could move from one school to another with a greater deal of continuity of instruction.[61] The Council, not unreasonably, suggested that the initiative should come from the Board of Education but Davidson's response was to tell his superior, Pelham, that he did not

see why the ball should not be returned to them[62] (the London County Council).

Earlier in the same minute, Davidson had revealed that what he really had in mind was to use the LCC's proposal to the Board's own advantage as a means of excusing it from taking any future action. He told Pelham:

> The LCC idea of a conference,,,does contain the germ of a partial solution of the difficulty, If such a conference is called it would probably break up in failure, but it would have the advantage of showing that the Board had considered the possibility of administrative action to ameliorate the situation of these children and would definitely disprove the possibility of such an amelioration,

Pelham too had felt that the scheme was impractical but felt that they ought to explore it further before turning it down.[63] Accordingly, H.M.I. Chambers was directed to make a detailed investigation. He reported[64] that the LCC's proposals were quite feasible and went much further himself by suggesting the creation of a National Council for the Education of Children and Others Connected with the Canal Boat Industry. It was to have consisted of representatives of those LEAs concerned, canal companies and carriers and canal workers and should have the status and power of an LEA in its own right. It was to establish a national register of children resident on canal boats and would co-ordinate the education of canal boat children in all schools and classes throughout the country. As an LEA, it would attract the normal grant from central government and would receive

income from the rates dependent on the assessment of canal property in each area concerned.

Such an ambitious and innovative scheme was not likely to find favour with the deeply conservative officials at the Board of Education, particularly in the midst of an unprecedented economic depression. Accordingly on 24th November 1930, Pelham directed that the LCC be informed that nothing ambitious could be attempted at the present time but that they might try liaising with the Middlesex Education Committee over the special canal boat school at West Drayton.

The following year, another official of the Board, R.R.Campbell, again addressed himself to the problem and considered it under two headings, firstly, the duty of the Board to collect accurate statistics and secondly the education of the children.[65] With regard to the former, he suggested ways in which the form sent out annually to the local authorities could be improved. With regard to the latter he resurrected the idea of a co-ordinated programme of education to be adopted by the LEAs concerned. He called for a conference to discuss the proposals of the Middlesex and London County Council Education Authorities and suggested that once their scheme had been settled the papers could be passed to other authorities with a view to their setting up similar programmes.

The hoped for conference was eventually convened on 9th July 1931[66] when it was decided that the two schools at West Drayton and Paddington should, whilst remaining the financial and administrative responsibility of their respective education authorities, confer on curriculum content and agree a common programme. This limited scheme was the full extent of co-operation ever achieved by the Board amongst LEAs and there was never any attempt to extend it to other areas. The Board confined its future actions to the collecting of admittedly faulty statistics[67] on forms which had remained unamended since the nineteenth century. It was found impossible to agree on an improved form and it was felt to be not worth the effort anyway since nothing short of the impossible - i.e. the removal of all children from canal boats - would secure the adequate education of the canal boat population. With that, the Board gave up, whether in despair or with relief is open to question, hoping and declaring itself to believe that with the decline of canal traffic the problem would solve itself.[68]

In 1927, the Transport and General Workers' Union, under the leadership of Harry Gosling, renewed its interest in the education of canal boat children and, in February 1928, Gosling approached the Board of Education with a proposal to have the children boarded out during term time.[69] The Union's idea was that a boarding-out allowance should be made available to canal boat parents to help them meet the

cost of maintaining their children outside the family home and it offered to contribute to such an allowance from Union funds. The Board found that it had no powers to contribute financially itself to such a scheme but that there was provision under Section 23 of the Education Act 1921 for the Local Education Authorities to do so.[70] In characteristic fashion, the Board welcomed any offer to solve the problem of educating canal boat children which did not involve itself in direct responsibility for action and it circulated certain key authorities to ascertain their views. Not surprisingly, they replied that they were unable to contribute financially in the present circumstances.[71] Not only was there the question of cost but, as Wolverhampton pointed out, there was the possibility that relieving able-bodied parents in full employment of the responsibility of maintaining their own children would create a dangerous precedent.[72]

When a deputation from the Union met the Parliamentary Secretary of the Board, the Duchess of Atholl on 22nd May 1928,[73] it was stated that the use of public funds for such a purpose could not be justified until there was a real demand from the canal boat people themselves for educational facilities. Gosling, claiming that his Union did in deed represent the wishes of the boat people, undertook to produce a few parents who would be willing to allow their children to take part in a boarding-out scheme on an

experimental basis. However, on 14th September he was forced to admit, in a letter to the Board,[74] that he had failed completely to get the support of the boat people for his scheme. Accordingly, he conceded the impossibility of solving the problem administratively and announced that his Union had resolved to seek a legislative solution through the introduction of a Private Members Bill.

Accordingly, early in 1929, Harry Gosling, a Labour M.P. since the early 1920s, introduced his Bill which sought to ban all children below the age of 14 years from travelling and residing on Canal Boats. This went further than the recommendations of the 1921 committee of enquiry and the Ministry of Health felt[75]

> a manifest objection to doing anything which will add to the demand for houses until more has been done to meet the present shortage,

Believing that if children were removed from the boats the women would follow and fearful of the consequences for the future of the industry they were also concerned that

> the Bill, if passed might ,,,add a quota of unemployment, this just at a time when this particular business is said to be making headway after a long depression,

The Ministry therefore requested that the Bill be blocked on the grounds that it would need considerable modification and there would be no time to deal adequately with it in the current session.[76]

The Bill failed to get a second reading but, with the election of a Labour government in May 1929, Gosling determined to re-introduce it during the new session. Accordingly he visited Charles Trevelyan, the President of the Board of Education, in the hope of enlisting his support.[77] The President appears to have been not unsympathetic but said that the Bill was of a kind which might lead to it being obstructed and that therefore the government could not afford the time to take it up itself.

When the Bill came up for second reading on 31.1.30, some of the objections voiced in the House of Commons debate and the class-bound attitudes of some of its opponents revealed a lack of altruistic interest in the education and welfare of these children.

Herbert Nield M.P.,[78] alleging that the lack of educational facilities was imaginary, quoted a letter written by the Vicar of St Mary's Paddington who claimed that the boat children received all the education that was really necessary. The implication that such children did not really need much education at all was taken up one of the Bill's supporters[79] who also criticized Nield's claim that the children were healthier on boats than if they were living in Paddington:

> If people are better off in barges than in Paddington slums the remedy is not to keep them on barges but to improve the slums.

Another supporter of the Bill felt that there was something very wrong with an industry which could only carry on by allowing a system which deprived its employees' children of education.[80] He felt that in such a situation:

> the State ought to step in and lay down the law that these things shall not be allowed,

This raised the important question of how far the State should go in regulating the lives of its citizens in the interests of the common good. Recognizing this, the former President of the Board of Education, Lord Eustace Percy,[81] felt that the Bill embodied a dangerous principle, "an extension of the powers of compulsion which the country ought to refuse to accept". He pointed out that legislation already existed to regulate the labours of children on canal boats but that the difficulty was enforcing it. The real issue which the Bill addressed was the need to put the population in a place where it could be properly inspected:

> That is a very dangerous principle and one which we have never yet quite adopted, that the locus of the family habitation should be determined by its immediate inspectability by a public authority.

Percy felt that the Bill too closely resembled nineteenth century ideas about protecting child workers in that it was a purely prohibitive measure. He thought that society had now moved on to the point that social legislation, instead of being compulsory and penal in its provisions should be providing facilities to help parents achieve that which they naturally wanted for their children themselves. Accordingly he called for boarding schools to be provided by local

authorities, a measure which must have seemed rather extravagant and idealistic given the economic circumstances of the day.

The Bill received a second reading by a large majority but by the time it reached its third reading in May 1930, opposition to it had increased and its principal supporter, Harry Gosling, was dead. By now the committee stage had modified the Bill so that it applied only to school-aged children who were to be excluded during term time but not at week-ends, during school holidays or during periods of certified sickness.[82]

Opposition came not only from those with vested business interests, such as the boat owners, who claimed that it would close the canals, voluntary agencies too found it unacceptable. The London City Mission and the Incorporated Seamen and Boatmen's Friend Society objected on the grounds that it would destroy family life. The London and National Society for Women's Service objected to the interference with the freedom of women involved in the clause excluding women from refuse boats.[83]

The boat people too voiced their objections. A group of them attended a meeting at the House of Commons on 5th May 1930 to protest about the Bill and a petition containing 1006

signatures was presented to the House of Commons two days later.[84]

At the Report Stage and third reading of the Bill on 9th May it was finally defeated. No further attempt to reform social conditions on canal boats by legislative means was ever made. The provisions of the nineteenth-century Canal Boats Acts were re-enacted in the Public Health Act 1936 and the welfare of the boating population continued to be governed by legislation which had already proved to be inadequate before the end of the previous century.

With the failure of Gosling's Bill, canal boat social policy entered a decade of quiescence and even complacency. By 1936, some disquiet about the educational difficulties began to reach the Board of Education once again but it was brushed aside. Whilst privately noting that the arrangements for educating canal boat children were still far from adequate,[85] the Board was reluctant to admit as much to outside agencies. When the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations complained in April 1936 that the education regulations concerning canal boat children were not being enforced, the Board replied that its annual returns from Local Authorities did not bear out such a claim.[86] In January 1937, *The Star* publicly accused the Board of complacency.[87] This and similar complaints from the Association of Superintendents of School Attendance

Departments[88] failed to move the officials of the Board. They contented themselves with the notion that as the number of children on boats seemed to be decreasing, the problem could be said to be solving itself and that furthermore, previous experience of attempts at legislation was not encouraging.[89]

At the Ministry of Health a similar atmosphere prevailed. Owen Llewellyn, the Chief Canal Boat Inspector, retired in 1931 and was not replaced. When the Board of Education requested the Ministry's help in revising their form for LEAs concerning canal boat children, the Ministry declined to assist, admitting that there was now no-one in the department who knew much about the subject.[90]

The success of the newly formed Grand Union Canal Carrying Company and its plans to expand further and build a new fleet of narrow boats did prompt some activity at the Ministry of Health. In December 1934 an office committee was set up to consider revising the regulations governing standards of accommodation on boats registered as dwellings.[91] However, the committee members confined themselves to structural features of the boats, particularly the ventilation of the cabins in view of the advent of motor traction. They were warned by A.M.Legge of the Ministry to "be aware of the previous history on other points" and to

"steer clear of points to do with the educational aspect of children".[92]

The committee spent six months collecting facts and produced an interim report in June 1935.[93] It then adjourned for more than two years and resumed in November 1937. A new set of statutory regulations were drafted in 1938. The main changes were new regulations concerning the ventilation of motor boats and an increase in the air space required in the cabin to 100 cubic feet per person.[94] The regulations were never implemented. Legge later blamed this on the outbreak of the Second World War.[95]

8.3 The Second World War and the Post-war Period.

Despite an up turn in canal traffic during the 1930s, by the eve of the Second World War, the boating population had diminished, probably by as much as 50% compared to 1921. The out break of hostilities stemmed this haemorrhage to some extent but many of the changes of the war-time and post-war period left the boating population more isolated and underprivileged than ever.

At the out break of war, the Ministry of Transport set up the Canals (Defence) Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of the Ministries of Transport, Food, Supply Agriculture and Fisheries, Labour and National Service and the Mines Department. The Canal Association, the National

Association of Canal Carriers, the Transport and General Workers' Union and the L.M.S. Railway Company were also represented.[96] The Committee's brief was to advise the Minister of Transport upon measures to secure the best use of canals in the national interest in time of war and in 1941 it was replaced by the Central Control Committee.[97]

As in the First World War, the control committees concerned themselves largely with labour shortages, the financial difficulties of the carriers and particular social problems arising from the peculiar conditions of war such as food shortages. Financial assistance given to carriers and canal companies prevented many going out of business and helped to prevent the living standards of boat families from falling too far behind those of other workers. Extra shops, canteens and iron rations helped to relieve some of the war-time hardships of canal life. It was the need to address the problem of labour shortage, however, which brought about the most important changes for boat people.

Richard Titmuss, the principal exponent of the theory that war is a major cause of social change, points to the exposure of social evils during war-time as one factor in the evolution of social policy.[98] Just as the evacuation of children opened the eyes of some middle-class sections of the population to the deprivations of some working families, so the recruitment of labour from sources hitherto greatly

removed from the lives of the boating population brought the social conditions of family boats to the attention of a much wider public.

During the Second World War, a number of women trainees were recruited to undertake war service by operating canal boats. Many were educated women of a social class which ordinarily would have been quite remote from canals and the people living on them. Such middle class women had probably had little previous contact with working class families. They were shocked by the conditions of life among the traditional boating population and communicated their disquiet to Sir Osborne Mance, the war-time Director of Canals. On 23 August 1943, Mance contacted Howell James at the Ministry of Health to express his concern that boat people were not receiving the medical treatment and welfare amenities to which they were entitled.[99]

After more than a decade of quiescence in the area of canal boat social policy, the Ministry of Health were irritated at the prospect of this old hornets' nest being reopened and its officials adopted a highly defensive stance at the suggestion of criticism from another Ministry. One official recorded his disgruntled response thus:[100]

> The Ministry of War Transport seem to think we have never heard of canal boats!

A similar note of irritation and resentment is evident in the report of a meeting which took place between the two Ministries on 14th September 1943. The Health Ministry officials reported that Mance[101]

> was not prepared to accept the experience of the past 70 years that the social and economic conditions of canal boats in fact worked and were satisfactory to the population concerned,

and accused him of "generalizing from extremely slight evidence" which he had obtained from the voluntary trainees who "told him things".

Ministry of War Transport papers record the extreme reluctance with which the Ministry of Health had agreed to this meeting:[102]

> He [Legge] is the only person at the Ministry of Health with information about canal boat legislation but his knowledge did not extend to medical arrangements. He knew of no-one in the Ministry who would be in a position to talk on this subject in relation to canal personnel. No regulations have been made by the Ministry of Health under the Public Health Act and the regulations still in force prior to that Act were still applicable. The only Minister of Health inspector of canal boats had retired some time ago and his place had not been filled.
> Mr Legge obviously wished to avoid a meeting. He suggested that we were stirring up a matter which the Ministry of Health had found desirable to leave acquiescent having regard to the peculiarities of the individuals concerned. I pressed him very strongly and ultimately he agreed to endeavour to find others in his Ministry who would discuss the questions likely to be raised.

This minute reveals not only an extraordinary amount of ignorance on the part of Health Ministry officials regarding a group of people for whom they had direct responsibility but also a desire to remain unenlightened and untroubled by such problems.

At the prompting of the Ministry of War Transport, the Ministry of Health undertook to investigate the provision of medical facilities in general and infant and maternity welfare provision in particular.[103] After extensive investigations including visits to various narrow-boat depots on the Grand Union Canal, an official from the Ministry of Health, N.B.Battenbury, concluded that public health activities among canal boat people had been allowed to lapse and in fact had never been very satisfactory.[104] Following this, some effort was made, particularly at the London end of the Grand Union Canal to see that expectant mothers received ante-natal and post-natal care. In August 1944, however, Howell James recorded:[105]

> The impression I have gathered from the reports is that there is little wrong with the canal boat population.

The difficulties experienced in recruiting men and women to relieve the labour shortage on the canals during the war also focused the attention of other government departments on the conditions of employment in the canal carrying industry. The Ministry of Labour held the view that the wages and conditions of employment for boat crews were so unsatisfactory that the employment should not be protected by the Essential Work Order until they were set right.[106] The system of families living-in on boats and the absence of any specific wage apportionment to the crew were held to be particular evils. Pressure to remedy the situation led in

1943 to the setting up of a Joint Industrial Council for the Inland Waterways Industry. Although it was found impossible to abolish the family boating system or even to apportion a specific wage to crews of narrow-boats, except on the canal between Birmingham and the Severn, significant reforms were made in other areas. For the first time, national agreements were made on wage rates for long distance and short distance boatmen and agreements were made on minimum weekly wages and demurrage payments.[107]

The problem of education was resurrected briefly in February 1945 when the Ministry of Education met members of the National Association of Canal Carriers to try to reconcile the needs of the industry to the new requirements on school attendance embodied in the 1944 Education Act.[108] Little if any action resulted from this meeting and the Ministry seem to have decided to turn a blind eye to the problem in view of the dwindling numbers concerned. In 1952, the Birmingham Education Authority established a hostel in Erdington which accommodated thirty canal boat children during term time and allowed them to attend local schools. This seems to have been the only post-war attempt by central or local government to make educational facilities more accessible to the five hundred or so children remaining on the canals.

After the Second World War, the inland waterways never really resumed their independent status and in 1948 they

were nationalised along with the railways. The Docks and Inland Waterways Executive and its successor, the British Waterways Board liked to project an image of benevolent paternalism towards their employees and the house magazine often contained references to "the family atmosphere" at Bulls Bridge depôt.[109] Other than the organisation of Christmas parties in conjunction with the canal boat missionary at Brentford[110] and the provision of a few extra sanitary and washing facilities, they did little to change social conditions for their narrow-boat crews and in 1963 they wound up their own narrow-boat fleet.

After the Second World War, responsibility for administering the provisions of the Public Health Act as they related to canal boat dwellings passed to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The department might have been content to forget the existence of such responsibilities but in 1957, the local public health authority for Northants wrote apologizing for the fact that they had not sent in their annual report on canal boats as required under the Act. The Ministry then discovered to its embarrassment that no-one had even looked at such reports for years.[111] However, the issue of state intervention on behalf of canal boat people was kept alive during the 1950s by the activities of the canal boat inspector and town clerk of Runcorn with the assistance of their local M.P. Dennis Vosper.[112]

The Runcorn town clerk opened his campaign on behalf of this "much neglected community" in 1950 by requesting the Ministry to issue amended regulations concerning the cubic capacity of boat cabins and the provision of drinking water and sanitary facilities. Vosper took up the case the following year. The Ministry responded by making enquiries of various interested parties such as the National Association of Canal Carriers and the Sanitary Inspectors' Association. Despite various reminders and exhortations from Vosper, these enquiries managed to take five years to complete. Vosper claimed to have discovered that the Ministry had actually told the Association of Sanitary Inspectors that there was no urgency to the matter and that they proposed taking no further action for the time being. Finally, in October 1955, the Ministry of Transport were consulted on the state of the canal carrying industry to see whether it was now worth while making any new regulations. They replied that it was wrong to assume that canal traffic was on a down grade as it had in fact increased since 1948 and that although the narrow boat trade was dwindling several hundred narrow boats were still working and were expected to continue to do so for some time.

In the light of this advice, a new set of regulations was drawn up in November 1955 and circulated for comment. However, by the time this process was complete, in September 1957, it was decided that there was no longer any point in

going ahead due to the dwindling number of people still resident on canal boats.

8.4 The Contribution of Voluntary Agencies

As in the earlier period, the canal boat community, or at least that part of it which lived wholly or mainly on board the boat, formed an obvious and easily identifiable target for the attention of charitable organisations. Boatmen continued to enjoy a reasonable level of income and even in the final years of canal carrying there is no evidence that they were seriously underpaid. Yet the confinement of the boat cabin and its lack of domestic amenities seems to have sown the idea in the minds of some people that canal boat people were impoverished and in need of help. Even if they were not poor, the itinerant mode of living did cause certain difficulties, for example in the education and care of young children, the provision of medical and especially maternity care, the provision of washing and laundering facilities and there were special problems for families from time to time when boats were held up by ice. Although local authorities and some employers were able to help overcome some of these difficulties, there remained much scope for voluntary agencies.

Voluntary provision came from four main sources, three Christian organisations, The London City Mission, The Incorporated Seamen and Boatmen's Friend Society, and The

Salvation Army, and the third, a non-religious organisation, The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The children who lived wholly or mainly on board formed the section of the boating community in most obvious need. The director of the N.S.P.C.C., Richard Parr, had been aware of their deprivations since the beginning of the century and had published a pamphlet on the subject in 1910. The aim of the Society had always been to have the children removed from the boats by law and to this end a Bill was drafted before the First World War. The Society was unable to interest anyone in taking it up until the 1920s when Harry Gosling, already engaged in a trade union-backed campaign on behalf of the boat people, agreed to introduce it as a Private Members Bill. The progress and ultimate failure of this Bill has already been discussed but this does not represent the sum total of N.S.P.C.C. action on behalf of this group of children.

In 1920, a special N.S.P.C.C. inspector was appointed who was to devote his whole attention to canal boat children. The appointment came about through the benevolence of John Watts, a director of Brunner Mond (a forerunner of ICI) who had observed canal boat families for himself and, wishing to do something to help them, had offered to pay the salary of a special inspector.'[13] William Hackett, who held the post

from 1920 to 1937, patrolled canal banks all over the country. He kept a record of all the boats he saw noting such details as the number age and sex of the occupants, whether he had seen children working and in some instances reporting on the educational attainments of the children he questioned. Where children were seen working, or where parents were said to be neglecting their offspring in other ways such as through poor diet or inadequate personal cleanliness, the offenders were warned or, in extreme cases, reported for prosecution. Hackett was said to have developed a friendly relationship with the boaters and he often gave help and advice on such matters as health and medical treatment. During harsh winters, when boats were frozen in, food was given to some families.[114]

Hackett was instrumental in bringing the circumstances of canal boat life to the attention of central government. Being employed by a non-government body, his evidence provided an important balance to that of the Chief Canal Boat Inspector, Owen Llewellyn, who was the only official source of statistics. He was called as a witness by the *Committee on Living-in on Canal Boats* in 1920 and, during 1928, the Board of Education used him to gather information and statistics about canal boat children.[115] He was disliked by Llewellyn who regarded him as an irritating nuisance, stirring up unwarranted trouble to justify his own appointment.[116] Llewellyn warned the Board of Education not

to attach too much importance to Hackett's figures and reports but despite this, the Board was impressed with what Hackett had to say. He was interviewed several times by high ranking Board officials and by the Parliamentary Secretary. His reports of child cruelty and neglect, educational deprivation and child labour led them to give enthusiastic support to the Private Members Bill when it was first mooted.

Despite the tireless efforts of the N.S.P.C.C. inspector along the canal banks, the good working relationship forged by him with both boat people and central government, the ultimate aim of the Society was never achieved. Furthermore, although Hackett was undoubtedly able to offer valuable help and advice to individuals, the impact of the Society's efforts on canal boat life was, in the final analysis, only minimal.

The Christian missionaries of the London City Mission and the Incorporated Seamen and Boatmen's Friend Society had a different approach. Their belief in the sanctity of family life led them to strongly oppose any proposal to remove women and children from canal boats. They preferred to ameliorate the hardships of traditional canal boat life rather than abolish it. Although primarily concerned with the moral and spiritual welfare of the boat people, their missions at Brentford, Paddington and various canal basins

throughout the Midlands also provided much needed domestic, educational, medical and recreational facilities. Details of these facilities have been described in chapter four of this thesis. In addition, missionaries organised collections of clothes, toys, books and writing materials for canal boat people and held Christmas parties for the children. Although the special canal boat schools soon passed to the control of the local education authorities, the voluntary bodies continued to provide accommodation for these classes in most cases and it is very unlikely that such special schools would ever have existed without an initial impetus from the voluntary sector.

Two Salvation Army Brigadiers, Mr and Mrs Fielding, lived aboard two narrow-boats at Hawkesbury Junction on the Grand Union Canal. They toured the canals in summer holding religious meetings, giving lessons to canal boat children, visiting boat people in hospital, writing letters for them and giving help with children's clothing and even the care of pets.'[17]

One other voluntary effort on behalf of the boat people should also be mentioned at this point, the medical services provided by Sister Mary Ward at Stoke Bruerne. The details of her activities have already been given in chapter four but it is worth stressing here that this important community service was provided entirely on a voluntary basis and there

was no comparable provision by the state even after the creation of the National Health Service.

Although the aim of the Christian organisations did nothing to help bring about a radical reform of canal boat life, their work, and that of Sister Mary Ward, had a definite beneficial impact on the everyday lives of canal boat people and was important in relieving physical and social needs in a way which employers and the state were unable or unwilling to do.

8.5 Conclusion

When C.L.Mowett coined his now well-known phrase to describe British social policy between the wars - "the welfare state in scaffolding,"[118] he commented that "extensive though they were, the social services left many groups where people crouched unprotected". Such a group, it seems were people living and working on board canal boats.

At the beginning of this period the captains of boats employed by a carrying company enjoyed the protection of the National Insurance Acts and the Workmen's Compensation Acts but the crews of these boats benefited from no income protection and the employer, the canal carrier, had no liability in respect of crew members what so ever. Although the dependants of other workers were also excluded from

benefits such as free medical treatment, canal boat crews were not strictly speaking dependants but working members of the community. Throughout the period there was no legislation to limit the number of hours worked, even by young members of the labour force and nothing to regulate other conditions of employment.

As far as domestic conditions were concerned, the boat people were probably one of the most heavily supervised of any able-bodied group of free citizens, yet the standards of accommodation and sanitation enforced were those of the nineteenth century and fell below those enforced in common lodging houses or even on merchant sea-going vessels, let alone those of ordinary members of the community.

During a period of growing, if still limited educational opportunities for the working classes, children living on canal boats remained almost completely uneducated.

In theory, canal boat people were entitled to the same level of medical facilities as other members of society but in practice, the problem of obtaining services when not permanently resident in a single place were not always overcome.

After the Second World War, the boating population became more and more socially and culturally isolated. Their

standards of living, education and access to life opportunities fell well behind those of other people of a similar class. Their numbers were, of course, dwindling so fast by now that it was hopeless to suppose that any government department would take a particular interest in them. Nevertheless, the fact that the use of family labour on boats continued until 1970 meant that, during a period of universal welfare provision, a whole generation - perhaps as many as two thousand people - were denied even a basic education or the bare minimum of modern living standards.

So, in the four main areas of social policy, income protection, housing, education and health, boat people were inadequately served by the state and, in the case of the first three at least, continued to be so throughout the period. In a period of extensive and expanding social provision by the state, for this social group, voluntary provision continued to be at least as important and effective. The story of the evolution of social policy during this period, as far as the boat population is concerned therefore, is not a matter of accounting for the progress and change which took place, but more a matter of explaining why so little was achieved.

During the 1970s, some historians of the twentieth century'[19] began to argue that for the majority, life between the wars, and especially during the 1930s, was

getting better and that the areas of heavy deprivation were isolated and hidden from view. The boating population was certainly isolated, but how far their problems were hidden from view is questionable. The campaigns and enquiries on their behalf during the 1920s ensured that the conditions of life for canal boat families were known by a much wider public than ever before and those in central and local government departments directly responsible for their welfare were certainly very well informed on the subject.

So why did so much activity achieve so little? First of all, one has to keep in mind the enormity of the problem and to ask what *could* have been done anyway? The choice seems to have been between taking a bold approach which would sweep away the problem all together, i.e. abolish the family boat system completely, or adopt a more cautious approach and try to bring about small improvements on an *ad hoc* basis by administrative means and by patching up the existing legislation.

No attempt at the first approach was made by central government departments. The one attempt by outside agencies to introduce a Bill failed and this approach was completely abandoned by the 1930s. Such a drastic measure was never likely to succeed in the circumstances of the inter-war period. The Ministry of Health, on whose shoulders it would have fallen to administer new legislation, was in no state

to initiate innovative and controversial measures, at least, not after the departure of Christopher Addison with his housing policy in tatters. The frequent changes of Minister throughout the 1920s meant that the department lacked strong leadership during a period which was in any case characterized by political instability and financial crisis. Furthermore, as the records of Ministry activity in the area of canal boat social policy show, the department was staffed by officials who were conservative, fearful of treading new ground and who preferred to do nothing rather than embark on a course of action which ran the smallest risk of failure or of incurring criticism of the department.

The case of canal boat people also illustrates the view that extended state intervention and welfare provision was not necessarily a desirable thing. The efforts of reformers received little support from the boat people themselves. Many made it quite clear that they did not want to leave their boats, or have their children boarded out. Reforms involving such measures, which touched on important fundamental questions about society, were seen as less than desirable by other people too. Not only did they run against traditional attitudes which emphasized the responsibility of the individual for himself and his dependants, the sanctity of the family and the concern not to interfere with competitive industry, but they raised the question of the extension of state power. Lord Eustace Percy voiced a

warning in the House of Commons that state intervention was not necessarily a progressive or desirable thing. The boating population was a relatively small and diminishing group but it was still important to the evolution of social policy as a whole in that any new extension of state power applied to it would act as a dangerous precedent for the rest of society.

This was recognized by officials as well as politicians. Usually their concern was not to create a precedent which would force them to take on unwanted financial responsibilities for other larger groups but, as Lord Percy pointed out, there were more sinister implications.

Short of abolishing the use of family labour on boats, there seem to have been a number of measures which could have been taken to alleviate the deprivations of canal boat people. The main difficulty here was that local authorities played a crucial role in the provision of social services and boat people, moving around the country as they did, could not be deemed to be the responsibility of any particular authority.

The Canal Boat Acts and the Education Acts deemed them to be resident in the area of the authority which registered the boat but as boats were usually registered in the area where they were built and not where they were operated, boat people often had no contact with the so-called parent

authority. This was particularly relevant in the provision of educational facilities. Both the Board of Education and the Ministry of Health were aware of the problem. During discussions it was suggested from time to time that the residents of a canal boat should be deemed to be resident in the district where the boat had its head quarters or main depôt. This seems to have been a sensible suggestion and, in any case, an improvement on the existing situation, but it was never acted upon. One might have expected the central department to act in some co-ordinating capacity in these peculiar circumstances but officials always resisted this. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the Board of Education.

The records of the Board of Health and the Ministry of Health leave one feeling that more could have been done to help boat people. In particular, the Board of Education could have co-operated more closely with its local education authorities and one is left in no doubt that certain officials at the Ministry of Health found canal boat administration an irritating nuisance which, if ignored, might solve itself. It is hard to see any real justification for the inordinate length of time taken to achieve any action, for example the drafting of new canal boat regulations. One cannot help feeling that this was merely a delaying tactic to enable a reluctant department to avoid facing its responsibilities.

Yet one has also to bear in mind the sheer enormity of tasks facing social policy makers and implementers at the time. Priorities had to be drawn up and if one accepts Pat Thane's view that these priorities were based on the promotion of economic efficiency and social stability rather than altruism, then it is not surprising that this particular social group, however needy, were of little concern to politicians and administrators.

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CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

This thesis has involved a detailed investigation of the social and economic circumstances of the canal boat population during the declining period of the industry. Some important conclusions have already been drawn about particular aspects of canal boat life but it is the purpose of this final chapter to draw together these findings in order to answer the issue which has been central to this study, namely how and why did this particular social group survive for so long? Before this can be addressed, two preliminary questions must be tackled. The first concerns the social circumstances of the group and asks whether and in what way the boat community formed an isolated and underprivileged social group. The second is concerned with economic circumstances and asks whether canal boating could be considered a depressed occupation.

There was no real sense in which the canal boat community formed a geographically isolated group. Boatmen and their families could be found living in dwellings throughout the country, wherever there were inland waterways. Very few lived in large urban centres but they could be found in almost any canal-side village, not forming separate boatmen's colonies but dispersed throughout the rural community.

The question of social and cultural isolation is more difficult. In some ways, boat people were *less* isolated than other working people. Their work took them to different parts of the country and brought them into contact with dockers, seamen, other transport workers, quay-side labourers, and the employees in the various factories, workshops, mines and quarries which the canal served.

The idea that many boatmen lived permanently on board the boat with their entire family and had little contact with the shore-based community has been shown here to be false. The fact that the vast majority of canal-born traffic was local meant that most boatmen could live ashore and in deed, the boats operated by them had no sleeping accommodation on board. Most long-distance boatmen in the nineteenth century were fly-boatmen who did not live permanently on board and who never took their families with them. Even among those boatmen who did take their families on board, most had some connection with the shore community. Many had houses to which they returned from time to time and many others had some family members living ashore with other kin.

The origins of boat people do not support the idea of a segregated group. In most places, the boatmen operating a particular stretch of canal tended to be local and many of those whose place of birth was further afield had married local women. Boatmen were not drawn exclusively from a few

particular villages or districts nor exclusively from boating families. There was a fairly strong tendency for sons to follow their fathers into boating but this was equally so in other trades and it was not the case that children never or rarely turned to alternative employment. This is clearly shown in the case of the East Midlands canals where traffic declined more rapidly than in some other areas.

However, there were ways in which boat people were different and distinctive from other working class people. This difference centred round their way of life and work. Where the family lived wholly or mainly on the boat, there was an obvious distinction between them and the people who lived a settled way of life on the land. Standards of living accommodation and school attendance are the most obvious difficulties associated with this mode of existence although in both these areas boat people were not greatly more disadvantaged than many other working class people in the first three quarters of the nineteenth-century.

The thing which marked boat people off most clearly from many other members of the working classes was the pre-industrial nature and task-centred orientation of their work. This was characteristic of almost all canal boat work whether the crew lived on board or not. It separated boat people from many other industrial workers, increasingly so

as the nineteenth-century progressed. This discouraged some from leaving the trade to take alternative employment and made it difficult to recruit labour from outside industry. It also helps to explain why boat people found it easier to integrate into rural communities where the nature of much employment was also pre-industrial.

More important, however, is the fact that task-orientated work was associated by many contemporaries with idleness and, by implication, immorality, drunkenness and degradation. Where the family lived on the boat, even on a temporary basis, such ideas were re-enforced because the travelling way of life was associated with gypsies and vagrants. Add to this the fact that many boat people were poorly educated, even by the standards of the day, and were also outside the influence of the main centres of social control - school, church and employer, and one begins to see one very important way in which the canal boat community could be seen by contemporaries as a distinct and separate social group. Boat people were not respectable.

This had enormous significance in the nineteenth and even the first half of the twentieth century. In the eyes of the middle classes, respectability was synonymous with regularity and order, habits which were inured through the discipline of the work-place and "civilizing" legislation intended to regulate and order other aspects of working-

class life. The irregularity and apparent freedom of canal boat life was the antithesis of such values. For working-class people too, the need to demonstrate respectability or "keep up appearances" was enormously important as Gareth Stedman Jones demonstrated in a recent article on working class culture in the last thirty years of the nineteenth-century.[1] Indeed, so important was this aspect of nineteenth century life that, according to T.W.Laqueur,[2] the great social divisions of the period were not between the working-classes and the middle-classes but between the idle and the industrious, the respectable and the non-respectable.

Recent thinking in social history has seen a move away from defining class in terms of essences and experiences, and towards the language, discources and ideas used to articulate those experiences. In deed, many social historians are now tending to think of people not in terms of social class at all but in terms of the groups constituted by various institutions to which they belonged - chapels, clubs etc., or by the state, for example, miners as a male group after the exclusion of women after 1840.

It seems that the canal boat community also formed just such a distinctive and cohesive social group based on occupation rather than class. The apparent insularity of the group at times attracted the mistrust, contempt and even repugnance of outsiders. It also discouraged migration

repugnance of outsiders. It also discouraged migration either in or out of the group, although of course, it could not and did not entirely prevent it. The special sense of community felt by members of the group also acted as a survival strategy for a community whose traditional way of life was becoming increasingly anachronistic, untenable and liable to attack from outside agencies such as trade unionists and others intent on social reform.

Anyone not particularly familiar with the history of canals could be forgiven for assuming that the loss of trade to the railways after 1840 led to canal boating becoming a depressed occupation. This was not the case.

A trade is usually classified as a depressed occupation where a technological breakthrough at some stage of the manufacturing process led to a dramatic increase for hand-craft workers and then a dramatic contraction when the hand-craft was mechanised. The outcome varied from one region to another. In the worst cases there was a large concentration of displaced skilled workers with no alternative employment resulting in great devaluation of skills and large-scale structural unemployment or debasement of workers.

None of this seems to have happened to canal boatmen during the nineteenth century. Firstly, technological advances had little effect on canal boat work and even where steam power

was used to propel boats there was little reduction in the need for labour. One exception was the system of towing boats or containers in trains, such as on the Aire and Calder Canal. Despite loss of trade to the railways and some decline in the number of men employed on the canals, there is no evidence of large-scale structural unemployment. Those that chose to leave the trade seem to have been relatively successful in finding alternative employment. The nature of the job, i.e. a widely dispersed and inherently mobile workforce, meant that there would never have been large concentrations of unemployed boatmen in one district. Furthermore, the nature of canal transport, serving heavy industrial areas, meant that there was probably plenty of alternative work for those that felt able to give up the independence of canal boat life. Above all, however, at most times throughout the history of canal transport, there seems to have been a shortage of skilled boatmen. Boats often lay idle for want of crews even in the 1930s and 1950s and dilution of skills did not pose the problem in the canal carrying trade that it did in many other industries during the First World War.

There is little evidence that standards of living dropped below that of other manual workers before the First World War. The evidence presented in chapter five above shows that in terms of money wages, boatmen compared favourably with other well-paid workers in textiles, coal-mining and the

iron and steel industry. Other indicators of living standards tend to support this view. There is some indication that family labour was used to replace hired hands during times of economic hardship. However, the custom of families living-in on canal boats began long before railway competition brought an end to the canal age and this thesis has also found evidence of a cultural and regional basis for family labour as well as an economic one. The high functionality and low calculative orientation of kinship patterns within the boat community indicate a certain level of prosperity since such an orientation requires at least a small surplus of resources.

Health and mortality are also indicators of standards of living but statistics for boatmen on this subject are hard to interpret. Contemporary opinion was that boat people were exceptionally healthy, yet the death rate for boatmen in the nineteenth century was slightly higher than average. If one eliminates death by accident, a particularly frequent cause of death on the inland waterways, this might not be the case.

Death from alcoholism and circulatory disease was significantly higher among boatmen than among the general population. Although alcohol abuse has never been confined to the more well-off, and heart disease can be attributed to causes other than rich diet, both these causes of death seem

to say something about consumption among boat people which indicates a certain level of surplus resources. That boatmen "ate well", that is to say consumed a large amount of red meat, butter and cheese, is confirmed by contemporary witnesses from the late nineteenth century onwards. Furthermore, in the 1930 mortality statistics, death from digestive disease was common among boat people. The death rate for most diseases increases as one goes down the social scale. With digestive disease, in 1930 at any rate, the reverse was true. Whereas death rates from other complaints put boatmen in social class IV or V (the lowest being V), boatmen were as likely to die from digestive disease as men in social group 1. This could be interpreted as further evidence that boat people enjoyed what would have been considered at the time a good diet, i.e. one containing plenty of meat and animal fat. This seems to indicate a high level of spending on food.

The reasons for this continued prosperity can be summarized as follows. Firstly, the rate of decline with regard to numbers in the labour force was higher than the reduction in tonnage carried resulting in some increased productivity and a reduction of underemployment. Outmoded and unmodernized as it was, canal transport still held attractions for some manufacturers. A mobile and flexible workforce and the possibility of hiring boats, horses and sub-contracting

labour enabled carriers to make the most of dwindling opportunities. The small carrier seemed better able than the large fly-boat company to cope with straitened economic circumstances and with his addiction to independence and ambition to own his own boat, many a boatman was willing to work long hours in harsh conditions rather than face the confinement and discipline of the factory floor.

Despite all the evidence of prosperity among the boating population there is no doubt that in the areas of housing and education, some sections of the community did suffer considerable deprivation. In this thesis I have argued that the majority of boatmen had a shore-based home in which part or all of their family lived, if not permanently then at least from time to time. In making this assertion, however, I do not wish to obscure the fact that many boat families, amounting to several thousand people depending on which period one considers, did spend a significant part of their lives living on board.

Accommodation on board compared favourably with average early to mid-nineteenth century working class housing in most aspects except space. However, over crowding was no worse, and probably better than amongst that section of the population housed in one and two-roomed tenements in the second half of the nineteenth century. From the beginning of the twentieth century, standards of accommodation on board

compared ever less favourably with those on shore and by the inter-wars, they were far from satisfactory.

The type of shore-based housing inhabited by the boating population in the nineteenth century seems to have been similar to that of other unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers in rural districts. In the twentieth century, as housing standards amongst working people improved and many moved out of the decaying urban centres to new suburban districts, boat people continued to inhabit the poorer housing stock near the canals. However, if conditions on board and ashore were poor, there were other sections of the labouring population who also continued to suffer similar deprivations.

There is no doubt that those who lived mainly or wholly on board were poorly served with community amenities such as schools, medical facilities and shops. Voluntary agencies tried to meet the peculiar needs of the itinerant section of the boat population but provision fell far short of requirements. Education was a particular problem. Even as late as the 1950s and 1960s, many boat children received no education worth mentioning and child labour remained a common abuse throughout the history of canal carrying.

I turn now to the question of how this group survived. Here we are talking mainly of the people who lived on board the

boat, whether wholly, mainly or only from time to time, since the experiences of those who never lived on board would have been similar to other members of the working classes. What has to be considered is not only how the community survived as an identifiably distinct social group but also how individual members coped with the usual stages of life termed by some welfare historians "life crises". These crises include infancy, childhood, adolescence, marriage, childbirth, child-rearing, old-age, sickness or injury, unemployment and bereavement. The various strategies for dealing with problems arising out of these life experiences can be arranged on a continuum which at one extreme begins with the self and moves through the family, the community, the employer, voluntary efforts of various kinds and finishes at the other extreme with the state.

With regard to the group as a whole and its particular way of life, some indication of how it survived has already been given. Many boatmen were relatively well paid and there was a continuing demand for their services. Given the lack of investment and modernisation of the canal system, the organisation of the work on pre-industrial lines and the need for the boatman and crew to sleep on the boat was the only way in which a good level of income could be maintained. The freedom to regulate ones working day to a far greater extent than the average factory worker and the enhanced status of being paid on a tonnage basis and having

to hire ones own crew proved more attractive to some than higher wages, shorter, more regular hours of work and the comforts of a shore-based home. The fact that so many fly-boat captains were said to harbour an ambition to own their own boat, even though slow-boat captains were less well paid and were lower in the boating hierarchy than fly-boat captains, shows how highly independence was valued.

The independence and self-reliance fostered by this way of life had important implications for survival, both on a group and an individual basis. The canal boat child was born into a world where it might be separated from its parents at an early age if the boat became too overcrowded and relatives on the bank were willing to accept responsibility for it. Many boat children were expected to make a significant contribution to the running of the boat from an early age and the possibility of being hired as a mate on another boat from the age of about twelve opened up the possibility of complete independence from the family.

The inclination to independence and self-reliance remained strong throughout adulthood. A good income at a relatively early age and, where a house could not be afforded, the possibility of living on the boat, meant that a young boatman could contemplate marriage at a fairly early age without needing to rely on the hospitality of his parents or parents in law. Even elderly people were unlikely to become

dependent on married children and widows were sometimes to be found captaining the boat in the place of their deceased husbands.

A strong sense of independence and self-reliance not only helped the individual to overcome life's obstacles but the reluctance to accept outside help led to a strong resistance to the interference of some well-meaning reformers whose stated aim was to abolish this way of life and with it, this particular social group.

Where life aims could not be easily achieved unaided, the next most likely source of help was the extended family. A flexible and extended kinship net was particularly useful in helping to cope with the child rearing stage of life when the family was living on board. An alternative family base on the bank could relieve overcrowding on board, provide a child with an opportunity for a little schooling or help solve the problem of nursing a sick child.

In the case of loss of income through sickness, injury, unemployment, underemployment or old age, the extended family could sometimes provide limited relief in terms of short-term board and lodging. Employers might offer limited relief in some cases. Several provided help, usually in the form of an advance of wages, at times of hardship when work was stopped by frost or drought. Some allowed a small

pension in the cases of long-serving boatmen and some helped with hospital benefit funds.

The trade union or friendly society, the usual recourse of many working men in such circumstances, had little to offer the boatman at such times. Only one short-lived organisation, the Watermen and Riverside Labourers' Union offered canal boatmen relief during a harsh winter and only one other watermen's society offered sickness benefit. None offered any other relief other than dispute and funeral benefits.

In the twentieth century, with the introduction of workmen's compensation and national insurance and pensions legislation there was some recourse to the state at times of reduced circumstances. However, on small boats where the captain hired his own labour, this legislation did not apply to members of the crew. The travelling nature of the job and a reluctance to deal with outsiders meant that many boatmen did not even receive the benefits to which they were entitled.

A reluctance to deal with strangers meant that when difficulties arose which could not be dealt with by the individual or within the family or community, voluntary agencies represented an alternative survival strategy which was more acceptable to the boat community than state

welfare. This was particularly true where people such as Sister Mary Ward or the London City Missionaries made an effort to win the confidence of the boat people through frequent personal contact. It was also important that, unlike the trade unions and certain sectors of the state, such people were in sympathy with the traditional way of life which the boat people wished to preserve. The approach of these Christian missionaries was to eschew radical reform through major legislative change and instead to bring about gradual *ad hoc* changes to help relieve deprivation. Such an approach could never completely solve the social problems of family canal boat life but, taking the period as a whole, it had far more beneficial affect on the canal boat population than attempts to solve such problems by legislation and other means. The canal boat missionaries were instrumental, before the 1920s, in providing what little education the travelling boat children received, in relieving other difficulties with canal-side washing and recreational and even medical facilities and in one case even providing an insurance scheme against sickness.

From the means of survival, I turn finally to why the canal boat community survived so little changed for over a hundred years. The simple fact of the matter seems to be that there was insufficient pressure for change, particularly for radical change which would have involved the abolition of family labour on boats. The boat people and the carriers did

not want it. Central government was divided. With many politicians and administrators, the philosophy of *laissez-faire* resulted in a reluctance to interfere in the private lives of able-bodied contributing members of society. Over-concern with legalistic minutiae and the possibility of attracting criticism, caused many civil servants to oppose action unless it could be taken by a department other than their own. The voluntary agencies were divided and the trade union movement, whilst it supported change, was unable to enlist the support of the people it claimed to represent and aimed to benefit. In addition, and despite the amount of public interest aroused during the 1920s, the canal boat community remained an obscure and little-known social group, largely ignored by social investigators, reformers and the framers of social policy and legislation.

In some ways, the canal boat community was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Its most obvious characteristic and source of deprivation, the practice of living-in on canal boats, strengthened the family. It kept members of the nuclear family together during working and domestic life and forced it to become a highly efficient economic unit. It made the influence of the family strong compared with other social influences and the family in turn became the main source of help and welfare. Radical solutions to the main problems of canal boat life i.e. poor domestic facilities and accommodation, poor educational opportunities and child

labour, involved the abolition of the practice of living-in and thus posed a serious threat to the family unit. Such a threat to the most important economic and social unit of canal boat life was bound to be fiercely resisted.

However fierce the resistance from within, it would still have been possible for the government to sweep away the social problems of canal boat people with a legislative or administrative measure which banned children from living on board the boats. This was never done or even seriously attempted by the central administration. The reasons for this can be found in the attitudes and motives of social policy makers showing that steadily increasing state intervention on behalf of those most in need was neither a fact nor an intention of government.

David Thomson's view[3] is that state social policy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century swung deliberately and decisively away from the state end of the welfare continuum and firmly towards the individual and the family If one accepts this, then the traditionally high dependence of the boating community on the this end of the continuum must have strongly discouraged any further interference from the state at such a time. Public and official concern with morality and respectability rather than the relief of physical hardship also militated against any measures which threatened the cohesion of the family and the values of

self-reliance. But even more significant is Pat Thane's assertion[4] that government motives behind social policy were ultimately concerned with economic efficiency and social control and order.

Canal boat people formed a relatively small and diminishing group, conservative, economically unimportant and politically weak. From the 1870s onwards, when the continuing importance of inland water transport was beginning to be recognized by some commercial quarters, the political and economic climate of the day militated against the investment of public funds in the improvement of canal transport and against government interference with private enterprise. Without modernization of the system and a complete reorganisation of the carrying industry (industrial reorganisation was in any case itself a politically sensitive issue after 1917), the existing social and economic organisation of the trade was probably the most acceptable to the main aims of the government of the day. It ensured the most efficient use of the canals possible in the circumstances and by protecting the family unit ensured social stability.

As a result of this study, a number of myths surrounding canal transport and canal boat life have been exploded and some hitherto little-considered facts have been brought to light. For example, it has shown that a working pattern

which conformed very closely to the working patterns of pre-industrial society continued to exist in the heart of industrial England until well into the second half of the twentieth century and that furthermore, in this particular instance, it proved exceptionally resistant to change and outside interference.

It has also been shown that with the rise of rail transport, canal transport did not fall into immediate and complete obsolescence but continued to fulfil a useful if diminishing function until after the Second World War. As a result, opportunities for enterprise and remunerative employment continued to exist. It is particularly surprising that employees of a declining industry continued to enjoy a standard of living which in some ways compared very favourably with other well-paid manual workers. Fewer boatmen than has been commonly supposed retained absolutely no link with the shore-based community and where boatmen did choose to take their families on board, this was often a matter of regional custom or personal choice rather than that they could not afford to do otherwise. However, where a boat family did decide to live wholly or mainly on board, from the late nineteenth century onwards, they did so at considerable social cost. Cramped, insanitary, primitive living accommodation on boats, illiteracy and ignorance gave the impression to outsiders that boat people were living in poverty, misery and ignorance. In some cases this was no

doubt true. However, for many, their determination to preserve the family unit, and their preference for the peculiarly independent way of life of canal boating rather than the tyranny of the factory, meant that they imposed upon themselves certain standards of living significantly below what they might have afforded ashore. It is interesting to note that social deprivation and some forms of poverty are not merely a reflection of low pay.

NOTES Conclusion

1,Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working-class Culture and Working-class Politics in London, 1870-1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class", in *Journal of Social History, Vol. 23, 1990.*

2,T.W.Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability; Sunday Schools and Working CLass Culture 1780-1850,* (1976).

3,David Thomson, "Welfare and the Historians", in L Bonfield, R.Smith, K Wrightson, (eds.) *The World We Have Gained; Essays presented to Peter Laslett,* (1986).

4,Pat Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State,* (1982).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 (a)
Canal Boat Numbers 1946

Summary of the craft position at the end of September 1946.

	Coal	General	Tank	Special	Total
NARROW BOATS					
Number owned					
Power	119	326	15	0	460
Dumb	2223	726	98	8	3055
	2342	1052	113	8	3515
Number in use					
Power	105	233	12	0	350
Dumb	1972	615	92	7	2686
	2077	848	104	7	3036
Not in use - under repair					
Power	12	58	2	0	72
Dumb	244	54	5	1	304
	256	112	7	1	376
Not in use - for want of traffic					
Power	0	0	1	0	1
Dumb	0	1	1	0	2
	0	1	2	0	3
Not in use - for want of labour					
Power	2	35	0	0	37
Dumb	7	56	0	0	63
	9	91	0	0	100
WIDE BOATS					
Number Owned					
Power	144	309	53	52	558
Dumb	627	1762	159	866	3414
	771	2071	212	918	3972
Number in use					
Power	136	271	44	43	495
Dumb	511	1369	144	542	2566
	647	1640	188	585	3060
Not in use - under repair					
Power	5	29	9	7	50
Dumb	107	171	11	321	610
	112	200	20	328	660
Not in use - for want of traffic					
Power	0	2	0	0	2
Dumb	3	209	2	3	217
	3	211	2	3	219

Not in use - for want of labour

	Coal	General	Tank	Special	Total
Power	3	7	0	2	12
Dumb	6	13	2	0	21
	9	20	2	2	33

All Craft September 1946

	Power	Dumb	Total	Percentage
Owned	1018	6469	7487	100
In use	844	5252	6096	81,4
Not in use -				
under repair	122	914	1036	13,8
for want of traffic	3	219	222	3,0
for want of labour	49	84	133	1,8

All Craft September 1945

	Power	Dumb	Total	Percentage
Owned	983	6582	7565	100
In use	844	5347	6191	81,9
Not in use -				
under repair	101	962	1063	14,0
for want of traffic	8	162	170	2,2
for want of labour	30	111	141	1,9

Source; Minutes of the 42nd meeting of the Central Canal Committee on 5,9,47. (PRO MT 50/100)

APPENDIX 1 (b)
Canal Boat Numbers 1947

Summary of the craft position at the end of November 1947

	Coal	General	Tank	Special	Total
NARROW BOATS					
Number owned					
Power	131	305	14	0	450
Dumb	2040	691	95	12	2838
	2171	996	109	12	3288
Number in use					
Power	114	223	13	0	350
Dumb	1786	578	83	10	2457
	1900	801	96	10	2807
Not in use - under repair					
Power	15	46	0	0	61
Dumb	248	65	11	2	326
	263	111	11	2	387
Not in use - for want of traffic					
Power	0	0	1	0	1
Dumb	0	0	1	0	1
	0	0	2	0	1
Not in use - for want of labour					
Power	2	36	0	0	38
Dumb	6	48	0	0	54
	8	84	0	0	92
WIDE BOATS					
Number owned					
Power	159	324	63	56	602
Dumb	586	1737	162	862	347
	745	2061	225	918	949
Number in use					
Power	143	294	51	45	533
Dumb	484	1456	143	604	2687
	627	1750	194	649	3220
Not in use - under repair					
Power	12	23	12	9	56
Dumb	100	135	15	258	508
	112	158	27	367	564

	Coal	General	Tank	Special	Total
Not in use - for want of traffic					
Power	2	5	0	0	7
Dumb	0	125	2	0	127
	2	130	2	0	134

Not in use - for want of labour

	Coal	General	Tank	Special	Total
Power	2	2	0	2	6
Dumb	2	21	2	0	25
	4	23	2	2	31

All craft November 1947

	Power	Dumb	Total	Percentage
Owned	1052	6185	7237	100
In use	883	5144	6027	83,3
Not in use -				
under repair	117	834	951	13,1
for want of traffic	8	128	136	1,9
for want of labour	44	79	123	1,7

All craft November 1946

	Power	Dumb	Total	Percentage
Owned	1027	6344	7371	100
In use	841	5171	6012	81,6
Not in use -				
under repair	135	975	1110	15,0
for want of traffic	4	114	118	1,6
for want of labour	47	84	131	1,8

Source; Meeting of the Central Canal Committee, 5,9,47. (PRO MT 50/100)

APPENDIX 2.

Notes on the use of Census Data

Information about the canal industry is found in the Census tables in two main forms. Firstly, there are the figures given in the occupational tables relating to men and women employed on or in connection with inland waterways. Secondly, there are the figures given in the population tables relating to people sleeping on board vessels on inland waterways.

In both of these cases, before 1961, a definite distinction was made between inland boats and sea-going vessels. However, no further distinction was made between different kinds of boats or different kinds of boat people. In the occupation tables, therefore, figures for inland barge and boatmen included people working on narrow-boats and wide-boats or barges on canals but also river boatmen of various types including the crews of large estuarial vessels. Lightermen, flatmen and watermen were also included. Although there was some lighter traffic on the Regents canal and some other broad canals, these craft were mainly confined to large rivers, docks and harbours and the nature and organisation of the work and the people engaged in it seem to have been quite distinct from the canal carrying trade and its labour force. In addition, tugboat crews, dredgermen and other maintenance boatmen seem also to have

been included along with a large number of day-boat men who were to be found particularly on the canals of the Midlands.

There are particular difficulties with the figures for women in the occupational tables, particularly in the nineteenth century where the notion of occupation seems to have had as much to do with the status of the head of the household as with gainful employment. Many of the women on canal boats have no occupation recorded against them in the enumerators returns, yet they would certainly have been very much involved in the operating of the boat. Amongst the boat families living ashore, some of the women described as "boatman's wife" and some of those against whom no occupation was recorded, would have been employed on the boats. Very few women described themselves as "boatwoman" unless, through widowhood for example, they had become heads of households or captains of boats. It seems likely that in compiling the occupational tables, only those women describing themselves as "boatwoman" or even "boatman" were counted and thus these tables by no means give a true picture of the situation. This is well illustrated by the figures for Staffordshire in 1901 where the occupational returns show 94 women employed on boats and barges. The population tables, however, show that 245 women were sleeping on canal boats in the county on the night of the Census. Even allowing for the fact that some of these would

have been children, there were clearly far more women working on canal boats than the occupational tables show.

Problems also exist with the figures for people sleeping on boats and barges where no differentiation is made between river and canal craft. There is also nothing to indicate how many of the people enumerated were children and how many adults. In the 1961 Census, the population of inland boats was obviously considered too insignificant to warrant a separate category and the figures for all civilian boats are given together.

Given the itinerant nature of the carrying trade, it might be supposed that a fair number of boat people escaped the Census enumerators' notice all together. No doubt a few did, especially fly-boats which were on the move all night but, on the whole, boats tied up for the night at well known stopping places and presumably the local enumerators knew where to look for them.

A note might be added here about the accuracy of the Census. On one occasion I found a boatman enumerated as sleeping on his boat at Braunston *and* in his house in the same village. On another, the Paddington enumerator had recorded details of an all male crew on a boat but a note appended by him explained that the boat was actually empty with the crew ashore and the details had been given by the canal agent.

How often, one wonders, did enumerators record details of people *normally* resident in a particular property rather than those who were actually present on the night of the Census?

Given the problems outlined above, I have attempted to eliminate some of the inaccuracies inherent in the Census data by adopting the following procedure. I first selected all those counties through which the canals of England run. I then collected data on inland boatmen from the occupational tables and population tables produced by each of these counties. In this way I eliminated some of the boats on rivers and waterways not directly concerned with the canal carrying trade. I then further refined these figures by eliminating a few more counties which contained large ports or rivers as well as canals. Thus were eliminated London, where by far the majority of inland boats were found on the Thames and in the London Docks, Gloucestershire where, although some canal traffic was to be found, the figures were greatly distorted by the docks at Bristol and Gloucester itself, Berkshire, where, despite the presence of the Kennet and Avon canal, all Census figures seem to refer to inland boats on the Thames, the North Riding of Yorkshire, where there are only rivers and the East Riding of Yorkshire where most inland boats seem to have been large vessels at the port of Kingston upon Hull. Even with these refinements, the figures remaining still do

not relate exclusively to canal boats. Because of the importance of the canals in Cheshire and Lancashire one cannot exclude these two counties, yet this means including a large number of vessels other than canal boats which would have been found in Liverpool docks and at Birkenhead and other places along the Mersey estuary and the Manchester Ship Canal. This set of data can be seen at Appendix 3 and is referred to in the text as "selected counties".

A final attempt to refine the figures was made using the county population tables. In each county report can be found not only the total number of people sleeping on boats and barges but also details of exactly where, within the county, such people were found. By selecting figures for only places which were on a canal and ignoring those places which were on rivers I have built up a detailed picture of the boats and people found on each of the main English canals between 1891 and 1971. Even these sets of figures, however, have faults. By not including rivers and docks, I will have eliminated some canal boats and by including such places as Runcorn, Ellesmere Port, Goole, Stourport and Worcester, which were, I felt, too important to the canal carrying trade to be excluded, some non-canal craft will have been included. As it is not possible to do the same with the occupational returns, these sets of data show only that section of the labour force which lived or at least slept on the boat. Many day-boat men will have been excluded.

APPENDIX 3

BARGE AND BOATMEN. PEOPLE SLEEPING ON INLAND BOATS AND BARGES IN SELECTED COUNTIES

A = figures from occupation table B = figures from population table

M = male F = female T = total B = boats

		1851		1861		1871		1881		1891		1901		1911		1921		1931		1951		1961		1971	
		A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
BEDS	M	57		65		14		29		15		5	56	23	0	36	3	15	0	12	0	9	0	4	0
	F	18		4						3			36			4	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	T	75		69		14		29	73	18	11	5	92	23	0	40	7	15	0	13	0	9	0	4	0
	B										5		26				2		0		0		0		0
BUCKS	M	65		83		77		75		88		164	56	123		86	64	85	54	44	37	7	14	2	15
	F	3		14		0		3		4		9	36	5		19	72	14	43	6	23	0	8	0	10
	T	68		97		77		78	57	92	78	173	92	128	199	105	136	99	97	50	60	7	22	2	25
	B										30		26		51		38		22		17		8		10
CHESHIRE	M	2107		2199		1683		2541		2496		2395	410	2219		1700	346	1268	268	626	27	616	1835	130	1320
	F	242		3		23		52		111		37	203	59		58	284	73	237	11	19	3	80	0	75
	T	2349		2202		1706		2593	1112	2607	1346	2432	613	2278	3126*§	1758	630	1341	505	637	46	619	1915	130	1395
	B										488		217		548		187		151		15		111		85
DERBY	M	508		374		253		159		121		91	22	74		72	12	33	15	15	0	15	0	6	0
	F	15		0		2		0		6		2	4	2		1	6	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	5
	T	523		374		255		159	64	127	65	93	26	76	43	73	18	33	25	15	0	15	0	6	5
	B										23		12		19		8		11		0		0		2
HEREFORD	M	85		27		28		12		4		17	0	0	0	22	0	24	0	6	0	1	0	1	0
	F	23		0		0		0		0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	T	108		27		28		12	9	4	0	17	0	0	0	22	0	24	0	6	0	1	0	1	0
	B										0		0	0	0		0		0		0		0		0
HERTS	M	284		306		350		283		254		179	85	148		87	31	65	19	52	56	22	45	9	15
	F	20		2		2		1		6		4	62	8		12	22	2	18	21	59	0	43	0	15
	T	304		308		352		284	130	230	119	183	147	156	74	99	53	67	37	73	115	22	88	9	30
	B										42		49		24		14		9		29		22		15
LANCS	M	2648		3012		2663		3323		3337		3363	639	2963		2261	186	1873	157	1258	25	1111	5663	365	2880
	F	182		42		113		85		193		97	203	55		73	100	40	55	5	5	1	136	0	150
	T	2830		3054		2775		3408	1607	3530	2042	3460	842	3018	6328#§	2334	286	1913	212	1263	30	1112	5799	365	3030
	B										842		369		984		125		96		15		287		165
LEICS	M	416		384		250		173		168		86	62	85		48	34	40	32	8	2	2	0	4	15
	F	32		0		6		5		7		4	32	6		13	22	11	26	3	2	0	0	0	0
	T	448		384		256		178	138	175	185	90	94	91	81	61	56	51	58	11	4	2	0	4	15
	B										74		38		27		15		14		2		0		5
MIDDX	M	367		491		511		474		609		737	158	675		556	131	552	170	436	35	113	172		
	F	6		5		10		14		20		9	106	33		28	150	21	144	7	33	0	135		
	T	373		496		521		488	292	629	352	746	264	708	440	584	281	573	314	443	68	113	307		
	B										119		87		111		73		89		21		112		
NORTHANTS	M	373		284		189		162		189		116	96	147		67	72	45	54	13	20	4	5	1	10
	F	31		2		15		14		18		4	65	14		15	70	9	53	5	19	0	3	0	10
	T	404		286		204		176	275	207	210	120	161	161	240	82	142	54	107	18	39	4	8	1	20
	B										66		43		55		31		27		12		2		10
NOTTS	M	688		498		348		262		219		237	43	254		182	97	217	105	92	32	30	21	9	10
	F	4		1		1		0		0		3	10	5		4	73	1	25	1	12	0	9	0	10
	T	692		499		349		262	79	219	64	240	53	259	96	186	170	218	130	93	34	30	30	9	20
	B										29		23		46		61		53		18		14		5
OXON	M	163		163		156		143		132		160	51	208		149	62	108	19	46	6	5	12	6	25
	F	6		4		3		7		8		4	34	4		13	31	4	26	2	10	0	8	0	25
	T	169		167		159		150	168	140	114	164	85	212	126	162	93	112	45	48	16	5	20	6	50
	B										39		30		42		34		17		5		11		15
SHROPS	M	326		338		256		110		129		88	46	109		46	33	33	29	5	0	7	2	2	15
	F	31		9		7		3		19		4	19	3		4	27	1	11	0	0	0	2	0	15
	T	357		347		263		113	148	148	139	92	65	112	101	50	60	34	40	5	0	7	4	2	30
	B										44		24		33		18		13		0		1		10
STAFFS	M	1676		1900		2481		2189		2219		2092	448	2009		1436	274	1056	262	295	59	21	5	13	25
	F	313		57		99		60		94		97	245	56		72	227	66	211	25	54	0	9	1	20
	T	1989		1957		2580		2249	1231	2313	868	2189	693	2065	846	1508	501	1122	473	320	113	21	14	14	45
	B										300		236		281		143		137		31		3		20
WARWICKS	M	920		1014		963		756		747		816	258	768		757	273	552	270	162	113	34	34	20	55
	F	221		13		19		25		40		38	126	46		86	274	57	228	30	92	0	36	0	45
	T	1141		1027		982		781	429	787	489	854	384	814	518	843	547	609	498	192	205	34	70	20	100
	B										164		113		154		131		128		49		17		40
WORCS	M	1041		946		803		742		686		697	78	607		501	83	351	16	126	45	18	28	8	10
	F	88		9		6		12		13		3	28	4		10	39	9	18	15	32	0	18	0	10
	T	1129		955		809		754	334	699	258	700	106	611	121	511	122	360	34	141	77	18	46	8	20
	B										98		40		48		47		14		17		15		10
YORKS WEST	M	2538		2,326§§		2062		2170		2094		1728§§		1845		859	207§§	948	210	552	23	508§§	163	48	250
	F	403		6		23		10		30		5		28		11	95	5	90	11	5	0	3	4	25
	T	2941		2,332		2085		2180	2634	2124	1623	1733	1087	1873	1575	870	302	953	300	563	28	508	166	52	275
	B										587		414		484				132		18		27		40

		1851	1861§§	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
TOTALS	M	14,262	14,410	13,087	13,603	13,507	12,971	12,257	8,865	7,265	3753	2,523	628
FOR	F	1,638	171	329	291	572	320	328	423	313	143	4	5
COL A.	T	14,900	14,581	13,416	13,894	14,079	13,291	12,585	9,288	7,578	3896	2,527	633

		1881	1891	1901	1911	1921§§	1931	1951	1961	1971
TOTALS	M					1,908	1,680	588	7,999	4,645
FOR	F					1,496	1,195	381	490	415
COL B.	T	8780	7963	4804	13,914	3,404	2,875	969	8,489	5,060
	B		2990	1747	2,907	1,055	913	249	630	430

* includes 99 vessels and 1270 persons at Birkenhead

§ includes vessels in Bristol docks

mainly vessels in Liverpool docks

** in 1961 and 1971 all civilian ships and boats were counted together

§§ figures for West Yorkshire are estimated this year as figures are only given for the whole of Yorkshire.

APPENDIX 4 PEOPLE SLEEPING ON BOATS AND BARGES ON INDIVIDUAL CANALS

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
GRAND JUNCTION CANAL									
Paddington	M				45	14	1		
	F				48	26	1		
	T	106	138	134	93	40	2		
	B	45	53	42	27	13	1		
Greenford	M								
	F								
	T		21	12					
	B		5	3					
Hanwell	M								
	F								
	T		5	6					
	B		2	1					
Hayes	M					11			
	F					10			
	T	20	13	14		21			
	B	5	6	3		4			
Heston	M				35	58	31	38	
	F				37	48	29	26	
	T	90		81	72	106	60	64	
	B	33		24	18	24	17	15	
Southall	M				7	10			
	F				8	3			
	T	39	5	17	15	13			
	B	13	1	7	2	3			
Uxbridge	M				25	28			
	F				25	23			
	T	48	75	18	50	51			
	B	19	22	4	13	12			
Cowley	M								
	F								
	T		16	13					
	B		5	4					
Harefield	M								
	F								
	T	51	14	55					
	B	15	5	17					
Rickmansworth	M				3	10	20	18	5
	F				6	17	17	17	5
	T	32	30	9	9	27	37	35	10
	B	10	11	4	3	4	11	10	5
Hemel Hempstead	M					3	15	3	
	F					4	12	3	
	T	17	33	13		7	27	6	5
	B	5	14	4		1	6	2	?
Berhampstead	M				19	3	11	21	
	F				11	5	9	20	
	T	18	19	16	30	8	20	41	
	B	7	4	4	8	2	6	8	

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
Tring	M				9	2			
	F				5	2			
	T	32	53	6	14	4			
	B	11	17	2	3	1			
Aylesbury	M				10	7		2	5
	F				11			2	5
	T	7	15	9	21	7		4	10
	B	6	6	4	3	3		2	5
Watford	M						10		
	F						11		
	T	10	12	27			21		
	B	3	3	9			6		
Wing	M				3	14	9		5
	F				3	11	5		5
	T	8		29	6	25	14		10
	B	3		8	1	5	4		5
Linslade	M		56		32	33	21	4	
	F		36		29	32	14	3	
	T	3	92	65	61	65	35	7	
	B	2	26	14	20	14	9	2	
Towcester & Potterspury	M				12	15	2	4	
	F				14	14	4		
	T	52	82	24	26	29	6	4	
	B	28	19	4	6	6	2	1	
Newport Pag.	M				2	Bletchley	6		
	F				6		3		
	T	31	54	26	8		9		
	B	12	18	6	3		3		
Cosgrove	M								
	F								
	T			21					
	B			6					
Bugbrooke	M						1	8	
	F						2	7	
	T	4	2	6			3	15	
	B	1	1	2			2	14	
Weedon	M								
	F								
	T			8					
	B			3					
Long Buckby	M								
	F								
	T	23	17	5					
	B	10	6	1					
Norton	M								
	F								
	T		19	19					
	B		7	4					
Crick	M								
	F								
	T			3					
	B			1					

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
Braunston	M				54	12	3	1	10
	F				45	11	1	3	10
	T	81	12	93	99	23	4	4	20
	B	20	4	20	22	6	1	1	10

OXFORD CANAL

Woodstock	M				2	6			
	F				3	3			
	T		22	21	5	9			
	B		5	5	3	3			
Bicester	M				3				
	F				1				
	T	28	18	21	4				
	B	9	6	6	2				
Nether Heyford	M								
	F								
	T	23	23	21					
	B	7	4	6					
Aynho	M								
	F								
	T		4	6					
	B		1	1					
Banbury	M				20	17	4	2	0
	F				9	11	8	1	5
	T	51	39	10	29	28	12	3	5
	B	18	15	6	10	11	3	1	2
Southam	M				2	1		6	5
	F				2	5		14	10
	T	22	21	48	4	6		20	15
	B	10	6	17	1	1		3	5
Rugby	M				28	18	8		
	F				34	31	3		
	T	37	45	39	62	49	11		
	B	12	12	11	11	8	3		

WARWICK & NAPTON

Solihul	M				4	4		1	
	F				12	2		1	
	T	15		11	16	6		2	
	B	3		5	2	2		1	

STRATFORD UPON AVON

Stratford upon Avon	M				1	9			5
	F				9	1			5
	T		3		10	10			10
	B		1		1	1			2

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
DROITWICH and WORCESTER & BIRMINGHAM									
Droitwich	M				1				
	F								
	T	14			1				
	B	6			1				
Worcester	M				23	5	5	7	5
	F				7	2	2	1	10
	T	94	32		30	7	7	8	15
	B	33	15		14	4	3	4	5
Bromsgrove	M				13		1	2	
	F				2		3	3	
	T		32		15		4	5	
	B		12		6		1	2	
Kings Norton	M								
	F								
	T	25							
	B	10							
COVENTRY									
Coventry	M				19	27	43	16	
	F				18	25	33	15	
	T	7			37	52	76	31	
	B	3			10	13	20	8	
Meriden	M					1			
	F					2			
	T					3			
	B					1			
Nuneaton	M				41	22	4		
	F				43	15	5		
	T	45	17	55	84	37	9		
	B	18	5	19	23	8	2		
Atherstone	M				14	8	8		
	F				19	3	8		
	T	36		57	33	11	16		
	B	10		16	8	5	4		
Foleshill	M				48	43	9	10	
	F				41	46	5	6	
	T	83	71	77	89	89	14	16	
	B	34	18	18	19	32	4	4	
Tamworth	M				18	1	5	3	
	F				18	1	2	7	
	T	4		19	36	2	7	10	
	B	2		5	9	1	2	1	
Lichfield	M				14	6			
	F				15	3			
	T	29	33	31	29	9			
	B	11	12	9	6	3			

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
BIRMINGHAM CANAL NAVIGATIONS									
Bilston	M								
	F								
	T			11					
	B			4					
Brierley Hill	M								
	F								
	T			14					
	B			5					
Brownhills	M				4	2			
	F				2	1			
	T			8	6	3			
	B			4	2	1			
Coseley	M								
	F								
	T								
	B								
Rowley Regis	M				2	8	3		
	F				4	4	1		
	T	38	2	3	6	12	4		
	B	13	1	1	2	3	1		
Smethwick	M				1				
	F				1				
	T			7	2				
	B			2	1				
Tipton	M				11	1			
	F				9	1			
	T	16	42	75	20	2			
	B	7	9	24	4	1			
West Bromwhich	M								
	F								
	T	80	36	23					
	B	22	15	9					
Wolverhampton	M				28	82	24	1	
	F				26	62	21	1	
	T	181	110	126	54	144	45	2	
	B	62	41	41	14	42	13	1	
Walsall	M				4	2	1		
	F					2			
	T	32	4	4	4	4	1		
	B	12	2	2	2	2	1		
Aston	M								
	F								
	T	33	28	1					
	B	9	9	1					
Birmingham	M				97	129	38		20
	F				76	87	36		10
	T	157	175	159	173	216	74		30
	B	49	54	48	46	54	15		20
Erdington	M								
	F	included in Aston							
	T			8					
	B			5					

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
Dudley	M				8				
	F				2				
	T	25	1	59	10				
	B	8	1	17	2				
Oldbury	M				6	4	30	16	
	F				6	3	27	12	
	T		44		12	7	57	28	
	B		12		4	3	10	6	

STAFFORDSHIRE AND WORCESTER

Stourport	M				28	6	9	1	
	F				21	9		1	
	T			14	49	15	9	2	
	B			6	17	6	3	1	
Kidderminster	M				3				
	F								
	T	63	4	1	3				
	B	28	2	1	2				
Cannock	M				29	7			15
	F				20	6			10
	T	147	195	88	49	13			25
	B	51	72	37	16	3			10
Tettenhall	M								
	F								
	T			1					
	B			1					

SHROPSHIRE UNION

Gnosall	M				2	23			
	F				4	23			
	T	24		12	6	46			
	B	7		3	1	13			
Shropshire	M				30	29			
	F				24	11			
	T	97	49	62	54	40			
	B	31	19	20	16	12			
Nantwich	M				45	16			
	F				41	17			
	T	21	26	101	86	33			
	B	5	8	33	21	11			
Chester	M				47	22			
	F				32	15			
	T	164	2	161	79	37			
	B	33	2	52	23	10			
Ellesmere Port	M				66	63			
	F				46	65			
	T			212	112	128			
	B			66	33	36			

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
TRENT & MERSEY									
Derbyshire	M				3	3			
	F				2	1			
	T	32	6	4	5	4			
	B	8	2	1	2	1			
Burton-on-Trent	M								
	F								
	T	14	6	6					
	B	6	2	2					
Rugeley	M								
	F								
	T			6					
	B			2					
Stafford	M				4	8	4	1	
	F				6	13	3	1	
	T	13	23	6	10	21	7	2	
	B	2	6	2	2	5	2	1	
Stone	M				14				
	F				18				
	T	10	20	58	32				
	B	3	6	15	6				
Stoke-on-Trent	M				133	107	25		
	F				107	83	24		
	T	223	132	271	240	190	49		
	B	80	41	83	71	57	12		
Kidsgrove	M				18	12			
	F				14	11			
	T			22	32	23			
	B			9	11	5			
Sandbach	M				1	1			
	F				3				
	T	115		3	4	1			
	B	42		7	1	1			
Middlewich	M				55	48	1	2	
	F				56	43	1		
	T	115	134	83	111	91	2	2	
	B	42	39	27	32	22	1	2	
Northwich	M				12	53	9	32	
	F				9	42	7	19	
	T	122	34	99	21	95	16	51	
	B	52	12	42	7	30	4	17	
CALDON CANAL (STOKE-ON-TRENT)									
Leek	M				3	2			
	F					2			
	T	17	18	15	3	4			
	B	4	7	7	2	1			
Cheadle	M								
	F								
	T	39	6	13					
	B	14	2	5					

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
BRIDGEWATER CANAL									
Lymm	M				12	4			
	F				6	4			
	T	28	17	10	18	8			
	B	17	8	5	6	3			
Runcorn	M				30	35	7	152	75
	F				24	30	11	7	5
	T	253	119	192	54	65	18	159	85
	B	102	50	54	20	20	6	13	over 10
MACCLESFIELD									
Macclesfield	M				8				
	F				5				
	T	12	16	8	13				
	B	5	4	3	3				
Marple	M				2	5			
	F				1				
	T	5		1	3	5			
	B	2		1	1	2			
Congleton	M				15	12		1	
	F				19	15		1	
	T	8	58	54	34	27		2	
	B	3	19	19	11	8		1	
LANCASTER CANAL									
Lancaster	M					7			
	F					7			
	T	59	48	23		14			
	B	17	4	3		4			
PEAK FOREST CANAL									
Chapel-en-Frith	M				1				5
	F				2				
	T	21	11	2	3				5
	B	8	6	1	1				?
HUDDERSFIELD CANAL									
Huddersfield	M				1	2			
	F					3			5
	T	5		1	1	5			5
	B	2		1	1	2			?
Stalybridge	M				1				
	F								
	T				1				
	B				1				

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
LEIGH BRANCH OF THE LEEDS AND LIVERPOOL CANAL									
Leigh	M				8	15	3	2	
	F				4	12	3	1	
	T	65	33	31	12	27	6	3	
	B	24	13	14	3	10	1	1	
LEEDS AND LIVERPOOL CANAL - LANCASHIRE									
Ormskirk	M				10	14			
	F				5	2			
	T	94	21	56	15	16			
	B	36	10	30	9	8			
Wigan	M				6	10			
	F				6	2			
	T	238	134		12	12			
	B	79	54		4	6			
Adlington	M				1	3			
	F								
	T				1	3			
	B				1	2			
Chorley	M				4	4			
	F				2				
	T	37	4	43	6	4			
	B	13	3	19	4	2			
Blackburn	M				11	4			
	F				4				
	T	169	46	73	15	4			
	B	59	17	33	6	2			
Burnley	M				3	5			
	F					2			
	T	47	27	59	3	7			
	B	6	8	22	3	3			
LEEDS AND LIVERPOOL CANAL - YORKSHIRE									
Skipton	M				2	13	1		
	F					4			
	T	30	21	30	2	17	1		
	B	8	7	13	1	7	1		
Bingley	M				6	2			
	F				1	1			
	T	22	18	27	7	3			
	B	7	8	12	4	1			
Shipley	M				1	19			
	F				1	3			
	T		46	22	2	22			
	B		19	11	1	14			
Bradford	M							1	
	F								
	T	5	8	21				1	
	B	2	3	10				1	

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
*Leeds	M				22	31	10	4	15
	F				5	6	2		10
	T	120	36	75	27	37	12	4	25
	B	42	15	24	10	19	6	3	5

ROCHDALE CANAL

*Sowerby Bridge	M				1				
	F								
	T	29	25	9	1				
	B	11	11	4	1				
Halifax	M				4		1		
	F				2		1		
	T	33	37	9	6		2		
	B	11	13	5	2		1		
Todmorton	M				1				
	F				1				
	T	16	10	21	2				
	B	5	3	0	1				
Rochdale	M								
	F								
	T	70	21						
	B	26	8						

CALDER AND HEBBLE CANAL

*Wakefield	M				46	10	1		
	F				38	3			
	T	153	122	45	84	13	1		
	B	61	38	19	33	5	1		
Dewsbury	M				13	2			
	F				5	1			
	T	64	11	28	18	3			
	B	24	7	10	6	2			
*Sowerby Bridge	M				1				
	F								
	T	29	25	9	1				
	B	11	11	4	1				

AIRE & CALDER NAVIGATION

*Leeds	M				22	31	10	4	15
	F				5	6	2		10
	T	120	36	75	27	37	12	4	25
	B	42	15	24	10	19	6	3	5
Rothwell	M					6			
	F								
	T		16	5		6			
	B		7	2		3			

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
Castleford	M						1		
	F								
	T	92	34	2			1		
	B	39	13	1			1		
Knottingley	M					4	1		
	F					3			
	T	61	55	2		7	1		
	B	20	29	1		2	1		
Goole	M						1	150	225
	F						1	1	10
	T	259	137	690			2	151	235
	B	90	58	154			1	19	30
Stanley	M								
	F								
	T	65		21					
	B	29		8					
*Wakefield	M				46	10	1		
	F				38	3			
	T	153	122	45	84	13	1		
	B	61	38	19	33	5	1		

RIVER OUSE

*Goole	M						1	150	225
	F						1	1	10
	T	259	137	690			2	151	235
	B	90	58	154			1	19	30
Selby	M				2	5		1	
	F				1	1		1	
	T	21	30	17	3	6		2	5
	B	11	15	9	2	4		1	
Riccall	M				17				
	F				3				
	T			14	20				
	B			10	10				
Escrick-	M				2				
	F								
	T				2				
	B				2				
York	M				10	14	1	4	
	F				2	4			
	T		50	12	12	18	1	4	
	B		52	9	6	9	1	1	

POCKLINGTON CANAL

Pocklington	M				2	1			
	F								
	T			2	2	1			
	B			1	1	1			

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
RIVER HULL									
Gt. Driffield	M				20	2			
	F				11	6			
	T		4	12	31	8			
	B		3	4	12	3			
SHEFFIELD AND SOUTH YORKSHIRE NAVIGATION									
Thorne	M				15	4			
	F				4				
	T	181	175	37	19	4			
	B	69	59	15	7	3			
Doncaster	M				5	15	5		
	F				9	6			
	T	55	89	43	14	21	5		
	B	16	24	16	4	6	4		
Mexborough	M				3	3			
	F				2	1			
	T	57		28	5	4			
	B	25		8	2	2			
Swinton	M				4	6			
	F				1	1			
	T	20		30	5	7			
	B	7		11	3	4			
Rotherham	M				8	4		1	
	F				1	5		1	
	T	68		8	9	9		2	
	B	15		3	5	2		1	
Sheffield	M				11	9		1	
	F				7	9			
	T	70	37	44	18	18		1	
	B	18	10	15	5	3		1	
RIVER TRENT									
Newark	M				23	40	5	3	
	F				11	13			
	T	5	13	16	34	53	5	3	
	B	4	7	9	15	21	4	1	
Long Eaton	M				2	8			
	F					6			
	T	9	3	21	2	14			
	B	4	1	7	1	8			
Southwell	M				7	26			
	F				4	1			
	T		10	21	11	27			
	B		5	8	4	12			

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
Bingham	M				1			2	
	F				1				
	T				2			2	
	B				1			1	
Nottingham	M				16	3	27	16	
	F				5	6	12	9	
	T	16	21	13	21	9	39	25	
	B	8	7	6	3	3	14	12	
Beeston	M				2	3			
	F				2	2			
	T			3	4	5			
	B			1	2	2			
Baseford	M				5	11			
	F				2	4			
	T			5	7	15			
	B			2	3	4			
Gainsborough	M				21	36	1	13	
	F				20	13			
	T	97	62	17	41	49	1	13	
	B	44	26	9	12	20	1	6	
Marton	M								
	F								
	T	7	21						
	B	4	11						
CHESTERFIELD CANAL									
Worksop	M				1	6			
	F				1				
	T	5		9	2	6			
	B	2		5	1	4			
E, Retford	M				5	2			
	F				2				
	T	25	9	15	7	2			
	B	10	4	5	3	1			
EREWASH CANAL									
Stapleford	M				26	8			
	F				29	2			
	T			7	54	10			
	B			4	19	4			
Ilkeston	M					3			
	F					3			
	T			3		6			
	B			2		1			
Sandiacre	B								
	F								
	T			5					
	B			3					

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
ROMFORD AND NUTBROOK CANALS									
Heage	M				1	1			
	F								
	T	1		2	1	1			
	B	1		2	1	1			
Ripley									
	F								
	T	2	1						
	B	2	1						
Chesterfield	M								
	F								
	T		5						
	B		2						
LEICESTER CANALS - RIVER SOAR AND GRAND UNION CANAL									
Loughborough	M				3				
	F				2				
	T	7	6	3	5				
	B	3	3	2	2				
Thurmaston	M					1			
	F					2			
	T					3			
	B					1			
Barrow-upon-Soar	M				4	3			
	F				2	4			
	T	15	9	7	6	7			
	B	5	3	2	2	3			
Leicester	M				8	20			
	F				7	13			
	T	26	13	30	15	33			
	B	9	5	10	4	5			
Blaby	M					3			
	F								
	T	8	5			3			
	B	1	2			1			
Market Harborough	M								
	F								
	T	15	23	19					
	B	4	11	4					
Hinckley	M				2				
	F				1				
	T	7	6		3				
	B	3	2		1				
Market Bosworth	M								
	F								
	T	3	10						
	B	2	3						

		1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
Lutterworth	M								
	F								
	T	9							
	B	3							
Castle Donnington	M				2				
	F								
	T				2				
	B				2				

ASHBY CANAL

Ashby-de-la-Zouch	M						3		
	F						4		
	T	95	22				7		
	B	44	9				3		
Ashby Woulds	M				15		2		
	F				10		3		
	T			20	25		5		
	B			7	4		1		

M = male F = female T = total B = boat

*places marked with an asterix appear on more than one canal, The figures for these places have therefore been duplicated,

APPENDIX 5
List of Trade Associations Affiliated to the Transport Workers' Federation.

(Organisations of boatmen shown in bold type)

Amalgamated Association of Carters and Motormen
Amalgamated Carters' Lorrymen's and Motormen's Union
Amalgamated Union of Engine and Crane Men
Amalgamated Society of Salt Workers and General Labourers
Amalgamated Society of Watermen, Lightermen and Bargemen
Amalgamated Stevedores' Labour Protection League
Associated Horsemen's Union
Cardiff, Penarth and Barry Coal Trimmers Union
Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union
Glasgow Ship-riggers Protective Association
Hull Seamen's Union
Labour Protection League
Liverpool and District Carters' and Motormen's Union
Mersey River and Canals Watermen's Association
National Amalgamated Labourer's Union
National Amalgamated Union of Enginemen and Firemen
National Amalgamated Union of Labour
National Sailors' and Firemen's Union
National Union of Dock Labourers
National Union of General Workers
National Union of Ships' Stewards and Cooks
National Union of Vehicle Workers
National Warehouse and General Workers' Union
North of England Trimmers and Teamers Association
North of Scotland Horse and Motormen's Association
Scottish Union of Dock Labourers
South Shields Steam Tugboatmen's Provident Society
Tyne Steam Packet Provident Society
Tyne Watermen's Association
United Carters and Motormen's Association of England
United Order of General Labourers of London
United Society of Boiler Scalers and Stokebole Labourers
United Vehicle Workers Union
Wear Steam Packet Trade Protecting and Friendly Society
Weaver Watermen's Association

Source; Letterhead of a letter sent by the Transport Workers's Federation to the Board of Education, 28.8.1919, PRO ref ED 11/88.

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