

York Poor Law Union Apprentice Indentures 1879-83

Summary

This paper demonstrates how one poor law union apprenticed young men from its workhouse in the period 1879-83. It draws attention to safeguards aimed at reducing the likelihood of exploitation, and cites examples of disputes that emerged between master and apprentice, and how these were handled by York Board of Guardians. Indentures are analysed by occupation and location, and provide data for further research.

Background

1844 legislation abolished compulsory apprenticeships and gave the central poor law authority - the Poor Law Commission (1834 - 47), the Poor Law Board (1847-71) and the Local Government Board (1871-1919) - power to prescribe terms of indenture, the agreement between master and apprentice. No child under nine or who could not read and write his own name was to be bound; and no one over fourteen bound without their consent. Further legislation in 1851 provided for the prosecution of cases of neglect or ill treatment. In addition, apprentices were to be visited twice a year.

When inmates reached the age of thirteen or fourteen applications were sought from masters in different trades. e.g. Guardians agreed on 3 June 1880 to advertise in local newspapers availability of five or six boys for apprenticeship to blacksmiths, tailors or shoemakers. These trades reflected industrial training received in the workhouse. A Poor Law Union Relieving Officer (RO) would visit the master to assess his suitability, and report back. If approved by the Guardians a match was made on the basis of a one month trial. Subsequently - on 3 February 1881 - Guardians agreed to apprentice ten or twelve boys; and on 26 May 1881 for a master to take on 'a bright, intelligent youth' of around fourteen who wanted to be a page in a gentleman's family.

Certificate of Indenture

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Where masters applied from beyond the York Poor Law Union (PLU) area York's clerk wrote to his counterpart in the relevant Poor Law Union requesting an assessment visit. (This inter-union cooperation was aimed at weeding out unsuitable employers, as also noted by Kathryn Thompson in her study of Leicester PLU). The result was reported back to York. e.g. a month's trial was agreed on 13 February 1879 for apprenticeship of George Dickenson to Christopher Ellis, shoemaker of Crayke, subject to no objections from Easingwold PLU, confirmed on 27 February.

Likewise York assisted other Poor Law Unions. e.g. in March 1880 Leeds asked if York objected to the binding of two boys to William Revell, a tailor and haircutter, of 44 Layerthorpe. Mr Wilkinson, York City Relieving Officer, made enquiries. There were no concerns, and this was subsequently reported to Leeds.



Boys were often indentured to masters some distance from York e.g. Darlington, and Stockton on Tees, in county Durham; and Normanton in the West Riding. On 7 April 1881 the Board decided to write to the Local Government Board (LGB) for consent to bind boy apprentices to masters over 30 miles from the city of York. Masters were often in rural areas where small, local workhouses prioritised training in agricultural skills, rather than crafts such as shoemaking and tailoring, more characteristic of larger, urban workhouses. Masters were aware of this and applied to those Poor Law Unions that best matched their requirements. As Thompson points out, the outwork system was under pressure; for example, shoemakers faced competition from factory-made American shoes, use of American machinery for sewing shoes, and then for machine welting. Provision of low-cost apprentices from the workhouse served to shore up the outwork system.

A shoemaker is selling shoes to a woman at the window of his workshop, as his assistants sew and hammer the shoes. Woodcut. Wellcome Collection.

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Terms of indentures

York PLU encouraged apprenticeships for boys, and domestic servant placements for girls. A report *Apprenticeships 1845-1929* by Elaine Bradshaw (see Appendix) lists children indentured to trades by the Board of Guardians. Apprentices are male, eleven to sixteen, and generally apprenticed for six or seven years. The most common payment is £10 fees plus two suits of clothes:

PLU Relieving Officers (RO) were responsible for visiting apprentices under sixteen at least twice a year to assess that adequate food was provided, and that they were not subjected to cruel or illegal treatment. Given the other responsibilities of ROs (e.g. assessing out-relief applications; and monitoring welfare of boarded-out workhouse children) it is unclear the extent to which this practice was implemented. Duties were sometimes sub-contracted to PLUs closer to the binding e.g. in November 1883 York PLU asked Leeds PLU to investigate a case of alleged ill-treatment towards an apprentice. A Leeds RO investigated, and sent his report to York PLU. (Details below).

Some disputes between master and apprentice might have been resolved if identified and addressed earlier. The Local Government Board (LGB) responded to a report by the RO on children sent out as servants, recommending Guardians adopt a register for both servants and apprentices. LGB circular of 31 July 1880 noted reports were 'in many cases unavailable as a permanent record and ... practically useless for reference at a subsequent time'. It strongly recommended use of a register to assist tracing an apprentice's subsequent career (and enclosed a model register with a page for each child so reports by the RO on each child might be seen and referred to consecutively).

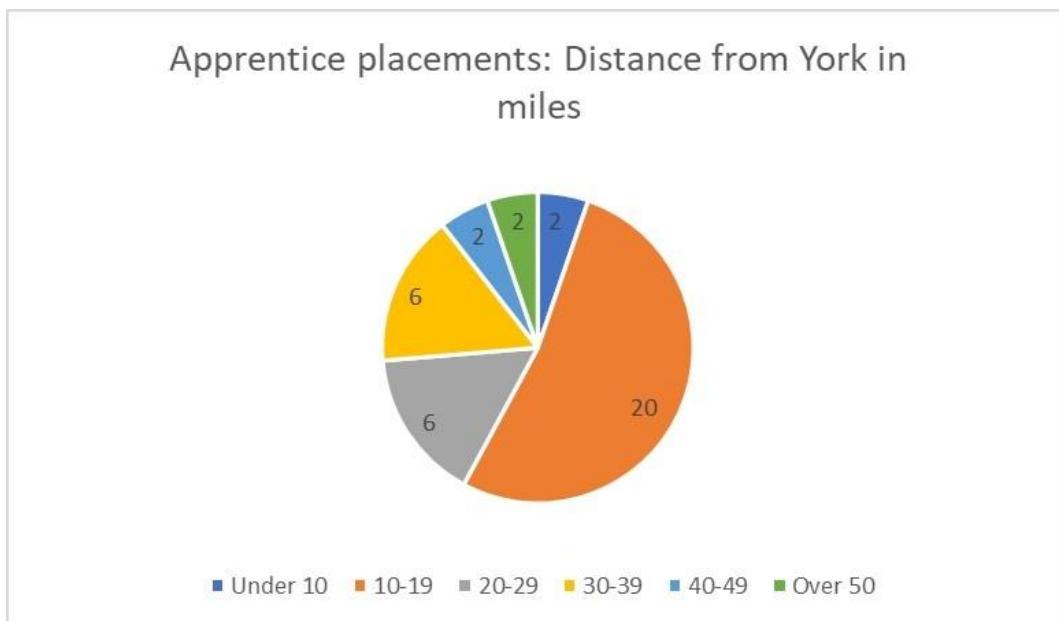
Apprentice and Domestic Servant List of Bindings from York Workhouse, 1879-83 See Appendix.

Note 50 boys were indentured in the period 1879-83; and 23 girls entered domestic service.



Others comprise two millers/bakers, two joiners, one confectioner, one grocer, one hairdresser, one engineer and one helper in house and garden.

Apprentice Placements: Distance from York in miles



Master and Apprentice Disputes 1879-83

At least nine cases of disputes between master and apprentice were considered by the Guardians. Most related to indentures made prior to 1879, and included:

- James Edwards of Myton asked Guardians to take back his apprentice Walter Weller. The Board on 30 January 1879 decided it could not agree to this request, and on 17 April 1879 Edwards offered to repay the first premium.
- On 14 August 1879 the Clerk was instructed to write to Richard Snell of Sutton on Forest to appear before the Board to answer a complaint against him by apprentice Edward Plows. A fortnight later a letter from Snell reported his apprentice had run away.
- The Board on 16 December 1880 noted a letter from Jennings, Driffield magistrates clerk, dated 10 December, regarding master Martin Taylor, a Bainton blacksmith. A postal order valued at £4 2/- was enclosed, the premium returned to York Guardians less 18/- for costs of proceedings, magistrates having consented to cancellation of indentures for George Garry. This indenture had lasted less than six months as the York Board had agreed Garry's one month trial on 17 June, Driffield PLU reporting on 8 July that it had no objections to the binding.
- On 16 June 1881 John Robinson Bowling was invited to attend a Board meeting to answer a complaint made against his apprentice.
- The 1 December 1882 Board meeting considered a letter from W. Hall of Batley Carr, Dewsbury regarding his apprentice William Boulby. Guardians resolved they could not be party to cancelling indentures and that, 'as the boy's settlement is now at Batley, it will be at his peril if by his action he becomes chargeable to the Union'. At the Board meeting on 22 March 1883 a letter was read from W. Hall of 12 Cross Mount Street, Batley Carr, Dewsbury dated 20 Dec with reference to his apprentice Boulby. York Guardians ordered its Clerk to reply that they declined to interfere.
- It was reported to Guardians on 5 October 1882 that a letter from Joseph Spencer, Hebden Bridge, tailor, dated 26 October, referred to his apprentice William Jackson. It was agreed the Board could not interfere between him & his apprentice, and that Spencer attend the Board meeting on 9 December when a letter from him was read regarding cancellation of indentures.
- On 22 Nov 1883 the Board agreed to write to the Leeds Poor Law Union about conduct of Thomas Vasey, confectioner, towards his apprentice Henry Usher. And on 29 Nov. 1883 a letter of 27 November from the Leeds RO was received with a copy of his report on Usher's alleged ill- treatment.

Further research

Consider using data to research subsequent lives. To what extent did apprenticeships remove individuals from a cycle of poverty as desired by the central poor law authority, and the Board of Guardians?

Consider how local research might contribute to research elsewhere, such as that of Patrick Wallis at the London School of Economics www.patrickwallis.net

Primary sources

Census returns for York Workhouse 1881 www.workhouses.org.uk/York/York1881.shtml

Lumley, W. G. *Manual for Relieving Officers* (3rd edition) 1888, pp. 53-4; 112-113. Explore York Archives PLU/11/5/4/9.

Research guides:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/apprentices-and-masters>

York Poor Law Union Board of Guardian Minute Books 1879-83, Explore York Archives
PLU/1/1/1/21-23.

Secondary sources

Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010). Sources used include hundreds of working-class autobiographies.

F. M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (Fontana, 1988).

Kathryn Thompson, 'Apprenticeship and the New Poor Law: a Leicester example', in *The Local Historian*, vol. 19 (2), May 1989, pp 51-55.

This analysis of the experience in Leicester shows the city's Guardians attempted to ensure that apprentices were treated fairly. Measures adopted included regular visits to employers to see the apprentices at work and the records of these visits form the basis of the article. They are analysed to show: i) patterns of apprenticeship; ii) the age of apprentices and their length of service; iii) occupational patterns; and iv) the geographical patterns apparent from data on the place of apprenticeship.

The article can be read online, and downloaded:

<https://www.balh.org.uk/publication-tlh-the-local-historian-volume-19-number-2-may-1989>

Website

<http://www.workhouses.org.uk>

Dick Hunter, Elaine Bradshaw and Judith Hoyle contributed to this paper.

York Poor Law Union Apprentices 1845-1929

(From: Explore York Libraries & Archives. Register of apprenticeships 1845-1929. PLU/6/1/1)

The register starts on 12 Jan 1845 and lists children indentured to trades by the Board of Guardians. Apprentices are all male aged around 11-16, and are generally apprenticed for six or seven years for which the most common payments are £10 fees plus two suits of clothes.

York PLU boys were apprenticed to a wide range of trades

No. of apprentices	Trade	Comments
71	Shoemakers, cordwainers and bootmakers	
68	Tailors	Most tailors got fees of £10, but one received £15. A few were paid only £5 but the apprenticeship period was shorter
39	Blacksmiths	
17	Joiners, cabinet makers, wheelwrights	
12	Cotton spinners, weavers (from 1860 on)	The boys were sent to James Hoyle, Acre Mill, Hebden Bridge (later notorious for its working conditions). No fee was paid, only 2 suits of clothing
9	Tinners, braziers	
9	Painters	
8	Hairdressers, barbers	
5	Saddlers	
5	Bricklayers	
4	Rope makers	
3	Gardeners, market gardeners	
3	Butchers	
2	Plumbers, glaziers, gas fitters	
2	Bookbinders	
3	Millers	
2	Farmers	Apprenticed for 3 years only 1 was paid £4, the other had £4 worth of clothes
2	Grocers, provisions dealers	

One each of the following: Brickmaker, Clock & watchmaker, Confectioner, Draper, French polisher, Implement maker, Lithographer (£15 fee), Mattress maker, Plasterer, Printer, Solicitor, Whipmaker, Whitesmith. There are no railway workers.

These are the boys who came from parishes in or near St Mary Bishophill Junior, 1845-1886 :

- 23 Jan 1845 Joseph Spink M age 15
Parents: Joseph & Elizabeth Spink [both] deceased
Parish: Bishophill Junior
To: William Calvert, Tailor of Micklegate £11.10.0
Until 21 years of age
- 11 Dec 1862 William Riley M age 17
Parents: both dead
Parish: Bishophill Junior
To: George Freeman, Tailor of Kirk Hammerton £10 + 2suits
For 7 years
- 11 June 1863 William Braithwaite M age 15
Parents: Elizth. Braithwaite, Workhouse
Parish: Bishophill Junior
To: William White, Shoemaker of New York Street £9 + 2 suits
For 6 years
- 2 April 1871 George Tate M 15
Parents: both dead
Parish: St Martin cum Gregory
To: William Haw, Tailor of Claxton £10 + 2 suits
For 6 years
- 4 Apr 1872 John Coward M 14
Parents: Orphan
Parish: Parish: Bishophill [Senior or Junior – unclear]
To: William Rowntree, Blacksmith of Furlington £10 + 2 suits
For 7 years
- 22 Aug 1872 John William Tate M 14
Parents: orphan, The Workhouse
Parish: St Sampson's
To: John Croft, Joiner & Wheelwright of Strensall £10 + 2 suits
For 7 years
- 3 July 1874 Robert Tate M 14
Parents: orphan, Hope Street
Parish: Holy Trinity, Micklegate
To: Samuel Easterby, Blacksmith of Wighill £10 + 2 suits
For 7 years
- 17 June 1886 John Thomas Tate M 14
Parents: Orphan
Parish: St George
To: Hugh Abell, Joiner & Wheelwright of Wigginton £10 + 2 suits
For 7 years

Apprentice & Domestic Servant Bindings from York Workhouse 1879 -83

Key to table below

Board: date of York PLU Board of Guardians meeting at which a minuted decision was made in relation to the binding of a young person as apprentice (male) or domestic servant (female).

ER East Riding

NR North Riding

WR West Riding

YOUNG PERSON	BOARD DATE	DOB	MASTER or MISTRESS	ADDRESS	TRADE	COUNTY
John Scruton	13/02/79		Geo Milner	Crayke	shoemaker	NR
Geo Garry	13/02/79		Wm. Vester	Huttons Ambro	blacksmith	NR
John Wilson	13/02/79		Samuel Easterby	Wighill	blacksmith	NR
Geo Dickenson	06/03/79		Wm. Smith	Stillington	shoemaker	NR
Wm. Hick	06/03/79		Wm. Morrell	Newton on Ouse	shoemaker	NR
John Henry Sharp	06/03/79		Philip Janson	Barton Le Willows	shoemaker	NR
Arthur Smith	24/07/79		Wm. Wilkinson	Micklegate	tailor	York
Florence Quinn	06/11/79		Mrs Waldy	Sutton on Derwent		ER
Wm. Cussons	22/01/80		John Knowlson	Skipenbeck	shoemaker	NR
Mary Cass	04/03/80		Mrs Martin	Stonegate	confectioner	York
Frederick Terry	18/03/80		Henry Horner	Wass near Oswaldkirk	shoemaker	NR
Francis Hick	29/04/80		Mrs Holmes	Normanton	shoemaker	WR
James Johnson	06/05/80		Septimus Thompson	Claxton	farmer	NR
Robert Borrex [?]	06/05/80		John Freer	Ampleforth	tailor	NR
“	05/11/85		JF sends letter to York PLU complaining that the apprentice has absconded. They advise him to summon the boy before the magistrates	“		

Henry Gray	20/05/80		George Hutchinson	Heslington Rd.	helper in house & garden	York
Ada Plummer	03/06/80		Mrs Mason	Nunthorpe Terrace		York
Geo Wm. Brown	17/06/80		Thos. Wentworth	Tollerton	implement maker	NR
	31/01/84		App. has not learnt his trade, received proper care or proper clothing			
George Garry	17/06/80		Martin Taylor	Bainton	blacksmith	ER
Harry Gray	01/07/80		Messrs Everingham & Son	Market Weighton	tailors & drapers	ER
Susan Dean	20/01/81		John Goodhall	Heslington		York
Sarah Tipling	20/01/81		Robert Fisher	Hull Road		York
Geo Wincup	24/02/81		Wm. Johnson	Warthill	shoemaker	NR
Geo Waller	24/02/81		Arthur Gee	Castleford	tailor/outfitter	WR
Athur Nightingale	24/02/81		Arthur Gee	Castleford	tailor/outfitter	WR
Herbert Nightingale	24/02/81		John Lacy	Whitwood Mill near Normanton	miller & baker	WR
“	22/05/84		R.O. to make enquiries about this case	“		
Walter Cartwright	03/03/81		Edward Nettleton	Brighthouse	grocer	WR
Wm. Thompson	03/03/81		Ann Mitchell	Tollerton	miller	NR
Isaiah Lewis	03/03/81		Thos Beilby	Hawnby near Helmsley	tailor	NR
Wm Hildreth	03/03/81		Wm Nelson	Pickhill near Thirsk	tailor	NR
Geo Marshall	03/03/81		Geo Francis Umpleby	Stockton on Tees	tailor	Durham
Wm Boulby	10/03/81		Wm Hall	Normanton	tailor	WR
Geo Whincup	21/04/81		Arthur Watson	Acaster Malbis	blacksmith	NR
Thos Richardson	19/05/81		Richard Webster	Monkgate	tailor	York

Frederick Inman	18/07/81		John Slater	Husthwaite near Easingwold	Smith & implement maker	NR
Sarah Pratt	06/10/81		Mr Lane	Eldon Street		York
Margaret Short	24/11/81		Thomas Anderson	Earswick		York
John Mason	26/01/82		Joseph Kershaw	Hebden Bridge	tailor	WR
Jessie Whitehead	26/01/82		Mrs McGuire	5 Milton Terrace		York
Isabella Cunningham	26/01/82		Mr Winspear	Micklegate		York
Adeline Thompson	16/02/82		Thomas Barks	Lowther Street		York
Louisa Sharp	02/03/82		Mr Field	Boston Spa		NR
Jessie Whitehead	02/03/82		Mr Matthews	Harton		NR
Martha Weller	23/03/82		John Wilson	Portland Street		York
Joseph Thackeray	06/04/82		John F. Dickson	Cockey Hill	farmer	York
Wm. Jackson	06/04/82		Francis Blackburn	Raskelf	shoemaker	NR
Emily Cussons	06/04/82		Thos. Squires	St Sampsons Sq	tinner	York
John Allan	20/04/82		Wm. Oliver	Raskelf	tailor	NR
George Whincup	27/04/82		Matthew Bellerby	Strensall	farmer	NR
Henry Usher	14/05/82		Thomas Vasey	111 Woodhouse Lane Leeds	confectioner	WR
“	22/11/83		Ordered that the Clerk write to the Relieving Officer of Leeds to make enquiries into the conduct of Thomas Vasey towards his apprentice Henry Usher			
Wm Drury	18/05/82		Francis Blackburn	Raskelf	shoemaker	NR
Wm Jackson	22/06/82		Joseph Spencer	Hebden Bridge	tailor	WR

Henry Young	29/06/82		Mark Anderson	Crayke	farmer	NR
John Woodcock	06/07/82		John Halder	Haxby	joiner	NR
Frederick Barker	05/10/82		Mr Shillito	Bolton Percy	farmer	WR
Kate Martin	11/01/83		Mr Hurworth	Stonegate		York
Margaret Short	18/01/83		Mr W. Etherington	Wheldrake	farmer	ER
Robert Wilson	01/02/83		Robert Maskell	Bolton Percy	farmer	WR
Elizabeth Richardson	01/02/83		Mrs Sowerby	Snow Hill Darlington		Durham
Wm. Whincup	15/02/83		John Walker	Flaxton	joiner	NR
Louisa Sharpe	22/03/83		Robert Quaques	Langwith	farmer	ER
John Hildreth	05/04/83		James Cooper	Flaxton	shoemaker	NR
Alfred Frankish	26/54/83		Thomas A. Watkinson	Lawn House, Huby	farmer	NR
Alfred Simpson	26/04/83		Francis Dickson	Heslington	farmer	ER
Preston Hood	26/04/83		MW Warner	Crayke	farmer	NR
John Henry Eastwood	03/05/83		James Whitfield	Sheriff Hutton	farmer	NR
Walter Dickenson	10/05/83		Edward Mellor	Yeadon near Leeds	engineer	WR
Jane Johnson	17/05/83		Revd. Horace Townsend	Easingwold		NR
Henry Nightingale	07/06/83		Mr IF (?) Petch	Harton	farmer	NR
Eliz. Taylor	06/09/83		Wm. Camidge	Monkgate		York
Walter Dickinson	13/09/83		Wm Dawson	Goodramgate	hairdresser	York
Eliza Pratt	25/10/83		John Rowley	Alne		NR
Isabella Parker	25/10/83		Mr E. Theakstone	Hull Road		York
Agnes Wheatley	27/12/83		Mrs Warner	Blenheim Place, Holgate Road		York