

©2017

Yvette Florio Lane

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

GOOD BUSINESS:
CHARITY, CAPITALISM, AND THE MORAL ECONOMY OF
THE WATERCRESS AND FLOWER GIRLS' MISSION, LONDON 1866-1914

By

YVETTE FLORIO LANE

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

Written under the direction of

Seth Koven

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May, 2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Good Business:

Charity, Capitalism, and the Moral Economy of

The Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission, London 1866-1914

By YVETTE FLORIO LANE

Dissertation Director:

Seth Koven

This dissertation is a history of the evangelical philanthropic institution, The Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission, which links flower-sellers, artificial flower-makers, and disabled women to the growth of modern fundraising. It raises questions about women's changing economic roles, and the struggle of people with disabilities to find work and independence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With its visionary leader John Groom at its helm (from 1866 until 1919), the London-based mission promoted the idea of beauty and meaning through work; the importance of craft; and the value of a redistributive economy rooted in social justice. At the same time, it held on to its foundational beliefs in personal salvation through faith, and a strict separation between masculine and "womanly" work. Somewhat surprisingly, given the Protestant-based ideology at its base, the notion of "grace through good works" remained an essential pillar. Good works and faith, however, were not enough to stem the constant tide of institutionalized poverty and economic and social inequality against which it battled; the mission could only continue as long as it was financially sound. Groom

believed the solution to the problem lay in monetizing the goods and services produced by the women in new and innovative ways. Groom's mission, and the way in which he melded business and charity, offers new insights into the good business of selling benevolence. The work he undertook in the mission, with the help of field missionary women and paid staff, was ambitious and wide-ranging. From homes for orphans, to workshops for women with disabilities, to savings-and-loan schemes, to free summer beach holidays for city children, all of these projects required organization, determination, and drive. With Groom as its guiding force, the mission became a complex social welfare agency and advocacy group with an extensive reach into the community of flower women and their children that touched on their lives through many phases. The institution continued into the twentieth century.

Acknowledgments

It is with an equal measure of joy and relief at the end of this long and transformative project that I write these thoughts. There are many people to thank, and I am delighted finally to do so. I owe Rutgers University Graduate School, and in particular, the outstanding History Department, an enormous debt of gratitude. First, for taking a chance by investing in a non-traditional student, for providing many years of generous funding, and for creating an incredibly rich academic community, of which I am immensely proud to be a part.

My dissertation committee was a model of engaged and committed scholarship—rigorous, yet allowing enough room for creativity to flourish. Seth Koven, Bonnie Smith, Jochen Hellbeck, and Deborah Cohen bring unequalled passion, imagination, intelligence, and verve to their respective projects. To have had their attention and insight focused so intently on my work was a privilege and an honor. I hope I can take that wisdom with me, and apply it to the next stage of this project in a way that repays their efforts and the many kindnesses they have shown me over the years.

In writing this dissertation, I relied on the expertise and services of many institutions, and the people that run them. First and foremost, the archivists at London Metropolitan Archives tirelessly handled request upon request for box upon box of materials, and somehow kept it all organized, and did so cheerfully, besides. I felt that I had truly arrived as a scholar at the British Library when the clockwork-like machinery heaved up some obscure nineteenth-century booklet on this or that. I shivered outside along with the displaced hive of diligent researchers when a bomb scare thrust us into the bright sunshine one cold day. I momentarily forgot about my abandoned passport while I

eavesdropped on some fellow academics. At the National Archives, an archivist who would prefer to remain anonymous scurried me through some back hallways and into a service elevator in search of a piece of mysteriously located sheet music. At the Victoria & Albert Museum, I saw charming original sketches made by Beatrix Potter, which unfortunately did not make it into this project after all. Bill Kay at the Poppy Factory in Richmond, gave me a tour, allowed me to speak with the workers, and gave me access to the files housed there. The ladies at the Alexandra Rose Day Charities in Surrey met me at the train in the pouring rain, took me for a fast ride in a Mini Cooper, showered me with gifts, and allowed me access to their records. A serendipitous discovery in the files of the Invalid Children's Aid Association led me to Virginia Beardshaw at ICAN, and the reminder that we inhabit a remarkably small world, indeed.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank the diligent staff at Alexander Library at Rutgers, and the international community of scholarship and governance that allows American researchers to barge into libraries and archives in the United Kingdom and demand equal access. I would also like to make special mention of the wealth of many online sources now available which has made researching across oceans much more possible than when I started this project. I made extensive use of both those that are available through paid subscriptions (such as Ancestry.com), but also that hodgepodge collection of wonderful sites which, for one reason or another, someone has gone to the great trouble of assembling and maintaining for no other purpose than to share and disseminate knowledge of the past.

A large part of what made graduate school so rewarding was the friendships I shared with other students. Chris Bischof, Bridget Gurtler, Melanie Kiechle, Anita

Kurimay, Allison Miller, and Matthew O'Brien were brilliant whether baking, bowling, making guacamole, or deconstructing an argument. Academic careers, as they do, have taken them to the four corners; I miss their good humor and keen insights. In New Brunswick, Highland Park, New York, London, Barcelona, and Tel Aviv, Dina Fainberg, Dora Vargha, and Tal Zalmanovich (and their amazing families) provided wonderful friendship and outstanding fashion sense with boundless humor, delicious food, excellent book recommendations, and countless hours of conversation. Each of them took time away from their own outstanding academic work to read and contribute to mine, and I am truly grateful to have them as friends and colleagues. My first mentor, Fred McKittrick, never let me lose faith in myself, or in the rewards of completing the journey.

I owe my family the biggest thanks of all. My parents filled my life with books, and a love of knowledge for its own sake, and my mother instilled in me a love of history that we share. Terry made me LOL in inappropriate places and at inappropriate times more than is legally permissible. My sweet canine companions kept me cozy company through some very chilly days. My children don't remember a time when I wasn't in graduate school. They have shared their entire lives with my studies and books and travels. They never complained about my split attention, even when it meant sacrifices for them, which it did, many times. I know they are proud of me, and that means more to me than they can possibly know. My husband has done everything from install computers, run cables, deliver meals, read drafts, and countless other things to help me reach this day. His love and his belief in me sustain me. This project is dedicated to him.

CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
Acknowledgments		iv
Contents		vi
Prologue	Benevolent Objects	1
Introduction		5
Chapter One	Finding John Groom	37
Chapter Two	City of Roses: Selling Flowers on the Streets In Victorian and Edwardian London	92
Chapter Three	Cripples, Orphans, and Broken Things: Disability and Domesticity in “Crippledom”	151
Chapter Four	Missionary Capitalism: John Groom’s Moral Economy	198
Chapter Five	‘The Wild Rose of Charitable Action’: Fundraising in the Postbox and on the Street	232
Conclusion	The Rosebud Garden of Girls	287
Bibliography		291

Prologue Benevolent Objects

Among the somber walking canes, trumpet-like ear-horns, and wire-rimmed spectacles in The Museum of London's permanent collection of disability-related artifacts sat a small curiosity. It was a bouquet of artificial flowers that the "Afflicted, Blind and Crippled Girls" of John Groom's Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission had made, sometime around the start of the twentieth century. The brightly colored fabric flowers appeared quite obviously fake. The handcrafted cardboard box that had held them, inscribed across the front with the words "The Crippleage," was a cliché of old-fashioned advertising style. This feminine and decorative object simply did not seem to belong with the other practical and utilitarian items in the collection. According to the curators, they included it in this exhibit because it was an example of the type of work done by the thousands of disabled women who lived in this institution during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹

As I was later to find out, the women in Groom's institution made hundreds of thousands of these flower boxes over the years. Many of them were given away as tokens of thanks to donors, and virtually all were destined for the waste bin. It was remarkable that this box of flowers survived at all, let alone that it ended up in a museum. I wondered about the women who had made it, and what they had thought of it. I wondered where

¹From the Museum of London website, "Re-Assessing What We Collect–Disability." The items were originally part of an earlier collection, now retired, and some have been reallocated to a permanent display, "London Before it was London." A note here on terminology: all the words used throughout–cripples, girls, inmates–which were in common use when the events described occurred--were also laden with meaning in their own day. In the intervening years they have only become heavier. We speak now of disabled (or differently-abled) people, not cripples, or of clients or patients, or residents, not inmates. I have chosen at times to use the term cripple in its historical context, but have resisted using inmates. The broad use of the term "girls" is discussed in the Introduction.

they had come from. How old they had been. What their lives had been like before they landed in the Crippleage and began learning to make artificial flowers. What choices had they made along the way? Did they have any choices at all?

And what about John Groom? What had made him “tick?” While a very young man, he decided to make the lives and livelihoods of the flower-girls of London the center of his own. How had this relatively uneducated artisan and lay preacher become so deeply involved with street-sellers, crippled young women, ragged girls, and artificial flowers? Why had he devoted himself entirely to this cause? Why did this entire endeavor end up in a museum in the center of London?

As I began to learn more about these girls and women and about John Groom, it became apparent that in uncovering the story of this single box of flowers, multiple layered histories would also be revealed.² To find the origins of this memento, the path led to the Watercress Market at Farringdon Road and to Covent Garden, and to the brick buildings and winding roads of Clerkenwell Close in north central London where the original workrooms had stood, and to Woodbridge Chapel, one of the first homes of the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission. In 1866, in a city then overflowing with charitable projects, it was the only one that addressed the needs of this particular group of working poor as they faced daily battles with cold and exposure, hunger, exhaustion, harassment by police, and the indifference of the public. In the beginning, the mission’s goals were modest. At its most basic level, it offered temporary shelter, clean aprons and dry boots,

² Here, I am borrowing from the branch of material culture theory that treats objects as sites of cultural memory. Simon Morgan, “Material Culture and the Politics of Personality in Early Victorian London,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17 (Jun 2012), 127-146. Morgan cites Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” wherein he advances the idea that objects have “biographies,” in Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–91.

and a warm breakfast. John Groom had big ideas, however, and there was seemingly limitless raw material with which to try his hand.

As I dug deeper into the past, the genealogy of the flower box soon crossed a broad swath of the nineteenth-century social landscape, from the orphaned, widowed, or ill flower-girls on the often-brutal streets of Victorian London, to the disabled and impaired adolescents in the workrooms of the Crippleage, to the sharp pens of Britain's opposing philanthropic warriors, to the silken lapels of its wealthiest and most powerful citizens--among them members of the royal family and high government officials, and an eccentric or two.

The flower box itself had served as the keeper of all these interwoven stories. Without it, it is unlikely that I would have looked into any of the histories I was about to uncover. John Groom did not leave a memoir, nor has he had a biography. Much of his work has passed from living memory. Flower girls have been replaced by green grocers. Poppy Day has superseded Rose Day. With it, we are also reminded, everything has a history.

As the Superintendent of the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission (and its many branches) for over fifty years, John Groom created a philanthropic Good Business by embracing and promoting a combination of capitalism and charity that confounded his critics. He gave expression to his enthusiasm for the entrepreneurial spirit that lay within his evangelicalism by dedicating himself to three separate but related areas of endeavor:

1. He envisaged street-selling flower-girls as penny capitalists in the informal economy and tried to help lift them to higher earning and status as independent entrepreneurs.
2. He attempted to raise the profile of artificial flower-making as a skilled artisanal profession--one which disabled women could perform--and he promoted it as a means to their economic independence.
3. He was an innovative fundraiser who created or exploited money-making schemes, including the annual event known as Alexandra Rose Day, but also trademarks, patents, direct mail and other large scale or high publicity events.

He brought his religious commitment to his grand philanthropic project and executed it in such a way to ensure that business would be *good* in every sense: earnings would be brisk; no moral, ethical, or legal lines would be crossed; charitable and financial goals would be reached; customers would be satisfied; work would be interesting and fulfilling; and, this was tantamount, Christ's work would be done so that souls would be saved. This was a big order and he was not always completely successful.

John Groom pioneered a social experiment that drew from some of the major intellectual and social movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including evangelicalism, marxism, Christian socialism, consumerism, capitalism, aestheticism, scientific social work, and eugenics, but also rejected aspects of them, as well. Together with the girls and women who worked with him in his many projects, they changed charitable fundraising practices, and expanded what we know about the lived experience of flower-girls, disabled girls and women, and artificial flower-makers. This is their story.

Introduction

This dissertation is a history of the evangelical philanthropic institution, The Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission, and the way that it linked flower-sellers, artificial flower-makers, and disabled women to the growth of modern fundraising. It raises questions about women's changing economic roles, and the struggle of people with disabilities to find work and independence in the late-nineteenth-and early-twentieth-centuries. With its visionary leader, John Groom at its helm (from 1866 until 1919), the mission promoted the idea of beauty and meaning through work; the importance of craft; and the value of a redistributive economy rooted in social justice. At the same time, it held on to its foundational beliefs in personal salvation through faith, and a strict separation between "masculine" and "womanly" work, and somewhat surprisingly, given the Protestant-based ideology at its base, "grace through good works" remained an essential pillar. Good works and faith, however, were not enough to stem the constant tide of institutionalized poverty and economic and social inequality. The mission could only continue as long as it was financially sound. Groom believed that the solution to the problem lay in monetizing the goods and services produced by the women in new and innovative ways. Groom's mission, and the way in which he melded business and charity, offers new insights into the good business of selling benevolence.

During much of the period examined here, a so-called golden age of philanthropy, many reformers, of different ideological persuasions confronted the same socio-economic problems of poverty, child welfare, homelessness, illness, and disability.¹ Radical new

¹ On Victorians and philanthropy see Brian Harrison, "Philanthropy and the Victorians," *Victorian Studies* 9 (June 1966) 353-374; F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: UK, Oxford, 1980); David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

philosophies were questioning the ways in which previously held concepts of “usefulness” and “work,” were constructed. Socialists, artists, and religious reformers challenged the capitalist paradigm that they saw as the source of many of the most pressing social problems of the day.² The way in which aid should be delivered, and to whom, was itself the subject of contemporary disagreement. Groom, being a religious nonconformist, was not a universally admired figure, especially among the socially correct guardians of charity, who grounded their proposed solutions in another set of principles, and found fault with his methods and beliefs.

Part I. Boundaries

John Groom was a member of an evangelical sect, a lay pastor, and the driving force behind the rescue mission he created and ran for some five decades. Like other reformers during the Victorian period, he became concerned about the child street-sellers he would pass during the early morning hours. Many of them gathered at the wholesale green markets to purchase watercress to resell. It was frigid, low-paying work, and contemporary sources depict the children as half-starved waifs, blue with cold and hunger. London, for much of the nineteenth century, was a city teeming with children,

Press, 1964); Frank Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988); On evangelical philanthropy see Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962); John Wolffe, ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980* (London: SPCK, 1995); on specific individual philanthropists or social problems see Seth Koven, *Slumming: Social and Sexual Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Ellen Ross, ed., *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

² Peter Stansky, *Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1880s, and the Arts and Crafts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 14-21.

just over a third of the population was under fifteen years old.³ It is not hard to imagine that the sensitive young man's heart went out to them. By the time he turned twenty-one years old in 1866, he had set up a small rented room in a nearby building where the watercress sellers could come in for a free breakfast of hot cocoa and buttered bread. Soon he was sponsoring "meat teas" for six hundred or so watercress sellers at a time, including men, women, and children—featuring such entertainments as a "watercress poet" and church ladies playing hymnals on piano. The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury even stopped in for a few words. Everyone took home a wrapped cake for the next morning's breakfast. All he asked for in return was that the guests listen to a few prayers.⁴

Girl Problems

By the mid-nineteenth century, girls and women had become the focus of intense concern, and many social reformers centered their efforts on steering them away from the dangers of street life and towards "respectability."⁵ Groom's own focus gradually moved away from the watercress-sellers as the popularity of their product waned, their fortunes faded, and the 1870 Forster Education Act greatly reduced the number of young children on the street. He became more closely involved with the flower-sellers, as they began to flood the streets in greater numbers. Cut flowers could be purchased from flower shops, from costers (independent, almost always male, street sellers with kiosks or stands), and from individual street flower-sellers who purchased their stock three times a week at the central flower market, and who often walked all day--selling the product from a large

³ Ginger Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2009), 3.

⁴ "Watercress Sellers Rejoicing," *Islington Gazette*, 30 July 1872; and "Entertainment to Watercress Sellers," *The Daily News*, 24 July 1872.

⁵ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.

basket that they hung from their neck. Buying a “posey” or a “button-hole” from a street-seller was arguably the most popular way to purchase a floral item. The popularity of both fresh-floral accessories and the street-sellers had boomed among both sexes. Buying from a street-seller was fast and it was cheap, as there was no queue to bother with, the street-sellers often had a quick wit, and could make a custom piece to match your outfit or your eyes in the time it took you to get your money ready. These itinerant sellers were almost exclusively women. They sometimes were called “flower-women,” but they were also called “flower-girls” and contemporaries used the terms interchangeably.

“Girl” was a capacious word which could include any female, from a very young child to an elderly woman, depending on the context in which it was used. Adults well into their third decade of life and beyond could be known as girls: as flower-girls, shop-girls, factory girls--the word conveyed more than chronological age; it conveyed a social status and position.⁶ One report noted that, by “working girls we mean to include all who have, at any employment whatever, skilled or unskilled, to earn their own living whether they be girls in domestic service, girls in factories and workrooms, girls at desks and counters, or any other that can be named.”⁷ The term indicated one not fully in possession of adulthood. Contemporaries applied it widely, using it to mean someone who was not a “lady,” which implied a higher status and privilege, and preferred it over the more austere “woman,” which could, in its broadness, encompass a much too diverse sample of the population, including prisoners, workhouse inmates, prostitutes, and other unwelcome associations. Of course, it could also mean, as it does today, a female in late childhood

⁶ Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Sjøland, and Christina Benninghaus, eds., *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1.

⁷ Nanette Mason, “How Working Girls Live in London,” Part I, *Girls’ Own Paper*, 1889, 422. Accessed online at <http://www.victorianvoices.net/work/conditions.shtml>

and very early adulthood. The flower-sellers John Groom took under his wing were called both flower-girls and flower-women and he, too, used both terms.

Although Groom was concerned for all the flower-sellers, his most impassioned efforts were directed towards the young women between the ages of about fourteen to eighteen. The period between the end of formal school attendance to marriage, was vaguely defined as the time of girlhood labor. Almost all working-class women were employed after leaving school and before marriage.⁸ Indeed, historian Carol E. Morgan has written, “the paid labor of girls from the time they left school until marriage was vital to household survival, largely taken for granted, and wholly acceptable in most working-class milieus.”⁹ This group of women, between school and marriage gave contemporaries much to be concerned about. They worried that they would fall into harm’s path, they worried that there were too many of them, and they worried that they would accept the lowest wages and undercut the wages of male workers. Some blamed the girls themselves for taking work at the lowest price, “Girls are the cheapest sort of labour-force employers can get; they would, if they could, work for nothing. No wonder, then, that the capitalist takes advantage of them, and that their weekly wage is a few shillings.”¹⁰ They wrote that girls were, “remarkable for their difficulty in making both ends meet, for the strain on their health and energies, for their temptations, and for the risk they run of being drawn at last into the current that hurries along to ruin.”¹¹ John Groom saw this as the age at which

⁸ Andrew August, *Poor Women’s Lives, Poor Women’s Lives: Gender, Work, and Poverty in Late-Victorian London* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 117.

⁹ Carol E. Morgan, “Work for Girls? The Small Metal Industries in England, 1840-1915” in Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Sjøland, and Christina Benninghaus, eds., *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 83-98; here, 83.

¹⁰ Anon., “City Work-Girls,” *Toilers in London or Inquiries concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis*, 1889, 195. Accessed Online at The Victorian Dictionary at www.victorianlondon.org

¹¹ Mason, “How Working Girls Live in London,” 422.

the proper influences were essential to keeping these young women from all sorts of ills to which they might fall prey. He feared that it was during this time when they were in the greatest danger.

Contemporaries addressed the problem of girls' labor as one of superfluity.¹² By 1892, there were 112 women to 100 men in London and many believed that women would take whatever work they could get at whatever price.¹³ Famed social reformer Clara Collet made news that year when she published a report in the journal *Nineteenth Century* that described the problem of "overstock." Many also assumed that women would work outside the home "only till they can find a young man eager to provide for their support." The paper, "Prospects of Marriage for Women" painted a disappointing picture for any girl who hung her hopes on that "chief profession."¹⁴ Indeed, for many girls, paid labor was "only a time of transition between their leaving school and entering on married life."¹⁵ The notion that women would be provided for by their husbands was enshrined in the economic dictum, "every woman a wife" and this domestic ideal held too, that working-class, as well as middle-class, women would be supported in this way.

Among the women and girls who sold flowers on the street, a large number had physical impairments, however, and many of the girls John Groom came in contact with on the streets, or who were referred to the mission, were disabled.¹⁶ During this time, most people believed marriage was outside of the realm of possibility for women with

¹² Editor, "The Chief Profession for Women," *Hampshire Advertiser*, 2 April 1892. The author of the article opined, "Marriage is by far the chief profession for women, though, like other professions, it is getting badly overstocked."

¹³ In "Girl Labour in London," the author noted the abuses of girls at even fine shops and the "devouring dragon" of slopwork, i.e. needlework, in *London Society: An Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature* (April 1877) 368-376.

¹⁴ Editor, "The Chief Profession for Women," *Hampshire Advertiser*.

¹⁵ Mason, "How Working Girls Live in London," 422.

¹⁶ John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-century Working-class Entrepreneurs* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 101.

disabilities.¹⁷ State interventions to address the needs of the disabled were extremely limited in this era before the more expansive aid afforded by the advent of the welfare state in the period after the Second World War. The disabled poor were not afforded much more in terms of assistance than the privilege of going to the workhouse minus the stain of being labeled “work-shy,” although they often bore a sense of shame nonetheless. The problem Groom set before out to tackle was to find work for women that could pay a living wage, that could be done by women with disabilities, and that would meet the moral standard he set for it.¹⁸

The three main categories of employment for women of the lower classes that existed at the time were in domestic work, factory work, and different types of retail sales, including working as shop clerks, in food service, and in street selling.¹⁹ The largest employer, domestic service, was the oldest, the most plentiful, and many believed that it was the “natural” work of women. It also served as a training ground for eventual homemaking, another reason it was seen as a proper experiential situation, and for the poorest women, a type of rehabilitation.²⁰ Preparing “ragged” women for positions in domestic service was not a novel idea of Groom’s, and in fact, other organizations were also doing this type of work among the “endangered” female population.²¹ Many of the

¹⁷ Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004) 94.

¹⁸ Morgan, “Work for Girls?” Girls making nails and chains, for example, in the Black Country, was considered “cruel and undignified,” something Groom most certainly would have agreed with, 90-91.

¹⁹ Anon., “Factory Girls,” *Toilers in London; or Inquiries Concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis*, 1889, 172. Accessed Online at The Victorian Dictionary at www.victorianlondon.org

“The factory girl proper ranks next to the flower-girl or the street-seller in the social scale, and constantly she falls into the ranks of the hawker race.”

²⁰ Anna Davin “City Girls: Young Women, New Employment, and the City, London, 1880-1910” in Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Sølund, and Christina Benninghaus, eds., *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 209-223; 215.

²¹ Sybil Oldfield, *Jeanie, An ‘Army of One’: Mrs. Nassau Senior, 1828-1877, The First Woman in Whitehall* (Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic, 2008), 214-218.

women Groom tried to recruit for the training either vehemently refused the offer or were quite unsuited or ill-prepared for the work. This ushered in a change in plans, with more emphasis being placed on recruiting and training the girls and women who had disabilities for the “industrial training” in domestic service instead. As domestic service proved to be “utterly impossible” for some due to their disabilities, Groom replaced that training with instruction in the textile trade-related craft of artificial flower-making . Groom wanted to make this training as accessible as possible and over time, adapted the tools and techniques to accommodate students with a range of disabilities. The enterprise eventually grew into a sheltered workshop, among the first of its kind. None of this happened without controversy—from accusations of “parading cripples” to the charge that such programs and work schemes excluding people with disabilities from economic and social opportunities.

The power of organized charity to effect individual and social change is an important historical phenomenon, yet the business end of philanthropy is often overlooked in historical analysis.²² Money (which necessitates the hunt for it) is, for charities, the root of all good; without it they can do little to bring about the change they seek. While it is true that Adam Smith, the father of free trade capitalism, conceived of compassion for strangers as an essential component of moral personhood, a sense of

²²Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taihe, “The Charity-Mongers of Modern Babylon: Bureaucracy, Scandal, and the Transformation of the Philanthropic Marketplace, c.1870–1912,” *Journal of British Studies* 54 (January 2015), 118-137. On philanthropy in history see, *inter alia*, Robert H. Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1994); William Damon and Susan Verducci, eds., *Taking Philanthropy Seriously: Beyond Noble Intentions to Responsible Giving* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); F.K. Prochaska, “Charity Bazaars in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Journal of British Studies* (Spring 1977): 62-84.

unseemliness accompanies the question of charitable donations and fundraising.²³ It is considered a delicate subject and one that fundraisers must always approach with care for fear of alienating or offending donors. Among an expanding sea of needy cases, and facing compassion fatigue, volunteer burnout, and public skepticism, Victorian charities struggled to be seen and heard.

Nineteenth-century philanthropy is often viewed as a way station in the evolution of the welfare state. Historians have etched a continuum from the voluntary associations of the Victorian period, to the emergence of the statist model following the Great War, and its fruition following the Second World War. Philanthropic efforts at reform are often seen as an exercise in bourgeois “social control” over the working class and the poor which harkens back to notions of deserving and undeserving poor.²⁴ Legislation intended to protect the poor, or ameliorate their suffering, has been regarded as benign paternalism at best, or as another route to exploitation at worst. As studies of voluntary action mature, historians are grappling with the complicated legacies of their founders in ways that attempt to add nuance, and which move beyond simplistic assessments. In this study I hope to add to that complexity by avoiding assigning present day concerns to nineteenth-century motives and to add to the depth of understanding through historical contextualization.

As Queen Victoria’s long reign wore on, the practice of individual benevolence began to ebb. In the twentieth century, government programs and state institutions gradually became responsible for the delivery of long-term care and social justice and

²³ Boyd Hilton, *Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 277-280.

²⁴ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1963).

welfare, and personal, charitable, and faith-based enterprises such as Groom's began to seem hopelessly out-of-date and smacked of white gloves and garden parties and bored gentry. Increasingly the social and cultural milieu was growing hostile, or indifferent, to emotional, theological, and need-based approaches to the delivery of aid.

The dissertation ends—on the eve of the Great War and on the precipice of profound social change—with the 1912 inauguration of a spectacular philanthropic event, borne of an unlikely parentage, with a long life-span, and a multitude of offspring. Alexandra Rose Day, held in honor of the wife of King Edward VII, was the first truly modern mass fundraiser, and it was the apotheosis of John Groom's high-Victorian social and economic experiment. With its combination of private charity, public spectacle, and the cult of celebrity, it pointed to a new approach to fundraising and set the model for years to come.²⁵

Disability History

The influence of Groom's organization was arguably most significant in the history of disability over the long term. Processes of change and continuity are at work in any history—and, according to many working in the field, this concept has not as effectively been applied to Disability Studies in Britain. Investigations of disablement in the past are often devoid of context, and assume an “already always” marginalization of people with disabilities at all times and in all places. Disability is a social construction,

²⁵ Paul K. Longmore has recently written about the way in which charity became business in twentieth-century America in *Telethons: Spectacle, Disability and the Business of Charity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); see also William Damon and Susan Verducci, eds., *Taking Philanthropy Seriously: Beyond Noble Intentions to Responsible Giving* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). See Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001) for some examples of how the Salvation Army coped with their fundraising needs.

but also an historical one that changes over time and is situated within a particular period of time; to separate it from its context is to miss the nuances. While the period at hand was one of important change in the way ideas about disability were in flux, it was at the same time one of striking continuity. Whether intensely personal and idiosyncratic, as in the case of memoirs and fiction, or depersonalized and mediated, as in medical records, census data, workhouse and school placements, the lived experiences of disability that lie between these two interpretive approaches have barely been explored.²⁶ We still know very little about how the physically or sensorily-impaired negotiated those spaces, and of what Michel de Certeau named the “practiced place.”²⁷ The subjectivities we seek as historians elude us.

While new studies continue to appear, Disability Studies scholars maintain, rightly, that the past experiences of disabled people are still largely missing from the grand narrative of history. Their thoughts and dreams, aspirations and struggles are mostly unrecorded, and what is recorded is seldom in their own words. Some scholars of the field argue that those which do exist are merely fictionalized characterizations and ostensibly objective reports in which the constructions of disability are created and reproduced, often uncritically. The prevailing historiographical position is that historians

²⁶ The historiography in Disability Studies continues to grow, although it is often noted that it lacks a sense of historical context. For some discussion and critique, see, *inter alia*: Elizabeth Bredberg, “Writing Disability History: Problems, Perspectives and Sources,” *Disability & Society* 14 (1999); Tom Shakespeare, “Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?” *Disability and Society* 9 (1994); B.J. Gleeson, “Recovering a ‘Subjugated History’: Disability and the Institution in the Industrial City,” *Australian Geographical Studies* 37 (July 1999): 114-129; Rosemary Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Anne Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750: A History of Exclusion* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2008).

²⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2002).

have neglected disability in general and disability scholars have, in turn, generally ignored historical documents.²⁸

Recent exercises intended to broaden the historical view demonstrate how nettlesome a job this is. For example, a recently published article, “Disability in Herefordshire,” uses demographic data derived from census reports to argue for a more integrated community presence of disabled citizens than had previously been thought.²⁹ What it does to particular effect however is underscore how difficult such research is, and how intractable the obstacles encountered in trying to arrive at anything like precise numbers or quantitative analysis. Historians know well the many ways in which census data is fraught with problems, the very least of which are the inconsistencies in census takers’ questions and records. As the author of that study notes, the goal of the census-taker never was to gather information about disability, *per se*, but rather, simply to enumerate household members. Insofar as this kind of research into disability is “doable” its analytical value is unclear and its reward limited. With problematic data, and limited contextualization, the risk in misinterpreting the evidence is great. Add to that the effect of subjects’ desire for anonymity as well as the impact of familial denial and of the mercurial definitions of “disability,” all of which serve to further destabilize the evidence. The epistemological dilemma they present is that these types of research questions do almost more damage than good when they suggest that the lived experience of the past is knowable through such records and figures, and that through them we are afforded many insights into the nature of disability in family and community life. Moreover, these sources privilege the gaze and the voice of the non-disabled, and often adopt either an

²⁸ Elizabeth Bredberg, “Writing Disability History.”

²⁹ Christine Jones, “Disability in Herefordshire, 1851-1911” *Local Population Studies* 87 (Autumn 2011), 29-44.

overly-sentimental tone, or advance a questionable sociological or quantifiable position. , In order to move beyond these limitations, some scholars of disability have issued (and re-issued), urgent pleas for its historicization. They encourage an analytical approach that investigates new evidence and poses new questions, and a research agenda that disengages from what they consider shopworn “medical model” or “personal tragedy” narratives of disability.³⁰

Victorian Things

For many researchers in fields such as literature and cultural studies, influenced by the anthropological turn, objects have become sources of increasing methodological significance. Historians have been notably slower to delve into this area.³¹ In her essay, “Beyond Words,” Leora Auslander argues that historians, to their detriment, are usually trained to view “words as the most trustworthy as well as informative sources; everything else is merely illustrative or supplementary.”³² As Auslander writes, however, historians who become attuned to the material soon realize that objects reveal the “affective, communicative, symbolic, and expressive aspects of human life that are central to the historical project,”³³ and they do so in a way that relies on less verbally-dependent methods, notwithstanding the fact that we must know them through words.

In their introduction to a special issue entitled “New Agenda: Urban Mobility: New Maps of Victorian London,” the editors of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* write

³⁰ B.J. Gleeson, “Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View,”; Tom Shakespeare, “Dustbins for Disavowal?”

³¹ Richard Grassby, “Material Culture and Cultural History,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35 (2004), 591-603; here, 593. His is a plea for expanding beyond written sources in the writing of history, especially of the early modern period.

³² Leora Auslander, “Beyond Words,” *American Historical Review* 110 (October 2005), 1015-1045; here, 1015. Emphasis added.

³³ Auslander, “Beyond Words,” 1016.

that some historians and literary critics are applying—and expanding—these concepts in studies of the Victorian period, especially studies of London. They note that there is a new focus on “the objects and artifacts that fill the modern metropolis, as well as on the affective life of things.”³⁴ Recent work, especially by literary critics John Plotz, Elaine Freedgood, and Talia Schaffer, has caused scholars of the period to recognize the emotional and relational registers Victorians invested in the objects they possessed. This has led to a reconsideration of the importance of things in the Victorian imaginary.³⁵ The tension between factory and handmade objects, such as those described here, can often function as evidence in place of words wherein “things” are analyzed as texts, that is, they are given a literary interpretation. When historians have taken up the challenge and explored opportunities offered by the “material turn” to enlarge and expand their archive to include the multifarious category of “things,” they frequently have imputed to them qualities formerly reserved solely for human actors: agency, resistance, and change over time. These very same forces have often been denied to those individuals or groups who, seemingly, were “without history.” This approach to material objects as historical texts has been particularly useful in uncovering the lives of those who lacked access to the tools and routes of literacy that might otherwise have preserved their voices.³⁶ And few groups in history have been less heard from than the creators of the objects here—disabled itinerant flower sellers, artificial-flower makers, and domestic servants. This is compounded by the reliance on literary and published sources preferred by cultural

³⁴ Katharina Boehm and Josephine McDonagh, “Introduction: New Agenda: Urban Mobility: New Maps of Victorian London,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 15 (August 2010), 194-200.

John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2010); Talia Schaffer, *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³⁶ Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Autumn 2001): 1-22.

historians and resulting in a tendency to focus on “literate perspectives,” that effectively erase lower-class women from the historical record, as an article in a recent *Journal of Victorian Culture* maintains.³⁷

Therefore, as a methodological and theoretical framework, material culture will be considered here as essential evidence, crucial in developing a fuller picture of the embodied circumstances of the girls and women who produced them. At the same time, it also enters into an exploration of the meanings that were created through the manufacture and exchange of material culture. In so doing, it contemplates the way women with disabilities have fought to find decent paid work and to lead independent lives. It opens a space in which to examine notions of women’s and girls’ work—what disabled women can do, should do, must do—and how those ideas have taken different forms across time and place. For Victorians, the things that filled their spaces did not exist solely as decorative objects, but actually embodied the very essence of those who had made them.³⁸ As can be seen here, in the objects resided the maker. In the end their objects tell us: We made these things. We were here.

Assembling an Archive and Method

Although the Groom institution’s name and history experience periodic bursts of activity in the British cultural memory, including the 2015 release of a fictional romance novel that tells the tale of two sisters, one growing up in an orphanage based on Groom’s, as well as a 2008 stage play, (underwritten by the National [UK] Lottery and performed

³⁷ Peter K. Andersson, “How Civilized Were the Victorians?” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20 (October 2015), 439-452; 441.

³⁸ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Shaffer, *Novel Craft*.

by a national touring company comprised of actors with disabilities) that looks at the role played by the flower girls in the manufacture of munitions during the Second World War, John Groom's is no longer a household name. The organization has been subsumed into Livability UK, which describes itself as the largest Christian-based disability charity in the UK. While it carries on much of the same type of work and ethos, it has not managed to capture the public's imagination with the same showmanship as its founder.

When I first contacted what remained of the Groom organization in 2007, it was in the process of shifting to its current structure, and I was directed to the collection at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) as being all that remained of any papers from the past. My requests to various institutions and archives for more specific or detailed information were met with politeness and willingness to help. Ultimately they failed to yield more than some of the printed pieces held at the British Library, and a very small repository of printed materials at the Islington Local History Centre,³⁹ and the patchwork of materials at the London Metropolitan Archives.

At that time, the papers themselves were in some disarray, and in the intervening years they have been put in much better order, and are more easily accessible with a recently improved computerized finding aid. The Groom boxes also contain a great many photographs of Groom and his family and the girls of the institutions, along with postcards and photographs of Groom and the mission buildings. Some of the photographs are annotated in studiously neat handwriting. In addition to the images, there are a few

³⁹ I have been in correspondence with what remained of the Shaftesbury Organization and Livability (the latter day incarnation of the Groom organization) and I was assured then that whatever papers they had had been turned over to the LMA. Other inquiries, such as to the offices of the London City Mission also turned up empty. I acquired some other sources through personal contacts, and of course, took advantage of anything that was available on line. Since I began this project, there have been *The Flower Girls* a dramatic piece produced in various local theatres in the UK in 2008. More recently, a romantic fiction novel based on Groom and the flower girls has been published in the UK and the US, entitled *A Memory of Violets*, Hazel Gaynor, 2015.

minute-keeping books that contain records of meetings that were held with the various committees of the Groom organization, as well as some personal handwritten correspondence (subsequently transcribed into typescript, undated) with notables such as Lord Shaftesbury and Angela Burdett-Coutts. There are also many newspaper stories featuring the mission of Groom and other published news and publicity items—evidence that someone along the line was put to the task of assembling a clipping file. Much of what is in the files is what can best be described as random, however. There are some printed tracts, other administrative papers, and a delightful box of tools and samples from the artificial flower workshops, including a pattern book that contains prototypes of individual floral petals.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, these materials, along with the Groom records in the “Enquiry files” of the Charity Organisation Society (later renamed and archived under Family Welfare Association), which is also housed at the LMA, comprise the extant archive of the Groom organization. The much-maligned Charity Organisation Society was a self-appointed, self-regulated, oversight commission, charged with coordinating and monitoring the number of charitable entities, their administration, the dispersal of funds, and their clientele. They favored vouchers in lieu of cash, and self-help over handouts of any kind.⁴⁰ In general, the COS was a better organized collector of papers, records, and ephemera—as it should have been. Its main purpose was to coordinate the distribution of charity benefits in order to prevent overlap or duplication of aid. This administrative oversight was in service to their larger goal of eliminating, or at least drastically reducing, the fraudulent practices of both the providers and the beneficiaries in

⁴⁰ Robert Humphreys, *Poor Relief and Charity, 1869-1945: The London Charity Organization Society* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001).

the mass of unregulated philanthropies that arose following the enactment of the 1834 Poor Law. Their bulging files offer up many more of the published pieces produced by Groom's organization than were found in the Groom archives themselves. Anyone wishing to view these pieces in the future will find many of them there. In addition, the COS archive contains a multitude of letters from people inquiring as to the legitimacy of Groom's many projects. Some of these are from ordinary citizens, others are from the administrators of regional branch offices of COS-affiliated operations, and still others are from other charities looking for placements for children or disabled girls or young women throughout the United Kingdom.

The main sources I will use in this dissertation will be the printed fundraising and promotional materials Groom and his associates produced for the mission, contemporary published essays, minute books, and letters that were written by him, or by "fellow travelers," that is, other members of the pan-evangelical community who would have been predisposed to view his activities favorably, as well as any "objective" or disinterested journalistic or opinion materials regarding the mission. These are by no means all of the narrative forms Groom and the mission produced over the years, but here I have selected from the extant materials the didactic tales and stories that appear most important in constructing the discursive dimensions of both the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission and the public persona of John Groom.

Like many other Victorian philanthropists, Groom operated as a one-man show,⁴¹ and his organization ran by its own lights; its record-keeping was subject to the idiosyncratic motives of its primary stakeholders. We are fortunate then to have the

⁴¹ What COS called a "One Man Mission" in its report regarding Groom, something it held in disfavor. For discussion of the COS's feelings about one-man shows in general, see Roddy, Strange, and Taithe, "The Charity-Mongers of Modern Babylon."

abundant records of Groom's ideological opponents, the Charity Organisation Society (COS) to preserve this, if only partially. In this case, the official archives of establishment actors provide not only counter-narrative, but content, context, and detail, in a more critical way than Groom would have wished. It is this contested nature of the archive that makes the history both richer and more complete, but at the same time, presents views which are usually diametrically at odds, and often downright hostile to Groom personally and to his stated goals. The overall effectiveness and the ideological underpinnings of the COS, its mission and its members are issues of both historical and historiographical debate. What is not debatable is the degree of seriousness of purpose and vigor with which its officers approached their self-appointed duties. Suffice to say it was zealous. Since it is not the main focus of this project, I will not spend a great deal of time on the precise contours of the COS, and the entity has been well examined. Their relationships with Groom are an important part of the story, however, and their archival contribution is crucial. I will show that the members of the COS also worked to forward a particular agenda. Groom was keenly aware of what the COS was writing and disseminating about him, and he actively rebutted it. Part of his active promotion of the mission's work was to wage a constant battle with powerful adversaries such as these who would have put an end to his work had they been able.

Institutional History

One of the pitfalls in studying the history of institutions, and relying upon the archives compiled by them, is that those archives are often controlled by the organization in question. Both the content, and the access to it, are carefully monitored. In some cases,

the researcher is not given full access to the record, or is discouraged from including information that strays from the image the group wishes to display. All too often, the historical record—and the historian—end up simply as mouthpieces for the organization. The archives of such significant organizations as The Salvation Army, Oxfam, The International Red Cross, and Save the Children have restricted archival access outright, implied conditions for their use, or so tightly edited their archive for public consumption making scholarship extremely difficult. In this case, no one has asked me to withhold any findings. In researching this project, of the very few files that were closed to the general public, I sought, and obtained, permission to use them with no further restrictions. That said, that I only had access to what was in them in the first place is key.

Part II. The Little Watercress Girl—Charity’s Muse

John Groom’s life’s work started with the watercress sellers he encountered in the Farringdon Watercress Market in the 1860s. The following section is meant to provide background to explain his interest first in the watercress sellers, and how it led over time to the flower-girls. It also explains how the watercress-sellers were already a culturally resonant presence. Ever since the pioneering social explorer and journalist Henry Mayhew first described the “Little Watercress Girl” in his 1851 classic catalog of misery, *London Labour and the London Poor*, she has reappeared periodically in literature and history as a leitmotif, a figure of pathos and sentimentality. She represents a casualty of the destruction of the garden--of childhood and innocence waylaid. The Little Watercress Girl was not solely a victim, however. She was also a survivor. Her life might be hard, but it belonged to her. To paraphrase a famous fictional flower-girl: she sold watercress;

she did not sell herself.⁴² What had changed was that by 1866, watercress had become a big business and watercress-sellers were more visible and in greater numbers than ever before.

While Groom made enormous contributions in aid of the watercress sellers and used the narrative force of the watercress-sellers' extreme poverty and tales of their hardships to drive a fundraising apparatus for their benefit, he did not create this narrative entirely himself. Instead, he built upon one that had been in the making for at least a decade before he started his work. By the time Groom began to write about the Little Watercress sellers they were already well-established figures on the streets of London and in the imaginative assembly of street characters that Londoners would have been familiar with, even if they seldom encountered them in person.

Although watercress-selling on this large scale had been a viable occupation for only a relatively short time, an entirely separate discourse about watercress-sellers already circulated, and it ran in total contrast to the stark one offered by Mayhew, and later by Groom. The opposing narrative painted a pastoral scene of unspoiled nature, a pre-industrial age, and a prelapsarian child. The romantic idea was furthered in such nonsense as this poem, "The Watercress Girl," printed in *The Quiver* in 1866, the same year that Groom was confronting the starving children in the market:

Watercress! Fine watercress!
 My cress I took
 from a shallow brook
 Some miles away
 At break of day, While slumbering
 in your beds you lay:
 bunches a penny some at less—

⁴² George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, 1914.

Buy my cress! My watercress!
 Watercress! Fresh Watercress!
 Begirt with stream Of limpid gleam,
 And crowned with dew—
 ‘Twas thus it grew; no wonder
 ‘tis so bright of hue!
 Bunches a penny, some at less—
 Buy my cress! My watercress!⁴³

This poem gives no hint of the urban reality of the children hawking the cress.

While social realists such as Mayhew and Groom wrote of barefoot waifs and malnourished bodies, a very different discourse promoted the idea that the children were pastoral innocents in from the country with their homegrown produce. One such tale is this one, “Little Jenny, The Watercress Seller,” in which the heroine, a “half-orphan” child with a dying mother and no milk at home for tea, sets out “buoyant with hope” to collect money from the mother’s employer, a thoughtless jobber who sends the girl away empty-handed. Despondent, Jenny went out again, taking a basket this time, “set off in the opposite direction” until she “stopped in a large meadow, where was a running stream. She followed eagerly along its course until, with an exclamation of joy, she put down her basket, and began to pull the cresses that were growing plentifully in the clear water.” She then tied them into bundles, took them to a farmhouse and sold them all to the kindly woman inside. She returned home with a loaf of bread and jug of milk “and soon Jenny told her story, and made her mother smile by saying she meant to turn watercress seller in future.”⁴⁴ It is no wonder that some believed that watercress selling was far removed from the city with its poverty and distress when stories such as this circulated in the popular discourse. Here we see a child in an edenic setting surrounded

⁴³ Editor, The Watercress Girl, *The Quiver*, April 1866, 509-510.

⁴⁴ “Little Jenny, The Watercress Seller,” *The Sunday at Home: A Magazine for Sabbath Reading*, 5 December 1861, 783-784. *The Sunday at Home* was an evangelical magazine meant for family reading published by the Religious Tract Society.

by nature's bounty, absolutely removed from the marketplace, capital, and want. This is the imagined perfect childhood realized as the Victorian's thought it should be.⁴⁵ If Groom went too far in his descriptions of the hard-knock life it may have been in an effort to counter the idea that watercress sellers were charming country sideshows in the urban street-life, or picturesque beggars. Groom's watercress sellers were instead independent sellers, dealing in hard currency, living on the very edge of the legitimate economy.

The Little Watercress Girl's Travels

The publication of Mayhew's journalistic work coincided with the opening of the Great Exhibition, in which the industrial muscle and creative breadth of the world, and in particular, the British world, were on highly celebrated display.⁴⁶ In contradistinction, Mayhew's subjects were largely victims of this modernity and recent urbanization, and he painted a dark, if sympathetic, picture of men, women, and children who sought to make a living in this new economy which had displaced many of the traditional modes of employment and introduced new complications. Mayhew's accounts provided some of the earliest details of life on the streets in this period of rapid industrialization in Britain, and his pioneering efforts forged a written and visual vocabulary that Victorians used in their conceptualizations of the world of the poor in the next decades. His descriptions of the watercress-sellers whom he identified as among the hardest-working of the working poor offered the first glimpse into their lives.

⁴⁵ Frost, *Victorian Childhoods*.

⁴⁶ Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

Watercress was something of a phenomenon during the mid-to-late years of the nineteenth century and its corresponding slip into culinary near-irrelevance is a historical curiosity in itself. The “ever-increasing demand” for the tasty salad green, said to impart a mustardy or garlicky flavor to an otherwise bland meal of cold meat, tea, and bread, was a welcome “little adjunct to the tea-table” across the classes.⁴⁷ Watercress was a burgeoning agribusiness on a large scale. The street-hawkers were the bottom rung of an extensive system that annually delivered “15 millions of the ‘bunches’ in which watercress is usually tied up, weighing something like 700 or 800 tons.”⁴⁸ It was grown in nearby farms, and shipped by train into the cities. Because it perished rapidly, new shipments arrived each day, and then had to be quickly distributed or lose their value, and street-sellers were crucial members in the distribution chain. Selling watercress demanded that the street-sellers arrived at the market when the cress did—usually by four in the morning—to have a chance of obtaining stock. The daily routine of the very poor and otherwise unemployed who tried to make a living by hawking the green herb in the street was described in one evangelical publication as drawing “from great distances” half-naked, half-starved, and wretched souls, who had to then “retrace their steps to sell,” and “pace their weary beat” in order to “dispose of their perishable goods, upon which, probably, will depend their daily bread.”⁴⁹ Groom later wrote that it was these types of scenes that had inspired him to devote his life to helping these girls and young women—products both of London’s incredible economic and industrial progress in the past decades, but also of its enormous social failings.

⁴⁷ “Watercresses,” *Bentley’s Miscellany*, 60 (1866) 485-493; 485.

⁴⁸ “Watercresses,” *Bentley’s Miscellany*, 60 (1866) 485-493; 486.

⁴⁹ Anne Beale, “Buy My Water-cresses!” *The Quiver*, Jan 1882 660-663; here, 663.

At least one watercress-seller was able to achieve remarkable success in this trade. Eliza James, who, like Mayhew's iconic child had started selling watercress bunches on the streets of Birmingham as a child, was known as the "Watercress Queen" by the end of the century. James grew to be one of the wealthiest women in the United Kingdom, and more-or less-controlled the sale of watercress to the capital's major hotels and restaurants.⁵⁰ When she died, at the age of seventy-two, the company she had founded, James and Son, was handling as many as fifty tons of watercress per weekend. Her death, in 1927, received international attention and the *New York Times* described her as the "oldest and best known of the characters of Covent Garden," who arrived at her market stall each day on a watercress cart driven by her son.⁵¹ Fairly gushing about her incredible accomplishments, the reporter went on, "the story of how this woman started with a capital represented by two baskets of watercress" is "one of the most striking romances of business on record." In spite of her great wealth, which included a river boat launch, she "hasn't forgotten the days when she dealt in pence." Her business was built by "hard struggling day in and day out," and "slow, uphill work." It continued, "Even now she works like a Trojan, beginning her day at 3 A.M. By ten o'clock in the morning she has finished with the market and attends to her office work at home. In the evenings she goes around the railway stations to meet the afternoon consignments of watercress, and sells them at once to the barrow men, to be retailed all over London." Although she was now running the operation, she kept the same hours. James herself was the first to admit that it was her own unrelieved labor that allowed for her unprecedented achievement:

⁵⁰ The company she created still owns most of watercress production in England with "Vita Cress," the name she trademarked.

⁵¹ "'Water Cress Queen' Dies," *New York Times*, 27 September 1927; reprint from *Daily Mirror*.

Holidays don't appeal to me. My greatest happiness is in my work, and I enjoy myself most of all looking after my customers in the market. I stand out in the open from three o'clock every morning till ten, and after that I've got to look after the fresh cut of watercress that arrives from the farm by every passenger train.

The one joy she allowed herself, besides her work, was keeping pet chickens.

“‘Hard work,’ she said, is the secret of success in business—at least, I’ve always found it so and I have been out in all weathers selling watercress for seventeen or eighteen hours a day since I was five years old.”⁵² In her brief statement to the reporter, James recapitulates every up-by-the- bootstraps old saw about the value of hard work and discipline, but it does not really reveal why she should be any different from the thousands of others who, like her, weathered the same storms and put in the same hours but came away with far less. Obviously, spectacular success such as James’s was not likely for the thousands who plied the trade. Yet, the promise of survival—and maybe a bit more—continued to entice some to make the effort.

The lure, imagined as it was, of easy money, would only serve to make it more difficult to raise awareness of what the watercress sellers lives were actually like. It appears that Groom wished clearly to disabuse readers of one of the prevailing ideas, that is, that selling watercress “was a very easy and profitable mode of livelihood.” Thus, he challenged anyone to “test it,” and to “follow one of the poor creatures on their round.” At day’s end, as they would see, there was barely enough to cover the rent and other expenses, but plenty of hunger and exhaustion and endless worry about the next day

⁵² Editor, “Notable Visitor Eluded Us: London’s ‘Water-Cress Queen’ made trip incognito,” *New York Times*, 18 February 1912.

instead.⁵³ Groom continued and enlarged on Mayhew's watercress and flower sellers discourse, and painted their lives as ones of hard and unforgiving toil.

Even Groom's earliest rhetoric tried to engender some sympathy for the difficult plight of watercress sellers, as when he wrote, "it has always seemed strange to me that in this great city of charity, so full of earnest and benevolent Christians, who seem earnestly to be going about doing good, some having found their labour and pleasure in hospitals, orphan asylums, or in seeking to reclaim the thief and harlot, –yet all seemed to have passed over the case of the cress-sellers, perhaps without a thought of their true condition." His frankness in pointing out that perhaps not all charity is coming from the most selfless place carries a bit of a sting. He does not seem to be afraid to confront even potential supporters with the hard truth. Moreover, he called out what he identified as an unfair attitude towards some with his pointed references, "surely the kindly disposed have picked out some few strong Irish girls, whom they may have seen selling watercresses, and have without a second thought considered them all as being unworthy of help or sympathy." He wrote of destitute widows struggling to keep families together and aged couples who had only the workhouse as a final resort. "Listen to the different tones of voices crying for sales this wholesome article, or better, call one of them to your door, ask them kindly a few questions, and you will doubtless hear a tale of misery such as you thought could not be found in England," he suggested to those who doubted the verity of his claims.⁵⁴

⁵³ John A. Groom, "About the London Watercress Sellers," *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, Jan., 1873, 11-14.

⁵⁴ Groom, "London Watercress Sellers," 11-14.

As difficult as these conditions were, he described the situation for children as worse yet in that they “are sent out to earn their mite to add to the daily store.”⁵⁵ Groom explained the hardships the children encountered, and again repeated “they must bide their turn at the pump to wash them, and then sit down upon the cold stones to tie them up in tempting bundles,” and place them systematically in their baskets all the while “standing shivering” in rags. Children, in particular, effectively pulled at the heartstrings, as the writer of the *Toilers of London* knew well, and it was this sort of sentimentality that interfered with reason. Even years later, when descriptions of such scenes would have been quite familiar to most contemporaries, these authors made a direct challenge to the number of “piteous tales” about shivering children washing cress at the pump, arguing that such stories were “rather exaggerated” since “during mid-winter there is practically no water-cress.” Dispensing with what they considered easy emotional manipulation in favor of a gritty realism they insisted that the actual numbers of children thus employed were exaggerated, but they did not deny such scenes still occurred. They revealed in the following sentence that one could nevertheless still see “barefooted children buying a ‘hand’ or two” of cress at Farringdon Market even in February, and that it was yet “cold enough” on these mornings.⁵⁶ So while they disputed the numbers, they did not actually challenge the fact that some unfortunate barefooted children washed cress in cold water during the winter months.

Danger and Pollution

⁵⁵Groom, “London Watercress Sellers,” 11-14.

⁵⁶ Anon., “Flower Sellers,” *Toilers in London or Inquiries concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis*, 1889, 8. Accessed Online at The Victorian Dictionary at www.victorianlondon.org

Sometimes however, social realism could go too much in the other direction, but with altogether different intent. As in this report that reiterated the fears many contemporaries shared about the possibility of contamination and pollution that could occur through eating the cress, or even being too close to the cress sellers: “A Commissioner reports the following case of a cress-girl, visited a few weeks ago at her lodging in Soho.” Recounting a dark and treacherous climb the author reports that in the small room, the door hung open, the window was broken, and “a dirty yellow apron was stretched across the cracked glass.” The “filthy mattress and an old torn blanket” made up the bed, underneath which was “a large basket, full of watercress.” He mentions the rosary and the picture of the Virgin Mary near the bed, indicating that the room most likely belongs to an Irish Roman Catholic immigrant. Having suitably set the scene depicting the filthy and dangerously dark room, he peeks under the yellow apron that serves as a window curtain and sees “Dead cats, old baskets, bits of wood, rags and refuse,” further down he can see the girl at the pump with a bucket. She soon comes up carrying the bucket. Without even really speaking she went right to work. “She squatted on the floor herself, beside the bucket, washing and tying her watercress into bunches “as though her fingers had been bits of machinery.””⁵⁷

As if the surroundings for the uncivilized child were not miserable enough, the grotesque imagery of the morning’s breakfast greenery being handled in such a manner would repel many customers. While the imagery further dehumanizes the subject by comparing the girl to a “machine,” immune to the discomforts around her and thus unworthy of sympathy and she is devoid of usual standards of decency and hospitality as evidenced by her inappropriate squatting and her indifference to her visitor, the more

⁵⁷ Anon., “Flower Sellers,” *Toilers in London*, 8.

threatening issue is the fear of pollution or contamination. One could not be but persuaded by such reports that asserted, “if people could have a look at the rooms in which water-cress is kept after it leaves the market... they would never eat water-cress again.” Just one glimpse at the way in which it had been handled by the water-cress girls would be enough to turn them away from it permanently, “even if they gathered it for themselves in country districts.”⁵⁸ These discourses competed for the “truth” as to the way the water-cress was handled in the market and by the sellers; while Groom put forth one set of images, the *Toilers in London* articles countered with another. It asked readers to imagine a clear running stream, and the cress being carried by the current. The watery reverie is interrupted by the unsettling prospect of the image of it now “in a London market, after it leaves the hamper in which it has been tightly packed for twenty-four hours.” The reader is bidden to see the “grimy hands” of the cress girl who carries the poor greenery home in her “dirty apron,” puts it in a bucket “used for every imaginable domestic purposes” and then lays it “under the bed...with nothing to cover it up” while she sweeps her room. After it is given “relish” by the “filth of the place” she begins to ready it for her customers. She turns it out on “an old blanket, or upon the bed” and perhaps she “nibbles a leaf, or bites a stalk,” while she does so.⁵⁹ Surely, not a pretty sight.

Here again, the contrast between the beauty and purity of the country and the garden- fresh cress is held in stark contrast to the watercress seller’s product. The cress itself undergoes a transformation as it journeys from its pristine running water environment to the sullyng of the market and the rough handling by the watercress-

⁵⁸ Anon., “Flower Sellers,” *Toilers in London*, 13-14.

⁵⁹ Anon., “Flower Sellers,” *Toilers in London*, 13-14.

seller. Having endured being tightly packed and sold at the market it now travels adjacent to the girl's body in her soiled apron. The description of the bucket actually leaves little to the imagination. Those purposes are bodily and contaminating whether the bucket has been used for elimination or cleaning. Bathing the watercress in that bucket of still and fetid water is particularly disturbing as water lacks boundaries, and any and all filth and disease is free to commingle in it, a complete inversion of its natural environment of clear moving water. To further degrade the product it is placed under the bed (typically where the chamber pot is stowed) where it is left open to the air and the filth of the floor, that is, until she places it on her bed or blanket, another obvious symbol of contamination and disease, not to mention a possible site of illicit sexual activity. Finally, the cress is subject not only to the girl's dirty hands, but she actually brings it *to her mouth* and, it seems, replaces the bitten portion. Even without germ theory as a model for how disease is spread through bodily secretions rather than miasma, the intimacy of putting the food into one's mouth and withdrawing it was probably enough to send some into near collapse. These concerns with the pollution of the product had followed the watercress sellers because of concerns over contracting typhus. Indeed, by late in the century, after the advent of germ theory, several cases of typhoid fever were linked to watercress. Fears of pollution or contamination did not apply only to foodstuffs; flowers too were suspect. These fears of contamination followed the flower-girls too.

It was these early experiences with the watercress-sellers that set the course for Groom's work and many of the same problems that plagued the watercress-sellers would hamper the efforts of flower-sellers to earn a living. These concerns and fears also set the course for the narratives that Groom would use over the years to describe the work of the

mission and to both reproduce, and challenge, the prevailing ideas and attitudes that many contemporaries retained regarding the flower-girls as well.

Chapter One Finding John Groom

As a biographical subject, John Groom resists historicization. To date, anyone wishing to know the story of John Groom's life or his work has only a few options, and they are generally unsatisfactory.¹ No scholarly biography exists, and there is no memoir or collection of his papers. Groom eschewed a formal published autobiography, but over the years he wrote multiple narratives to raise money, to publicize the mission's work, and to burnish the image of the girls and women it served. These marketing materials were an integral component of the mission's public image. While the materials were intended to draw attention to the flower-girls, Groom nevertheless revealed much through them. Using these stories of origin, rescue, transformation, and conversion Groom inextricably linked his personal life to the mission in all of its spiritual and charitable dimensions, as well as its business contexts.

By reading Groom's propagandistic texts alongside the evidence culled from the "official" sources, this chapter aims to do several things. First, it is an examination of some of the major events of John Groom's life, the circles in which he traveled, the social forces that shaped him, and the influence he exerted in the communities with which he interacted. The texts analyzed here reveal the way in which Groom packaged the organization's nuts-and-bolts history and its social and spiritual goals for his audience.

¹ For example, Kathleen Heasman dedicates a few favorable sentences in *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 222; Carolyn Steedman's, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) also mentions his work with the watercress and flower-girls, essentially just naming him, 120. A few other examples exist, but they are usually quite short, and some are also factually inaccurate. Groom is mentioned vis-à-vis the Earl's charitable work with the costermongers and flower-sellers in K.G. Hodder's, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury* vol. 3 (London: Cassell & Company, 1888). The collaboration between Groom and Shaftesbury on the Emily Loan Fund is discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

They also underscore some of the aspects of his faith's teachings, which he hoped to magnify through the narratives he unfolded. Through these promotional materials, he highlighted the mission's extensive reform projects and its guiding philosophies. In this way, via the personal and intimate medium of the individual narrative, he offered solid demonstrations as to how its saving grace extended not only to the unnamed and anonymous "hundreds of thousands" who passed through its offices, but, more intimately—and in miniature—to a handful of ostensibly real, individually named girls whose lives he transformed.

I also make some observations and draw some conclusions about the evangelical family, evangelical masculinity, and evangelical charitable fundraising practices during the late-nineteenth century. Evangelicals viewed the family as among the most important elements in life, the center of feeling and emotion and the basis from which all action arose.² As a family man himself, and one whose interests led him to minister to its needs early in his career, Groom brought his strong opinions on the duties and obligations of parents to bear in his many of his writings, and I follow that lead in making the family one of the organizing principles of his life story, even though his own family is often

² Many recent works have offered sustained discussion on the importance of the family in the life of the evangelical individual and community, and the importance of evangelical belief in the structure of the family during the long-nineteenth century. It has been seen as providing the stability necessary to the reproduction of middle-class consolidation of wealth and cultural hegemony, as best advanced by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and as the source of men's domestic and social authority, in John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999); these themes further expanded and elaborated on by William Van Reyk in "Christian Ideals of Manliness in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *The Historical Journal* 52 (December 2009), 1053-1073. It also gave the working classes moral authority, Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 6 sees it as the center of most concerns; as does D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993). On the other hand, it has also been interpreted as the site of repressive authoritarianism and punitive emotional flaying, notably, and memorably, E.P. Thompson's bitter and eloquent take-down of the nonconformist sects in *The Making of the English Class* (London, Penguin Books, 1968).

given only tacit recognition in his writing. Last, I grapple with some questions related to autobiography and life writing and how to construct a life story when confronted with the most fundamental problem—finding people who left very little personal paper trail, or in some cases, none at all.

In searching for any information that would contribute to my overall aim of compiling a more complete record of my subject, I have mined repositories of (mostly) published sources, including items that cannot be considered strictly autobiographical--such as pamphlets about the founding or the organization of the mission, or journalistic articles that publicized the mission. Besides the unpublished, and previously unanalyzed materials found in the London Metropolitan Archives' files, other contemporaneous sources include essays Groom wrote for publication in the evangelical and mainstream press; correspondence, by and about Groom, to editors of these papers; and interviews or features written by friendly journalists and published in the Christian press, including journals such as *The Christian* or *The Girls' Own Paper*, or similar outlets. What is not here are personal and private records and writings (with one or two exceptions), or even any extensive business correspondence. Groom's personal papers, his sermons, his library—almost all appear to be lost to the past. Whether this was through accident or design is unknown. In regard to Groom's interior life--and the firsthand evidence of it--through journals or letters by which we might have corroborated his private thoughts or his mind's workings we have almost nothing. For these we must rely solely on the ego documents and the semi-fictionalized accounts of his highly-edited life's events for clues.

The extant texts are arranged into three categories: *Ego Narratives*, *Biographical Writing*, and *Philanthropic Fables*:

Ego Narratives

I use this term to include any pieces Groom wrote about himself or his work. These, mostly published pieces, can take different forms--from printed letters and speeches, to biographical sketches to short journalistic items. These include *The Romance of John Groom's Crippleage and Flower Girls' Mission, 1866-1919*, one of the longest and most autobiographical of his publications. All the ego narratives offer some explanation or rationale for his scope of feeling and subsequent action. Most, but not all, are written in the first person. He also wrote about some of his life's major events in a short booklet published by the organization to jointly celebrate his sixtieth birthday and recognize the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the mission.³ Some other personal detail and remembrances are also contained in the extant typescript of the speech he delivered at his seventieth birthday party in 1915. His most extensive autobiographical commentary appeared in these pieces. He did not provide any greater personal details about his life anywhere that I have found. In addition, he produced some dedicated short booklets to describe various aspects of the mission's branches including one titled, *The Silver Vase, or, the Gathered Posy* (1890). Although these do not provide traditional biographical information, they can be useful in searching for characterological insights or for clues regarding his relationships and interactions with others in his circle.

Biographical Writing

These are texts *others* wrote about Groom, either contemporaneously, or after his

³John Groom, *A Brief Record of These Forty Years: Evangelistic and Pastoral Work in Clerkenwell. Pastor John A. Groom's Diamond Jubilee (60th) Birthday*. 1905, 4. LMA/4305/9/5.

death. This includes the quasi-biography published by the Groom organization, as well as twentieth-century journalistic material that discusses him or his legacy.⁴ I also include here his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* which is succinct, reflecting the paucity of documentary materials available.⁵ However, many of these sources are also problematic. For example, one of the only “books” about Groom is little more than a pamphlet, written for a juvenile religious-education audience.⁶ The other, is an extended promotional or propaganda piece published by the rump mission.⁷ However, both have been cited as the biographical sources when Groom appears in secondary literature. Moreover, both repeat serious errors of fact, such as stating that Groom’s father died in 1855, when Groom would have been ten years old—a point disproved by the historical evidence in death records and census data.

Philanthropic Fables

Another source from which I draw is the series of individual booklets Groom produced during the late 1880s or 1890s. I call these Philanthropic Fables. They were presented as free-standing booklets that detailed the rescue narratives of some of the young girls who entered the mission. The attractive and engaging booklets featured rich illustrations and glossy paper. Each was titled for the heroine or heroines whose stories they contained. The girls themselves bore names of flowers, or in some cases, small animals—such as Ferret or Kit. What the booklets *Rose, Dumpty Rose, Kit and Sue,*

⁴ According to notes in the archive, interviews were conducted at various points for other biographies which seem never to have come to fruition. Neither the notes, nor additional published pieces have been discovered.

⁵ Mark Pottle, “John Alfred Groom,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004/2007).

⁶ Nancy Martin, *A Man with a Vision: Faith in Action Series* (Exeter and Oxford: Religious and Moral Education Press, 1983).

⁷ Ruth E. Gillard, *More than One Mountain to Climb: The Story of John Grooms, 1866-1996* (London: John Grooms Association for Disabled People, 1996).

Crippled Dot, and *Limping Ferret* have in common with one another and with Groom's Ego Narratives, is that while they are partly about conversion and grace, each one also contains elements of life stories.

Genre Trouble

My method of uncovering Groom's "sense of self" through the narratives he constructed about the lives of others relies on the notion that Patrick Joyce expresses so well in *Democratic Subjects*. Joyce writes that narratives "pattern[ed] 'experience' into coherent and satisfying, or unsatisfying, wholes."⁸ By examining these narratives, and the disparate historical pieces of Groom's life, I present my interpretation of the man who lived--the patterns of meaning he created about himself, about the social world in which he moved, and his agency within that world. In so doing, my approach in some way resembles "traditional recovery and archival scholarship"⁹ that seeks to collect a "magic number" of documents which, taken together, and arranged just so, will produce the true story of an individual life. In that sense, my approach may seem to break with feminist biographical theory, which instead sought to disrupt the academic privilege and popular preference for "unified life" narratives of--mostly male--auto/biographical subjects.¹⁰ As Kali Israel argued in *Names and Stories*, a deeply thoughtful and influential exegesis on the gender problematics of biography, the danger in this more traditional approach lies in

⁸ Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 82.

⁹ Cynthia Huff, "Towards a Geography of Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities: An Introductory Essay," *Prose Studies* 26 (2003) 1-16: 4.

¹⁰ Clinton Machann, "The Construction of Masculinity in Victorian Autobiography," *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 26 (Fall 1999), 9.

“reassembly” itself, through which the historian undertakes an “invisible suturing.”¹¹ The haphazard stitching together of statistical scraps and narrative leavings results not in the desired attainment of an always elusive subjectivity, she argues, but risks instead only “fantasies of knowledge” and “false closures.”¹² Because traditional--that is, male-dominated--scholarship held that women did not write autobiographies, but rather tended to produce instead “life writing,” her argument was an attempt to change the terms of the academic discussion surrounding women writers of the nineteenth century as feminist scholars began to research their lives and works.¹³ Life writing is the term used to describe the corpus of writing composed by an individual, including letters, diaries, devotionals; but it is not “biography” in the sense of an unfolding narrative.¹⁴ Rather than arguing that life writing and biography were equally effective in revealing or exposing, Israel concluded that the entire premise of seeking subjectivity relied on reading sources which could never yield it; a collection of narratives about any individual, no matter the shape or form, would always just be a collection of narratives--with the location of the subject identity to be found somewhere between the page and the reader. Israel’s

¹¹ Kali Israel’s section on “Claims and Refusals,” drawing from a range of interpreters, challenges the ways in which we write narrative biography, and addresses the perils of attempting to know the “lives” of our subjects, *Lives and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12-18.

¹² Israel, *Names and Stories*, 17, 18. I understand “subjectivity” in the way Regina Gagnier suggests, as the expression of individual identity shaped by material or social circumstances, with an emphasis on social class as a formative force, in *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹³ Regarding the masculine/male gendering of autobiography (vs the feminine/female gendering of other forms of biographical writing, i.e., life writing), Linda H. Peterson writes, “Since the publication of Martin Danahay’s *A Community of One*, we have designated this mode of life writing ‘masculine’ and noted its dominance, in practice as well as theory, for nearly two centuries.” In “Collaborative Life Writing as Ideology: The Auto/biographies of Mary Howitt and Her Family,” *Prose Studies* 26 (2003), 176-195.

¹⁴ a “capacious (and amorphous) term” used to indicate “a composite of conversion narrative, spiritual autobiography, and hagiographic commentary,” ... that “includes first-person narrative, diary entries, letters, and third-person accounts of events,” Joyce Quiring Erickson, in “Perfect Love”: Achieving Sanctification as a Pattern of Desire in the Life Writings of Early Methodist Women,” *Prose Studies* 20 (1997) 7.

insistence that “no document or artifact can be considered ‘raw,’ unprocessed and unmodified by time and human agency”¹⁵ now seems so self-evidently right that historians do not dispute it, but proceed from that as given.

Social context and historical specificity are crucial to understanding any life. To arrive at the biographical narrative included here, I examined published promotional and propagandistic texts by, and about, John Groom and the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission (broadly construed) against the data of social history--census reports, parish records, and other documentary evidence.¹⁶ I have combed them for information about John Groom’s exterior world, his social and cultural milieus, his benefactors, and his extended evangelical community. But I have also relied on them for bits of insight regarding his interior life, his personal preoccupations, and his motivations. If there is any possibility of reconstruction of an individual subjectivity absent diaries, memoirs, and correspondence, these texts, problematic as they are, will have to do.¹⁷ Within these narratives lie virtually the only access to John Groom and the world that he inherited, created, and inhabited. It was within this world that he thought and acted, and made the decisions that directly impacted the lives of many women.

To be clear, my own arguments about Groom proceed in full recognition of the “constructedness” and intertextuality of all the evidence which I employ here, especially that which was issued top-down from official bodies.¹⁸ But I do not distrust so forcefully

¹⁵ Israel, *Names and Stories*, 17, 18.

¹⁶ Kathrin Levitan, *A Cultural History of the British Census: Envisioning the Multitude* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁷ Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015) and Alison Light *Common People: In Pursuit of My Ancestors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). Both have recently written movingly about the difficulty, the surprises, and also, to some degree, the self-deception that comes with attempting to piece together the whole pot from small shards.

¹⁸ What Israel describes as “the ways in which ‘evidence’ was made—preserved selectively, guarded, lost, and found in institutions and discourses,” *Names and Stories*, 13.

the documents and data themselves as to find one set to be *as* telling or *as* truthful as the next. Even so, I still make no claims to the “real” John Groom (or the “real” flower girls) or to any privileged knowledge. With my stack of fortuitously saved and recovered documents in hand, I set before myself the most basic historical caretaker’s task—to gather up the dust, to organize and fix in print the tangible traces of a life, and to “restore[d] the dead to the light of day.”¹⁹

Simply searching through such sources for a set of data about people, places, and events would be to overlook one of the crucial aspects of the materials however, which was that they were intended to be used for fundraising and education, and not only to be straightforwardly factual documents. They were meant to persuade supporters, tug at their emotions, and open their purse strings. As its most ardent believer, Groom boasted about the charitable work of the mission, but he did so as one among the lilies of the fields. He faced an inherent contradiction, one that was alive in much evangelical fundraising. On the one hand, it was necessary to praise the mission (and the missionaries), and to crow about its many successes, but on the other, he had to appear humble and self-denying--always exemplifying the ways in which Christ’s love and example from the cross guided the mission. He also had to insist that despite his best efforts, the generosity of its supporters, and divine favor, the mission continually fell short in meeting its financial goals and needed sustained—indeed, increased--contributions to survive. Thus

¹⁹Carolyn Steedman, “Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust,” *American Historical Review* (October 2001), 1175. Steedman invokes Jules Michelet’s famous statement about breathing in the dust of the dead.

he sought to communicate to readers in a dual register.²⁰ Although he may have intended to avoid it, these pressures actually led to the creation of a discourse in which Groom, reluctant autobiographer that he was, put forth narratives in which he simultaneously boasted of his success and shrank from acknowledging it. He confided the details of his life and work under a cloak of genuine modesty and discretion, and the awareness that too much success, or too little, could damn his entire endeavor. Yet it is largely through such sources that we see any of the contours and texture of Groom's life story. Therefore, I also tried to read the sources not only *prima facie*, but also "against the grain," to account for the many silences Groom maintained in the few brief autobiographical writings he left. The tensions that lie between discretion and secrecy, honesty and truth are frequently exposed in these works.

The same texts, meant to shed light, often erased, obscured, evaded, and manipulated both the public record and the image of the private man. Identical narratives can appear reproduced in whole or in part, over and over. Chronological specificity is elusive. It is almost impossible to determine if many of the scenarios or characters he describes were real or invented or inspired by current events. Names of characters in his stories appear pseudonymous; there are enough Roses to make it seem more than coincidental.²¹ Then again, in his own family there was a surfeit of Mauds. He named his own daughter Maud (she used the name Eleanor as an adult). Possibly he was influenced,

²⁰ On this contradiction in fundraising, Brian Dickey, "'Going About and Doing Good': Evangelicals and Poverty, c. 1815-1870," in John Wolfe, ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780-1980* (London: SPCK, 1995), 39-33.

²¹ It ranked 32nd in popularity according to one source, based on the compiled rankings in England and Wales in 1870, from the original scanned pages of the *England & Wales, Free BMD Birth Index, 1837-1915*. Statistics compiled by Eleanor Nickerson at [britishbabynames.com](http://www.britishbabynames.com) <http://www.britishbabynames.com/blog/2014/04/top-200-most-popular-names-in-england-and-wales-in-1870.html>

or found resonance in the popular bourgeois parlor song, “Come into the Garden, Maud,” based on the poem, *Maud* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson with its lines:

Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,
Come hither, the dances are done,
In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls,
Queen lily and rose in one;
Shine out, little head, sunning over with curls,
To the flowers, and be their sun.²²

Historicizing the Ahistorical Subject

In his public roles of fundraiser, missionary, and pastor, John Groom was in the business of telling stories. Of the many he told however, few contained the “facts” of his own life. Instead they were the sermons he delivered from the pulpit; the “Good News” that was the basis of his evangelical Christian faith; the colorful tales of the Watercress and Flower-Girls’ Mission’s heroines; its apocryphal origins; and its ongoing work among the great metropolis’s flower-girls, the orphaned, the disabled, and the poor. While he conceded that, “Many of my devoted and much-loved friends have asked me to write the history of my life’s work,” he preferred that he “be personally unknown and unseen.”²³ Instead of issuing his own biography, however, or having one written, he composed some short tracts in which he outlined some of the major events of his life and some of the milestones in the mission’s history. The most complete picture we have of his own life in the short (twenty-four 4”x 6”-pages) chapbook-like tract titled *The Romance of John Groom’s Crippleage and Flower Girls’ Mission, 1866-1919*, published

²² Alfred Tennyson, *Maud (Part I)*, 1855.

²³ John A. Groom, “*The Romance of John Groom’s Crippleage and Flower Girls’ Mission, 1866-1919*,” 1, 4.

shortly before his death in 1919.²⁴ The proximity of the publication of his most personal work to his death was surely not accidental. In it, he put forth an accounting of his life's work, although it is not very explicit about his own particular struggles and challenges. This may reflect his reticence to appear to be taking all the credit for the mission's success. As he wrote, "I have been most reluctant" to write a history, "and until now have refused to do so, for it seems impossible to tell the story of this work without seeming to praise the worker."²⁵

Other men in positions akin to his were less reticent. *The Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Labours of Andrew Reed, D.D., With Selections from his Journals*, provides one counter-example. The editors of this volume struggled to limit it to one. Reed had begun similarly, born of "godly parents," beginning life as an artisan and lay evangelist and following a path that led him into philanthropic works among the poor, sick, and orphaned of East London in a nonconformist sect. Reed's diaries however, "full of deep religious feeling," as well as the annals of his chapel, compiled by his sons, bore "witness to the devotedness and success of his ministry."²⁶ Reed was not for hiding his light. For that matter, neither was Groom's contemporary and friend, the evangelical preacher Charles Spurgeon, whose autobiography ran to four hefty volumes. Or Lyman Beecher, who deeply wished to compose a history of his own life.²⁷ Although these men attained greater fame in their lifetimes, arguably their memoirs helped cement that celebrity for future generations. Observing the tendency, one church historian notes, "It is

²⁴ For this I owe great thanks to Richard Senter, then of the Essex Local History Centre who sent me a photocopy of this hard-to-find publication.

²⁵ Groom, "The Romance of John Groom," 1.

²⁶ "Brief Literary Notices: *The Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Labours of Andrew Reed, D.D., With Selections from his Journals* (1863)," *London Quarterly Review*, July 1864, 528-531. This was actually a fairly long and gushing review of the book in question.

²⁷ "Brief Literary Notices," 531.

true that most of the leading nineteenth-century divines either wrote their own life stories—as, indeed, did a good number of the less prominent—or subsequently were made the subject of a biography.”²⁸ He apparently did little to ensure or solidify his own legacy. Even at the grand outdoor party celebrating his seventieth birthday, if ever there was a day to indulge in a bit of reminiscing, to expound upon his own story, to crow just a little about his many successes, he demurred.²⁹ When he took the podium, he acknowledged that he preferred to talk about his plans for the work of the mission going forward in the future, rather than to focus on the past.³⁰ Paradoxically, for as much time as he spent in his lifetime promoting its work, he did little to ensure that it would continue after his death, and the eventual death of his eldest son, to whom he bequeathed the mission’s future. It is likely that Groom’s decision to limit his own commemoration to so few words had real consequences in furthering the work of his mission or spreading the word about it. The place of a published biography in anchoring one’s name in the firmament should not be underestimated. Arguably, men such as Reed and Spurgeon, and John Kirk, another contemporary evangelical reformer, with whom Groom shared many similarities, lived on, in part because their philanthropic works were remembered in print long after their death. When Groom and his son passed from living memory, so too, would the mission’s past, and with it the record of its achievements.

Yet, for most of his life, he had served in the role as the mission’s familiar name and face and its highest official. The all-important task of keeping the mission afloat financially and in popular favor fell to him. Possibly his most important job had been to

²⁸ Kenneth D. Brown, “An Unsettled Ministry? Some Aspects of Nineteenth-Century British Nonconformity,” *Church History* 56 (June 1987): 204-223; 204.

²⁹ John Groom, 70th Birthday Speech typescript, and Groom, *Romance of John Groom*.

³⁰ Groom, 70th Birthday Speech typescript.

keep the organization in the public eye and consciousness. He was the enthusiastic spokesman for his philanthropic project--which promised any disabled young woman not only an escape from earthly misery, but eternal salvation. Those were tall orders. Through the written word and in his public appearances, he performed the fundraising and public relations functions critical to sustaining the business of the mission. To that end, he wrote items for the evangelical press describing the plight of the flower-girls and the mission's good work among them. He encouraged financial support in forceful and emotional language. He penned letters to the editors of major establishment newspapers such as *The Times*, defending the mission's practices, rebutting unjust accusations, and advancing its cause. In one series, published in *The Girls' Own Paper*, an evangelical magazine for adolescent girls, the mission was the focus of three highly favorable articles. The national and local press covered the frequent special events and large exhibitions he staged and which drew visits and patronage from royalty and other society notables. He brought the girls on tours and to expositions and contests across the UK to demonstrate their handiwork and their skills in action, and he gave speeches and other public appearances recruiting other young girls and women to come to London to join the mission's work. All of these tactics were meant to win donors, attract volunteers, reaffirm support, and retain existing subscribers. In short, to bring in new money and hold on to the old money.

Groom also conveyed the mission's multi-layered message through expensively produced annual reports, in free-standing pamphlets about particular branches of the organization, and in small chapbook-style booklets in which was told an individual salvation narrative, mainly featuring disabled girls whom he had rescued. Some of the

printed pieces, such as those that described the artificial flower-making training program, or the Clacton-on-Sea orphan homes, and the mission's annual reports, focused mainly on the solid footing of the organization and its social reform commitments. In these, Groom emphasized the extent of services and the types of clients the mission provided for. They also included balance sheets and profit-and-loss statements, as well as other financial information, and lists of subscribers and supporters. Although they did not feature individual conversion testimony, these nonetheless affirmed the mission's spiritual aspect and the way in which it received God's grace by describing the providential arrival of anonymous monetary donations at crucial moments, just in time to repair an orphanage, or build a new house for infants, for example. These were also important public relations pieces for the mission's subscribers, who looked to them for confirmation of solid return on their sound investment.³¹

A Life, Annotated

Groom's assembled and disseminated version of his life offers a rather dispassionate view from his early childhood on. In his own words, we see his rise in the evangelical world from his "humble beginnings," up to the end of his rather humble life, with, presumably, only the elements that contributed most favorably to the mission and its works. While it follows a common pattern of revealing a social and humanitarian awakening, an explication of identity, and the description of conversion (albeit an extremely short one), it also is selective in its details and omits inconvenient sidelines.³²

³¹ Dickey, "'Going About and Doing Good,'" 40.

³² D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-16. Andrew Tate, "Evangelical Certainties: Charles Spurgeon and the Sermon as Crisis Literature," in Linda Woodhead, ed., *Reinventing*

Discrepancies and silences appear where the historical record and the narrative do not align. Like many other authors, Groom chose to begin his story with a description of his hard-scrabble life in a working-class neighborhood in northern London.

John Albert Groom was born on 15 August 1845, in Middlesex County, in Greater London. He was the third son born to Sarah Maria and George Paul Groom--a copperplate engraver by trade, and thus a member of the skilled artisan classes. Such an occupation likely placed the Groom family at the higher end of the labor-and-wage continuum. Clerkenwell, where the Groom family lived, was already known as an area with a high concentration of artisans.³³ It also had a long reputation as a home to radicals and religious nonconformists.³⁴ Although many of its residents were poor, the majority who lived in Clerkenwell did not experience the utterly miserable conditions found in the notoriously awful slum areas of parts of London in mid-century.³⁵ In 1861, John Hollingshead, a writer and *flâneur* in the tradition of Henry Mayhew, published a lengthy account, in which described the many sections of *Ragged London*. Of Clerkenwell's "sixty to seventy thousand residents" he seemed to have thought rather well. In his view, much of the district was "hard-working" containing "few thieves," save the prisoners "bottled up" in the district's House of Correction and Detention.³⁶ With that notable exception, the remainder he found to be "patient, industrious, and honest." Very little

Christianity: Nineteenth Century Contexts (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001), 27-36 writes, the renowned evangelical preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon believed that "contemporary narratives must be self-abasing, emphasizing grace and election, sole gratitude to God, and explicitly acknowledge the necessity of substitutionary atonement," 28.

³³ Andrew Whitehead, "Clerkenwell Tales," *History Workshop Journal* 68 (Autumn 2009), 247-250.

³⁴ Whitehead, "Clerkenwell Tales," 247-250.

³⁵ John Hollingshead, *Ragged London in 1861* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1861), 13-35.

³⁶ Later the site of the notorious "Clerkenwell Outrage." The explosion, perpetrated by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (nicknamed Fenians) to facilitate the escape of one of their members on 13 December 1867, killed twelve and injured 120 others and destroyed several houses. It caused a backlash against the Irish among the English and set back Independence efforts. Groom openly spoke of his "fearlessness among the most violent of socialists, Fenians, and criminals," in his mission to them, thus winning their admiration and respect, *These Forty Years*, 5.

open prostitution “defiled” the neighborhood. Individual cases of dire suffering existed, but often they were brought on by unusual hardships, such as death or illness of the primary wage-earner. Neighborhoods also acquired religious personalities as well, with denominations tending to correspond to class, especially with the emergence of class-specific suburbs later in the century. Families, such as Grooms, with an artisan head of household, were leaning towards nonconformity in higher numbers. While “artisans constituted some 23 per cent of society at large, they composed 59 per cent of Evangelical Nonconformist congregations,” and the skilled artisans, such as watchmakers, jewelers, and printers, would be much more likely to go to worship than others in the working and lower classes. Moreover, their children would be more likely to take on clerical or similar posts and to climb higher up the social scale.³⁷ Clerkenwell, with its high proportion of artisans and lower-middle-class residents was fertile ground in which to plant the seeds for the subsequent transformations that occurred within the Groom family.

Groom characterized his parents as having been “extremely poor.”³⁸ It is not clear precisely what that means because he does not offer many details about the extent of their poverty; it may have just made for an interesting story. One of the very few specific details he did share about his youth, however, is that he and his siblings often brought home less-fortunate neighborhood children to share in the family’s meals.³⁹ This story can be read in several ways. First, it serves as an indication that however lean their meals may have been, there was food enough for the large Groom family, with some to

³⁷ Bebbington, on worship and class, in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 75-76.

³⁸ Groom, *These Forty Years*.

³⁹ Anna Davin, “Loaves and Fishes: Food and Households in Late 19th Century London,” *History Workshop Journal* 41 (Spring 1996), 167-192, on the significance of food; and the components, preparation and the difficulty of preparing meals for large families.

spare, even if spread thin. No small thing.⁴⁰ As the son of an artisan, and an artisan and the head of a household himself, Groom was aware that notions of respectability depended in large part on the male breadwinner's ability to meet the family's basic needs.⁴¹ A good man provided for his family.⁴² Groom may have included this story to demonstrate that his father was a "good man" who had met his expected masculine duties—something that might have been in doubt when it is revealed later that John began working at a very young age.⁴³ Taken in total, the imagined scene of communal dining offered a vision of the Groom family as a model of working-class respectability and godly values presided over by the *pater familias*. Sharing meals with less fortunate children was also in keeping with the values related to food and fellowship he espoused, and which were cherished by many evangelicals, many of whom held the belief that "neither Jesus nor his apostles ever separated the physical from the spiritual well-being of men."⁴⁴ Regarding his controversial practice of indiscriminately giving food to the poor, Groom acknowledged, "Yes, at first they came for the loaves and the fishes; had these not been provided, they would not have come at all."⁴⁵ The mission became known for the "meat teas," free breakfasts, and half-penny dinners he organized as he continued to recognize the importance of filling hungry bellies as both a good deed unto itself, and

⁴⁰ Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil, Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York and London: Oxford, 1993). Ross writes that food was crucial to family and community cohesion in poor neighborhoods, 30-31.

⁴¹ Julie-Marie Strange, "Fatherhood, Providing and Attachment in Late Victorian and Edwardian Working-Class Families," *The Historical Journal* 55 (December 2012), 1007-1027; Anna Clark, "The 'New Poor Law' and the Breadwinner Wage: Contrasting Assumptions," *Journal of Social History* 34 (2000), 261-283.

⁴² Strange, "Fatherhood, Providing and Attachment," on breadwinning as an act of devotion to the family. Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1992), on the male breadwinner in working-class families, 138-153.

⁴³ Ross, *Love and Toil*, on the idea of the good man, 72-76; Strange, "Fatherhood, Providing and Attachment," on this as cliché in social history accounts, 1009.

⁴⁴ From the evangelical weekly paper, *The Christian*, 1880, quoted in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 82. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 20.

⁴⁵ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 7.

as a necessary precondition toward alleviating an equally pervasive spiritual hunger among the poor.⁴⁶ He expressed that philosophy in this way, “Most came for what they could get; some got what they did not at first come for—viz., a new conception of themselves, of life, of God; having obtained them, all else mattered little.”⁴⁷ Although opinions differed on such matters, many non-evangelicals, and some evangelicals too, believed that giving with an open hand was a sign of weakness on behalf of both giver and receiver, and at its worse amounted to no more than a bribe.⁴⁸ Groom aligned himself with evangelicals such as Lord Shaftesbury, who opined that since God had created both the body and the spirit, each had to be attended to in order to fulfill the purpose for which they were formed—“fitness for His service.”⁴⁹ Combining humanitarian impulses with religious doctrine would remain a fundamental aspect of the mission’s work—made manifest in the generosity of both spirit and material aid and based in what Groom and like-minded associates believed to be the teachings of their faith. Generosity in general was a hallmark of evangelical life, derived from the example set by Methodist leader John Wesley, who believed it was the Christian way to give away anything beyond one’s basic needs.⁵⁰ Groom’s emphasis on the sharing of food provided a living example of how one might also emulate Christ—a signal requirement of evangelical belief.⁵¹ The childhood story also served to underscore his moral development and path towards

⁴⁶ Editor, “Tea with the Watercress Sellers,” *The City Press*, 19 August 1871, 3.

⁴⁷ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 7.

⁴⁸ Graham Bowpitt, “Evangelical Christianity, Secular Humanism, and the Genesis of British Social Work,” *British Journal of Social Work* 28 (1998), 675-693; 685-686 spells out the debate. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 121-122.

⁴⁹ Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, quoted in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 82.

⁵⁰ David Hempton, “Evangelicalism and Reform c. 1780-1832” in John Wolffe, ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780-1980* (London: SPCK, 1995), 17-37; 30-31.

⁵¹ Van Reyck, “Christian Ideals of Manliness,” 1054-1055; Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1986, 5.

spiritual awakening. In leading the reader through parts of his childhood, Groom's selective use of biographical elements that emphasized his early commitment to reform helped to establish what Kali Israel described elsewhere as "a narrative for the development of social concern."⁵² Tropes, such as the sharing of daily food, and concern for other children, pointed to his personal qualities of individual selflessness and are indicative of a burgeoning humanitarianism at a very young age. They demonstrated the value of early inculcation of moral rectitude and presented a Christ-like model of behavior for others—especially for children—to follow.

One crucial aspect of Groom's childhood and youth that is unclear from his writing is the religious affiliation of his parents, and consequently, his own early religious training and beliefs. This may have been a purposeful choice. In his narrative, Groom stated that they were "godly people" and "themselves descendants of a long line of devoted Christians."⁵³ This non-committal description is also given in a profile article about him in the evangelical weekly, *The Christian*.⁵⁴ Rather than identifying the family as members of a specific sect, or as Baptists, with whom Groom would later associate himself, the Grooms at that time appear, at least for some of John's early life, to have been good (High Church) conforming Anglicans. George Paul Groom, and his wife, Sarah Maria (*née* Wigton) had posted the Marriage Banns and been married in the Church of England in 1840 in the Parish of St. Pancras.⁵⁵ It seems that the crisis of

⁵² Israel, *Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture*, 29.

⁵³ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 2.

⁵⁴ Editor, "Mr. John A. Groom, Honorary Superintendent of the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission," *The Christian*, 5 November 1891.

⁵⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, Saint Pancras Parish Church, Register of marriages, P90/PAN1, Item 076.

“church and chapel” which swirled around much of Britain in those decades had not yet engulfed the family.⁵⁶ As evidenced by the parish documents, seven-month-old John Groom and his elder brother, George Frederick, who had been born in 1843, were baptized on the same day in 1845,⁵⁷ at the established church, St. Mary’s, in Islington. Although George was already three years old, illness or other disruptions could delay an infant’s baptism.

It is not only individuals who experience conversions, but parish constituencies also change over time. The building has since been razed, but St. Mary’s stood in the parish of St. Bartholomew’s, which was the home to a large congregation of Low-Church, or evangelical, Anglicans. In trying to reconstruct the family’s religious affiliations, church records have been useful in making speculations as to some of their allegiances, but do not lend any insights as to how they made changes in their patterns of worship or why or precisely when. What is more important than their particular denominational affiliation, however, is the fact that at some point they joined the evangelical community, or, in the specific language of the evangelical movement, they “converted.”⁵⁸

To be converted has a specific meaning in evangelical belief. While evangelicals did not follow a wholly unique set of doctrines, instead adapting and adhering to a broadly held Judeo-Christian theology, they separated themselves from other sects partly by their belief in the notion of “vital religion” or “heart religion.” The way in which one enters into this privileged community of emotionally experienced belief is through the

⁵⁶ Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change* (London: Longman, 1976).

⁵⁷ London Metropolitan Archives, Islington St. Mary, Register of Baptism, p83/mry1, Item1177.

⁵⁸ It does not mean accepting a new faith tradition (and possibly rejecting one’s previous beliefs) as it does today.

process of conversion--which was meant to be dramatic and sudden and consequential. It was also a key tenet of the faith. Evangelicals spoke of their conversion as being central to their identity.⁵⁹ At what point George Paul and Sarah Maria began to be converted, and if it was something that happened together or separately is not reflected in the record. But one clue is provided by a noticeable change in the Groom family baptismal practices, which happened after the birth of their fourth child, Charles, in 1850. While the first three Groom children, born in 1841, 1843, and 1845 had been baptized in infancy, or in early childhood, Charles was not baptized until 1864 at the age of fourteen.⁶⁰ The Groom family had rejected the traditional Anglican rite of infant baptism.⁶¹ To make a choice to eschew infant baptism was a strictly evangelical position. In fact, to reject infant baptism and embrace a conscious baptism—at which point one “becomes a Christian”-- was one of the hallmarks of evangelicalism. Doctrinal questions surrounding infant baptism were highly contentious among both Anglicans and nonconformists and remained unsettled long into the nineteenth century.⁶² Evangelicals believed that one can only become a “Christian” through conscious adult baptism—available only to those who have experienced conversion. The adult baptism of Charles in the first month of 1850 most likely indicates that the Groom family made a shift to an evangelical practice of faith sometime during the late 1840s.

⁵⁹ Bebbington writes “of the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion,” he places first, “*conversionism*: the belief that lives need to be changed” in *Evangelicalism*, 8; Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 8;

⁶⁰ Ancestry.com. *England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975* Charles William Groom, 17 Jan 1864 St. Jude's, St. Pancras, Middlesex, England 579643.

⁶¹ I. G. Doolittle, “Age of baptism: further evidence,” *Local Population Studies* 24 (1980), 52-55. Which, strictly speaking does not make one a Christian. It only ensures a “hope” for the future regeneration of the child, Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 76.

⁶² Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. Baptism crises continued to be controversial through the century, with doctrinal differences over infant vs. adult baptism at the center, 73.

The Groom family was not alone in embracing new practices during this time. As the historian of British evangelicalism, D.W. Bebbington observes, the 1850s and 1860s were a period of “evangelical ascendancy.”⁶³ In addition, their class status as artisans, and the neighborhood in which they lived, which contained a large number of nonconformist worshippers, would have contributed to this transformation in religious identity and belief.⁶⁴ So, while Groom writes that he was reared in a “Christian home,” he avoided giving the precise details about their conversion and the denomination to which they belonged.⁶⁵ While they may have increasingly embraced aspects of Low-Church evangelicalism, this does not necessarily mean that they would have left the Anglican Church for a nonconforming sect. Without additional evidence, it is impossible to gauge their level of conversion or commitment. This aspect of Groom’s life then is mostly shrouded in the writing he has left behind and it is not clear why. Matters of “church and chapel” could be deeply divisive and separate families.⁶⁶ People can have many reasons for switching church affiliations, not all--or even most--of them having to do with faith. Camaraderie, group cohesion, convenience, expedience, political affiliations, all these, and more, can cause one to lean a little on one side or another in making decisions regarding parish affiliations. If they had been swayed by the Baptists, then it was with a smaller band of outsiders with whom they were pledging their fates.⁶⁷

It is also hard to know what to make of the scant amount of writing Groom left about what many evangelicals considered the signal event of their lives, that is, their

⁶³ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 12, 73.

⁶⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 73.

⁶⁵ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 1.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Cox writes “the church/chapel divide was more significant in the nineteenth century than the Protestant/Catholic divide,” in “Were Victorian Nonconformists the Worst Imperialists of All?” *Victorian Studies* 46 (Winter 2004), 243-255; 244.

⁶⁷ Light, *Common People*, 73, 85-90, on the particularities of the Baptists.

conversion. He remembered only that it occurred in a classroom and that it gave “a lasting and vivid impression.”⁶⁸ What that impression was though, he does not say. Seeing as how it would give meaning and structure, as well as define the scope of his action, for the rest of his life, it is accorded surprisingly few words. It is especially surprising when measured against the critical importance many other evangelicals give to the experience. In fact, the conversion narrative, or experience is usually one of, if not the crucial events in the life of an evangelical. Groom’s contemporary, peer, and friend the wildly popular evangelical preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon believed that “the individual’s claim to conversion” itself could be based on “the quality of the story” he or she told about it.”⁶⁹ Does this paucity speak to his conversion experience, or his tendency to minimize, at least in writing, his personal emotional response? In that it runs counter to one of the defining aspects of evangelical narrative tradition, is another puzzling aspect of his narrative picture.

His writing is a bit more emotional and detailed, however when he describes his rise from “the bottom of the ladder.”⁷⁰ Even there, he is vague enough to create more questions than he answers. He explained how his childhood years had been cut short by economic necessity. Of that apparently abrupt change he wrote, “Sent to work before he was ten years of age, he had but little time for schooling and education.” He did not provide any reason as to why he had been sent to work at this early age, only that he was engaged as an errand boy.⁷¹ It is possible that he worked as an apprentice to his own father in the senior Groom’s print shop, which was located in the garden of the family

⁶⁸ Groom, *These Forty Years*, 4.

⁶⁹ Tate, “Evangelical Certainties” in Woodhead, ed. *Reinventing Christianity*, 28.

⁷⁰ Groom, Typescript of 70th Birthday speech.

⁷¹ Groom, *These Forty Years*, 4.

home, or elsewhere for another master, but even this is not known.⁷² Unlike in the more industrialized north, where children tended to work in factories or in the coal fields, child labor in the metropolis encompassed a more diverse range of occupations, but most of the London working boys of that age were errand-and-message runners, and “the pre-eminence of that position cannot be overstated.”⁷³ Although child labor has often been envisaged as having been performed by the very “exploited or destitute children” described by Henry Mayhew, Dr. Barnardo, and of course, Groom himself, in 1855 it would not have been deemed that unusual for a boy from his class to be contributing economically to the family maintenance.⁷⁴ As Jane Humphries has written, in working-class families often sent children to work by that age, and his situation, in that respect, would not have been considered out-of-the-ordinary or even unduly severe.⁷⁵ That said, according to a recent study, based on mid-century census returns, in London, only about half of the children aged ten to fourteen were working, compared to the national average.⁷⁶ One article in the *Ragged School Union Magazine* lamented that among their pupils, drawn from the city’s poor, that “there are few boys who have attained ten years who are not engaged in some handicraft,” by this they meant paid factory employment.⁷⁷ They found this highly objectionable, with premature work stunting both their moral and physical capacities. Drawing any conclusion from Groom’s first taste of labor is difficult

⁷² In Gillard, *More Than One Mountain to Climb*, from an interview that revealed that the elder Groom father had a workshop in the shed in the garden of the family home at that time.

⁷³ Peter Kirby, “A Brief Statistical Sketch of the Child Labour Market in Mid-Nineteenth Century London” *Continuity and Change* 20 (2005) 229-245, “a profusion of small trades and services [that] characterized the nineteenth-century London labour market,” 229.

⁷⁴ Michael J. Childs, “Boy Labour in Late Victorian and Edwardian England and the Remaking of the Working Class,” *Journal of Social History* 23 (1990), 783-803.

⁷⁵ Jane Humphries, “Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution,” *Economic History Review* 66 (2013), 395-418.

⁷⁶ Kirby, “A Brief Statistical Sketch of the Child Labour Market.”

⁷⁷ Editor, “Premature Juvenile Labour—Its Physical and Moral Evils,” *Ragged School Union Magazine*, October 1867, 217.

because he provided no detail except to write that it was during those “early experiences,” of earning a wage where he had learned “the lessons he most needed to fit him for his successful life’s work.”⁷⁸ Whether he meant that in terms of practical mechanical skills or something pertaining to his character or moral development, or his awareness of the problem of child labor, he left open to speculation.

It is at that juncture, however, around the year 1855, that a mystery emerges. A religious instruction book, written for a juvenile audience and published in 1983, claims that when John was ten years old, “his father had died.”⁷⁹ This statement of non-fact is repeated on the website for Livability UK. In a short booklet published by the National Lottery and Heritage in 1993 it is affirmed that “Groom was an orphan himself.”⁸⁰ It is not clear how or when this error entered into the biography, but, based on archival evidence, it is untrue. In fact, Groom senior did not die until a full ten years later. If it had been true that Groom was half-orphaned as a child, it indeed would have made an interesting and—at least from the standpoint of narrative—appealingly tragic dimension to the story. Regarding this convention, especially as it pertains to the question of character or moral development, Kali Israel observes, “Victorian novelists notoriously relied on orphanhood to foreshadow the exceptionality of a hero’s or heroine’s adult life.”⁸¹ Could earlier interpreters, possibly influenced by such notions, have been led astray and imagined Groom an orphan on only the flimsiest evidence? Affinity for orphan stories pervaded much Victorian discourse, from relief literature to popular culture, to literary

⁷⁸ Groom, *These Forty Years*, 4.

⁷⁹ Martin, *A Man with a Vision*, 2.

⁸⁰ Livability UK is the current incarnation of Groom’s organization at the date of this writing in 2017.

⁸¹ Israel, *Names and Stories*, 19.

fiction.⁸² Groom's deep compassion for orphaned children could be thus explained, in part, by his own experiences of being a half-orphaned child. It would also offer an uncomplicated and innocent justification for his focus on young girls without parents. In this case, however convenient a plot device, or poignant a story it would have made—good fortune, presumably, prevailed, and it did not actually happen that way. It is worthwhile to ponder why this bit of falsehood became part of the narrative about John Groom's life and the mission. Perhaps it arose from the perceived hardship of John having to go out to work at ten-years-old and the concomitant discontinuation of his education, or perhaps it is because of the close imaginative link such misfortune would have forged with the child flower-sellers, many of whom made essential contributions to the survival of their families with their incomes. In any event, George Paul Groom lived on for another ten years. It is worth asking if he fulfilled his role as the *pater familias* during that time. Or did economic necessity based on some dereliction of duty or personal shortcoming befall the Groom family? Presumably, he continued—at least partially—to provide for his growing family (as well as sire more children. Sarah Maria gave birth to Walter Henry sometime in the first three months of 1855, Arthur Wigton in 1857, and Louisa in 1859).⁸³ It is certainly true that fathers could be unreliable or absent, un- or underemployed or ill; over-reliance on the male breadwinner wage could lead to economic insecurity if it were threatened, necessitating broader family contribution.⁸⁴ In 1861, a “very young errand-boys” at work in London could expect to earn about “2s. 6d.

⁸² On melodramatic representations, see Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 12-15; Israel, *Names and Stories*, 18-19; Shurlee Swain, “Sweet Childhood Lost: Idealized Images of Childhood in the British Child Rescue Literature,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 2 (Spring 2009), 198-214.

⁸³ 1861 England Census. Class: RG 9; Piece: 108; Folio: 66; Page: 55; GSU roll: 542575.

⁸⁴ Humphries, “Childhood and Child Labour,” 413.

a week.”⁸⁵ A small amount to be sure, but in a cash-strapped family, every penny counted.

Indeed, from the perspective of a twentieth-century observer, sending a ten-year-old child to work might seem to be so extreme that the only explanation for it was to conclude that his early entry into the workforce had occurred because of the supposed death of his father, and the economic struggle which likely would have resulted with a widowed mother with four or five young children. It may at least be partly the case that whatever prompted this early removal from school and entry into waged labor shaped his life-long concern for children who had to work to survive; he evidently felt that it was worth mentioning to his reading audience. This concern was reflected in the mission’s emphasis on keeping children off the streets as wage-earning adjuncts to their parents. His early entry into paid labor also was a major obstacle in his attaining a higher education, something he would later come to regret, or at least express ambivalence about. Even so, he had apparently acquired enough of an education so that by the age of sixteen he was appointed a Sunday school teacher, a position Bebbington describes as “the epitome of working-class respectability.”⁸⁶ The evangelical Sunday school movement, although it has been somewhat overlooked as an important contributor to literacy among the working classes, began modestly as a way to educate the children of the poor in the rudimentary language and numerical skills required for the low-skilled jobs for which they were now competing. The combined effects of capitalism, and the proselytizing effort to spread the literacy which was an essential component of Protestantism led to the participation of “huge numbers of children and adults” both as

⁸⁵ “Children of Toil,” *Chamber’s Journal*, 23 November 1861, 334.

⁸⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 84.

teachers and students. Prior to the Forster Education Act of 1870 these volunteer-run schools were “crucial in creating mass literacy,” and it is likely that Groom attended one of these free schools himself.⁸⁷ While attending the Sunday school, it is possible that the reading material there helped shaped his cultural identity in lasting ways, just as it did for the thousands of other children who attended similar schools during the middle years of the nineteenth century.⁸⁸ It is where he may have first encountered the “waif stories” which would be so influential in his later work, and perhaps, just as importantly, etched some of the contours of his cultural ideas about Christian masculinity.⁸⁹

Turning Point

At the age of eighteen, in 1863, Groom began his association with the London City Mission, although in what official capacity is uncertain. The records of the London City Mission do not have John Groom recorded as a paid employee.⁹⁰ It seems that he was a volunteer or worked unofficially for this organization which had such extensive reach into London’s evangelical philanthropic community. It was during this first foray into missionary work he first encountered the watercress-sellers and became alarmed by

⁸⁷ The classic work on the Sunday School movement remains Thomas Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and English Working Class Culture 1780-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); K.D.M. Snell, “Sunday School Movement in England and Wales,” *Past and Present* (August 1999), 164, 125-168; 125, 129. In 1851, there were about 2.6 million pupils attending Sunday school in Britain, 126.

⁸⁸ Bebbington writes that “of those aged 15 and above at twelve Manchester cotton mills in 1852, 90 per cent had at some time been to Sunday School,” *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 84.

⁸⁹ As Davin maintains “waif stories” were not an entirely new form of literature, and rightly belong to the same school as the “tract fiction” and “Sunday school literature” and have roots back even further to the tractarian literature in the first part of the nineteenth century, in “Waif Stories in Late Nineteenth-Century England,” *History Workshop Journal* 52 (Autumn 2001), 67-98. Joseph Stubenrauch, “Silent Preachers in the Age of Ingenuity: Faith, Commerce, and Religious Tracts in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain,” *Church History* 80 (September 2011), 547-574.

⁹⁰ No records of Groom’s tenure there have been found. From my conversations with the archivist at LCM.

their condition.⁹¹ Seeing the children there in the early mornings made a strong impression on Groom and informed many of the decisions he would make in the years ahead. As a young man with a reforming zeal, he found his life's work was right in front of him. It was just that sort of transformation personal experience that had been the goal of the London City Mission.⁹²

Founded in 1853, the London City Mission was the spiritual brain-child of an evangelical minister, David Nasmith. Considered by some contemporaries to be a bit of a social oddball, Nasmith's mission was an experiment in many ways. He established missions in large cities in the United Kingdom with the plan to set the up mission and depart, leaving it to run on its own.⁹³ As a contemporary wrote, "it was established to attend to the heathen at our own door, to carry the Bible, and the gospel it contains, from house to house, among the lowest neighbourhoods of London, by means of Christian men, animated by a missionary spirit and a zeal for Christ."⁹⁴ One of its innovations was that it paid a salary to the working-class missionaries to work in their home neighborhoods, rather than relying on self-funded middle-class or well-to-do volunteers. It thus opened the possibility for men such as Groom, with drive and ambition, to enter into social and pastoral work in their local communities, but it also gave them entrée into the wider philanthropic world.⁹⁵

When Groom described his association with the mission, he used imprecise

⁹¹ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 2.

⁹² Donald M. Lewis, *Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860* (Westport CT: Paternoster Press, 1986).

⁹³ Irene Howat, *Streets Paved with Gold: The Story of the London City Mission* (Ross-shire, Scotland and London: Christian Focus and London City Mission, 2003).

⁹⁴ H.S. "Some Remedies for City Perils," *Ragged School Union Magazine*, August 1859, 145-147; 146.

⁹⁵ In *Streets Paved with Gold*, Howat writes, "Finally, Nasmith recognised the inadequacy of the volunteer system and took the remarkably bold decision to recruit and pay full-time, non-ordained workers to do the work of evangelistic visitation. These workers, unlike most of the volunteers, were men and came mainly from the working classes," 26-27.

language once again. He wrote in *The Romance* that it was “a friend” who first introduced him to the mission.⁹⁶ It is possible that this unnamed friend had been George Lee, who, according to the census, was a missionary with the LCM, and the second husband of Sarah Maria Groom. Sarah Maria Groom remarried in 1868—two years after the death of her first husband, John’s father, George Paul. It appears she brought her youngest children to live with her new husband, a widower with young children of his own.⁹⁷ Neither John nor his elder brother joined them. Whether George Lee facilitated Groom’s introduction to the LCM, or whether Sarah Maria and George Lee met through Groom’s work there, I do not know. In any event, Groom never wrote about his mother’s second marriage to one of his colleagues at the organization which paved the way toward his life’s work.

Whatever his organizational standing, it was likely through these early associations that Groom expanded his professional contacts in the philanthropic evangelical world. His relationship with the most influential among them, the evangelical superstar, the Earl of Shaftesbury may have stemmed from the time Groom spent here. The London City Mission and the Ragged School Union were closely linked projects, and Shaftesbury was involved in both, having been one of the founders of the Ragged School Movement in 1844.⁹⁸ Groom began to publish in the mission’s newsletter in the 1870s. A truly momentous event occurred when Groom invited Shaftesbury to become Honorary President of the Mission in 1872 and honored him with a dinner among the watercress

⁹⁶ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*.

⁹⁷ George Lee and Sarah Maria in the census, 1871 with children from both marriages. Original data Class:RG10; Piece:262;Folio:59; Page:38;GSU roll:824915. Ancestry.com. 1871 England Census.

⁹⁸ H.S. “Some Remedies for City Perils,” *Ragged School Union Magazine*, August 1859, 145-147; 146.

and flower-sellers to mark the occasion.⁹⁹ At every opportunity, whether in print or in public appearances, this sponsorship was highlighted as evidence of the *bonafides* of the mission and an endorsement of its work. This celebrity name attachment cannot be underestimated. To have someone of Shaftesbury's stature visibly and vocally support the mission gave it a credibility and legitimacy that was inestimable. That the LCM and Groom's early association with it may have been the connection to friends in high places who would later be instrumental in the mission's success is reinforced by a letter, sent to him in honor of his seventieth birthday, by W.J. Orsman, the founder of the Hoxton Costermonger's Mission. In the congratulatory missive Orsman reminisced about their early days together in the evangelical mission movement and "that memorable evening when we met in the home of Lord Shaftesbury half-a-century ago."¹⁰⁰

The years that Groom spent as a missionary under the auspices of the London City Mission were no doubt critical ones in shaping the man John Groom would become. It was during this time that he had his first professional encounters with the watercress sellers, his experiential training in the field, and met influential people who would be important to his work over the years. Through Shaftesbury's interest in the flower girls, and his contacts in the evangelical world, Groom's circle expanded in ways that it might not have otherwise. His friendships or acquaintanceships with other notables such as Charles Spurgeon, the heiress and philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts, and Queen Alexandra depended on personal ties as much as public works. The evangelical world was a small one. As Kathleen Heasman writes in *Evangelicals in Action*, "there was a

⁹⁹ Shaftesbury to Groom, unpublished correspondence in LMA4305 1872 Personal correspondence from Earl of Shaftesbury to John Groom, June 26, 1872. LMA/4305/3/4. "Watercress Sellers Rejoicing," *Islington Gazette*, 30 July 1872.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to Groom from Orsman, 14 August, 1915, LMA 4305.

fairly close-knit group of Evangelicals responsible for a very large part of the social work which was performed in the second half of the nineteenth century.”¹⁰¹ He had--as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have written about other men from rather modest backgrounds--managed at a very young age to position himself “into the public gaze” through his philanthropic and religious work.¹⁰² Much as middle-class women had increasingly been able to expand the limits of domesticity through their work in charity, for many men these positions afforded those with drive and talent to attain a type of celebrity.¹⁰³ Thomas “Doctor” Barnardo may be the most familiar one today, but he was joined by many others whose endeavors among the poor brought them into the spotlight. Groom’s work would eventually take him further into the public eye than he may ever have imagined when a ten-year-old errand boy.

1866—An Eventful Year

The year 1866 was one of upheaval in Britain. A cholera epidemic that claimed five thousand lives swept through London. Violence shocked the nation in workers’ demonstrations in Hyde Park, and a series of devastating mine explosions tore through the northern coal country. It was the first of the young William Ewart Gladstone’s many years in Parliament. And discontent simmered among the nation’s working-classes, whose demands for representation and enfranchisement and better working conditions were only partially met in the Second Reform Act then being debated in Parliament, and which would be passed the following year. It was an eventful year for John Groom too,

¹⁰¹ Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 22-23.

¹⁰² Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 23; Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, 132.

¹⁰³ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*; Elliott, *Angel out of the House*; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

now in his twenty-first year. He completed his apprenticeship with the company Bastard & Son as an “engine turner,” that is, an artisan specializing in silver engraving.¹⁰⁴ In this trade he learned tool-and-die making, one of the manufacturing skills that would be indispensable in coming years in the production of artificial flowers.¹⁰⁵ He was also appointed Superintendent of the Farringdon Mission, and he began to describe himself as “a voluntary evangelist.”¹⁰⁶ Many small missions were beginning to spring up around the city at that time under the auspices of the London City Mission. Most were pan-evangelical and inter-demoninational. Wherever they were located, they dispensed, in the words of nineteenth-century social journalist Charles Booth, more or less the same product:

They set out to preach the Gospel, to teach and train the children, to influence and guide the mothers, to visit the homes and relieve poverty. They bring help in sickness comfort in distress. They seek to inculcate temperance, and most aim at being centres of social relaxation and enjoyment, while underlying all is the desire to lead man to God.¹⁰⁷

Although he never attended seminary for formal religious training Groom became a lay preacher, first at Forresters’ Hall on Clerkenwell Road, and then later he became Pastor of the local Woodbridge Chapel, a short walking distance from the buildings that would in eventually comprise the Crippleage.¹⁰⁸ Apparently, he could fill the seats. He had started his informal preaching while in his teen years, and over time his congregants

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Gillard, *More Than One Mountain to Climb*, no reference given and I am not able to independently confirm this.

¹⁰⁵ The creation of dies for cutting pattern pieces; also Groom designed or made the tools as well as the adaptive tools that the disabled workers used.

¹⁰⁶ Cited in Gillard, *More Than One Mountain to Climb*, no reference given and I am not able to independently confirm, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 3rd series, vol 7 (London, 1902), 270. Quoted in Lewis, *Lighten Their Darkness*, 273.

¹⁰⁸ Woodbridge Chapel is now the site of the London branch of the growing American-based Grace Community Church, a fundamental evangelical sect headed by a charismatic preacher who has called Roman Catholicism “a satanic religious counterfeit,” and describes Islam as “false.” <http://gracelifelondon.org/>

grew to “as many as 5,000 at one time.”¹⁰⁹ As the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission later expanded to include The Crippleage, the orphanage, the babies’ villa, and all its sundry offshoots, Groom also continued preaching in the open air of Clerkenwell Green, a place known for fiery oratory. The *Quiver* made note of Groom’s success in attracting people, who otherwise might have avoided traditional places of worship, to come to hear his sermons delivered every Sunday under the blue sky:¹¹⁰

In order to draw into Christ’s fold a portion of His flock that neither church nor chapel will attract, Mr. Groom and other Evangelists have opened a door of entrance on Clerkenwell Green. ... But open-air preaching attracts, and many have been ‘turned from darkness to light’ by some word in season¹¹¹

It would not be until much later, however, when he was already over the age of forty-five, that he first gave his occupation as “Baptist preacher” when the census taker came to call.¹¹² It was a job he had been doing for about twenty-five years by then, but only in a “voluntary” capacity, although he had embraced the life of the pastor long before. As such, in addition to his day job as a “silver engraver,” and any other volunteer positions, as a lay minister he would have an expanded scope of official action, and also a pressing roster of duties.¹¹³ Both the established church and the nonconforming sects relied on lay pastors to carry out much of the endless work that had to be done. It obviously helped to keep costs down. In this role, Groom was part of a tradition among nonconformists, promoted by John Wesley, in the spirit of the “mechanic preacher,” that

¹⁰⁹ Editor, “Mr. John A. Groom: Honorary Superintendent of the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Christian*, 5 November 1891, 17-19.17; Groom, *These Forty Years*, 8.

¹¹⁰ Anne Beale, “Buy My Water-Cresses!” *The Quiver* 17 (1882), 660-663; 662.

¹¹¹ Beale, “Buy My Water-Cresses!” 662.

¹¹² According to the 1891 census.

¹¹³ Kenneth D. Brown, “An Unsettled Ministry? Some Aspects of Nineteenth-Century British Nonconformity,” *Church History* 56 (June 1987), 204-223; 204.

is, laymen who “entered careers as full-time evangelists.”¹¹⁴ How closely he identified with such a label is not clear. In Groom’s case, the salary he collected from his silver-engraving business paid him enough so that he could devote himself full-time to running the mission and to his pastorship without needing payment from the mission or the church.¹¹⁵ Yet, Groom sometimes seemed insecure or regretful that he did not have a formal education—something that was beginning to become more desirable mid-century, although not yet strictly a necessity for a clergy position in most nonconforming denominations.¹¹⁶ The so-called Red Brick Universities, the civic universities, would make it easier for men from backgrounds like Groom’s to attend university.

The Baptists were a fiercely independent small group of dissenters who “held most fervently to the distinctive nonconformist characteristics that marked them off from their neighbors.”¹¹⁷ They conducted their churches individually, and separate from an overarching body, and they democratically elected officers and committees to run them. They bristled at government intrusion and monopolies of power in both the state and the established church.¹¹⁸ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, the Baptists, one of the last among the groups of nonconformists to do so, began to think that their preachers, too, should be college educated, and Groom may have been seeking to legitimize his position and explain why it was that he had not attended college.¹¹⁹

In one passage in his fortieth anniversary booklet he wrote that although unnamed “friends” had offered several times to pay for him to go to college or seminary, it was not

¹¹⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 80.

¹¹⁵ £208 per annum. Committee Meeting Notes, 1888, Letter explaining financial arrangement with Angela Burdett-Coutts. LMA4305.

¹¹⁶ Edward Royle, “Evangelicals and Education” in Wolffe, *Evangelical Faith*, 117-137; 128-131.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Armitage, “Why I Am a Baptist?” *The North American Review* 144 (March 1887), 232-243.

¹¹⁸ J. Cox, “Were Victorian Nonconformists the Worst Imperialists of All?” 248-249.

¹¹⁹ Royle, “Evangelicals and Education” in Wolffe, *Evangelical Faith*, 117-137; 129.

to be, alas, and instead, “his training was to be in the hard school of personal experience of life’s struggles and triumphs.”¹²⁰ He perhaps wished to assure his readers that he had spent his life as a practicing evangelical regardless of his lack of a book education. By suggesting that “friends” or a “lady” had offered to cover his expenses he also validated that others—in positions to make such judgments--considered him worthy of the investment. The idea of his having to pass up university appears at least twice in the writings I have collected. His return to this topic points perhaps to some discomfort with his lack of education, or an indication that he believed he needed to explain it.¹²¹

Unfortunately, he had another compelling personal reason for turning down the proffered scholarship in 1866. His father, George Paul Groom, had indeed died that year. In a profile article in *The Christian* in 1891 a popular evangelical magazine, Groom’s lack of seminary training was mentioned--along with a justification for this shortcoming. The article stated that although he had been “pressed to enter upon a ministerial career” and that “a lady agreed to meet all the expenses,” he had to pass up the opportunity because his mother was recently widowed with small children, and “John shared the family burden with his elder brothers.”¹²² The article did not mention her subsequent remarriage, which occurred within two years of her first husband’s death.

At the completion of his apprenticeship, Groom set up his silver-engraving workshop in a shed at the family home. His father’s death, his mother’s remarriage and move may have allowed him to acquire the space where his father had kept his own workshop. Also that year, with a small group of helpers, and very little fanfare, Groom began offering free breakfasts of hot cocoa and buttered bread from the newly-established

¹²⁰ Groom, *These Forty Years*, 5.

¹²¹ Edward Royle, “Evangelicals and Education” in Wolffe, *Evangelical Faith*, 117-137; 129.

¹²² Editor, “Mr. John Groom,” *The Christian*, 17.

Farringdon-based mission to the watercress and flower-sellers.¹²³ This marked the official beginning of what later grew into the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission. In subsequent years, this work would take off in many different directions, but at least in its very earliest days the concentration of effort was on the street-selling flower-girls in the neighborhoods near the major flower and watercress markets. The way in which all of the appointments to positions of spiritual guidance and physical responsibility came together in 1866, when Groom was yet an unmarried, twenty-one-year old silver turner and voluntary missionary is unclear. His tenure at LCM had been in an unofficial, and probably unpaid capacity, even though the LCM was among the first to pay its missionaries. His education, at least formally, had ended when he was ten-years-old. In spite of this, he obviously had been making many connections, and apparently, a very favorable impression, in the evangelical community. It also appears that he was willing to take on a great deal of work and step into leadership roles gladly. Most likely, and not for the first time, nor the last, he also demonstrated he had a pretty good eye for the main chance.

Marriage and Family Life

John Groom and Sarah Farringdon, the eighteen-year-old daughter of a local carriage maker, posted the Church of England's Banns of Marriage and married in the established church in March of 1868, already two years after he had begun his missionary work among the watercress and flower-girls.¹²⁴ Posting the Banns was not part of evangelical practice, and civil marriage was already an option, had they wished for one.

¹²³ Groom, *The Romance of John Groom*.

¹²⁴ London Metropolitan Archives, Saint James, Clerkenwell, Register of banns of marriage, P76/JS1, Item 180.

At the time of their marriage, the young couple may have imagined that much of their new life together would be spent running Groom's engraving shop, and Sarah's experience as the daughter of an artisan may have prepared her to take on the traditional role of the wife of an artisan who typically helped run the business. Whether she expected then that she would be living the life of a pastors's wife is impossible to say. But the demands such extensive commitments as those which Groom would make in the coming years would take him away from his home in family for long hours. Evangelicals took their devotion to work to a different level than had the gentry clergy of other eras. In *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, Bebbington writes, "for the Evangelical, however, pastoral work was laborious."¹²⁵ Work weeks could go beyond 100 hours. Burn-out and attrition occurred frequently and Groom himself wrote that he had been so ill at least twice that he had been unable to work.¹²⁶ He did not specify what his illnesses were, but overwork and exhaustion could have only exacerbated them. Whether ordained or not, it was an extremely demanding position.

Mrs. Groom's actual role in the day-to-day running of the mission, if she had one, is not known. She may have been helping to train some of the women to be domestic workers. In 1881, a sixteen-year-old girl named Martha Williamson resided with the Groom family and was employed as a domestic servant, and may have been a trainee from the Industrial Training Home.¹²⁷ It is also possible that she remained involved in running the engraving business that John had started. Although he passed the actual running of it to his brothers in 1879 when he took on the mission Superintendent position

¹²⁵ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 13.

¹²⁶ Groom, *These Forty Years*.

¹²⁷ According to the 1881 census return available at Ancestry.com. Class: *RG11*; Piece: 345; Folio: 121; Page: 39; GSU roll: 1341075. Groom started the Industrial Training Home in 1879. See Chapters Two and Three.

full-time, he still owned the business, and Sarah may have had a hand in operating and managing it.¹²⁸

Children were an essential aspect of family life, of course, and Sarah and John raised four—three boys and one girl. The Grooms also informally adopted at least three orphan girls from the streets.¹²⁹ No legal bar to adoption was in place at the time. Over the course of his life, he voiced strong opinions and condemnations of parents who had failed their children. The great historian of the English working-class, E.P. Thompson, famously found little to praise in the evangelical movement and painted the sons of the Great Awakening as scarred by their brutal, religion-inflected upbringing, and limited in their imagination and in their capacity for affective wellbeing.¹³⁰ Yet, the family was the defining institution for much of Groom's work, and indeed for the Victorian era. For Groom, as often as the family could be the root of many of the ills around him, it could also be the source of the greatest comfort. In regard to his own family, however, and with the exception of his eldest son, Alfred, his children are not mentioned at all. The women in his life--his one daughter, Maud, and his wife, Sarah--are virtually invisible. In fact, Sarah Groom is effectively a non-player in the story as Groom tells it, with the exception of a desultory homage or two. Sarah Groom died at the age of fifty-six from cancer of the uterus.¹³¹ As far as her near total absence in the written material Groom produced, Patrick Joyce offers an explanation that may make sense if we look at Groom's writings as

¹²⁸ Notes in committee book detail the exchange between Angela Burdett-Coutts and Groom wherein he became full-time Superintendent of the mission and Burdett-Coutts paid his salary equal to that which he earned from his engraving business. His brothers ran the business from that point on although he never sold it. LMA 4305.

¹²⁹ Mabel Russell, nine years old is listed as a "border." Seeing that so many children were in need of homes led Groom to create the orphans' homes at Clacton in the 1870s, which would be an important branch of the organization in later years.

¹³⁰ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working-Class*.

¹³¹ Although she eventually bore four children, she did not have her first child, Alfred, until 1874, when she had been married more than six years.

essentially an expression of Groom's subjectivity as a working-class activist, and his writing as part of the larger body of working-class autobiography. Arguably, Groom's could be included in the evangelical tradition of narratives that reflect on a spiritual journey, one centered on the individual's effort to shape a spiritual identity--a form that was a crucial component of the autobiographical writing of which Joyce analyzes in *Democratic Subjects*. As Joyce argues, for men such as Groom, involved in such a project, the natural subject position would have been to exclude considerations of their wives and children from their reflections. This was not to say that they did not care for them, or regard them as important in their lives, only that "the drive to determine identity was located elsewhere than in the circle of domestic affections."¹³² Perhaps in an expression of domestic politics, evangelical belief, and economic imperatives, Groom had been so busy being a spiritual Father to his rescued girls that he lost sight of his real role of husband and father to his biological family. As he stated in his last work, *The Romance of John Groom's*, one of his most cherished accomplishments had been to see "child life saved to noble womanhood!"¹³³ Groom's emphasis on "child-life" paradoxically, took him outside of his own home and his own family. As Deborah Gorham has written, the feminine ideal of purity was by nature, asexual.¹³⁴ In Groom's *Philanthropic Fables*, he often replaced the failed earthly father, and offered the protection and love of the Holy Father as well. Moreover, as Roger Cox argues, "the ideal of the feminine was focused particularly upon the daughter rather than the wife or

¹³² Joyce, *Domestic Subjects*, 52.

¹³³ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 10.

¹³⁴ Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982).

mother, and upon the child rather than the adult.”¹³⁵ Cox suggests too that ideas of “purity and dependence” could be mapped onto the girl, and a sense of “duty and devotion,” particularly when it came to the relationship with the father, could inflect family dynamics as well.¹³⁶

Another possibility for the virtual effacement of his wife may have had to do with the complicated aspect of sexuality in the Victorian imagination and evangelical culture in particular. Paradoxically, a wife and children could serve to remind subscribers that Groom was a young man with an active sexual life. According to a number of historians, however, the Victorian child, not the woman, was the locus of sexual attraction.¹³⁷ Much of Groom’s work and in fact, much of his life, revolved around the preservation of innocence of young girls. This was necessary because of the potent messages around the little girls. Little girls could be innocent but also sexual. In Groom’s world, girls could be grouped into those who were obvious “instruments of god” and the potential fallen. He was not alone in this preoccupation, but the very premise of his mission was to save girls and women from prostitution by enabling their other economic possibilities. Simultaneously reminding subscribers of Groom’s marriage and family and thus his conjugal fitness, while also reminding them that he spent long days in the company of sexually available girls might have seemed as if they were advertising that the fox was loose in the hen house.

¹³⁵ Roger Cox, *Shaping Childhood: Themes of Uncertainty in the History of Adult-Child Relationships* (London and New York: Routledge), 1996, 144.

¹³⁶ R.Cox, *Shaping Childhood*, 144-145.

¹³⁷ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*; R. Cox, *Shaping Childhood*.

While wives could pose problems, he, like most reformers in the period, had definite ideas about how fathers and mothers should behave.¹³⁸ In every Philanthropic Fable that Groom put forth, a girl-child has been profoundly disappointed—abused, abandoned, neglected—by a father or father stand-in. As in the story he unfolds of Kit and Sue, whose father was, “a disreputable character discharged from the army,” who “spent much of his time in prison, and had died in the infirmary,”¹³⁹ the fathers in his narratives are uniformly horrible or absent. Although it was a common theme, with “dead or missing parents” sometimes appearing to be “a prerequisite for an interesting plot,”¹⁴⁰ Groom employed this trope not merely for that reason alone. The anger at parents who neglect and abuse their children for their own selfish ends is strongly evinced, as is his compassion for those whose weakness overcame them. Yet, unlike some other reformers he could find forgiveness for even the worst parents if they truly wanted to change, and he offered repentant parents the opportunity to convert by attending classes to become better parents. No one was beyond saving if they gave themselves over to Christ, and the narratives always left open a path by which one could do that. An objective in all John Groom’s narratives was to give examples of how one’s life could turn around: How a transformation from utter despair to independence was possible. How the greatest suffering would be rewarded; how even the lowest sinners were not beyond Jesus’ love. After all, the forgiveness that Jesus would show to even the worst sinners was a central tenet of his faith.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*; Monica Flegel *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2009).

¹³⁹ Groom, *Kit and Sue*.

¹⁴⁰ Israel, *Names and Stories*, 19.

¹⁴¹ Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 10-11, 17.

Telling Tales

While the Philanthropic Fables can be read as entertaining and edifying stories of spiritual conversion, they were also and always, promotional and public relations materials for the mission. The narratives in their multiple duties had to work also as recruiting tools for others who might wish to join the work as a missionary or serve as a means to communicate to potential referrers who might arrange to have girls placed there. Thus one of their main goals was to convince subscribers that the girls truly had been saved. The narratives had to be testimony not only of Groom's conversion and faith, but also of the spiritual conversion of the flower-girls. This was not an easy task; contemporary spiritual leaders judged the legitimacy of "an individual's claim to conversion" based on the "quality of the story" that was told.¹⁴² Much as we today have become accustomed to testimonial-type before-and-after marketing strategies, nineteenth-century charities and their supporters looked to personal stories of transformation to elicit emotions and support. Something else that few readers would have failed to notice, these communiqués were asking for their money. Mission details—its address, committee members, bankers, subscribers, balance sheets--were given at the end of each booklet, or enclosed in a package, and this reinforced their explicit financial purpose. The implicit message was that in order for the fables of physical rescue and Christian transformation to come to fruition—that is, for the mission to continue to do its beneficial work of turning near-feral street children living among disorder and untamed nature into domesticated servants or floral workers—the reader had to join in the effort through a monetary offering.

¹⁴² Andrew Tate, "Evangelical Certainties," 28.

In some of his narratives, he played a central role by serving as the catalyst for the girls' transformations. While they did the spiritual work themselves, it was through the rescue he was called upon to facilitate that the transformation could begin. It was through such narratives—whether of the flower-girls, cripples, or orphans who came into the organization—that Groom acted as their sympathetic ventriloquist. He told their stories, sometimes through an imaginative transliteration into his words, sometimes in an appropriation or reproduction of theirs. Together, John Groom and the various heroines of his Philanthropic Fables brought his life's work to fruition. Their stories were his story and this was made clear as he inserted himself into each of their stories of transformation.

Throughout the Philanthropic Narratives, he often appeared as the star player, a seeming contradiction for a man who professed to seek no fame for himself. At times, he seemed intent on downplaying his own agency, or minimizing his personal drive and ambition in realizing the goals of the mission, and appeared to shrink from the praise he earned. He stated that if the work had been at all successful then it was a reflection of divine favor, and had little to do with his own contributions.¹⁴³ That said, however, at other times he sometimes seems to be acting in defiance of his own proclamations of modesty, his stated his desire to be viewed as “only the instrument used.”¹⁴⁴ In those instances he could have a tendency towards the “humble brag” as when he described the mission's work as being of “national importance,” and of his name being “honoured for his own and work's sake.”¹⁴⁵ This reflects the inherent paradox at the heart of evangelical fundraising, and how it manifests in one individual's striving to balance the need to boast and the need to show humility. His narratives often also served to highlight attributes--his

¹⁴³ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*; Groom, *These Forty Years*, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Groom, *These Forty Years*, 3-4.

good character and his brave actions--that he refused to commit to a more traditional memoir or biography. How conscious he was of the choices he made, and the impression he created through those choices is impossible to say.

In the same year that Groom wrote and published his most autobiographical piece *The Romance of John Groom's*, the American historian Henry Adams famously wrote an autobiography in which he referred to himself only in the third person, a habit that Groom sometimes assumed.¹⁴⁶ Literary critics have grappled with Adams's choice, and its overall meaning. The use of the third person in place of the first person is thought, *inter alia*, to reveal a lacuna between the person of the past (what is unknown) and the person of the present (what is now known); between "potential" and "accomplishment";¹⁴⁷ or, somewhat differently, it demonstrates that the tale in which it is used "transcends the merely personal to create a cultural parable of modern historical existence."¹⁴⁸ In transcending the personal, it also allows space for a reader to imagine themselves in the role of protagonist—something Groom may have wished to do as well, as the pieces often could also be used to spur volunteers to action.¹⁴⁹ It may seem to be reading much into a small booklet, but the stakes were high for Groom and for the mission. Printing was expensive. Running the risk of disenchanting subscribers and potential subscribers with a misstep was something he could not afford.

¹⁴⁶ Coincidentally, although Adams's work was not widely published until 1918, it too, was written in 1905, the same year Groom wrote his. P.J. O'Rourke, "Third Person Singular" *The Atlantic* (December 2000).

¹⁴⁷ Andrew West, "The Education of Henry Adams: A *Bildungsroman*" *South Central Review* 25 (Summer 2008) 91-108; 92.

¹⁴⁸ Albert E. Stone, *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of American Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 52. Quoted in West, "The Education of Henry Adams," 92.

¹⁴⁹ Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, says volunteers for mission were found through "didactic stories and pamphlets."

A Godly Man

The type of man that Groom would have revered would have embraced the characteristics of fatherhood, protection of children and women, temperance, and an entrepreneurial ethic. Through these narratives we learn a great deal about Groom—or what he wanted readers to believe about him: He went readily into dangerous situations—unfamiliar housing in dark and treacherous neighborhoods—with only young girls as his guide. He was known well enough and trusted enough that girls went to him alone in the night and sought his help—and they believed he was “manly” enough to enter into forbidding neighborhoods and situations. He was a trusted figure among the abandoned and fatherless women in his sphere, one who was relied on for emergencies, for spiritual aid, for money, for small provisions. He also described his work among the city’s outcast class where he made “midnight visits to their kitchens, where he has been brought to pray with a dying burglar, while in silence the criminal associates have stood uncovered.” The way in which he risked his own personal safety attested to his commitment to his cause: “I visited prisons, lodging-houses, refuges, rescue homes, and missions of various kinds in districts as notorious as Whitechapel or St. Giles’s. The crime, vice, drunkenness, dirt, and neglect of fifty to sixty year ago are unimaginable to the young life of to-day.”¹⁵⁰ This was a recurring theme in much of the missionary literature and Groom used it to show both his skill in confronting and negotiating difficult situations. He saw himself as exerting a calming presence as he stood back and allowed grief and anger to unfold without interference. No doubt this was an image that Groom would have wanted to project: when someone was in danger or dying or lying in squalor at the top of a reeking staircase, people knew that they could turn to him. In these

¹⁵⁰ Groom, *Romance of the John Groom*, 7.

narratives, Groom reveals, through the theme of the masculine hero among threatened femininity, several things about the mission, its work and its goals, and the type of rescue and reform that it promoted.

In spite of the manly image he cultivated, he seemed to worry that his “softer” and—though he leaves this unspoken—his feminine side, was in tension with the “muscular Christianity” he wished to embody and for which he was esteemed in evangelical eyes. In one passage he wrote, “As an evangelist Mr. Groom has always been acceptable and successful, especially among men, and the devoted band of assistants and voluntary helpers are practically all of his own training.”¹⁵¹ In other words, he was a manly Christian man and his trainees were manly men trained by him personally. As a leader of a community he set a fine example for the men to follow in his path. This path, in good evangelical tradition, would be shaped by an emphasis on a strong work ethic, temperance, a renunciation of physical violence, and “an entrepreneurial, individualistic” masculinity.¹⁵² It was part of his responsibility not only as a civil and moral leader, but also as a religious leader to serve as a spiritual Father guiding the young men of his flock. It was through the character of “Mr. Groom” where he demonstrated—in a way which was visible to all readers without him having to say as much—his commitment to his principles. As much as Groom was apparently sincere in his belief and secure his own moral righteousness, he also cherished a modesty that can seem paradoxical today.

If he was aware that some people looked askance at the propriety of a grown man who surrounded himself with teenage girls, artificial flowers, and tea parties, this may

¹⁵¹ Groom, *These Forty Years*, 8.

¹⁵² John Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914,” *Journal of British Studies* 44 (April 2005):330-342, 331.

have been a subtle rebuttal to anyone who meant to suggest that his behavior bordered on the feminine.¹⁵³ Historian of masculinity, John Tosh, has written that Britain during this period was “characterized by increasingly sharp distinctions of gender and sexuality.”¹⁵⁴ The importance of avoiding any hint of femininity deepened towards the end of the century when femininity was becoming increasingly linked to homosexuality and the “slur” of “effeminacy” had become a principal signifier of homosexuality—and a highly negative one.”¹⁵⁵ Any suggestion of homosexuality could be devastating, both personally and professionally, as Groom well knew, and as contemporaries, such as “Doctor” Barnardo learned in a most painful and public way.¹⁵⁶

Later Years

Towards the end of his life he left some limited, yet revealing, remarks about his personal struggles and repeated illnesses. He described himself as being of ill-health and weak constitution; although his long and active involvement in the philanthropic community, and his apparent boundless energy somewhat belie this self-assessment.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, he was, he admitted, “never physically strong, of an intensely nervous temperament, highly strung and hypersensitive, brought two or three times to Death’s door, yet restored to continue the work of his life with greater passion, success and

¹⁵³ The association of femininity and nature, and the masculine role of protecting it, is discussed in Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

¹⁵⁴ Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society,” 330. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

¹⁵⁵ Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society,” 338. On changing notions of femininity and masculinity, effeminacy and gender, also see James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 4-9.

¹⁵⁶ Seth Koven, Dr. Barnardo’s hardships amid accusations of impropriety including innuendos of homosexuality in his homes in *Slumming: Social and Sexual Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 88-139.

¹⁵⁷ Cited in *Romance of John Groom*.

energy”¹⁵⁸ It is not clear what these physical complaints were. However they seem to be validated by a letter from a well-wisher, a fellow missionary, the Reverend F.W. Newland. On the occasion of Groom’s seventieth birthday, Newland sent congratulations to his “friend, neighbor, and comrade” in Clerkenwell. “When I think of what he has accomplished in religious and social enterprise I marvel greatly,” he wrote, and in an apparent reference to an unnamed malady he remarked, “It is a case where strength of heart and brain has overcome all physical weakness most marvelously.”¹⁵⁹ Whatever the nature of these “weaknesses,” he obviously rebounded with enough energy and good health through the years to continue to pursue what appears to have been a punishing schedule. That the expectation to conform to this role may have also taken a heavier toll than he allowed is hinted at, but also under-examined. The “Mr. Groom” that populates many of the narratives is the idealized version of the always-able always-ready rescue hero. Groom acknowledged long periods of exhaustion and illness and a “sensitive nature.”¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the work could be grueling both physically and emotionally. The planned festival for the mission’s fortieth anniversary in 1906 had to be cancelled because of his long and “serious” (and unnamed) illness, which also led to the early appointment of his son Alfred as his direct successor. Perhaps the desire for a helpmeet who could assist him inspired his choice of second wife. In fact, they met during one of those long illnesses. One of the houses at the Clacton orphanage served as a sanatorium, and Groom went there for recuperative care after the death of Sarah in 1906.¹⁶¹ “Sister”

¹⁵⁸ Groom, *These Forty Years*, 8.

¹⁵⁹ Correspondence to Ernest Trott, Chairman, Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission, 24 July, 1914. Groom Archive. LMA4305.

¹⁶⁰ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*; Groom, *These Forty Years*.

¹⁶¹ Meeting Minutes of 4 October 1906, “Council expresses pleasure and congratulations at the recovery from a very serious illness of their Secretary.” Also mentions house in Clacton being reserved for “special convalescent patients.”

Ada Margaret Wood, was a district nurse for Northampton, and a Watercress and Flower Girl Missioner.¹⁶² She was also thirty-two years his junior—Groom was sixty-three years old at his second marriage in 1908. There was no shortage of marriageable women his own age.¹⁶³ As Esther Godfrey argues in her book about what she calls “January-May, romances” this relationship type was attractive because of beliefs about younger women possessing childlike innocence and other Victorian ideas about girls and women. There is one photograph of her in the archive, taken at or around the day of their marriage. She appears, in this sole photograph, to be modest, not at all girlish, and altogether capable. As he had promised, after his seventieth birthday, he finally passed the reins of the mission to his eldest son, Alfred. The couple then resided with Alfred and his wife (Ada Maud) and Alfred and Ada’s young daughter (Maude Ada) in their home. John Groom died following a short illness just after Christmas, in 1919, at his beloved house in Clacton-on-Sea.

It is difficult to determine where the public figure of John Groom ends and the private man begins. Groom began to appear as a somewhat mythical figure even in his own lifetime. Elements of such depictions were crystallizing in some of the published accounts about the mission, or were passed on to the investigators from the COS: He helped the elderly across the street. He was a kindly man. He always carried sweets and coins for children. During the nighttime Zeppelin bombings of London during the Great War he ran out in his bedroom slippers to check the condition of the dormitories where

¹⁶² Baptists refer to each other as “Brother” and “Sister.” This may be a clue to her religious affiliation before marriage.

¹⁶³ Esther Godfrey, *The January-May Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). (In which there are at least fifteen years between the spouses) upsets power relations; she cites Davidoff and Hall’s observation in *Family Fortunes* that “childlike innocence” was an “attractive mode” for women, 2.

the flower-making students were housed. He was the Father of the Flower Girls and the Champion of the Cripple.¹⁶⁴ All of these characterizations had contributed to an aura that gave him and the mission its necessary gloss in order to be successful in the evangelical philanthropic community of which he was a member.

The Providing Father—Leaving a Legacy

The Groom family name, if not the Groom family itself, was inseparable from the mission.¹⁶⁵ Although the branches and offshoots of the mission used many iterations over the years, his own name was attached to it in many of its forms. For John Groom, it was personal. Early on, he began to lay the groundwork for his eldest son Alfred to continue the work in the family name after he eventually retired from the mission. This is a significant detail, as the care with which a man had prepared his own sons for adulthood was part of the final reckoning among both Victorians and evangelicals.¹⁶⁶ Groom was in the fortunate position of being able to pass on the “family business” to his eldest son, while also providing apprenticeships and employment to his others in his engraving business. He was able to extend employment in the mission to his son-in-law as well.¹⁶⁷ By the final years of his life, he appeared less interested in describing his own accomplishments and more intent on insuring that his work would continue, both for the sake of the girls and women he continued to care for, but also for the sons whose future

¹⁶⁴In 1871, while a very young man, he shepherded three hundred watercress-sellers on a field trip to Hampton Court Palace—a day’s outing requiring transportation fare and entrance fees, meals and rest breaks for a large group of men, women, and children who had never before been outside central London.

¹⁶⁵This, too, was the source of some trouble for him as questions were raised as to the propriety of this, and whether he and his family gained from it personally. In Chapter Four.

¹⁶⁶Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, 115; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 332.

¹⁶⁷Groom, *Romance of John Groom*; census data.

worldly success he safeguarded.¹⁶⁸ At one of his last public appearances, he once again expressed a sense of personal loss in that he had not attained the education he might have. He also suggested that the work had sometimes been a struggle and been performed with some personal sacrifice as well.¹⁶⁹ He wondered too if he had done his family an injustice by depriving them of his time and attention. He took comfort in knowing that he had provided well for them and had given them security for the future by ensuring that they would assume the mission's leadership. Yet, doubts remained. Had it been enough; could he have done more?

Conclusion

In all the narratives presented in this chapter it is clear that Groom was at work in shaping and controlling the way in which the public received information about him. Groom's commitment to this facet of the mission is an example of evangelical directive to follow Christ's model as closely as possible in all endeavors. For evangelicals such as Groom, these were not merely platitudes, but goals they strived to attain in their daily lives. In his discussions of his awareness of the suffering of others and his moral obligation to help end it, his dedication to his God and his calling, and his efforts to live selflessly and with generosity, he operated fully within the narrative discourse central to his beliefs.¹⁷⁰ One aspect that these narratives underscore, is that while many of his core beliefs and commitments seem to have remained fairly consistent, he rarely committed to any particular creed or philosophy. Aside from identifying himself as a Christian or an

¹⁶⁸Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 115; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 332.

¹⁶⁹Groom, Typescript of speech seventieth birthday.

¹⁷⁰Andrew Tate, "Evangelical Certainties," 27-38.

evangelical, it is hard to pinpoint his actual denomination. He called himself a Baptist, but only once in the census, and there are several types of Baptists. Rather than suggest that this indicates fecklessness on his part, it may mean that the communities in which he moved were more fluid and less rigid than they may sometimes appear.

But what, if anything, is to be made of the disappearance of many of the pieces of Groom's own life story? Did he intentionally erase his own fingerprints from the archive? Did he do it himself, or did someone carry out his wishes after his death, or did someone take it upon themselves to scrub him from the record? Why John Groom erased the personal details and private aspects of his lived experience from the public presentation of the mission and his work can only be a matter of speculation. Plenty of reasons existed for such an erasure. Scandals in the philanthropic world could mean personal humiliation and financial disaster to the cause for which one had worked so hard. Already others had been embarrassed, and their organizations tainted by misleading or false claims.¹⁷¹ In Doctor Barnardo's infamous case, he had overstated the effects of neglect and poverty in the visual depictions of the children in his homes. Groom recognized the problem in balancing details that both conveyed the extent of the horrors many faced, but he also maintained an awareness of the possibility of losing his credibility. As a man sensitive to the pain that others experienced and the possibilities of forgiveness he may have cherished privacy and discretion for their own sake, or perhaps he preferred not to expose others as would inevitably happen if correspondence or other papers were read. In many of the texts, although he is present as narrator, he occupies the page like a fictional character, one who failed to exist outside the space of the *Watercress* and *Flower Girls*'

¹⁷¹ See Koven, *Slumming*, 88-139, for Dr. Barnardo's hardships amid accusations of impropriety including innuendos of homosexuality in his homes.

Mission narratives. Mr. Groom was a figure he created and when the author died, so did his creation.¹⁷²

¹⁷²Groom is buried at Highgate Cemetery in northern London in a family plot that includes the sites of repose for his mother Sarah Maria, his first wife Sarah, and their son Alfred. Photos on Ancestry.com

Chapter Two

City of Roses: Selling Flowers on the Streets in Victorian and Edwardian London

The flower-girls were an important economic, social, and cultural phenomenon that arose on the streets of London and (other major cities) during the mid to late-nineteenth century.¹ Among them were self-supporting business women and single-owner entrepreneurs worthy of serious consideration as micro-capitalists. Despite their crucial role in the expanding floral trade, flower-girls were not considered capitalist stakeholders in this market, nor highly valued as critical links in the commercial chain from grower to final consumer. Issues of gender and class helped to render the real economic work of the flower sellers invisible to many observers although they were key partners in developing and sustaining a burgeoning consumer desire that they had done much to help create.²

In general, “public women” who made their living outside of the domestic sphere were viewed as social problems in need of containment. Yet, flower girls were also admired, welcomed and desired, if at times they were also scorned, feared, and shunned. This ambivalence is reflected in some of the enormous discourse they provoked, not only emanating from the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission, but from many parts of society. Although many of the flower-girls earned only enough to keep themselves and their dependents alive, and some not even that much, others prospered enough to open

¹ Kristina Huneault, “Flower-girls and Fictions: Selling on the Streets,” *RACAR* 23 (1-2 1996), 52-70.

² Katrina Honeyman, “Doing Business with Gender: Service Industries and British Business History,” *Business History Review* 81 (Autumn 2007), 471-493. Honeyman writes, “Women have played a more important part in British business history than historians have acknowledged. Business historians have failed to recognize British women’s participation in business.” Wendy Gamber acknowledges that “studying the history of women in business means studying the history of small business, indeed the history of very small business,” in “A Gendered Enterprise: Placing Nineteenth-Century Businesswomen in History,” *Business History Review* 72 (Summer 1998), 45-55.

larger stalls, or become small business proprietors.³ It also became a practice of last resort for some who were pushed into street-selling in a society that often viewed it as a cost-free safety net to absorb many of its poorest citizens.⁴ John Groom worked among the flower-girls of London, attempting many interventions aimed at improving their immediate life and livelihood circumstances, and their long-term chances of survival and success. Many rejected his efforts aimed at completely reforming their lives, which included temperance pledges and evangelical conversion, and some of the economic strategies Groom and his allies employed were short-sighted failures. Others were more successful. Surprisingly, it was the failure of one the mission's most anticipated efforts that led to opening a space for women who may have benefitted the most from the mission's services, and which set it on the course for its social mission work into the next century.

A Note on Sources

The flower-girls of the nineteenth century were not an unchanging monolith of picturesque Victorian street characters. John Groom was a sympathetic and keen recorder of the lives of the flower-girls he worked among, and spent most of his life raising public awareness about their existential struggles. Much of what he observed of the day-in-and-day-out found its way into his various promotional and educational pieces. Through its many brochures and pamphlets, along with assorted journalistic items, published letters, photographs, and other promotional writing that described the practices and conditions of

³ Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission, *A Brief Report or the Object and Workings of the Emily Loan Fund* pamphlet, nd, 6. LMA4305.

⁴ John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-century Working-class Entrepreneurs* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 10.

the street flower trade, these materials have helped to preserve the history of the flower-girls. As a result, the assembled documents of the Groom archive make a major contribution to our knowledge regarding the ways in which the women engaged in flower-selling managed details of their businesses and their lives including marriage, childrearing, illness, death, financial setbacks, as well as some insights into their saving and spending habits, their households, their dress and appearance, their preferences, and other quotidian details. While the Groom canon is not free of its own mythologizing and mediating, it nonetheless provides many descriptions of the women who plied the trade and is certainly the largest such collection of writings concerning flower-girls. Although the purpose of almost everything in the archive was to elicit some sympathy or compassion with the ultimate goal of gaining financial support for the mission, Groom did strive for an approximation of reality in his descriptions and, I would suggest, believed himself to be a sincere and accurate reporter of conditions on the ground. In his estimation, the truth, *as he saw it*, was powerful enough on its own to convey the message. With these caveats then, I believe these materials are the most revelatory that we have regarding the real lives of the flower-girls, and that they sometimes may even capture something close to the voice of the flower-girl.⁵

I. Representations vs. Reality

The Victorian flower-seller is arguably the most romanticized, and least understood, of the various “types” that populated the streetscape of London in the nineteenth century. Like the other famous street women of the period, the Victorian

⁵ John Seed, “Did the Subaltern Speak? Mayhew and the Coster-girl,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 19 (2014), 536-549.

prostitute, they also assumed a cultural importance larger than what their actual numbers alone would suggest.⁶ Although they were a common sight and were the subject of countless literary and artistic productions from the mid-nineteenth century, they had all but disappeared by the end of the Great War. In her article on flower sellers, the art historian Kristina Huneault argues that because of this extensive interest in flower girls as subjects of the “artistic gaze,” flower girls existed as more of a “discursive category” rather than as historical actors. She maintains that despite the vast amounts of contemporary commentary about them, it is still almost entirely unknown how they lived, what they earned, and other aspects of their actual existence.⁷ This however means overlooking the abundant contemporary social reportage and reformer literature on the flower girls and focusing only on the aesthetic representations.⁸ As objects of considerable fascination, flower-girls appeared over and over in stories in magazines and newspapers, in short expose pieces and *feuilletons* and as characters in novels, religious tracts, and didactic literature; they were depicted in artwork—both fine and popular—and portrayed on stage in theatrical comedies, dramas, ballets, and *tableaux vivantes*; and they were featured characters in music hall performances, and were the fodder for female impersonators. From mid-nineteenth century onwards they abounded in a discourse that both depicted flower-selling in the most romantic, and at the same time, the most

⁶ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*, (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), on the general demographics of the prostitutes, 13-18.

⁷ Huneault, “Flower-girls and Fictions.” While Huneault is primarily interested in fine art and fiction, my own research is in the written accounts and philanthropic narratives as social and cultural history of flower-girls generally, and as a history of philanthropic fundraising. Because we have different research agendas, I have been able to add to the numerous useful sources she has uncovered, many of which I have usefully consulted or referenced in this project.

⁸ Peter K. Andersson, “How Civilized Were the Victorians?” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20 (October 2015), 439-452; 441. He cites path-breaking studies that investigated the lived experience of working-class women published by Ellen Ross, Francoise Barret-Ducrocq and Melanie Tebbutt as leaders in the field in the 1990s and says that little follow-up work has resulted.

melodramatic terms possible. It is nevertheless possible to find evidence of their lived experience amid the abundant representations that fill the historical record if not the historiography.

In 1886, when the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported that, “the flower girl is a familiar figure in our streets and squares” they had become an institution in Britain’s cities, especially in London, where, “the stately palaces of the south, public and private, are aware of her presence.”⁹ Although hard figures varied, as many as three thousand women of varying ages and attributes plied the trade every day of the week.¹⁰ And their number climbed higher in the pleasant summer months when otherwise employed women tried their hand at what looked like a more “genteel” trade away from the watchful eyes of factory foremen and middle-class mistresses, out of doors, and—ostensibly—easier, to boot. As a means of survival, selling flowers was an attractive occupation for some poor girls and women as it seemed to offer a quick-and-easy cash profit, and an escape from the drudgery of domestic service or the confinement of the factory. Some believed that the life of the flower-girl was preferable to others, such as factory workers, because “flower-sellers breathe the sweet air of heaven and handle nature’s fairest products.”¹¹ Even the officials of Committee on the Employment of Children believed that the “evils” of street life and “habits of the gutter” along with the “physical danger to health from

⁹ Editor, “Our Flower Girls,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1886.

¹⁰ Estimates vary from between 1500 and 3000 with 2000 being the more consistent number, especially later in the nineteenth century. The anonymous author of “Flower Girls,” says 2000, in *Toilers in London; or Inquiries Concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis*, 1889. The author (most likely John Groom) of “Flower Girls’ Mission” said 1200 in 1881, with number much higher in summer and 1500 registered with mission, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, October 1881, 124-128.; 124. By 1903, the number Groom was reporting, in December, had climbed to 5000.

¹¹ Anon., “Flower Sellers,” *Toilers in London or Inquiries concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis*, 1889, 31. Accessed Online at The Victorian Dictionary at www.victorianlondon.org

expose to inclement weather” could be offset somewhat by the “advantages of an open air life.”¹²

Although the label “flower-girl” was the most popular term used in London for the female flower-seller of any age, the term “girl,” especially after 1870, when the Education Acts took most of the youngest children off the streets for most of the day, generally meant a woman past the school-leaving age of fourteen, all the way into mature adulthood. In certain jobs, women well into their sixties or seventies were called “girls.” Even for contemporaries, the term itself led to misunderstandings. When the Anglo-Indian journalist, Olive Christian Malvery, wrote about the “real conditions” of the various poor women of London, in her article on the flower-girls, with whom she lived and worked for a very brief time, she expressed that she was keenly disappointed, for the flower-girls of fiction bore them no resemblance at all. While she had expected “flax-haired, blue-eyed, innocent-looking children” she was instead confronted by “dirty and untidy women” most of whom were “ugly” and, worse yet, some of whom thrust their “wet draggled flowers” under her nose were “fat and old.”¹³ This disparagement from Malvery points to the fact that despite a circulating discourse of charming floral maidens, the truth of the matter was something far different, and, as she, however unkindly, pointed out, it encompassed a far broader swath of society’s working poor than many people realized.

Nevertheless, flower-girls appeared continued to appear throughout the period—variously—either as true heroines of poverty, innocent victims of urbanization and industrialization, vectors of disease and pollution who lived in “fever-breeding alleys,”

¹²N.B.Dearle, “Report of the Departmental Committee on the Employment of Children Act, 1903,” *The Economic Journal* 20 (September, 1910), 487-492; 490.

¹³ Olive Christian Malvery, *The Soul Market* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1907), 65-66.

or, as peculiarly hardy English specimens able to endure soaking rain, killing frost, and blazing sun alike—sometimes all in the same day.¹⁴ Yet, for all their familiarity, they remained, in the words of the *Pall Mall* writer, a “strange race of beings, of whose existence everyone is aware,” but of whom very little of their “hard battle with life” was actually known.¹⁵ In some regards, flower-selling, while physically taxing, and notoriously low-paying, did offer certain advantages for women whose choices ran a narrow gamut. Flower-girls were generally tolerated as long as they followed the rules—spoken and unspoken—and demonstrated a degree of “respectability.”¹⁶ There was a low bar to entrance, “no training was required”¹⁷; a few pennies of “stock money” were enough to start. A pedlar’s license was needed, but it is not clear that that was closely, if at all, monitored. Some popular assumptions about the ease with which flower-girls could conduct business on the streets did not always bear out—rainy weather was ruinous, they often had “a rough time” when the weather was “tolerably propitious, but when a bad season” had to be faced, “the condition of large numbers” of them was “pitiable,” the police did not allow them to stand about, [...] always requesting them to ‘move on,’” and even with relatively lax impediments, earning enough cash to meet the next day’s expenses was not always as simple as it was sometimes made to sound.¹⁸ They could also be a nuisance in their persistence, and “if there is the least hesitancy or the faintest glance of sympathy,” in your refusal to buy, “she follows all down the street, begging you” in a

¹⁴ Editor, “The Girl of the Period,” *The London Journal*, 1 November 1868, 237-238.

¹⁵ Editor, “Our Flower Girls,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1886.

¹⁶ E. Cowing Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate Monthly*, July 1891, 177.

¹⁷ “Those Penny Bunches,” *The Quiver*, January 1901, 1115-1119; 1115.

¹⁸ John A. Groom, “To the Editor: Dark Days for the London Flower Women,” *The Saturday Review*, 19 December 1903, 763; Editor, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union Quarterly* 125.

“persuasive undertone.”¹⁹ Depending on the time of day or part of town, it could seem as if there were a flower-girl at the “corner of every street.”²⁰

Perhaps the most precise thing that can be said about contemporary attitudes towards flower-girls is that they were ambivalent. Like other people who lived and worked on the margins of respectable society, the flower-sellers were members of a constant foot parade of the poor and ragged who made a living in the streets. As economic historian John Benson writes about street selling, it also “performed a real and much needed retailing function” to the growing urban population. Informal trading “flourished in the nooks and crannies left by the shopkeepers.”²¹ The streets were a locus of commercial activity and flower-girls provided a service, one that was often characterized as beneficial, even desired. The author of “Our Flower Girls” reminded readers, “fifteen years ago, no such figures enlivened our thoroughfares; and, if florally inclined, one had no choice but to hunt up a ‘nurseryman,’” and hope for the best.²²

As Erica Rappaport has argued, during the Victorian era, the city streets were a site of negotiation between classes and genders in ways that were not only new, but also erotically charged and uncomfortable.²³ In addition, the mix of commercialism and femininity in the public arena could be disruptive, particularly as the flower-girl, anxious as she was to make a sale, was prone to “takes advantage of the crowded streets to press close to your side” in order to hold “a ‘buttonhole’ right under your chin.”²⁴ Her impertinence, too, could be unnerving. She was the complete opposite of what a proper

¹⁹ Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate Monthly*, 177.

²⁰ Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate Monthly*, 177.

²¹ Benson, *Penny Capitalists*, 102.

²² Editor, “Our Flower Girls,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1886.

²³ Erica Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 193. James Winter, *London's Teeming Streets* (London: Routledge, 1993).

²⁴ Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate Monthly*, 177.

Victorian middle-class lady should be, and instead was, “pert and defiant, bold-eyed, sometimes saucy.”²⁵ Yet, all these women mingled together, side-by-side, “on the western thoroughfares, at noonday,” giving rise to such pitched observations:

With be vies of fresh young girls, themselves ‘maidens in their flower’ youthful matrons bent on ‘shopping,’ stately dowagers taking the constitutional that makes the dreaded ‘middle-age’ of English women so often a meridian splendor, maidens from the ‘rosebud garden of girls,’ still on the thither side of the brook, all full of life and health and energy, and all, or nearly all, with bunches of flowers in their neatly gloved hands.²⁶

Flower-girls, as public women, with their overdetermined workplace on the street, their urgent need for cash, their forward behavior, and their product—one which was especially linked with female sexuality—shared uncomfortable characteristics with prostitution. Some observers, believed flower girls to be little more than criminal or beggars, and others considered them to be actual or potential “fallen women” using flower selling as a pretense for selling sex.²⁷ In 1860, The *London City Press* issued a stern warning about “Midnight Flower Sellers,” after the arrest of “a girl named Ann Gleeson” for the assault of Dinah Ellis. Mrs. Ellis, her husband, and another friend, were returning home from the theater around one in the morning when Gleeson “importuned” the husband, Mr. Ellis, with some “bunches in her hand.” When he refused, his wife—who had been following at some distance behind--set upon the flower-girl to “release him from the annoyance” at which point the flower-girl “sprang upon her in the most savage manner, put her wrist out of joint, and tore large quantities of hair out of her head.” The flower-girl received four months’ of hard labor for her crimes. Interestingly, the paper

²⁵ Editor, “The Girl of the Period,” *The London Journal*, 1 November 1868, 237-238; 237.

²⁶ Editor, “Our Flower Girls,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1886.

²⁷ Anon., “Flower Girls,” 7; *Toilers in London*; Henry Mayhew, “Flower Girls,” *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1851, 134.

felt it their responsibility to now warn their readers that the “practice of selling flowers at midnight [...] is only a blind to cover the designs of these girls upon the pockets of the unwary.” In the past, they admit, they had had occasion to complain about the overly harsh treatment that street traders received before the alderman, but they believed that in this case the sentence was warranted. They cautioned their readers “against purchasing bouquets at such unseasonable hours, and advise them to have their eyes about them when they are importuned to buy flowers in Fleet-street by moonlight.”²⁸ A rough guide to flower-girls, rather predictably, classed those who sold before ten at night as legitimate, and those past ten, as not.²⁹ A weepy fictional story, entitled “A Little Mistake,” tells of a young flower-girl, “a poor little waif” wrongly accused of theft after being beaten and robbed of some money entrusted to her by a kind customer. “A flower-girl! Surely you have never trusted one of them!” says the lady customer’s gentleman friend when the flower-girl disappears with a half-sovereign.³⁰

Contemporary physical descriptions of flower-girls remained remarkably consistent over the decades; they were usually not especially flattering, and warned the uninitiated--who, like Malvery, might anticipate too much roseate beauty--that the majority of the girls were “not over lovely,” and that “the ideal flower girl is very seldom on view.” Rather, the girls on the street were possessed of “red, fat faces, and a ‘fringe’ of hair plastered on their foreheads.”³¹ Likewise, due to their long days exposed to the elements, their complexions were “bronzed,” and “coarse featured,” and their skin

²⁸ Editor, “Midnight Flower Sellers,” *London City Press*, 23 June 1860. Benson notes it was often a “cover for begging, prostitution, receiving and other petty crime,” *Penny Capitalists*, 100.

²⁹ Anon., “Flower Girls,” *Toilers in London*, 6.

³⁰ I.H., “Meg-A Flower Girl,” *Every Week: A Journal of Entertaining Literature*, 9 January 1889, 22-24.

³¹ Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate Monthly*, 177.

“weather-beaten.” Their voices were “harsh,” and their manner “pushing.”³² According to one writer, “the remark has been made that the class of flower-girls in our streets never seems to improve...it remains at one dead level.”³³ This, despite the fact that the flower girls were not a uniform class of workers, and the business of flower-selling was neither fixed nor static over the course of the nineteenth century.

In fact, flower selling changed a great deal over the course of the century. Numerous journalistic features noted that the “extensive traffic” in cut flowers and the flower-girls “both matrons and maids” who sold them on nearly every street “in all parts of London” was “the growth of the last generation.”³⁴ Flower girls and women proliferated in this period as a result of remarkable developments in the nineteenth century which led to this new category of laborer. In 1851, when Mayhew had gathered his data about flower selling in London, he was astonished by the numbers of the newly abundant “bunches” of cut flowers traded in the metropolitan streets each year [upwards of 994,560 units].³⁵ That was just the beginning. The market for cut flowers would not even reach its height until four decades after Mayhew first investigated. Later figures and studies would confirm that the daily business in the floral trade was extensive and profitable.³⁶ In 1897, G. Holden Pike wrote, “at the present time, cut flowers alone, in London, represent quite an important industry, the expenditure in them reaching a sum of some thousands sterling daily,” admittedly vague, but this statement gives some idea of

³² “Our Flower Girls,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1886; Editor, “Flower Girls of the Street,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 June 1885, 6.

³³ Emma Brewer, “The Flower-Girls of London,” *The Girls’ Own Paper*, 1892, 79. Online at www.victorianvoices.net

³⁴ George Cecil, “The Op’ra Button-‘Ole,” *The English Illustrated Magazine*, April 1890, 98-99; 98.; G. Holden Pike, “Flowers in London—Natural and Artificial,” *Good Words*, January 1897, 607.

³⁵ Henry Mayhew, “Cut Flowers,” in *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1851, Vol. 1.

³⁶ G. Holden Pike, “Flowers in London—Natural and Artificial,” *Good Words*, January 1897, 608.

the significance of the business to the overall economy.³⁷ A series of technological changes laid the ground for the increase in both the supply and the demand for cut flowers—first locally-grown, and then some years later, shipped from further abroad. The greatly improved delivery of flowers from the rural commercial growers to the distributors in the city’s greenmarkets was among the first of these changes. The tremendous expansion of the national railroads now made possible the large-scale transportation of cut flowers from newly industrialized farms.³⁸ Rapid rail delivery meant that larger shipments of the perishable and fragile product could be quickly sent from giant outlying farms with little loss of quality or profit. The widespread design and use of glass greenhouses, which further increased productivity by artificially lengthening the growing season, was bolstered by the enormous success in 1851 of Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace—the most spectacular greenhouse of all—as the site of the Great Exhibition. Shortly after the opening of the Great Exhibition, one author, writing for *The Garden* in 1853, extolled the “triumphs of the Crystal Palace” and exclaimed that it had “lighted the way to improvement” and that “we may anticipate the multiplication of conservatories and greenhouses, and an increased culture of tender exotics.”³⁹ This was indeed prescient. Prior to these changes in the business of horticulture, the retail sale of display-ready flowers to the ordinary citizen was a rarity, as “there was not supposed to be a single seller of cut flowers with the Lord Mayor’s jurisdiction.”⁴⁰ The profit-generating possibilities these new developments opened up at the time were astounding. These

³⁷ Pike, “Flowers in London,” *Good Words*, 608.

³⁸ Edward A. Arnold, “The London Flower Trade,” *The Nineteenth Century and After: A Monthly Review* (August 1885), 328-346.

³⁹ “‘Review of Charles McIntosh, *The Book of the Garden*,’ in *The Garden*,” Reprinted in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 73 February 1853, 135.

⁴⁰ Pike, “Flowers in London,” *Good Words*, 607.

factors—improved growing techniques and longer seasons, rapid delivery, and the resulting investment in new farms by old growers looking to expand, and young men looking for an open field of opportunity—combined to produce a floral boom that resulted in vast amounts of fresh flowers delivered to the greenmarkets, such as the internationally known Covent Garden, in rapid time and dramatically lowered prices.⁴¹ Their appeal reached across class, age and gender Britons were known to be avid flower-lovers and the mid-century surge in urban residents also meant fewer open spaces for private gardens and a deeper desire to bring flowers into the home.⁴² The flowers were abundant and inexpensive enough to be affordable to all but the poorest consumers, and a range of products could be found that appealed to virtually every budget and taste.⁴³ It was generally true that it had only been twenty-five years ago or so, “when the sale” of cut flowers on the streets “was a rare occurrence, and never at a price that brought them within reach of our poor.”⁴⁴ Many Victorians became enthusiastic purchasers of the bouquets, poseys, bunches, and “button-holes,” from the flower-girls now frequenting the streets of many of the larger towns and cities. Some observers even found plenty to praise in the flower-girls themselves, noting that “she never tires,” and “goes forth to her daily labor with an alacrity so cheerful,” or that they were out in all sorts of weather. Some admired the skills and talents they brought to the job, and how they actually performed a valuable service, “scattering and circulating beneficial influences,” and remarking how they “have done more than any other class to enliven the London thoroughfares with

⁴¹ Arnold, “The London Flower Trade,” *Nineteenth Century*, 328-346.

⁴² Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate Monthly*, July 1891, 177.

⁴³ Brewer, “The Flower-Girls of London,” *Girls’ Own*, 78.

⁴⁴ Brewer, “The Flower-Girls of London,” *Girls’ Own*, 78.

flowers.”⁴⁵ Also worthy of praise was the hard work they put in: the early hours and long days. “One of the most interesting sights in London is reserved for the delectation of the few who are sufficiently energetic to sally forth at the early hour of five a.m. on a spring morning and wend their way to the wholesale flower market at Covent Garden [...]” where of course, one would find the flower-girls among the throngs of buyers and sellers shouting, pushing, and haggling.” Some even edged towards flattery, “her personal appearance is not unattractive, considering her station and breeding. Her attire, coarse in quality and scanty in material, however, has some neatness about its putting on and wearing.”⁴⁶

Over the 1860s and 1870s the sale of cut flowers continued to increase, but winter months were lean when all that was available to sell was perhaps some dried lavender or greenery. Some flower-girls sold other small seasonal items, such as oranges or nuts, or tried to find unskilled factory work for a few weeks. Getting through winter could be a matter of life and death. Even as late as 1895, when the Great Frost struck, if she were not well cushioned, “that phenomenal visitation killed many flower-sellers outright.”⁴⁷ What really brought change to the market was the introduction of new imports of flowers in the mid-1880s from the Scilly Isles, a far-flung British archipelago off the west coast of Cornwall. Due to geographic good fortune, while still part of the British Isles, the sparsely populated rural outcropping experienced very mild winters. Under one man’s inspired vision, the Scillonian vegetable farmers had been persuaded to intergrow flowers with their other crops. This proved to be a significant boost to the trade as it made new varieties of flowers available for the first time, and competed favorably with foreign

⁴⁵ Pike, “Flowers in London,” *Good Words*, 608.

⁴⁶ Arnold, “The London Flower Trade,” *Nineteenth Century*, 328-346.

⁴⁷ Pike, “Flowers in London,” *Good Words*, 608.

flowers from France and Spain.⁴⁸ The trade grew to two hundred tons of cut flowers each season shipped from the Scilly Isles alone.⁴⁹ Not only did this broaden the range of flowers available for sale, and increase the overall volume in trade, which in turn lowered prices and drove up demand, it also had the benefit of making flowers truly available all year round.⁵⁰ These factors also led to an increase in the number of flower-girls in the mid-1880s, according to people close to the trade, such as John Groom, as well as interested observers, although there are not hard numbers to prove it. As for the flowers, after their sea voyage, they traveled by train to Paddington Station, where they were then packed in carts, reaching Covent Garden in time for the morning market.”⁵¹ Channel Islands growers also began to supply new varieties, and they too were “packed with remarkable care”⁵² to ensure that the delicate fresh product would arrive at the market in good condition.⁵³ There they were greeted by the large volume buyers and then, well before dawn, auctioned off to the various sellers along a distribution chain, at the end of which waited the flower-girls. After the “higglers” and middlemen of the market stalls and the shopkeepers had their pick, the flower-girls would then negotiate for the leftovers, and “what may be left of the wholesale salesman’s stocks can be cleared by the ever-growing sisterhood of street flower-girls.”⁵⁴ Some flower-girls had considerably more financial muscle, and did not need to wait for bargain prices. A few could compete handily with the best of the West End flower shops and outpace even commercial buyers

⁴⁸ William E Bear, “Flower Growing in the Scilly Isles” *The Garden*, 2 December 1899, 441-445. This is an excerpt of a longer paper that was printed in a giving a full history of the Scilly Isles and their horticultural development. Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate*, 178.

⁴⁹ Brewer, “The Flower Girls of London,” *Girls’ Own*, 78.

⁵⁰ Percy Collins, “Flower Farming in Scilly,” *Good Words*, 45 (December 1904), 37-42.

⁵¹ Bear, “Flower Growing in the Scilly Isles,” *The Garden*, 441-445.

⁵² Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate*, 178.

⁵³ Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate*, 178.

⁵⁴ Pike, “Flowers in London,” *Good Words*, 608.

from flower shops that had come from as far away as Manchester to purchase stock--at least for the small quantities that flower girls traded in for their elite customers, as an article in the *Daily Telegraph* explained. The story detailed the complex delivery and sales process that occurred three times a week as the high-quality flowers arrived from the Scilly and Channel Islands to the Duke of Bedford's new flower market.⁵⁵

Business as Usual

Contemporary business analysts looked mostly at the large-scale trade and the men who were involved in it--from the farmer to the greenmarket dealer to the larger flower-shop owner. Yet it was through the entrepreneurial efforts of the street-selling flower-women that virtually all areas of London had become sites of the commercial flower trade, from the toniest Royal Boroughs, to the centers of commerce and entertainment in the West End and the City, to the East End with its poor and working-class tenement-dwellers and the Sunday visitors to the charity hospitals located there.⁵⁶ Few contemporaries were aware of the crucial role the flower girls played in the wide distribution. This increasingly broad geographic dispersal of the flower-girls, branching out their trade far from Covent Garden and other central markets, was a further factor in advancing the idea that the city was a-bloom with flowers and flower-sellers.⁵⁷ Indeed, the flower-girls had capitalized on the popularity and availability of flowers to create

⁵⁵ "Flowers for Christmas," *The Daily Telegraph*, reprinted in *The Daily Express*, 25 and 26 December, 1885, 3. Some flower-girls had regular male customers who purchased daily buttonholes before going to their offices at the 'Change (Stock Exchange) or other places of business. Scopes, "Our City Flower Girls," 178.

⁵⁶ Editor, "The Real Flower Girl," *London Journal*, 13 October, 1894, 285.

⁵⁷ George Cecil, "The Op'ra Button-'ole," *The English Illustrated Magazine*, April 1908, 98-99.

customers' needs, and they had built a system, of their own agency, for bringing their product to the buyer.⁵⁸

The variety of products they sold had a specific social geography within highly delineated "territories" with known rules and operators and types of purchasers—buttonholes and nosegays or poseys in the business and theater districts, loose cut flowers or bouquets in the residential areas.⁵⁹ One needed to know the likes and dislikes of the different classes of customers, and the depth of their pocketbooks.⁶⁰ Careful observers made note of the many skills the flower-women executed in procuring, preparing, and selling their wares. They exhibited skill in their knowledge of the flowers, how to display and store them, and how best to sell them. They negotiated the marketplace in the still-dark hours of the morning and bargained with the wholesale dealers for the most stock at the lowest prices, taking advantage of the less-than-top-quality produce left after the larger purchasers—the costers and flower-shop-owners—had had their pick.⁶¹ From their motley supply they then fashioned—in very short time—the floral arrangements their customers desired. Significant skill was needed to prepare a basket for the day's sales. Making up individual nosegays and posies in rough conditions took a substantial amount of time before the retail day began. Some flower-sellers "will pay a few coppers to have their baskets 'got ready' by a comrade" with more talent for display to enhance their sales in a competitive field, "some of the girls display more taste than others, and this makes, it seems all the difference in the world to the receipts."⁶² They might pay for them to do this, or trade services, such as doing the buying at the market for both women. This was

⁵⁸ Brewer, "The Flower Girls of London," *Girls' Own*, 78.

⁵⁹ Cecil, "The Op'ra Button-'ole," *The English Illustrated Magazine*, 98-99.

⁶⁰ Scopes, "Our City Flower Girls," *The Ludgate*, July 1891, 178.

⁶¹ Brewer, "The Flower Girls of London," *Girls' Own*, 78.

⁶² Editor, "What a Flower Girl Earns," *London Journal*, 28 July 1900, 70.

just one of the ways the women displayed their abilities as entrepreneurs by trading or exploiting their particular skills. It is also evidence that they employed mutual aid and relied on local networks of knowledge.

It is not clear if the flower girls themselves viewed their colleagues in quite the same terms as Groom did with his ordering of *bonafides*, that is, the year-round, more or less “professional” flower-girls and interlopers, the part-timers or “fly-by-nights,” however, there is evidence that points to an arrangement of territories and awareness of competitors’ prices, as well as fierce defense of these.⁶³ There was a “floristocracy” of sorts among the street sellers prime spots and favored locales where they were not harassed by the police and their presence was expected, if not welcomed.⁶⁴ Tourist and theater areas had especially high foot traffic and both men and women purchased there and the trade was steady.⁶⁵ The mission locations in the busy areas were probably useful in this regard as they provided resting spots where women could set down their baskets for a while to rest, or take care of other needs.⁶⁶

While their labor can be seen to fit into the wider group of male costers who threatened and challenged the British shopkeepers’ exclusive claim to custom, neither they, nor their male colleagues, viewed the flower and watercress girls as part of the collective. Some insisted that flower-girls were not really doing “work” and that they were not capitalists in the same way as the larger costers or shopkeepers, and “the trade is

⁶³ John A. Groom, *City Flowers, Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, 1892-1892.

⁶⁴ Brewer, “The Flower-Girls of London,” *Girls’ Own*, 79.

⁶⁵ Cecil, “The Op’ra Button-‘ole,” *The English Illustrated Magazine*, 98-99.

⁶⁶ Lee Jackson, *Dirty Old London: The Victorian Fight Against Filth* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), on the difficulty of working-class people and costers to find a place to urinate “on the job,” 157. The highlight of George Bernard Shaw’s stint as a St. Pancras vestryman came as an advocate for a public toilet; fears that flower-girls would wash their violets in the sinks blocked the move, 179. See also, Barbara Penner, “A World of Unmentionable Suffering: Women’s Public Conveniences in Victorian London,” *Journal of Design History* (2001), 35-51.

too hard a one to admit of many capitalists being included in their numbers.”⁶⁷ They argued that their investment was too low; that the stakes were not high enough; that their identity as capitalists was not bound to the enterprise; that they did not have others dependent on them or their success.⁶⁸

Groom fought to have the work of the flower-girls taken seriously as labor. One of his important contributions was to see this as work with regular routines, systems of support, and knowledge. While it now seems evident that what the women were doing was indeed work as we would define it, the idea that it was an entrepreneurial enterprise may be more problematic. If one model of entrepreneurship is used and it depends on larger investment, particular industries and ways of knowing or experiencing the world, then clearly, many of women’s experiences of entrepreneurship will be excluded. Stana Nenadic has written, “the preoccupations of modern historians have also obscured our understanding of the scale and role of women in business.” The consequence of this has been to “marginalize” and “dismiss” women who were active agents in their own businesses, with the “classic businesswoman being characterized as the impoverished widow reduced to a life of penny capitalism.”⁶⁹ An analysis that is sensitive to gender and class would pay closer attention to the strategies employed by the working-class women who used what was available to them to attain independence and control over their own work lives and income, even, and especially, when other options simply did not exist.

⁶⁷ Editor, “Our Flower Girls,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1886.

⁶⁸ Anon., “Flower Girls,” *Toilers*, “Of course selling flowers is unskilled labor,” totally discounting all the skill that goes into selling flowers, and then proceeds to list all the skill they must have. It is hard to tell if it is facetious, 13-14. Mayhew said they were mostly children, but he was writing well before the period when it became a big business, “The Flower-girl” in *London Labour and London Poor*, 1851.

⁶⁹ Stana Nenadic, “The Social Shaping of Business Behaviour in the Nineteenth-Century Women’s Garment Trades,” *Journal of Social History* 31 (Spring 1998) 625-645; 626.

Very few historians have even considered the role of the street-seller as an entrepreneur or a capitalist. They have been excluded from virtually all business history in favor of larger concerns. Although a recent article in *The Journal of Social History*, “A Dangerous Class: The Street Sellers of Nineteenth-Century London,” characterizes the costermongers of the late nineteenth century and their nascent political activism as “a dynamic, thoughtful, subversive presence,” and is a promising sign, the article does not use gender as a category of analysis.⁷⁰ In fact, the historiographical situation has changed little since John Benson wrote in 1983, “For economic, business and labour historians alike, penny capitalism has remained on the margins: at best unimportant, at worst unknown.”⁷¹ In his work, he put forth a set of criteria for defining and analyzing penny capitalist enterprises. In using this set of criteria it is possible to apply capitalist principles and strategies to small owner-operators and see them in a new light--as contributors to the formal system of exchange.

According to this model, in order to meet the criteria and qualify as a working-class capitalist, the business owner should, of course, be of working-class origins. She should be ready to assume all the risks involved in exchange for the possibility of making a profit. The entire process is under her control—she selects the product, the workspace, the clients, the advertising, and the hours she will work. Ordinarily she starts the business with her own money, or capital, although she might borrow it from a micro-lender or from a local “big woman.” She makes all the arrangements for stock and supplies herself, and she does this without constraint, with and through others in the open marketplace.

⁷⁰ Stephen Jankiewicz, “A Dangerous Class: The Street Sellers of Nineteenth-Century London,” *Journal of Social History* 46 (Winter 2012), 391-415. As micro-retailers in the global South and the “gig economy” of the US, UK, and EU expand or melt down in coming decades of the twenty-first century such historical perspective may prove instructive.

⁷¹ Benson, *Penny Capitalists*, 3.

Anyone is free to enter the specific trade, only custom or tradition would grant some “hereditary” access to more desirable locations in which to locate the business, but these are not legally binding, and theoretically, she can set up anywhere that is legally allowed. Benson concludes by stating that there is “one essential characteristic of any capitalist endeavor” and that is, the capitalist should “maintain control” over the way her “capital and labour” is used.⁷² It is easy to see how flower-girls meet each of these criteria for capitalist enterprises despite contemporary opinion to the contrary.

In Benson’s model, however, the penny or working-class capitalist is envisaged solely as a male actor. Regarding the continuing exclusion of gender as a category of analysis from business history, Katrina Honeyman has written, “the contribution of gender analysis [...] has regrettably played no part in British business history.”⁷³ On the contrary--Benson indeed makes a gendered analysis; he makes a marked distinction between what he calls “full-” and “(nearly full)-” time penny-capitalism, saying that the two were “very different.” He argues that the full-time penny-capitalism is the economic pursuit of men alone, specifically naming it “the domain, not of women, children, and the unskilled.” Rather he assigns it to the skilled, male, artisan who wanted to escape the “increasingly severe restraints of factory and other work discipline.”⁷⁴ The goal was not to escape total destitution, however, but merely to become financially independent from wage labor through one’s own efforts. On the other hand, “Female penny capitalism” he restricts to taking in “washing, sewing, and lodgers,” reproducing in his analysis the very same “separate spheres” ideology that limited nineteenth century conceptions of “women’s work” to that which was performed within the parameters of domestic

⁷² Benson, *Penny Capitalists*, 5.

⁷³ Honeyman, “Doing Business,” *Business History Review*, 478.

⁷⁴ Benson, “Working-Class Capitalism,” 149.

concerns, inside the home, and bound more or less to the caretaking of other people's bodies.⁷⁵ This also was how John Groom's contemporaries viewed the work and the prospects of the street-selling flower-girls. Unfortunately, a full century later, Benson too, was seemingly blind to the way in which he labeled similar work, when done by men, "capitalism," and when done by women, "*not* capitalism."

What was at stake in not conceiving of flower-girls as penny-capitalists, or indeed, as entrepreneurs? Failure to include women among the self-made economic actors or entrepreneurs, or even consider them to be sole proprietors of a small business is a part of the larger erasure of their role in the extensive and profitable horticultural business. Why would that be desirable? One reason might be, that by removing the "stain of capital" from the transaction between the final sale and the consumer, a pastoral fantasy could be maintained, that is, that the flowers were the product of a pastoral England, not an industrial farm many dozens, even hundreds, of miles away. It is much more difficult to assess what it cost the flower-girls in terms of organizational power and access to legal rights, respect, independence, and self-determination, the same things, one would assume, that men are granted when the label capitalist or entrepreneur is attached to their economic self-fulfillment.⁷⁶

Groom, and thus the mission, never resolved the tensions in the struggle between the entrepreneurial impulse embedded in the flower-girls' endeavors and its own emphasis on domestic service, which much of the rhetoric of the mission promoted. This was reflected in some of the ambivalent and paradoxical printed material that it produced,

⁷⁵ Benson, "Working-Class Capitalism," 150.

⁷⁶ Shirin Motola, "Organising Capabilities of Street Traders Particularly Women" *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 78 (2008), 208-219. The contemporary case in South Africa, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

and in the way its own efforts seemed at times to be divided. A great deal of the early mission's energy was split between steering women away from street selling and into domestic service, yet this effort seems to go directly against the essential beliefs of Groom himself. As an entrepreneur, an artisan, and a missionary with a particular capitalist ethos, it seem it would have been more in keeping with those values to help the flower-girls achieve independence through their own economic efforts. One of the mission's proudest and most successful programs, the Emily Loan Fund, would do just that.

II. Friends in High Places

Although he was its greatest promoter, its staunchest advocate, its most tireless campaigner, and visible frontman, Groom was not alone in this entire undertaking. By 1881 he was joined by a cohort of “over fifty voluntary helpers” and “two paid agents.” It may have begun earlier, and carried on longer, but that is the only year for which there is an actual accounting that I have found.⁷⁷ In addition to Groom's immediate family members and his uncle and aunt, I've gleaned that there were lady visitors, “Sisters” and nurses whether paid or voluntary is not clear, named missionary, Mr. Lynes, and a Mrs. Taylor, who had a prominent organizational role, but it is not clear when these were added. A quite sizeable staff must have also been employed as there were ten orphan homes and a Babies Villa in Clacton-on-Sea, each headed by a matron, and presumably there were caretaking responsibilities on the properties as well as all the other administrative and operational expenses of an organization of this size and complexity.

⁷⁷ Editor, “Flower Girls' Mission,” *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, October 1881, 126.

The industrial training program would have required a specialized staff. In addition, there were a number of ancillary programs including a Band of Hope, a Dorcas Sewing Society, a Mothers' Club, a group that visited the sick and the crippled homebound, and more. Free breakfasts for as many as five thousand flower-girls were served three times a week and half-penny dinners for all comers were a regular event also. There was also a board of directors and committee whose names are listed on the promotional pamphlets the mission published. The mission gathered attention from the start from a variety of clergy members (including some from the established Anglican Church) and other concerned citizens. Among them two highly influential and important friends helped to create the mission and forge its public image.

Groom had attracted the attention of the indefatigable Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, possibly before he started the mission in 1866, although Shaftesbury did not take up an official position until 1872. He would serve as its Honorary President until his death in 1885, and for years afterward, the Mission continued to use his name in its promotional materials, a reflection of both his enormous popular influence and his commitment to the aims of the organization.⁷⁸ The second influential person who may actually have had more of an impact on the early daily operations of the mission was the philanthropist, the Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts. Very few contemporaries—and indeed, very few successors, carried the same influence and stature as Shaftesbury and (to a lesser extent) Burdett-Coutts. Through their public positions and financial support they brought a legitimacy and attention to many organizations which their founders would have been unlikely to secure on their own. As

⁷⁸ Until his death in 1885. Costers, flower-girls and chimneysweeps turned out for the funeral.

a result, their contribution to the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission was inestimable.⁷⁹ Groom also forged connections to other well-established and wealthy members of British society and they were key factors in the Mission's success. The patronage in of Alexandra, Princess of Wales, put the royal seal of approval on the Mission.⁸⁰ Lesser royals and persons of noted had given patronage earlier on, but Alexandra would prove a most useful friend of the organization in the years ahead.

Shaftesbury and Burdett-Coutts, were not simply "checkbook philanthropists." In other words, they did not simply donate a sum of money to a favored charity in return for the good publicity and image-crafting it would engender, and then leave the administrative and disbursement details to the charity itself.⁸¹ Instead, along with their money and image and influence, they contributed time and ideas, and they were active in shaping the direction of the charities they supported. They imprinted their causes with their particular views of the world and their own spiritual and ethical values, which had a significant impact on the types of projects that were carried out on the ground. In the case

⁷⁹ There is an extensive historiography on Shaftesbury, although the biography I liked best was written by his friend, with his permission, and made extensive use of his diaries, Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury* (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1888), Burdett-Coutts is less fashionable these days, and I relied on older works for her also. The best is Edna Healey, *Lady Unknown: The Life of Angela Burdett Coutts*, (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978). On nineteenth-century philanthropy in general, Frank Prochaska is the undisputed expert. To guide me early on, I relied on Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) F. Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988); F.K., Prochaska *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Brian Harrison, "Philanthropy and the Victorians" *Victorian Studies* (June 1966), 353-374; David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964). For evangelicalism and philanthropy: Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); D.W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993); Brian Dickey, "'Going About and Doing Good': Evangelicals and Poverty c. 1815-1870" in *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980*, John Wolffe, ed., (London: SPCK, 1995), 38-58; Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era*. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962).

⁸⁰ Charlotte Knollys, Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Alexandra, Letter to Mr. Groom. 1896. 4305 LMA from Sandringham Castle.

⁸¹ Harrison, "Philanthropy and the Victorians,"; Owen, *English Philanthropy*; Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain*.

of the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission each was attached to a major project. One was a great success, the other an apparent failure.

Shaftesbury and Emily Loan Fund

Shaftesbury was a legendary reformer, who, despite, or because, of a pathologically austere childhood, made survivable only through the kindness of his aristocratic family's Christian housekeeper Maria Millis, shared most of his privilege and energy battling a long list of horrors and shortcomings of the Victorian period. Some of the causes he devoted himself to include the passage of the Ten Hours Act which limited the hours that children and women could work in coal mines and textile mills, the reform of the Lunacy Laws which dealt with the care and treatment of the mentally ill, and the Chimney Sweepers Act which protected boys from being hired for this alarmingly dangerous work. He was one of the main proponents of the Ragged School movement and was additionally active in many evangelical charities. He was known as a "hero of the working-class people" and was responsible for many of the works that helped to change the material conditions of the poor and oppressed over his long lifetime.⁸²

Shaftesbury was already a well-known figure among the costermongers, a mostly male group of street sellers who did business on a larger scale than the flower-girls.⁸³ He would in due time endear himself to the large community of London flower-girls as well.

Though not involved in the day-to-day operation of the Mission, Shaftesbury and Groom had a personal relationship, although whether it can be described as friendship as

⁸² Hodder, *Shaftesbury*; Owen, *English Philanthropy*; D.W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*.

⁸³ Stephen Jankiewicz, "A Dangerous Class," *Journal of Social History*, 391-415; Hodder, *Shaftesbury*, writes, "among the working classes there were none in whom the Lord Shaftesbury was more deeply interested than the costermongers of London," 645.

we would today is impossible to know. Groom had tea at Shaftesbury's home at least once, and was seen in his office, and Shaftesbury attended several WFGM events where he was an honored guest.⁸⁴ In 1872 at the age of seventy-one, and following the death of his beloved wife, Emily in October of that year, the Earl wanted a very personal way to honor her memory. In correspondence with Groom, dated July of that year, Shaftesbury invited Groom to tea, to discuss what he called his "wild scheme," and expressed his deep fondness for the flower-girls and his desire to raise them out of poverty.⁸⁵ He proposed that a lending system be established in aid of, as he called them, "these good and honest girls."⁸⁶ To that end, Shaftesbury donated a start-up fund of one hundred and fifty pounds and left it in Groom's hands to determine the size of the loan and the qualifications of the applicant.⁸⁷ The fund made cash loans, perhaps a pound or so, but sometimes much more, to flower-girls so that they could survive as independent women. Sometimes this meant lending a small amount to a flower-girl just starting out to buy the necessary items to get herself established, but other times it meant larger sums that women were then able to invest in equipment or supplies. Some of the women were able to use the loans to move out of street-selling through the purchase of flower stalls or shops. Others used the money to start coffee stands, or set up stalls to sell food stuffs

⁸⁴ Hodder, *Shaftesbury*, the flower-girls gave him a clock at one of his last public appearances, 723. Newspaper accounts of the first meeting Shaftesbury attended in 1872: "Watercress Sellers Rejoicing," *Islington Gazette*, 30 July 1872; and "Entertainment to Watercress Sellers," *The Daily News*, 24 July 1872.

⁸⁵ Shaftesbury to Groom, unpublished correspondence in LMA4305 1872 Personal correspondence from Earl of Shaftesbury to John Groom, June 26, 1872. LMA/4305/3/4.

⁸⁶ Shaftesbury to Groom, unpublished correspondence in LMA4305 1872 Personal correspondence from Earl of Shaftesbury to John Groom, June 26, 1872. LMA/4305/3/4.

⁸⁷ Hodder, *Shaftesbury*, 671. Shaftesbury describes the informal loan interview process that he and Groom subject one of the women to in his office. They gave her the loan.

such as baked potatoes or whelks.⁸⁸ Food trades were considered “to give them the best chance of success during the winter months.”⁸⁹

A simple contract was drawn up and signed by both parties, with Groom serving as the lender, the woman also needed to have a witness willing to back her.⁹⁰ The terms of the micro-loans meant that they were to be repaid without interest, and at the end of the loan period, the women owned the items they had purchased.⁹¹ According to the mission’s publication, in the first year, one hundred and seventy women received loans, and at the time the report was written, over one thousand three hundred had been made.⁹² The items purchased included “Stalls of various kinds, Ovens for Baked Potatoes” as well as stock, barrows, and baskets.⁹³ The amount lent total over two thousand pounds and the program incurred additional administrative costs.⁹⁴ Shaftesbury and Groom were also proud to say that no one had defaulted; the very few loans that were not fully repaid had occurred in cases of the death of the borrower.

In the “Brief Report of the Object and Working of the Emily Loan Fund,” the Mission provided some individual examples of how women used the funds they had borrowed to support themselves “through honest labour.”⁹⁵ Again, in a technique they employed elsewhere, the success stories drew from the range of typical flower-girl scenarios contemporaries likely would have been familiar with, including widows, deserted wives, and starving children. In one, A.B, an abandoned young of a newborn

⁸⁸ *Emily Loan Fund* pamphlet, 4.

⁸⁹ Editor, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, October 1881, 126.

⁹⁰ *Emily Loan Fund* pamphlet, 5.

⁹¹ *Emily Loan Fund* pamphlet, 4.

⁹² No date is given, it is after the second year of the program’s inception, but beyond that it is impossible to say, but possibly before 1879 because there is no mention of the Industrial Training Home, but that is just a guess.

⁹³ *Emily Loan Fund* pamphlet, 6.

⁹⁴ *Emily Loan Fund* pamphlet, 6.

⁹⁵ *Emily Loan Fund* pamphlet, 6-7.

child, who also supports her own mother, but without sufficient stock to make it through the winter borrowed enough so that she was “enabled comfortably to provide” for them. Another client, C.D., “a poor flower-girl” gradually increased the amount she borrowed and repaid. She started with one pound for stock; eventually she borrowed enough to supply a shop, “which she has taken, and in which she is now doing well.” This last, having one’s own shop, was certainly among the more common of the higher aspirations of people who made their living through street selling. As Benson has written, “There can be little doubt that opening a small shop...remained the dream of any number of working people.”⁹⁶ How many women were able to actually achieve this, is of course, unknown, but it seems that it was not so far out of the realm of the possible for some women who began as penny capitalists and were aided through programs such as Emily Loan Fund to go on to more substantial endeavors. It should be remembered too that when George Bernard Shaw created his aspirational flower-girl, the ambition he assigned to Eliza which delivered her to the machinations of Henry Higgins was the desire to own her own flower shop.

Shaftesbury and Groom regarded the loan program as a success. Both men spoke or wrote favorably about how effective it had been as a method of empowering women to independence without reliance on charity, and how it underscored the degree to which people living in poverty were worthy of trust. It was this idea that lay at much of the disagreement between the COS and charities such as the WFGM. In a meeting of the St. Olave’s and St. Savior’s Committees of the Charity Organisation Society over which Shaftesbury presided in 1880, he spoke on the problem that while over five million pounds had been donated to charities over the previous decade, he feared that very little

⁹⁶ Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, 118.

had actually been put to direct use, or as he phrased it, “the right channels.” He suggested as an alternative to many individual charities that the COS fulfill its original intended purpose, and organize as a singular body with the mission to directly lend money to individuals—with the principle of “loan-relief with punctual repayment, free of interest.” He gave as the model “the great success” which had attended such a program of the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission, and claimed that they had advanced over three thousand eight hundred pounds with a loss of only twenty. He believed that if only the vast sum of money now being donated could be put to similar use, “in a few years London would bear a very different aspect.”⁹⁷

Shaftesbury named The Emily Loan Fund his most successful work. In a lifetime of remarkable benevolent accomplishments that was truly saying something. Since Shaftesbury was involved in so many causes and organizations over his long life, the biographer made the editorial decision to include only those projects that “broke up fresh ground.”⁹⁸ The success of this plan is indicative of the seriousness with which flower-sellers pursued their entrepreneurial goals.

Mrs. Moore’s Barrow

The idea that the women used money they borrowed from the mission to pursue their own goals is reinforced by the following example. It also shows that Groom argued on behalf of the women and their desire to use the money as they wanted, and just as importantly, not in the way that was prescribed by some. In the files is what appears to be a draft of a letter Groom started to write to a board member who evidently was in

⁹⁷ Editors, “Charity Organisation in St. Olave’s and St. Savior’s,” *The Charity Organisation Reporter*, 24 June 1880, 152-153.

⁹⁸ Hodder, *Shaftesbury*, 670-671.

charge of the disbursement of monies.⁹⁹ The letter looks to be in Groom's hand. It contains several strike-throughs and is messy, the writing is slanting off the page. It ends abruptly in the middle of the fourth page which is why I believe it to be a letter that he may have been writing, and, realizing it was not neat enough to send, decided to start over, and somehow this early edition ended up in the files. It is not signed, but it is on official letterhead with a raised blue flower-girl illustration and it is dated the fourth of February 1886.

The tale that unfolds in the letter involves a woman named Mrs. Moore, a flower-girl, who had applied for a loan in the amount of five pounds to purchase the type of large basket used for street selling, along with some stock, so that she could return to selling after an absence. Apparently, instead of granting this loan for the desired business equipment, the board had recommended to Groom that he offer Mrs. Moore a larger loan, in the amount of ten pounds, for the purchase of a laundry mangle. A mangle was a wringing machine used in doing the laundry, and it is not clear whether the mangle intended for Mrs. Moore was the type for removing water from wet laundry, or for pressing the wrinkles from dry linens such as bedsheets and tablecloths. Victorians had different wringing machines for different processes, and all were called mangles.

Many poor and widowed women took in laundry as a way to survive during this era, and the bestowal of a mangle, either from neighbors, or as a form of aid from a charitable body, might be the only way for a respectable woman to earn a few pennies. A

⁹⁹ As I understand it, Shaftesbury left Groom in charge of the allocation of the monies for the Emily Loan Fund, so this may, in fact, be another lending account, but it is not possible at this stage in my research to tell. It is included because if the loan was named something else at the time is irrelevant to the argument I am making which is that the women asserted their desires and Groom backed them up when it came to using the loan for the entrepreneurial endeavors they chose over the home based domestic labor that others recommended.

woman with a mangle could also rent it out for a few more pennies when possible. Taking in laundry, however, was a thoroughly miserable affair. It was physically exhausting, dangerous, smelly, hot in summer, cold in winter, damp and wet year round, and, as usual, the worse the job, the worse it paid. It bound the woman to the home which was one reason it was sometimes done by women with small children. There was no mistaking that it was drudgery of the worst kind. Anyone who could possibly afford a laundry woman hired one; sometimes it fell to the unfortunate maid-of-all-work, and before the advent of steam laundries, if the other options were too expensive, sending the laundry out to a washer woman or mangle woman might be within reach.¹⁰⁰ If the mangle intended for Mrs. Moore was a flattening or ironing mangle it would have meant receiving bundles of dry linens and heating the mangle with hot stones from a coal stove until a sufficiently high temperature was reached, and then working the large items through the mangle until they were perfectly creaseless and smooth with the glossy finish that Victorian housewives prized. This too was heavy, hot, dangerous, exhausting work done for mere pennies. It is no wonder that Mrs. Moore resisted.

Groom wrote that he had indeed taken the suggestion to both his “committee” and to Mrs. Moore, and had interviewed Mrs. Moore and visited her in her home. He wrote that it was the opinion of the committee, and Mrs. Moore, that the mangle would not be appropriate for her. He enumerated her objections: It would cost over ten pounds; she had nowhere to put it; she was too old to work it; and there was “no mangling work to be got.” Put simply: “The result is Mrs. Moore does not want a mangle.” The letter continued, “The Committee proposes, and Mrs. Moore desires most of all a new barrow

¹⁰⁰ Arwen P. Mohun, *Steam Laundries: Gender, Technology, and Work in the United States and Great Britain, 1880-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

and board.” The barrow and board cost four pounds and the stock one additional, thus “Making five pounds received on her behalf.” The final sentence on this matter from Groom reads: “She has been used to this work all her life and desires with her own barrow to begin again.”¹⁰¹

As Groom makes clear, Mrs. Moore’s skill and trade, indeed her life-long business had been in flower-selling, and he advocated for Mrs. Moore in favor of the basket rather than the mangle. He could just as easily have told her to take the mangle and be grateful and make the best of it, which of course, demonstrates why the flower-girls needed an advocate such as Groom who took seriously their needs and concerns as a group with a specialized skill and was willing to employ his cultural capital in ensuring that those needs were met. As this episode also beautifully demonstrates, the preference for domesticity vis-à-vis women’s work is always present in society at large. Rather than simply outfitting Mrs. Moore, a life-long flower-girl with the suitable equipment she requested so she could continue in her chosen trade, the lenders tried to manipulate her into work which was completely foreign to her, yet what they considered suitable women’s work instead. They overlooked not only the fact that she had no desire to do this but the practicable matters that she neither had the skill, the training, nor the space to do it, or that apparently, there was little call for it. Laundry work, however, was considered to be more appropriately woman’s work because it was a “natural” outgrowth of women’s labors within the sphere of the home and family and was conducted indoors.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Handwritten letter from John Groom to Committee, LMA *re* Mrs. Moore, 1886, LMA 4305.

¹⁰² As Honeyman argues, the nineteenth century saw a real retrenchment in what was considered appropriate women’s work “Doing Business,” *Business History Review*, 478.

The letter also is a wonderful example of the way women asserted their own preferences in the way that they would use the money. If they were going to buy the equipment on time, and repay the money, and the evidence—at least as it was claimed by Groom and Shaftesbury—is clear that they did so, then they were going to exert agency and choice in the work that they did. The case of Mrs. Moore’s barrow, though just one incident, reinforces how flower sellers resisted being organized into domestic home laborers. Along with the significant amount of money disbursed in the form of loans by the *Emily Loan Fund* it illustrates that, when given the opportunity, flower-girls took seriously their role as independent business operators and honored their commitments. It demonstrates that Groom recognized the flower-girls as self-supporting, industrious, and honest economic actors, and that he was willing to advocate for them as well.

Burdett-Coutts and the Flower Girls’ Brigade

The banking heiress, Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts (1814-1906) was a notable philanthropist of the Victorian age who earned the sobriquet the “queen of the poor” for her extraordinary generosity to a range of causes remarkable in its depth and breadth, from the prevention of cruelty to animals, to cancer hospitals, to open food markets, to affordable housing, and a great many more.¹⁰³ While in her early twenties, Burdett-Coutts had inherited an enormous fortune, which made her the wealthiest woman in Britain. Like Shaftesbury, she was deeply religious, and though she herself was not an evangelical, she also gave to many causes, such as the Ragged Schools, that were associated more closely with the non-conformist sects. Like Shaftesbury, she devoted her

¹⁰³ Edna Healey, *Lady Unknown*.

life to using her good fortune to help others in need or in trouble. According to the sources, Burdett-Coutts was involved in the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission from its earliest days, and had been introduced to the mission's works through her life-long companion, Hannah Meredith (later Mrs. Brown).¹⁰⁴ There is no record as to how Brown first became involved in the WFGM, but apparently she had long been "deeply interested" in the cause.¹⁰⁵ The two met when Burdett-Coutts was twelve years old, when Meredith became her governess. Over the years they developed a very close friendship, and when Burdett-Coutts received her inheritance and moved into a house of her own, she brought Meredith with her. When a few years later Meredith married Dr. Taylor Brown, Burdett-Coutts rented the adjoining house to the newlywed couple, and built a pass-through so that the drawing rooms of the two houses opened onto each other. When Brown died in 1878, Burdett-Coutts was despondent. As a tribute to the woman she spoke of as "my poor darling, the companion and sunshine of my life for fifty-two years!",¹⁰⁶ she, like Shaftesbury wanted a personal way to honor the memory of her lifetime partner.¹⁰⁷ To that end, the Burdett-Coutts took up the cause "of endeavouring to raise the whole tone of this flower-selling class," and to do that "by diminishing, as far as possible, those precarious conditions of their trade which have hitherto baffled their attempts to live in decency by honest industry."¹⁰⁸ The project she decided on required adopting an entirely new approach to delivering aid to the street-selling flower-girls in what historians and social scientists generally describe as a top-down strategy.

¹⁰⁴ Anne Beale, "The Flower-Girls' Brigade," *The Quiver*, January 1882, 722.

¹⁰⁵ Editor, "Flower Girls' Mission," *The Ragged School Union*, 127.

¹⁰⁶ Healey, *Lady Unknown*.

¹⁰⁷ Healey, *Lady Unknown*.

¹⁰⁸ Editor, "Flower Girls' Mission," *The Ragged School Union*, 127.

Over the subsequent years, the name that was chosen for that new project, The Flower Girl Brigade, would be attached to so many different branches of the WFGM it is necessary to ensure that a source is referring to this particular early iteration of the Brigade, which seems to have run from the years 1879-1881 only. This first blooming of Burdett-Coutts's envisaged Flower Girl Brigade—in which select flower-girls were to be “properly organized,” with each member at a “small stand apportioned her” was also a source of much creative “spin” in the way it was presented to the donating public. The Flower Girl Brigade was to become known as the Groom workshop where girls and women learned to make, and some were subsequently employed to make, artificial flowers. The name eventually became interchangeable with the Watercress and Flower Girls' Industrial Training Home and John Groom's Crippleage and any number of variations. The thing was, as successful and famous as the flower-making would become, the Flower Girl Brigade did not start out as an artificial flower-making project at all. The idea, in fact, was to teach the flower-girls how to sell flowers.

The entire plan is well spelled out in a lengthy article entitled, “The Flower-Girl Brigade” that ran in *The Daily News* on April 22, 1879. After offering some general background about flower-girls, the author says that due to the fact that “many of the poorer race of workers” such as costermongers and water-cress sellers have proven to be of “honest intent” it occurred to Burdett-Coutts and a “few other benevolent ladies” that they might try with the flower-girls a program, which had already worked on others of similar character. It was a risk, because until now they had regarded flower-sellers as “the most hopelessly irreclaimable of the quasi-vagrant classes.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Editor, “The Flower-Girl Brigade,” *The Daily News* 22 April 22 1879.

The idea was to enroll some of the most attractive flower-girls in a “brigade,” by which they meant a small cohort of women under the leadership of a supervisor from the mission. The main aim was to teach them “regular work,” and thus bring them “gradually to the condition of responsible beings.” If they managed the “punctual fulfillment of their duties” then, on that condition, they would have “certain rewards before them.” The way to find regular work, the ladies believed, was through adopting the values of work and time discipline, temperance, thrift, neatness, docility, and honesty.¹¹⁰

The first order of business in this edifying plan was to engage “a few of the most teachable” as employees to make flower bouquets to be distributed to those “less apt to learn the combination of colour required.” In this way, no one seller’s wares would be preferred over another since there would be a uniformity of quality and cost as well. It turned out, apparently to the surprise of the organizers that the talent for combining color and form was not equally meted out among all workers or between young and old. Speed in wiring and assembly was acquired with practice, and the basic steps could be taught, but the “eye for colour is as common among the juvenile as the more mature practitioners,”¹¹¹ that is, it did not necessarily get better with practice. This was something that flower-girls themselves already knew, however and they were well aware that an attractive display or a beautiful bouquet would lure customers and help to close sales and they were willing to pay for it. Flower-girls on the street often traded services and goods among themselves. Relying on the superior eye of other flower-girls was a strategy some already employed in a system of mutual aid. A flower-girl who was better at arranging baskets for display might also arrange some others in exchange for favors,

¹¹⁰ Editor, “The Flower-Girl Brigade,” *The Daily News*, 22 April 1879.

¹¹¹ Editor, “The Flower-Girl Brigade,” *The Daily News*, 22 April 1879.

such as having her flowers delivered to her from the market, thus saving herself the early trip.

In order not to waste the expensive real flowers in the practice of wiring and assembling, artificial flowers were used instead. Once the basic skills were mastered, real flowers were used. This is a significant development. Floristry as a business was in its infancy during this period and it is very difficult to find any much about the history of it before the 1920s, so if this was a common tutorial practice I do not know. Yet, the implications for the future of the WFGM are obvious. According to the *Daily News* article, the floral arrangements were so well done that customers began asking Mr. Groom to send bouquets directly to their houses. As all the bouquets were to be made on the premises of the mission, none of the flowers would leave the mission and be exposed to the dangerous conditions of the flower-girls' homes. Customers could be sure that bouquets delivered to patrons had spent no time "among unwholesome surroundings."¹¹² This was one thing the street sellers could not guarantee. It was an attractive selling point. Another article, this one in the newspaper *The Graphic* in May of 1879 ran an item entitled, "The Flower Girl Brigade." It too emphasized the ways in which flower-girls were being brought to heel. The author wrote that Lady Burdett-Coutts was making an attempt to bring the "so-called 'flower-girls' ... under some humanizing influences." A house in Clerkenwell was being used to affect much "practical good" in "three directions." First, a bank stores the flower-sellers' surplus pennies, and if they exhibit decent behavior money is advanced to them to buy stock in weekly instalments. Secondly "the women are being taught to make bouquets" and some are so good in color and form

¹¹² Editor, "The Flower Girl Brigade," *The Daily News*, 22 April 1879.

that their “nosegays are in brisk demand.” And finally, all of the flowers are stored in the house in Clerkenwell close so that no member may bring the flowers home with her in order to “mitigate the prejudice which is not unnaturally felt against some flowers sold by itinerant vendors” because the flowers have been in the “dirty and unwholesome lodgings of the flower-girls.”¹¹³

By contrast, the article that was published in *The Ragged School Union Quarterly*, the newsletter of the London City Mission, painted a very different picture, when explained how the Baroness, endeavoring to raise the tone, “therefore determined to make the trial with the girls, and accordingly, in the spring of 1879, founded a society from the most hopeful amongst them, which she called the Flower Girl Brigade.”¹¹⁴ From “the most hopelessly irreclaimable” to the “most hopeful” is a nice bit of work. *The Ragged School Quarterly* also took a softer approach when it said that the first step was to “secure for the flower-sellers regular custom,”¹¹⁵ but because the girls looked awful, and behaved roughly they would need to be cleaned up. This was a familiar refrain, as flower-girls were constantly lambasted in the press for their terrible clothing choices, which usually involved their enormous black hats, the ubiquitous ostrich feathers, and “dirty woolen shawls.”¹¹⁶ They needed a new dress code if they were to attract customers. So in the Flower Girl Brigade the required outfit consisted of “a neat dress, not strictly a uniform, but of similar materials and makes,” so that all the girls would be recognizably of a group, they would all wear an “ivory badge on a blue ribbon.”¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Editor, “The Flower Girl Brigade,” *The Graphic*, reprinted in *Edinburgh Evening News*, 2 May 1879.

¹¹⁴ Editor, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union*, 127.

¹¹⁵ Editor, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union*, 127.

¹¹⁶ Editor, “Our Flower Girls,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1886.

¹¹⁷ Editor, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union*, 127.

Finally, the girls would go back out onto the street to sell the bouquets that had been prepared for them, but not as individual sellers, rather more as shop-girls at a stand. Each flower-girl in the Brigade received a certain number of the prepared bouquets to sell from the assigned location. The mission could determine the size and price of each item to be sold and apportion each seller with an equal amount. As it was explained in the *Ragged School Union Quarterly*, “they are stationed in places where they can sell their flowers, either bouquets or for the button-hole, secure from insult and molestation,” or, as the *Daily News* put it, away from “the savage insolence and more hideous familiarity of any dullard or sot who has a few pence to expend on the remnant of her wares,” with all monies collected at the end of the day, and unsold flowers returned to the Mission house.¹¹⁸ This too went against the way flower-girls ordinarily conducted business in almost every possible way. Flower-girls knew well that the aesthetic appeal of their wares was critical to their success, and they tried to meet their customers’ preferences, basing their hunches on their knowledge of the geographic variations in the city, as “a well-defined economic law decides whether a girl shall sell bouquets or loose flowers or both.”¹¹⁹ What was popular in Shoreditch on hospital visiting day was not the same as what was going to adorn the gentleman’s coat on his way to the theater in the West End. Just as there was a geographical vocabulary in this way, there was a territorial hierarchy, “a sort of unwritten law, [by] which they each claim a given spot” with some women having “hereditary” rights to prime perches in the city, with “The Shaftesbury Fountain” being a “luxurious position for the flower sellers.”¹²⁰ Bold newcomers could try to push

¹¹⁸ Editor, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union*, 127.

¹¹⁹ P.F. William Ryan, “At Piccadilly Circus: London’s Flower Girls” in George Sims, *Living London*, (London, 1902) 50-51

¹²⁰ P.F. William Ryan, “At Piccadilly Circus,” 51; Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” 178.

their way in, or they could be chased off. Tourist areas were popular, but crowded and highly competitive, with sharp-elbowed flower-girls. Prices rose and fell with the day's weather and the mood of the crowd and the condition of the flowers. Flower-girls also counted on tips and tried to approach customers who seemed more likely to be generous or subject to persuasion. Flower-girls believed they needed to approach customers aggressively, not wait patiently behind a stand.¹²¹

"The Flower-Girls of London," a three part series written by Emma Brewer, a well-known and popular journalist, described the difficulty that Groom had had in trying to enact some of these reforms. She said that the girls were given button-holes of different prices and sizes, but sometimes a gentleman would buy a floral spray priced at one penny but give three pennies, which led to dishonesty and squabbling among the girls. In order not to obstruct traffic and to appease the police, the stands had to be positioned out of the way of traffic, and consequently had few sales. The flower-girls would not wear the special dress provided even though they had to pay a shilling a week for it (!). She wrote, "altogether the attempt was a failure."¹²² It is hard to believe that any of the *bonafide* flower-girls were coaxed or cajoled into trying this experiment, but it is not known who actually did agree to participate, and one can only guess what incentive might have been offered. It is not hard to see why the flower-girls would have rejected the plan. In every way it contradicted what the career of a flower-girl offered, and robbed them of every aspect of the working-class capitalism that allowed them control of their own labor and capital. Furthermore, it imposed a new set of rules and surveillance including limiting access to their own money based on how well their behavior

¹²¹ P.F. William Ryan, "At Piccadilly Circus," 51.

¹²² Brewer, "The Flower-girls of London," *Girls' Own*, 79.

conformed to middle-class expectations. It evaluated how well they were performing their job according to subjective middle-class values of politeness and decorum, and took away all of their decision-making capacity in regard to the thing they knew best—which was how to sell flowers. When John Groom looked back on this effort he considered it to be one of the biggest failures of the WFGM.¹²³ It is also hard to believe that the organizers of this project could have got it so wrong. It even insulted the girls' own clothing.

On the matter of flower-girls' clothing, Emma Brewer wrote that efforts had been made to reform the girls' distinctive dress style for one "more in harmony with the lovely flowers in their baskets" but with little success. She said that Mr. Groom had tried dressing "ten women and fifty girls" in "print dresses, black jackets, and straw hats." This was the outfit the members of the Brigade refused to wear. She agreed that "If only a pretty costume could be secured" the streets would be cheery, but, she reminded her Christian readers, "we must not forget while condemning the dress...that some of the flower-girls are veritable heroines...we should be amazed at their powers of endurance and self-sacrifice."¹²⁴ For his part, Groom eschewed uniforms from that point forward. The Groom Orphanage was famous for being the only one that did not require the school-aged girls who lived there to wear uniforms so they would not suffer any stigma at the neighborhood schools or playgrounds they attended.¹²⁵

Although the attempt at a Brigade failed, Groom did not let failure halt the mission's progress. He took the lessons he learned there about making fresh flower

¹²³ John Groom, *The Romance of John Groom*.

¹²⁴ Brewer, "The Flower girls of London," *Girls' Own*, 79.

¹²⁵ Ruth E. Gillard, *More than One Mountain to Climb: The Story of John Grooms, 1866-1996* (London, John Grooms Association for Disabled People, 1996).

arrangements, principles of color and form, and making artificial flowers, and in time applied them to the next venture. In the meantime, he still had orders to fill from ladies who had been so impressed with the work the Brigade cadre of floral workers had turned out that they had ordered fresh flowers for their parties and weddings and church affairs and a substantial order from a “lady with an extensive artificial flower business at the West End.”¹²⁶ He would need to train some girls to make fresh bouquets and arrangements and train others to make the artificial flowers used for instruction and practice. This configuration of the Flower Girls’ Brigade clearly did not last long, and within a short time, articles appeared describing how a new venture was being attempted to find the Brigade girls work during the winter months. It seems that this happened in 1879 which is also the year the Industrial Training Program opened its doors.

Industrial Training Program

As the number of girls and women involved in flower-selling grew in the late-century, Groom’s efforts towards their welfare intensified. It became clear that not all of the flower-girls were equally talented or equally capable of earning enough to thrive on the streets. Yet, for many of the sellers, their meager earnings often stood between them and the workhouse or starvation. Moreover, there were worse ways to make an equally paltry sum, as Groom well knew. Some would by choice, or by necessity, continue as flower-girls. This group included, primarily the *bonafides* who had been “born to the trade,” and the women and girls who had come to the trade more recently, but because of their particular circumstances, such as needing to care for young children or sick family members, (thus ruling out service), would also likely remain flower-girls. This was not a

¹²⁶ Editor, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union*, 127.

bad decision necessarily. People liked flower girls in general: they provided a service, and mature women might be able to resist temptations of the street.¹²⁷

For the rest—whom he described as the youngest, the weakest, the most vulnerable—Groom took up the work of removing them from the streets entirely and replacing street trading with another method of earning an income. Like other missions and benevolent institutions that existed at the time and catered to poor or “fallen” girls and women, it initiated a domestic training school for the purpose of preparing young women for employment more in keeping with the Christian values of the mission, its supporters, and of respectable society at large. Thus, in 1879, it started a training program to prepare girls for service positions. Domestic service was one of the occupations that did not suffer the vicissitudes of weather or seasons and there was always work. Not only was domestic service employment deemed acceptable; it was plentiful.¹²⁸ The demand for domestic servants was higher than it had ever been and the need for trained servants continued to increase each year. While flower selling was becoming more crowded and more competitive, domestic service seemed to offer an alternative for some of the more vulnerable of the girls in the mission’s purview.

Groom’s early training with the London City Mission had introduced him to the concept of refuges and domestic training homes for endangered girls, an idea that the LCM was advocating as early as the 1850s. The LCM’s newsletter, *The Ragged School Union*, ran stories and letters over the years that outlined the necessity and the importance of taking “the young from the streets” and placing them “in homes or at service.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷Editor, “The Girl of the Period,” *The London Journal*, 1 November 1868, 237-238.

¹²⁸ Alison Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008) she writes, “in the 1860s there were over a million servants,” 13.

¹²⁹ Editor, “Flower Girls’ Mission,” *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, Oct 1881, 124-128; 124.

These ideas would have a lasting impact on Groom. He expanded and enlarged on some of the ideas as the domestic realm as the ideal place for women. Groom described service as “a better, safer, more womanly mode of life.”¹³⁰

Still, convincing even the most struggling flower-girls to give up their flower selling careers would not be the easiest case to make. To that end, he attempted to lure them with *food and clothing*, the two things they probably most desired. As he explained, service seemed to be an opportunity, as Groom put it, to “be well cared for, have good clothes, good food, and a good home, and where [one’s] efforts would be appreciated.”¹³¹ Flower-girls, perhaps because of the long days of walking, the hours spent outside, and the seasonal fluctuations, are often depicted as especially hungry and as “that unfortunate class which lives on the brink of starvation and requires but a slight impetus from cold, wet, or hard times to slip over altogether,”¹³² Popular characterizations portrayed her as care-worn and thin, looking either far younger, or far older, than her years, the following passage being a perfect example:

Her face and figure at the first glimpse seem to belong to immature girlhood—frequently childhood; but look again, and you find the former lined and set, as if the great artist Care, had given a precocious strength to her young sole, and the latter, angular in its slimness, as if that grim guardian of the needy, Economy, had scrupulously adapted her frame to her round of activity and utmost need of clothing.¹³³

Another advocated that the flower-girl not be over-fed, for aesthetic reasons, as,

“Plumpness of form would utterly destroy the character of a Flower Girl.”¹³⁴ One of the few benefits of service was that meals were mostly reliably provided, and this was not to

¹³⁰ John Groom, *Kit and Sue*, nd., 11- 12.

¹³¹ Groom, *Kit and Sue*, 11- 12.

¹³² Editor, “The Flower Girl Brigade,” *The Daily News*, 22 April 1879.

¹³³ Editor, “The Girl of the Period,” *The London Journal*, November 1, 1868, 237-238.

¹³⁴ Editor, “The Girl of the Period,” *The London Journal*, 237-238.

be discounted. One young woman reported that her mother had advised her to secure a place in service in this way: ““get your feet under somebody else’s dinner table...and keep ‘em there.’”¹³⁵

Not that this was always guaranteed. Maids too complained of being stiffed for meals or of having inadequate food. But in general, it seems that the issue was a minor one in the litany of grievances, and moreover, was much less an issue than it was for women in other positions. For example, in a magazine piece about the lives of factory girls, one journalist wrote “amongst the difficulties of working girls...many lead lives of semi-starvation.”¹³⁶ As late as 1914, a story could be found in the *Nottingham Evening Post* with the headline, “Starving Flower Girls.” It was reported that “icy blasts” that January caused a shortage in the market unlike any seen in the past two decades, with the result that “in London and all over the country the street flower sellers are reduced to the verge of starvation.” It added that, although the “real life flower girl” is “a less attractive creature than she is represented in song and romance,” she was nevertheless often the family breadwinner and worthy of “public sympathy.”¹³⁷

As Groom soon found out however, the task of converting the flower-girls, even hungry ones, to domestic servants was going to be more complicated than he thought. As Lucy Delap has written, in Victorian popular culture the domestic servant was typically represented at the bottom of the social hierarchy.¹³⁸ And, contemporaries knew “what the

¹³⁵ One of the Crowd, [James Greenwood], “Maid-of-all-work,” *Toilers in London*, 1883, 30. Accessed online www.victorianlondon.org

¹³⁶ Nanette Mason, “How Working Girls Live in London,” Part I, *Girls’ Own Paper*, 1889, 763. Accessed online at <http://www.victorianvoices.net/work/conditions.shtml>

¹³⁷ Editor, “Starving Flower Girls,” *Nottingham Evening Post*, 19 January 1914.

¹³⁸ Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 631.

life of a slavey” was like, “for fiction and farce have made her famous.”¹³⁹ Despite the ubiquity of the work, many women avoided it at any cost. A working-class character, created by *fin-de-siècle* novelist George Gissing, chafed at the suggestion that domestic work had once figured in her past, and declared that, “She herself had never been a servant—never.” With the narrative explication that, “The [factory] work-girl regards a domestic slave as very much her inferior.”¹⁴⁰ In another novel of the period, its heroine is described as being set-upon by Groom’s “rescuers”; a gesture she swiftly rebuffs.¹⁴¹ Another journalist summed up the service situation for the “coster’s child” this way, “‘service’ is indiscriminately extolled as far more suitable for a respectable girl of the lower classes,” than factory work, however, it is practically impossible to avoid exploitation and “the life of the much pitied match-worker is infinitely easier than that of these little drudges.”¹⁴²

It was not just that the work was hard and the hours long and the wages low that most girls objected to; it was the near-constant surveillance and control their employers exercised over them. Most reformers were sure it was “lack of liberty” which caused women not to stay in service or chose not to enter at all. Some attributed their “difference,” from other women in not wanting to embrace the seemingly natural work of domestic service to their Irish ethnicity, “the unwillingness of these women, the majority of whom are said to be Irish, to enter domestic service is only natural after a life of such

¹³⁹ Anon, “Slaveys” *Toilers in London*.

¹⁴⁰ George Gissing, *The Nether World*, (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1889), 213.

¹⁴¹ Richard Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street* (London, 1899).

¹⁴² Editor, “Child Workers in London,” *The Strand*, Volume 1, Jan-June 1891.

unbounded freedom,”¹⁴³ another said their Irishness predisposed them to enjoy “a roving life.”¹⁴⁴

When the reporter James Greenwood interviewed domestic servants about their situations, one girl complained that her sister, a “fur-puller,” had a life of enviable relative ease, “look at the liberty she’s got...her hours are from eight to seven.” Time off at the weekend was a sore spot, “Of course she gets her Sundays. I get two hours of an evening once a week, and half a Sunday once a month.” Moreover, she continued, “what they call ‘half a Sunday’ is after one’s washed up after three o’clock dinner, which makes it four or half-past.”¹⁴⁵ By any measure this does seem unfair. To be clear, a fur-puller sat on a low stool in a barn or out building, removing, with the blunt edge of a knife, the fur and skin from a dead rabbit. Rabbit skins are greasy, so the fur-puller must stop to clean the knife every few minutes. The fine fur flies around everywhere to the point that “her hair and clothes are white with it.” It gets into the worker’s nose and mouth and she suffers from constant “breathlessness,” because her lungs are “filled with down and she is always more or less choked.”¹⁴⁶ That this seemed better by comparison is a telling statement about how domestic servants sometimes viewed their confinement in the homes of their employers.

The issue of “liberty” that had made flower-selling so attractive in the first place was precisely what made domestic service so unattractive. This would prove to be the most formidable challenge. Any sort of work that imposed the limitations on personal

¹⁴³ “The Flower-Sellers of the Street,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 June 1885, 6.

¹⁴⁴ Anon., “Flower Girls,” *Toilers*, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Greenwood “Maid-of-All-Work,” *Toilers in London*, 31.

¹⁴⁶ “Fur pullers” *Toilers in London*; Ellen Ross, *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 2007), 104-116. A “visiting lady’s” account of the horrible work of rabbit-fur pullers.

liberty of service was bound to fail among flower-girls, a group of women, “opposed to such discipline as Arabian fillies are to being caught and broken in to harness and regular work.”¹⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, very few, if any, of the *bonafide* flower-girls showed interest in the domestic training program, and most flatly refused Groom’s attempts to persuade them to exchange the relative freedom of flower selling for the relative captivity of domestic service.¹⁴⁸ Instead, it soon filled its empty places with the kind of flower-girls who were barely able to make a living on the streets. Among these were likely to be the youngest, the ones with no family support, or with dangerous families, the vulnerable, or others that seemed unlikely flower-girl material, and would indeed probably have a better chance in service than on the streets.

Before any girls could be sent into the homes of the middling sort however, a great deal of domesticating would need to take place. Groom sought to reassure potential employers that the girls would be trained in domestic technologies, but would receive a thorough enculturation into middle class mores and habits as well. For many girls, living as they had, in complete poverty “in the street, and in their poor home,” or having spent their lives between the streets and the workhouse, the middle-class home with all its “domestic duties” were things that, although “commonplaces to us, are unknown things to them.”¹⁴⁹ As Groom also realized, no matter what the previous situation, “the demand is for trained servants only.”¹⁵⁰

Thus, a training program would need to start from the ground up. The middle-class women who hired servants were expected to make the home the center of their

¹⁴⁷ Pike, “Flowers in London,” *Good Words*, Jan 1897, 607.

¹⁴⁸ ““We’d a deal sooner go to prison”” in Brewer, “The Flower-Girls of London,” *The Girls’ Own*, 284.

¹⁴⁹ John Groom, *Forget Me Not 28th Annual Report*, 1894.

¹⁵⁰ John Groom *25th Annual Report*, 8. 1891.

world and keeping the harmful elements of the streets at bay was one of their primary responsibilities. Therefore, Groom would have to convince potential employers that the girls were indeed suitably trained, and that they were ready to be welcomed into the households of the middling-sort. He reassured supporters that he would not place “a raw recruit” directly into a home. He wrote that each “girl needs to have her affections drawn from the seductive charms of *freedom* as she understands it. She must also learn to be subject to discipline, and the control of those who know what is best for her better than she does herself.”¹⁵¹ This would be in addition to the thorough education she would receive in all domestic technologies.

III. Imposters

Flower-girls continued to interest contemporaries through the nineteenth century. In addition to the cultural entertainments there was also an audience for the grittier real-life stories as newspapers often featured items that had to do with flower girls and their brushes with the law. These ran from the mundane and comical to the poignant to the tragic—involving murders, infanticide, suicides, and a slew of misdemeanors. All of this contemporary fascination also gave rise to two prominent women journalists who disguised themselves as flower-girls to capture a compelling story for their readers and to give a boost to their careers. Olive Christian Malvery, an Anglo-Indian and Elizabeth Banks, an American, were both new to London, were both “stunt journalists,” and were both trying to establish themselves as stars in the male-dominated field of journalism.¹⁵² The technique of “stunt” or “yellow” journalism, pioneered by W.T. Stead and James

¹⁵¹ Groom, *25th Annual Report*, 8.

¹⁵² Olive Christian Malvery, *The Heart of Things*, 1904; Elizabeth L. Banks, “How the Other Half Lives: The Flower Girl,” *The English Illustrated Magazine*, June 1894, 925-931.

Greenwood in which the journalist goes undercover to write an exposé gave some women an opportunity to grab the headlines themselves.¹⁵³ It was a daring move because it risked losing one's respectability and professionalism, but both women managed to make it work with their sympathetic treatment and their rather obvious disguises. Although the goal of the exercise in both cases was to infiltrate the working-class occupations for the true story neither woman could resist the impulse to improve on the appearance of the flower-girls and to distinguish themselves from the genuine sellers.

Before setting out, Banks readied her basket for the day's sales and wrote, "once finished, my basket was certainly a dainty-looking affair, and I felt no doubt I should carry on a thriving trade."¹⁵⁴ Malvery says nearly the same thing, without even benefit of preparing a tray, "I realized very speedily in my career as a street hawker that a little ingenuity and originality would be worth a fortune to those who wring out a mean living by appealing to the passersby." She was quite sure that using her "brains and taste" to decorate her peddling tray she could make a "very good living" but she refrained because she felt in this case she would not be practicing "legitimate gutter trade."¹⁵⁵

Regarding the clothing, it seemed that everyone who could lift a pen in London had an opinion about the flower-girls' dress and an idea to improve it. Although Malvery kept herself in check, she apparently could not resist advising two real flower-girls to clean up their presentation. She stationed the girls in Kensington Gardens in outfits she herself had designed, consisting of a floral print dress, accessorized with a fresh apron and straw hat. They had a banner day, but soon went back to their own clothing.

¹⁵³ Koven, *Slumming*, 155-180; and Judith Walkowitz, "The Indian Woman, the Flower Girl, and the Jew: Photojournalism in Edwardian London," *Victorian Studies* (1998/1999), 3-46.

¹⁵⁴ Banks, "How the Other Half Lives: The Flower Girl," *The English Illustrated Magazine*, 928.

¹⁵⁵ Malvery, *The Heart of Things*, 589, quoted in Walkowitz, "The Indian Woman, the Flower Girl," 10.

Disappointed that they had given up on the “artistic trade” she lamented that they instead wanted “big hats with felt feathers.”¹⁵⁶ Banks found the flower-girls “dirty, coarse-featured, harsh-spoken with draggled skirts, ragged shawls, and befeathered hats,” a poor example next to the Continental flower girls who dressed in “bright, picturesque costumes” and “vie[d] with the blossoms” in attractiveness.” She added she that if only some “dainty dealer” who was both “attractive herself, and attractively attired” would sell flowers at one of the busy spots such as Piccadilly Circus, there was no doubt that “fame and a fortune” awaited her. Although she opted in her own ruse to wear a sensible “black dress, black shawl and a brown straw hat trimmed with pink roses,” her basket veered far from the “great, heavy, cumbersome” working ones carried by real flower-girls.

Declaring that theirs were “far too ugly and weighty,” she carried instead “a light round basket” that she tied around her neck with a ribbon.¹⁵⁷ Both Banks and Malvery concluded at the end of their investigations that flower-selling was a more difficult, and in Banks’s case, less attractive occupation than they had imagined. The harsh reality of long hours, uncomfortable situations, and low earnings came as a surprise to them.

The amount of attention and interest that Malvery and Banks invested in describing their wardrobe and basket choices reflects what they thought their readers would be interested in as well as their own performative motivations. People were indeed fascinated by the flower-girl’s clothing and by the idea of improving her; making her over into a “Continental” flower-girl, or a fantasy flower-girl in a clean white dress with clean white flowers. The interest Banks and Malvery expressed in the flower-girls’ wardrobe and display was not merely a function of their own vanity or even of the

¹⁵⁶ Malvery, *The Heart of Things*, 589 quoted in Walkowitz, “The Indian Woman, the Flower Girl,” 10.

¹⁵⁷ Banks, “How the Other Half Lives: The Flower Girl,” *The English Illustrated Magazine*, 925.

calculation that photographs of the journalists in flower-girls' weeds would stimulate sales of their own work, but it was also symptomatic of a deeper preoccupation that contemporaries harbored regarding the dirtiness or cleanliness of the flower-girls themselves, and to the chance of being polluted either by contact with them or with their flowers.¹⁵⁸

One persistent question and concern that people had when it came to buying flowers on the street was that they wanted to know where the flower-girls kept their stock. Contemporaries feared that the flowers had been contaminated by the women during their handling, and from storing them in their unsanitary—or worse—living quarters. The English physician John Snow discovered in 1854 that cholera spreads through contaminated water, but the precise way in which this happens, and measures to limit and control it were still being worked out over the next decades. Fears of contagious diseases were understandably persistent and seemed only to get deeper as people became more aware of how disease spread. This concern appears in numerous accounts of flower girls. Groom and sympathetic writers such as Emma Brewer did much to try to alleviate fear. Yet even flower-girls' staunchest defenders acknowledged that conditions may not be up to the standards of hygiene and morality their middle-class clients demanded. Brewer herself had to admit that some homes were really frightful.

Groom was aware that many prospective purchasers worried that they might be contaminated by the girls and their products. It was a fear that flower-girls were well aware of themselves, as one answered when a journalist asked her where she kept the flowers at night. "Where does I keep 'em at night? Ah! Now! Yer want to know suff'n," she replied to the rather inappropriate question, "Well, I don't put 'em in the dining

¹⁵⁸ Koven, *Slumming*, on the erotics of dirt, 21, 226-227, 185-186.

room.” The reporter did not record his response. Then, she added, “yes, if yer likes, hunder the pianner; only it’s the pianner I sleep on.”¹⁵⁹ It was one of the difficulties the flower girls faced and that Groom wanted to find a way to ameliorate. The obsession with where the flowers-girls kept their stock turned out to be more of a driver of the logic of the mission than I imagined, and helped set the course for many of the subsequent developments of the WFGM.

IV. Strange Convergences

Although Groom could not stop the narratives about the flower girls, he did try to rebut them in the promotional pamphlets. He portrayed the flower-girls as hardworking and diligent, but his attention was soon to focus on another group of girls and young women on the streets where a more dramatic change could take place. In 1879 the year the Flower Girls Brigade started, the WFGM had also opened the Industrial Training school for training former flower-girls as domestic servants. As autumn approached, Baroness Burdett-Coutts and the other ladies may have been coming to the realization that the Brigade was not a success. They may have begun to wonder what they would do with the Brigade members during the winter. The Brigade organizers reasoned that because of “their early freedom from all restraint it is not easy, scarcely indeed impracticable, to teach them any business involving much monotony and confinement.”

At the same time, the *bonafide* flower-girls had also said “no thankee, sir” to the Industrial Training. Other students would have to take their places. Groom’s domestic training school, uniquely dedicated to providing work for former flower-sellers, also trained women to make floral bouquets and arrangements and provided instruction in

¹⁵⁹ Scopes, “Our City Flower Girls,” *The Ludgate*, 180.

artificial flower-making as a transitional phase of its overall program to prepare women for indoors positions as domestic servants. For the girls being trained for service, Groom maintained that flower-making offered an excellent transitional phase to accustom the former flower-sellers to indoor work after their lives on the streets. Making artificial flowers, he argued, would help to get them accustomed to being confined and relatively inactive for long periods, and to channeling some of their energy into a productive task that required focus and attention. He reasoned that since the girls already worked among flowers, they should therefore have some familiarity with the natural model and be able to produce a suitably convincing imitation. This may not have been as self-servingly commercial as it sounds. After all, artificial-flower making was a highly popular domestic handicraft among middle-class women at the time. More importantly, Clerkenwell also happened to be in close proximity to the West End milliners and had become the center of London's artificial flower manufacturing. Women who were trained as artificial flower-makers could find jobs in workshops when flowers were out of season.

With winter approaching, and Groom's orders for flowers waiting to be filled, perhaps it was inevitable that regarding the Brigade girls, "The Baroness at length decided to have them trained to mount and arrange artificial flowers,"¹⁶⁰ which was really quite a good stroke of luck because, "the aptitude they show for this work is something wonderful. Their early familiarity with natural flowers, and their unconscious observation of their growth, peculiarities of foliage, &c. seem to have fitted the girls precisely for this handiwork."¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Editor, "Flower Girls' Mission," *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, Oct., 1881, 127.

¹⁶¹ Editor, "Flower Girls' Mission," *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, Oct., 1881, 127.

The watercress and flower-girls, drawn as they were from the ranks of the poorest street-hawkers, also included a large number of women and girls with disabilities. The crippled flower-girls also soon took placements in the flower-making training program. According to their reports, the mission trained 250 girls at a time, both able-bodied and girls with various physical impairments.¹⁶² Whether this was an entirely pragmatic decision as the skeptics believed, or whether it developed from an evolution in Groom's thinking that led him to champion the cause of the disabled will be addressed in a subsequent chapter. So while the training school apparently hummed along, it did so without the *bonafide* flower girls. The unintended consequence of the failure of both the Brigade and the Training Home among the *bonafide* flower-girls was that it opened a space of possibility in the mission both physically and imaginatively that led to the full-time pursuit of the artificial-flower making projects that would determine the direction of the mission in the decades to follow. In so doing, it also shifted the mission's overall focus from rescuing the street selling flower-girls to an emphasis on the education and training of crippled girls, a development that would continue to grow until it essentially become the mission's sole focus by the Second World War. As the mission's work begins to shift from the sale of natural flowers to the manufacture of artificial flowers in a workshop, the proximity of the girl to the flowers also changes meaning. The intense fear of being contaminated by the flowers that have been in contact with the dirty flower girls and their filthy lodgings is mitigated by the artificial flowers made in a workshop. In time, the flowers will take on new meanings in a changed philanthropic relationship.

Conclusion

¹⁶² Editor, "Flower Girls' Mission," *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, Oct., 1881, 127.

Flower-girls were part of a large, but mostly undervalued, group of nineteenth-century micro-capitalists who made rational decisions, employed strategies of self-help and mutual aid, achieved genuine success, and deserve to be more fully appreciated as innovators and entrepreneurs. However, flower-selling was hardly an unalloyed golden opportunity to great numbers of poor and unskilled women. The women who were able to survive long-term and wear the honorific, “old hand” were described by contemporaries as the *bonfide* flower-girls, that is, women who were considered to be adults, made flower-selling their primary means of economic survival, and identified themselves as such. For many such women, the established street-trading economic system, with its own logic, rules, and territories evidently worked well enough. Yet, while they rejected many of the proposals and projects of the mission, on their own they remained an atomized, loosely cohesive group, internally competitive, and one that did not organize even when other costers, or street sellers, were beginning to see themselves as a collective unit. They resisted the top-down, external rigidity that middle-class morality demanded. Many of the accommodations Groom offered did survive however. For example, the mission provided free or low-cost shelter, food, and other material comforts to the street sellers, while also continuing to offer spiritual guidance, but much of that was given without many demands on the part of the mission.

Although Groom often maintained that the mission would not do anything to keep a girl in flower selling when other alternatives existed, he also went to some lengths to encourage people to view the flower-sellers in a more favorable light. Paradoxically, the projects that the *bonafide* flower-girls embraced most enthusiastically, such as Emily Loan fund, but also clothing clubs, penny banks, free breakfasts, recreations rooms, and

others, which were also some of the most successful, were the ones that actually helped to keep the flower-girls on the streets.

Groom was also pragmatic. If most of the flower-sellers he encountered would not be spiritually transformed, neither would they be “rescued” from the life of street-selling. He claimed that he never encouraged women or girls to stay on the street, and he allowed that for many of the women involved—especially those who supported children or other family members—a career change was not likely. Although the mission literature reports that thousands of girls and women were trained for domestic positions or as artificial flower-makers, thousands more remained on the streets. For those women the mission continued to provide numerous services and many of his actions and interventions may have made a difficult existence easier for some of the flower-sellers on the streets of London nonetheless.

Nevertheless, in its overall goals in transforming street sellers into uniformed domestic servants, and respectable flower-girls, it was at least partially successful. By Groom’s count over 1000 girls passed through the domestic training and were sent out to positions and many were aided through the Emily Loan program, so while it didn’t get them off the streets entirely, it did help them to a better standard. In spite of some successes, many of the interventions and reforms Groom tried to implement were rejected, however, and Groom publicly acknowledged that his early attempts to “rescue” and transform the flower-girls had been failures. The mission was a sprawling enterprise, however, and Groom was tenacious. He added new programs or changed direction as old ones proved unworkable. Groom’s mission adapted and changed over time. When it turned out that the women whom he believed were in need of rescue refused to become

domestic servants or lacked the necessary cultural and social background, he both found new types of recruits, and new types of employment. So new, in fact, that they didn't have a name for them at first and called the girls who made artificial flowers in workshops, flower-girls.

Chapter Three Cripples, Orphans, and Broken Things: Disability and Domesticity in “Crippledom”

Disability scholars and activists now refer to the “custodial landscape” that arose in the nineteenth century as “crippledom,” and describe it as “an archipelago of orphanages, kindergartens, schools, workshops, hospitals, clinics, and, of course, the workhouse.”¹ Social reformers from across a range of beliefs and ideologies developed an array of initiatives intended to provide care for the “whole of life.”² While these institutions share some similarities, this statement does not account for the many differences among them, yet they have come to be grouped together in analyses of Victorian interventions such as Groom’s. The degree to which charity should extend itself into the lives of individuals, and into the free market, was a matter of debate in a society much guided by ideas of laissez-faire capitalism, and notions of self-help, however.³ As the number of flower-girls increased through the late nineteenth century, even as the 1870 Education Act and the 1871 Pedlar’s Act removed many children from the streets, John Groom maintained that some of the poorest and youngest flower-girls were the “halt and blind.”⁴ In 1879, The Watercress and Flower Girls Mission had opened an industrial

The title of this chapter is owed to George R.R. Martin: “I have a tender spot in my heart for cripples and bastards and broken things,” *A Game of Thrones* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996).

¹ B.J. Gleeson, “Recovering a ‘Subjugated History’: Disability and the Institution in the Industrial City,” *Australian Geographical Studies* 37 (July 1999), 114-129.

² Gleeson, “Recovering a ‘Subjugated History,’” *Australian Geographical Studies*, 120.

³ Anne Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750: A History of Exclusion* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2008), 129.

⁴ On the early education legislation and its enforcement, see David Rubinstein, *School Attendance in London 1870-1904: A Social History* (Hull: Hull University, 1969); Denis Gleeson writes, “While the 1870 Act stipulated that no child under ten years of age could be employed, and that parents had a statutory obligation to ensure their children’s attendance, the legislation was widely interpreted,” in “School Attendance and Truancy: A Socio-historical Account,” *The Sociological Review* 40 (August 1992), 438-490; 443. In “Families in the Firing Line: Prosecutions for Truancy in Coventry, 1874–1899,” *Local Population Studies* 83 (Autumn 2009), Nicola Sheldon writes, “Forster’s Act of 1870 is usually taken to be

training school for flower-girls willing to exchange a life on the streets for a position in domestic service; within a short time it also formally made the workforce training of disabled women part of their overall social reform goal. Over the next four decades Groom made it his goal to help disabled young women to independent lives, to ensure that they would no longer be “a drain” on society.⁵ He recognized that contemporary notions of femininity, domesticity, and respectability gave physically or intellectually impaired women extremely limited options when it came to achieving social adulthood through paid labor or marriage.⁶ While he endeavored to make positive change in the lives of the women in his orbit, he came up against the opposing viewpoints of those who found his educational program and his fundraising techniques--shaped by his Evangelical worldview as well as his working-class pragmatism--problematic. His choice of occupation, the training scheme itself, and the question of sheltered employment for the

the landmark act in the introduction of universal elementary education. Yet it was a permissive act with respect to attendance; compulsion was not enacted until 1880 and then not practically enforced, especially in rural areas, for several years after that. However, the 1870 Act was designed to enable action most urgently in the burgeoning cities and towns, where thousands of children roamed the streets unsupervised by parents during the working day.” “Halt” was commonly used to indicate that one was “lame; crippled; limping” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Lionel Rose provides evidence from a police report in 1905 Manchester that states that the city’s match- and flower-girls were “crippled and weak,” in *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain: 1860-1918* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 1991), 67. It was not until 1903 that the mission’s artificial flower-making training was adapted and extended to girls with visual impairments.

⁵ Groom often used this figure of speech, one that was in wide circulation, in many of his publications. Rosemary Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), describes the problem of work as one of critical importance, 46-51. She writes, “to be excluded from earning a living in a society that equates virtue with work is profoundly diminishing, 93; Borsay, in *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750*, writes, “disabled people who are unable to participate in the labour market are regarded as less than full citizens,” 119; 119-138. “This is just one of the many ways in which disabled people were made to feel ‘burdensome [...] they [...] cause their parents much anxiety,’” in Iain F.W.K. Davidson, Gary Woodill, Elizabeth Bredberg, “Images of Disability in 19th Century British Children’s Literature,” *Disability & Society* 9 (1994) 33-46; 42.

⁶ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), on ideological debates about what “woman” represented; Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), writes, “the disabled woman’s difference is often imaginatively marked by [...] the difficulty of her having her own home, and by the ‘impossibility’ of her marrying and having children,” 94.

disabled all proved to be contentious, however, and beliefs about the type of work suitable for the disabled met with disagreement from various quarters. Even the amount of public visibility appropriate for disabled workers stirred controversy. Although they often did not see eye-to-eye, reformers could often find points of intersection, especially when it came to the exploitation of crippled children, even if their underlying philosophies differed. Crippled adolescents were a different matter, however. Nevertheless, Groom persisted. Although occupational training for disabled men and children has received more attention--both historically and by historians--this chapter describes John Groom's intervention into the "social problem" of employment for young women with disabilities.

I. Locating Crippledom

Who Were the Crippled?

It is generally accepted that before the separation of work and home that occurred as a result of the rapid nineteenth-century move to industrialization, factory production, and urbanization, the physically or cognitively impaired found useful positions for themselves within the domestic and artisan or farm economy. In this pre-industrial "golden age," some of the many tasks involved in the maintenance of the home went to the disabled who were able to contribute to the family enterprise. However, once work became industrialized and located away from the home, it rendered anyone not "able-bodied" essentially incapable of work in a system that demanded that the worker accommodate to it, rather than the other way around. The conditions of industrialism in turn increased the numbers of accidents and injuries, increasing the number of workers who were disabled.

Thus, a new and enlarging category of worker, or more to the point, non-worker, was born.⁷

Henry Mayhew defined the crippled as not being *unwilling* to work but *unable*; “*driven to the streets by utter inability to labour*,”⁸ a crucial moral distinction, but not one that did much to improve the material circumstances of those so affected. Even so, many contemporaries believed that cripples may not have been altogether “blameless” for their actual condition. And although they were perceived as a category of pauper who perhaps did not deserve the same degree of scorn as those who would *not* work, neither did they qualify for much in the way of government support. They were still found to be problematic.⁹

What to do with Cripples?

Up until the mid-twentieth century, with the passage of the National Assistance Act in 1948, the economic maintenance of the non-earning adult disabled fell largely to their families. Government-provided and charitable sources of aid were limited, occasional,

⁷Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750*; Jennifer Esmail and Christopher Keep, “Victorian Disability: Introduction,” *Victorian Review* 35 (Fall 2009), 45-51; 46; Paul Abberley, “The Limits of Classical Social Theory in the Analysis and Transformation of Disablement,” in L. Barton and M. Oliver, eds. *Disability Studies: Past, Present, and Future* (Leeds: The Disability Press, 1997), 25-44; B.J. Gleeson, writes, “The coming of industrialism meant the end of paid work for many disabled people who had been formerly integrated into domestic production,” in “Recovering a ‘Subjugated History’: Disability and the Institution in the Industrial City,” *Australian Geographical Studies* 37 (July 1999), 114-129. This is the essential Marxian analysis, derived from Engel’s classic study of factory workers in Manchester. In this concept of disability, however, work, is privileged over the worker. Elizabeth Bredberg, “Writing Disability History: Problems, Perspectives and Sources,” *Disability & Society* 14 (1999), 189-201.

⁸ Henry Mayhew, “The Crippled Seller of Nutmeg Grinders,” *London Labour and the London Poor; A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of those that will work, those that cannot work, and those that will not work*, Vol. 1. *The London Street-Folk* (London, 1851), 329-332. Available online at archive.org through Google Books. Emphasis in original.

⁹ Jamie L. Bronstein, *Caught in the Machinery: Workplace Accidents in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London: Gregory Bles, 1962), 208; Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750*.

and unequally distributed in what has been labeled the “mixed economy” of care.¹⁰

Working-class and poor families adapted to having a disabled member in different ways, drawing upon personal networks of support where possible.¹¹ The Poor Law Union workhouse was so universally dreaded that it was, most typically, the resort of last choice in the event that family, friends, neighbors, and parish were exhausted of resources.¹²

Historian of disability Anne Borsay cites an incident recounted in the contemporary press in which a disabled man was so terrified of entering the workhouse that he committed suicide instead. Surely, such tragic episodes only reinforced existing beliefs.¹³ Yet, a disabled family member could increase the financial stress on a family. Indeed, the cost, in both financial and social terms, of supporting a non-working member of a household could be steep, and emotional language often reflected that concern, as in this well-meaning passage, “All who have been accustomed to visit amongst the poor, must know how great a calamity it is in a working man’s family, when one of its members is either born, or by sickness, becomes a *cripple*.”¹⁴ The loss of income meant, for many, the loss of one of the main sources of dignity and independence available to most members of the

¹⁰ As Heasman writes, “it is only since the National Assistance Act of 1948 that the authorities have had any obligation for the welfare of the adult cripple,” *Evangelicals in Action*, 208. Jane Lewis, on mixed economy, “The Voluntary Sector in the Mixed Economy of Welfare” in David Gladstone, ed., *Before Beveridge: Welfare Before the Welfare State* (London: Civitas, 1999), 10-17.

¹¹ Borsay, in *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750*, “only a small minority of disabled people was ever domiciled in workhouses, hospital, asylums or schools.” 119.

¹² According to Christine Jones’s study of the community of Herefordshire, “Disabled people were likely to remain in the parental home until their late thirties, and when their parents died, they moved in with siblings, or became a lodger or inmate.” Christine Jones, “Disability in Herefordshire, 1851-1911,” *Local Population Studies* 87 (Autumn 2011), 29-44; 29. Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750*, quotes Charles Booth, “the aversion to the ‘House’ is absolutely universal, and almost any amount of suffering and privation will be endured by the people rather than go into it,” 40.

¹³ Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750*. The event was reported in the *Dereham and Fakenham Times* in 1897, 40.

¹⁴ “Industrial Charities,” *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church* 1 January 1864, 86. Emphasis in original.

working classes.¹⁵ A sense of shame accompanied becoming disabled, as it also meant dependency on a public not inclined to view such expenses favorably. A Select Committee of the House of Commons convened in 1846 to investigate the impact of the numerous accidents incurred during the construction of the nation's railways. While they acknowledged the personal loss to the individual, they were also much concerned that a man who survived a traumatic accident would become "a wretched cripple, a mendicant, or a pauper, to be maintained, with those who were dependent on his labour, at the public expense."¹⁶

For many nineteenth-century reformers, especially among Evangelicals, who viewed work as source of moral and personal stature, facilitating productive, that is wage-earning and self-supporting labor was a signal goal.¹⁷ Many contemporaries believed that the ability to earn a living was the marker of masculinity;¹⁸ thus self-support was crucial for disabled men.¹⁹ Women, on the other hand, were envisaged legally and socially as dependents, and under the concept of coverture, they were to be provided for by male family members, typically a husband but sometimes a father, brother, or son.²⁰ At the same time, many Victorians believed that because of their illnesses or injuries, disabled women would be unlikely or unable to perform duties of motherhood and

¹⁵ Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 15, 148.

¹⁶ Quoted in Bronstein, *Caught in the Machinery*, 133.

¹⁷ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. (London: Routledge, 1993), work and respectability and philanthropy 133-136; Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*; Brian Dickey, "'Going About and Doing Good': Evangelicals and Poverty c. 1815-1870" in *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980*, John Wolffe, ed. (London: SPCK, 1995), 38-58.

¹⁸ Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, 130.

¹⁹ Seth Koven, "Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain," *American Historical Review* (October 1994), 1167-1201; 1191; Stoddard Holmes *Fictions of Affliction*, 94.

²⁰ Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, 15; Koven, "Remembering and Dismemberment," 1172, 1193; Stoddard Holmes *Fictions of Affliction*, 94; Lois Keith, *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk: Death, Disability and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls* (New York: Routledge, 2001.)

marriage—a belief that hardened as social Darwinism grew more influential later in the century.²¹ Absent that support, disabled women could try to earn some money through such things as straw-hat weaving and simple needlework under the auspices of lady's societies or church groups. This was very poorly paid work since the items were of cheap materials and not in high demand and made expressly for sale through charity bazaars and shops. Nor was this employment really capable of producing a wage that could lead to self-support.²² It was nevertheless assumed that these disabled women would necessarily, somehow, be self-supporting, but if they were not, then they would be either dependent (“drains”) on charity or be forced by circumstances to turn to begging or prostitution, or the workhouse.²³ The paradox of necessitating women to rely on husbands to support them, while at the same setting arbitrary and prohibitive boundaries regarding marriage and parenthood for the disabled woman was amplified by the fact that this was already a largely unrealizable ambition because in many working-class families women could not depend solely on husbands' wages for support and often had to supplement the family income with paid labor of her own.²⁴

Even when the catastrophe of the Great War forced a recognition of the war's devastating effect on the bodies and livelihoods of many of the returning disabled

²¹ Nils Roll-Hansen, “Eugenics and the Science of Genetics,” in Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 80-97; 86.

²² For example, a Cripples' Home run by the Anglican Church operated a booth at a bazaar and opened a bonnet shop at 33 Baker Street, “under the care of some of the inmates of the Cripple's Home,” where they sold the items the inmates had learned to make, among them, straw bonnet, hats, and baskets and “straw screens, straw mats, and many other articles of similar description.” Industrial Charities,” *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for younger Members of the English Church*, 1 January 1864, 86.

²³ This was the line of argument that Groom frequently used in making his argument for supporting the mission's work. Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, 94; Lois Keith, *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk*. This theme resonated in girls' literature also.

²⁴ Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, “working-class family budgets suggest that only a minority of working-class men were sole family providers,” 78; August, *Poor Women's Lives, Gender, Work, and Poverty in Late-Victorian London* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 119.

soldiers, the attitudes towards disability in women remained unchanged.²⁵ In 1917, an article entitled “Cupid on Crutches: Why the Girl of To-Day Will Not Hesitate to Propose to Her Disabled Lover,” encouraged women to embrace the wounded veterans despite their scars and amputations. The author began by stating, “The love of a man for a maid and the love of a woman for a man are two totally different emotions.” The article explained that a woman may be willing to marry a man even if he has “left parts of himself on the battlefield,” and despite the fact that he is not “physically perfect.” That, however, is where “men and women differ.” Though it seems it hardly needed explaining, the author continued, “Man looks for perfection when he goes a-wooing.” Perfection may be in the eye of the beholder, but it was indisputable that, “hardly a man living” would search for a wife at “the Cripples’ Home.” The author went on to say that while Cupid “will work in the cause of the maimed man,” in the case of the “deformed woman,” she will have no such luck. The fate of the woman with a disability is that “she usually reconciles herself to spinsterdom.”²⁶ Although attitudes towards the prospects for disabled men to secure waged employment and sexual relationships were becoming, by necessity, somewhat more tolerant in the wake of war, the Victorian double standard toward women, and ideas about feminine desirability and marriageability proved remarkably durable.²⁷

²⁵ The Great War is often described as the *caesura* in a least acknowledging the difficulty many disabled men faced in securing employment, housing, etc., if not a loosening of the state’s purse strings. See Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and German, 1914-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 16; Seth Koven, “Remembering and Dismemberment.”

²⁶ “Cupid on Crutches: Why the Girl of To-Day Will Not Hesitate to Propose to Her Disabled Lover,” *Answers*, 21 April 1917, 432. Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, 94.

²⁷ See Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-1914* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), for analysis of the double standard and fears of reproductive contamination, 222-225. Koven, writes “female cripples remained on the fringe” in interwar renegotiation of policies and attitudes towards disability, “Remembering and Dismemberment,” 1193.

Writing in 1962, Kathleen Heasman attributed the nineteenth-century lack of economic support for adults with disabilities to a reluctance to “presumption” on the part of the Victorians, who would have found the “adult cripple” was “managing to keep himself” well enough, “even if it were only by begging in the streets.”²⁸ Without recourse to adequate welfare provision, few options existed for economic survival in the absence of waged labor. Some disabled people in the past had managed to resist the workhouse by grasping onto the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder as street sellers in what one historian describes as a survival strategy.²⁹ At mid-nineteenth-century, Henry Mayhew had documented the plight of a nutmeg-grater seller who was able to scrape out a living through honest street hawking. Street-hawking had become a refuge for a great many women, children, and men whose impairments had left them out of the new industrial, capitalist economy, and as Mayhew characterized it regarding his subject, independent men and women preferred to “*sell* rather than beg.”³⁰ Mayhew had validated the crippled street-seller as “noble” for choosing to sell trinkets--rather than beg--in the face of his diminished capability to earn a living independently. Despite his miserable condition, he retained his dignity because he had never lowered himself to begging. He even went so far as to have witnesses testify to it in written letters he carried with him. Remaining a notch above begging was crucial to maintaining his identity as an independent adult actor, if only to himself. Although he was nominally earning his living, he nevertheless

²⁸ Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 216-217.

²⁹ As BJ Gleeson, a historian of disability maintains in “Recovering a ‘Subjugated History’: Disability and the Institution in the Industrial City,” *Australian Geographical Studies* 37 (July 1999), 114-129. Historian John Benson suggests, it sometimes amounted to a survival strategy for the “ambitious and destitute alike.” *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-century Working-class Entrepreneurs* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 100.

³⁰ Henry Mayhew, “The Crippled Seller of Nutmeg Grinders.” Emphasis in original.

remained an object of pity, and survived largely through public largesse and some private acts of kindness.³¹

In any event, selling on the street was perhaps the best choice out of a narrow range of bad ones, although it was certainly frowned upon. For women, some considered street selling to be just a small step away from, or a mask for, outright prostitution.³² Yet, the wide-spread nineteenth-century practice of street hawking among the poor and disabled, often facilitated by charitable subsidies of small monetary aid for this purpose, “constituted almost a traditional form of welfare provision,”³³ and served that purpose when little other aid was forthcoming. Although flower-sellers generally could often escape associations with prostitution, provided they met certain standards of respectability and appeared to be engaged in full-time trade, crippled flower-girls, were looked at with more suspicion. Groom acknowledged that, although “cheerful flowers seem to meet us everywhere” they “remind us that the monotony of bricks and mortar has a limit...beyond there is a sweet country.” And “what a contrast they are to the sellers!” with these words he both evoked an unsullied retreat from the pollution of the urban landscape—and underscored how distant the crippled flower-girls were from it.³⁴

In Victorian Britain, few types among the poor were more reviled than beggars.³⁵ Some believed that beggars disliked or avoided work.³⁶ They were the people to whom the label “undeserving poor” was affixed. Rate-payers resented being burdened

³¹ Henry Mayhew, “The Crippled Seller of Nutmeg Grinders.”

³² Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, 100. Mayhew, in fact, believed that “many ingrained beggars certainly use the street trade as a cloak for alms-seeking,” in “The Crippled Seller of Nutmeg Grinders.”

³³ Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, 101. Stephen Jankiewicz, “A Dangerous Class: The Street Sellers of Nineteenth Century London” *Journal of Social History* 46 (Winter 2012), 391-415.

³⁴ John Groom, *Forget-Me-Not*, 28th Annual Report, 1894, 7.

³⁵ Lionel Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds: Vagrant Underworld in Britain, 1815-1985* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 1988).

³⁶ Deborah Epstein Nord, “a trope for non-productive work, refusal of ambition,” *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 14.

with the maintenance of imposters and swindlers, and charitable organizations themselves could be either the agents of or victims of fraud. It was an atmosphere where suspicion ran high and trust low. “Cripples” and amputees were often the most disdained and distrusted, because, in addition to their physical appearance, which many found offensive, there was a pronounced suspicion of imposture affected through the aid of props and performance.³⁷ Towards the century’s end, though the public was losing its naiveté regarding such imposters, it was still advised to be aware of cases where, “the paint is washed off the fictitious sore, the splint removed from the broken arm; the lame man cuts his caper and the ‘poor blind’ recovers his eyesight.”³⁸ Reactions to begging were harsh, and street-beggars were frequently categorized as “others,” as racial and ethnic outsiders, who roamed the street, as in this contemporary commentary in which the London beggar was inherently beyond reform.³⁹ Likewise, it was “so with gipsies, so with Arabs, so with the Indians of North America.”⁴⁰ Much the same as racial difference, it was bred in the bone and no amount of attempting to “indoctrinate them into the forms of civilized life,” would change the beggars; their recidivism was guaranteed by their biology. The figure of the tragic and destitute cripple became a metaphor for those whose adult status and earning potential had been destroyed through bodily impairment. The vocabulary contemporaries used to describe the disabled beggar sometimes elided their human characteristics and reduced the individuals to moving masses or forms that evoked fear or disgust, such as when a reporter described the “fearfullest beggars” including a

³⁷ Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, 28-33.

³⁸ Editor, “The Trade of Begging is Not What It Was,” *The Times*, 12 March 1849, 4.

³⁹ Nord, *Gypsies*, writes that they were considered to be “outside the economic and social structures of British life,” 14.

⁴⁰ Editor, “The Trade of Begging is Not What It Was,” *The Times*, 12 March 1849, 4.

“hobbling female mass of rags,” and a “truncated dwarf.”⁴¹ All negotiated the same visual and moral space, limited by their subalternity, difference, and foreignness to a life of public begging, and who, “sailed upon the street, and moped and mowed for alms.”⁴²

Few historians today would so benignly assess the willing ignorance and callousness of fellow citizens who believed that “begging in the streets” was a viable and acceptable way to earn a living, but Heasman’s analysis above helps to contextualize some of the choices made Victorians, who, despite a generally widespread and demonstrable lack of concern for the adult disabled, nevertheless recognized that, because he needed protection and help to reach adulthood, “The crippled child was different.”⁴³ In the nineteenth century, almost the entirety of the charitable and state aid for the disabled was directed to children, guided though it was by self-interest.⁴⁴ Groups such as the Invalid Children’s Aid Association, (which originally arose from the Charity Organisation Society), set out to provide protection and help. Formed in 1888, their goal was, in the own words, “the supervision and assistance of the invalid and crippled children of the London poor.” One of its main concerns was to ensure that the children were not used for the purpose of begging. Despite the mandatory school attendance laws that were enacted in 1870 and meant to curtail such abuses, disabled children were still exploited for economic benefit.⁴⁵ The records of the Invalid Children’s Aid Association

⁴¹Editor, “The Trade of Begging is Not What It Was,” *The Times*, 12 March 1849, 4.

⁴² Editor, “The Trade of Begging is Not What It Was,” *The Times*, 12 March 1849, 4. James Winter, *London’s Teeming Streets* (London: 1993); Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁴³ Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 216-217.

⁴⁴ Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 216-217; Koven “Remembering and Dismemberment,” 1172-1173.

⁴⁵ Rubinstein, *School Attendance in London*; D.Gleeson “School Attendance and Truancy,” *Sociological Review*, 443. See note 4 above. In “Families in the Firing Line: Prosecutions for Truancy in Coventry, 1874–1899,” *Local Population Studies* 83 (Autumn 2009), Nicola Sheldon writes of the 1870 Education Act, “it was a permissive act with respect to attendance; compulsion was not enacted until 1880 and then not practically enforced.” However, and most importantly for the present study concerning the youths

(ICAA) reveal instances where they found this happening, as in the case of a six-year-old, “whose leg had been amputated for strumous disease of the knee-joint,” and who was taken “from one public-house to another, exposing his unhealed wound,” by his father, “a drunken vagabond of the lowest type.” In another “typically low-class case,” “a very lame,” three-year-old girl was “constantly taken walking about the streets begging.”⁴⁶ The inspector feared that this girl too was being used as a prop to stir sympathy and encourage strangers’ generosity.⁴⁷

Groom himself inveighed against parents who used a “crippled child in a go-cart” as “a source of income.”⁴⁸ Parents could face accusations of deliberately worsening their children’s illnesses, either to enhance their sentimental value as beggars, or to increase their charitable or state aid.⁴⁹ He vividly exposed the horrors they suffered at the hands of the adults who watched over them—these included beatings, hunger, theft of their earnings, neglect, and worse. He appealed to subscribers’ heartstrings and sense of moral outrage as he described the child flower-sellers as “worse than orphans,” as he did in the narrative of *Limping Ferret*, a girl who was described by a “Street Arab” as “crawling like a bloomin’ ferret.” The ten-year-old girl was kept in almost feral conditions--naked,

attempting to make a living in the streets, and their removal, (or lack thereof), “the 1870 Act was designed to enable action most urgently in the burgeoning cities and towns, where thousands of children roamed the streets.”

⁴⁶ “Strumous” meaning scrofulous, and related to tuberculosis bacteria.

⁴⁷ *Invalid Children’s Aid Association First Annual Report*, vol 1, 1889-1911, 15. LMA A/FWA/C/D194/1.

⁴⁸ John Groom, *The Romance of the John Groom’s Crippleage*, 1919, 6.

⁴⁹ This was a common charge from a broad swath of commentators. Tales of casual cruelty abound in Rev. Benjamin Waugh, “Street Children,” *Contemporary Review* 53 (Jan/June 1888), 825-835. This is an exposé of sick children who were exploited for begging purposes; in addition, some had their lives insured—their inevitable deaths by disease hastened through exposure, malnourishment, beatings, and other physical and emotional torture.

starved, and semi-abandoned in the wretched hovel in which she was more or less imprisoned by her depraved parents.⁵⁰

Although they saw eye-to-eye on little else, the misdeeds of parents regarding the gross exploitation and abuse of their crippled children made common cause of the staunchest ideological rivals. Helen Dendy (later Bosanquet) one of the “scientific” social workers of the Charity Organisation Society ideas about who deserved charity and who did not, and the form in which it should be supplied. In an 1893 paper, she decried what was done by unscrupulous caregivers to attract “the shallow charity which flies about London” and the harm it does to the individuals and to the fabric of society. She wrote of a girl named Mary E., “a hopelessly crippled orphan, who was found living in one of the worst slums in London...” in which, “The London relations kept their hold on the girl merely for the sake of what they could get by her.”⁵¹ Whatever else they might disagree on, reformers who held broadly different beliefs about the way in which charity should be administered, by late in the nineteenth century, all could agree that the exploitation of children, especially sick and crippled children, to support the vices of those meant to care for them were “lower than the nature of the brute creation.”⁵²

Becoming Crippled

The disabled flower girls that John Groom rescued from the street and made into the heroines of his philanthropic fables—Rose, Sue, Ferret, and Dumpty Rose—

⁵⁰ John Groom, *Limping Ferret*, ca. 1891, 6, 8.

⁵¹ Helen Dendy, “The Meaning and Methods of True Charity” paper read at the first meeting of the Charity Organisation Conference, London, May, 1893. On Helen Dendy Bosanquet’s life and career and her life in social policy, see A.M. McBriar, *An Edwardian Mixed Doubles: The Bosanquets versus the Webbs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

⁵² John Groom, *Forget-Me-Not*, 28th Annual Report, 1894, 19. Monica Flegel, *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Ashgate, 2009); Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 71.

represented the many other actual girls who shared this lived experience. In his narratives he described young girls sent out to the streets to earn a meager living despite debilitating illnesses or impairments. Some of the girls he wrote about had become the sole support of other members of their families, sometimes of other children as well. Girls who were reliant on their own earnings, or who had others depending on them, could not easily give up street-trading, even if it was barely short of begging and kept them only a step ahead of starvation or homelessness. Unlike the *bonafides*, they lacked the experience and social and professional networks that allowed the “old hands” in the floral business to survive, or even thrive.⁵³ These girls, “cripples” or “otherwise sick and weakly, and for whom no Home is found willing to open its doors,”⁵⁴ who were on the threshold of physical womanhood, and aging out of the child-centered system of provisions, caused him the most concern.

Many of the young women Groom encountered likely would have become disabled as a result of accidents or illnesses they suffered in childhood. In 1864, The Commission on the Employment of Children had observed that in the poorest parts of London, the children as young as seven and eight were, “stunted in growth, their aspect pale, delicate, sickly.” Estimates put the number of disabled children in London at five in one thousand, though exact figures are much more difficult to determine.⁵⁵ Groom often

⁵³ Historian Stephen Jankiewicz writes in “A Dangerous Class,” that the professional street-sellers “were sometimes referred to as a ‘race’ or ‘tribe’.” Disabled girls, in general, would not have belonged to this in-group, having resorted to the occupation because they had no other options, not because they had been “raised” into the costermonger trade “by their parents and integrated into an already established community,” as had their more established peers, 395.

⁵⁴ John Groom, *Twenty Seventh Annual Report*, 1892/3, 10.

⁵⁵ Katheen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, writes “a school board enquiry at the end of the [19th] century found that five out of every 1,000 school-children were crippled, maimed, or deformed,” 217. Figures are difficult to verify with accuracy, since even relying on a metric such as census data is complex, as “the way in which individuals’ disabilities are described can sometimes vary from one census to the next,” Christine Jones, “Disability in Herefordshire, 1851-1911,” *Local Population Studies* 87 (Autumn 2011), 29-44. No

gave the figure of seven thousand children in London alone.⁵⁶ The poor lived in conditions of overcrowding, insufficient sanitation, malnutrition, and inadequate housing. These stresses weakened immunity and made children especially vulnerable to the many diseases that swept through communities. In the 1860s, the most widespread diseases were those of the “nutritive organs, curvature and distortion of the spine, deformity of the limbs and especially of the lungs, ending in atrophy, consumption, and death.”⁵⁷ Twenty years later, in one of the classic works of social journalism, the Reverend Rice-Jones wrote that the children of a notorious London slum were “nearly all more or less afflicted with that terrible disease called “rickets,” which is par excellence, a children’s disease, although it remains in the blood and the bones through life, up to whatever age its victims may live.”⁵⁸ A preventable disease, the result of vitamin D deficiency, rickets led to as many as fifteen percent of the children having deformed legs and pelvises, which beyond the problems that alone posed, it could also complicate future pregnancy, labor, and delivery--leading to yet more problems in the newborn children of the next generation.⁵⁹

Other acute and chronic illnesses caused damage that lasted a lifetime. Scarlet fever killed more children than any other infectious disease, but it also caused blindness

central authority compiled or verified disability figures until 1899 under the Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act, when children were first enrolled in state schools for the disabled, however, the degree to which they were impaired varied. Nor did this included “crippled” children who continued to be served under charitable institutions or in mainstream ones provided they were physically able to attend. Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy*, 106-109. Some children surely went uncounted.

⁵⁶ In 1912 Groom claimed to have the names and addresses of over 7000 crippled children in London alone, “The Crippled Flower Girls’ Mission,” *Leamington Spa Courier*, 23 February 1912, 5.

⁵⁷ From Thomas Dormandy, *The White Death: A History of Tuberculosis*, (London, 1999), quoted in Picard *Victorian London* (2005), 190.

⁵⁸ Rev. D. Rice-Jones, *In the Slums, Pages from the Note-book of a London Diocesan Home Missionary*, (London, 1884), 167.

⁵⁹ Alex Werner and Roy Porter, *London Bodies*, (London, 1998); in Liza Picard, *Victorian London* (London, 2005), 190.

in many of those whose lives it spared.⁶⁰ Rheumatic illnesses, inflammatory diseases, and accidents also damaged joints and bones and tendons, and these too could cause permanent destruction of tissues.⁶¹ Some sick children were further injured due to improper care—whether through ignorance, poverty, or malice. A common theme in fictional stories about crippled children was that they suffered because of someone else’s carelessness, negligence, or brutality.⁶² Although it may have been a discursive trope, it was nevertheless the obvious case that if medical attention were lacking, lifelong complications developed. One of the girls in Groom’s care had a treatable condition that became a permanent impairment because she did not wear—or was denied—her surgical (orthopedic) boot. Despite recommendations by an orthopedic surgeon that if the boot were worn daily, the injury to the growing bone could be forestalled, her leg and pelvis became irreparably damaged.⁶³ In one of his longest philanthropic fables—*Limping Ferret*—Groom told the story of another girl who suffered from “rheumatism.” She had become ill at the age of six, and the disease “settled in her limbs.” In her case, the leg had “withered” and “shrunk” and eventually stopped growing. It is not clear if medical attention could have prevented the loss of her leg, but the “near starvation” inflicted on her, as well as the deprivation of sunlight, clothing, bedding, and affection did nothing to improve her condition.

⁶⁰ Creighton, *A History of Epidemics* 2nd Edition, (London, 1965) Quoted in L. Picard, *Victorian London* (2005). Blind street selling flower-girls were not unknown, and Groom made plans in 1903 to “extend the benefits of the Industrial training re artificial flower making etc.” to between eight and fifteen blind fourteen-year-old girls, with their own house and workrooms. Although he was late to adapting the work for the visually impaired students, soon after admitting them, he printed postcards featuring several blind girls, and around the same time he took some on tour to demonstrate the work that they could perform using specially created tools. Minute Book, July 1903, LMA 4305.

⁶¹ Creighton, *A History of Epidemics* 2nd Edition, (London, 1965) Quoted in L. Picard, *Victorian London* (2005).

⁶² Davidson, et al., “Images of Disability,” *Disability & Society*, 39.

⁶³ Letter to Mr. Groom from H.E. Grinling, 23 September 1908 *re* Jessie Badman LMA 4305.

For the girls Groom cared most about—those in mid-to-late adolescence--tuberculosis killed and disabled the most.⁶⁴ Also known as “consumption” (and by various other names depending on where in the body it manifested), it could attack not only the lungs, but the joints as well—especially the hip.⁶⁵ As literary scholar Lois Keith writes, in the popular imagination, a tuberculosis diagnosis was viewed as “a death sentence.”⁶⁶ Such an illness made the work of flower girls or domestic servants, which involved long hours of standing and walking while carrying heavy loads, painful, difficult, and exhausting. Rose, one of the flower-girls Groom wrote about in a philanthropic fable recalled the agonizing physical pain she experienced selling flowers despite being crippled with “hip disease.” She was “nearly run over,” and “hurt very much” after being knocked down by a cyclist. She finally had to be carried home by a policeman who had wanted to take her to a hospital.⁶⁷ Another girl, Sue, fainted in the street while selling flowers. She had been “an exceedingly delicate child,” who became very weak through “neglect, exposure,” and “want of medical treatment and nourishment.” Bullied and roughly handled by some older girls, she had fallen on her hip. It apparently never healed, as it resulted in “a diseased bone, a useless limb, and abscesses.”⁶⁸ Yet, she continued to go out to work every day. Contemporaries knew well that some flower-girls labored while suffering with the tubercular disease. A sympathetic

⁶⁴Lois Keith writes, “The most common paralyzing illnesses of the day were chronic tubercular diseases of joints, particularly of the hip (known as ‘hip disease’) or the spine (Pott’s disease) [...] These were unromantic illnesses resulting in lameness and deformity [...] with clear links to poverty,” *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk: Death, Disability and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls*. (Routledge, New York, 2001), 25. Tuberculosis was the leading killer of girls between the ages of ten and twenty years old. “‘Convulsions’—a favorite term used on death certificates—were probably caused by tuberculous meningitis,” Charles Creighton, *A History of Epidemics* 2nd Edition (London, 1965) quoted in Liza Picard, *Victorian London* (London, 2005), 190.

⁶⁵George Arthur Wright, *Hip Disease in Childhood: With Special Reference to Its Treatment by Excision* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887); Liza Picard, *Victorian London* (London, 2005), 190.

⁶⁶Lois Keith, *Take Up Thy Bed*, 10.

⁶⁷John Groom, *Rose*, 11.

⁶⁸John Groom, *Kit and Sue*, 11.

poem about a dying flower-girl describes her worsening condition--“walking still with sore and weary feet”-- as she continues to provide for her blind father. The tell-tale “small pink spot” that “told consumption” marked her fate. She finally succumbed to the illness that had left the “seal of death upon her shrunken face.” It had also left her weak, feeble, thin, and anxious.⁶⁹ While the poem is melodramatic, it nevertheless underscores that the flower girl, as the sole economic provider, had but little choice than to continue working--despite the incurable illness—which wreaked havoc on her mentally and physically, sapped her strength, and marginalized her economically.⁷⁰ It also provoked fear of contagion as Groom noted, the crippled flower-girls had “the seeds of disease sown in their constitutions.”⁷¹

Historians of disability have generally not included tuberculosis among conditions of disability or bodily impairments, however, this seems in need of redress, but it also directs attention to one of the most complex issues in the study of disability. Some Disability Studies theorists argue that disability is socially constructed, and notions of disability change over time and in relation to such things as the scope of contemporaneous medical intervention. They make a distinction between a biologically based disability and a socially situated disability, and from that position argue that suffering experienced by the person with disabilities is not the physical or medical pain of aberrant biology, but a psychological or emotional pain stemming from a social reality that does not support them; it is pain based on exclusion and “disavowal.”⁷² They argued

⁶⁹ Nicholas Michell, “The London Flower-Seller,” *The New Monthly Magazine* (May 1865).

⁷⁰ Alex Tankard, “The Victorian Consumptive in Disability Studies,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 5 (2011) 17-33.

⁷¹ Groom, *Forget-Me-Not*, 28th Annual Report, 1894, 19.

⁷² Historiography on Disability Studies is large and growing and the debates with the field center on the models, primarily on the location of disability, whether it written on the body or on the social landscape.

that in employing an earlier “medical model” of bodily normativity, such institutions and analyses furthered and deepened the exclusionary and economically-detrimental structural policies and practices that continue to shape the lived experience of people with disabilities. Tuberculosis, which could persist for months or years before making a very visual presentation, required women to continue working while it robbed them of the vitality necessary to perform sufficiently well in those jobs to earn a decent living. Moreover, too often, analyses focus on the depiction of cripples as uncomplaining or “plucky,” and the pain and exhaustion that accompanied many of these impairments is often not given its due in studies of disability that focus on social or structural models; it is simply silenced.⁷³ As Alex Tankard writes, before effective antibiotics, “much of the consumptive’s suffering was, indeed, biologically determined.”⁷⁴ Thus, this question is not merely an abstraction. Understanding how people experienced tuberculosis is one of the ways in which a historical analysis challenges current models for theorizing disability. For the flower-girl with consumption, her experience of disability would have been both physically and socially based. Groom’s accounts of young women with aching backs and legs, doctor’s notes of teen-aged girls with open running sores, testimony of women with debilitating pain—all of these speak to the circumstances of disability that was both rooted in a physiological as well as social reality.⁷⁵ That many of the crippling conditions they experienced were the result of communicable—and incurable—diseases was not lost on contemporaries, least of all John Groom. To some, the “crippled and

Deborah Stone, *The Disabled State* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1984); M. Oliver and C. Barnes, *Disabled People and Social Policy: From Exclusion to Inclusion* (London: Longman, 1999), Elizabeth Bredberg, “Writing Disability History: Problems, Perspectives and Sources,” *Disability & Society* 14 (1999), 189-201. Tom Shakespeare, “Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?” *Disability and Society* 9 (1994), 283-299.

⁷³ Davidson, et al. “Images of Disability,” *Disability & Society*.

⁷⁴ Tankard, “The Victorian Consumptive,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 23.

⁷⁵ Letter to Groom regarding Mary Isabelle’s open sores September 29, 1904. LMA 4305. Loose Papers.

afflicted” girls of John Groom’s would have been seen in much the same way as the adult beggars and racialized “others,” as eyesores on the public landscape, as burdens to charity and the rate-payers, and as possible, or likely, imposters. As he had noted in one of the organization’s publications, although the flowers may be lovely, the crippled flower-seller is “turned away from as an object more or less repellent.”⁷⁶

II. Domestic Salvation and the Industrial Training Home

When Groom had opened The Industrial Training Home it had been with the intention of preparing the street selling flower-girls for domestic service positions, but that did not go to plan. Describing his efforts to recruit *bonafide* flower-girls for the new endeavor, Groom wrote that many of those girls flatly refused when offered the opportunity to train for service.⁷⁷ Few or none of the *bonafide* flower-girls wanted to trade flower selling for service (or full-time flower-making, either). At some point after the initial opening, he changed course, and began to welcome--or actively encourage or solicit--girls with disabilities instead. That too, would present difficulties. Still, Groom held fast to its beliefs about providing more “suitable” work for the girls and women who now sold flowers on the streets.

Despite the fact that very few of the women in Groom’s sphere of action actually *desired* work in domestic service, it was, nonetheless, an almost unquenchable devourer of surplus female labor. Domestic labor employed more women than any other occupation in the nineteenth century. A discourse of ennobled service supposedly elevated what was physically taxing, poorly remunerated, repetitive exertion into

⁷⁶ Groom, *Forget Me Not*.

⁷⁷ Groom, *25th Annual Report*, 8.

anything from morally cleansing and nationally uplifting, to a spiritually gratifying and purifying endeavor.⁷⁸ Clearly, some laborers must have bought into the line; others did not. An optimistic historiography currently reassesses domestic service, a less positive view is clouded by weary bodies and broken spirits or broken bodies and weary spirits. For nineteenth-century reformers, who thought the answer to the “girl problem” lay in domestic service, their drive to remove girls to the safe and sheltering interior of the middle-class family home, while rooted in good intentions, clearly put many girls into utterly miserable circumstances.

A Mission to Domesticize

It is now a commonplace that the nineteenth-century's feminine *ideal* was that of the “angel in the house,” the woman fully immersed in the cult of domesticity, and occupying an entirely separate sphere from the masculine world of work.⁷⁹ Though this was an aspirational model rooted in the culture of the bourgeoisie, the hegemonic “domestic ideal” nevertheless seeped across class boundaries and exerted a strong influence on notions of respectable womanliness during the nineteenth century.⁸⁰ It was the anonymous legion of servants—the-maid-of-all-work, or the “slavey”—composed

⁷⁸ Carolyn Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Alison Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008). Peter Laslett wrote, “In spite of what might seem to be its demeaning character, service can be a source of considerable satisfaction to the servant.” “Notes and Queries on The Institution of Service,” *Local Population Studies* 59.

⁷⁹ Although this notion has been challenged, most notably by Amanda Vickery in “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History” *Historical Journal* 36 (June 1993): 383-414, it was prevalent enough as an idea to make domestic service the largest employer of women in the nineteenth century. For one discussion of the way this worked in practice, see Alison Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, 25-26.

⁸⁰ There is a large literature on the domestic ideal and cult of domesticity, beginning with Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) in the early part of the period, and Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) for the latter.

mostly of poor and working-class girls and young women, which allowed the smooth operation of the machine of cherished domesticity.⁸¹ Domestic service was also an occupation of very young women.⁸² So many woman spent part of their working lives as domestic servants, that even those with physical impairments often sought employment in service.

By mid-century, “the servant problem” was already a cliché. Yet when 400,000 households employed a servant—many of whom left each year for marriage or greener pastures—finding, training, and keeping a servant was a preoccupation.⁸³ Even under the best of circumstances, domestic service was widely despised by many (although certainly not all) who practiced it.⁸⁴ While their lived experience varied somewhat, there were commonalities among servants. Many complained of their lack of privacy, their relative isolation, inadequate time off, and the forced abandonment of their own religious practices.⁸⁵ Living quarters were often uncomfortable, at best. Servants, when not performing work duties, were typically barred from the living spaces and public rooms of their employers. As architectural styles changed over the century, new housing plans relegated the servants to purpose-built areas that ensured their complete separation.⁸⁶ Like flower- girls, they were sometimes perceived as vectors of both disease and moral turpitude. In addition to the physical demands of the job, the loneliness, and the poor living conditions, work as a “slavey” could also lead to exploitation—which itself might eventually lead to prostitution if the girl’s employment were terminated leaving her

⁸¹ Steedman’s, *Labours Lost* strikes, it seems to me, a more optimistic tone.

⁸² Andrew August estimates that seventy-six percent of the women employed in domestic service were under the age of twenty-five, *Poor Women’s Lives*.

⁸³ On the “shortage” of servants in the nineteenth century, Alison Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, 36.

⁸⁴ Light *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*; James Greenwood, “The Maid of All Work” in *Toilers in London*, offers the contemporary view that some women endured it well enough, 1883.

⁸⁵ “Letters to Commissioners,” *Toilers in London*, 1899.

⁸⁶ David Eveleigh website at the Faculty of the Built Environment. UWE Bristol, 2006.

without a reference for a new situation.⁸⁷ Out-of-wedlock pregnancies or sexual imbroglia would usually end with dismissal.⁸⁸ Some women were not safe from abusers in even “respectable” homes, as one newspaper clipping from 1896 reveals. “M” was an orphaned girl sent to work for a “grey-haired gentleman,” with a checkered, and, presumably, concealed, past. He had been charged previously with indecently assaulting a young girl under his employ. During the time “M” worked in his home in Bayswater, he was again arrested, at the age of seventy-seven, and sentenced to nine months hard labor for exposing young women in his presence to “grossly indecent acts.” Although no evidence of assault or improper conduct is recorded in the case file of “M,” she soon was out of work nonetheless.⁸⁹ While it may not have been the typical experience, domestic service could very often be a precarious and tenuous position for women inside the houses of strangers. Thus, the notion of service as a route to salvation for flower-girls was a complicated one. But for some of the thousands of young women so trained and placed by Groom and his peers, it was perhaps a step up. The promise of regular meals, a nightly bed, clean clothing, and undergarments, sturdy boots, and refuge from homelessness or violence certainly cannot be discounted as compelling reasons to accept employment in domestic service.

So great was the need for trained and acceptable servants that Groom’s was not the only mission that attempted to rescue women from the street and prepare them for

⁸⁷ “By a “slavey” we mean a child-servant, a Maria, Jane, or Susan, who drudges from morning till night in some house where ‘only one servant is kept.’ Of course, we are speaking here of metropolitan slaveys, those, for instance, who come under the notice of societies like the M.A.B.Y.S. How many slaveys there are in London at present it is impossible to say but the M.A.B.Y.S. (Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants) has under its care at least 8,000 slaveys, and other societies such as the Girls’ Friendly Society, the Young Women’s Christian Association, the Girls’ Helpful Society, etc., etc.,” Anon, “Slaveys” *Toilers in London; or Inquiries Concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis* 1889.

⁸⁸ Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, 26-27.

⁸⁹ Waifs and Strays Archive, Case 941 “cutting from a newspaper, recording the conviction of M’s employer, Alfred Burnett, for acts of gross indecency 1896.”

places in service.⁷ Other charitable concerns had taken on what was seen to be the mutually beneficial task of training working-class girls for middle-class servitude. One of the best known of these philanthropic endeavors was the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants, which went by the acronym—MABYS—restyled by some of its 8,000 trainees as “Mind and Behave Yourself.”⁹⁰ MABYS was founded in 1875 by the underappreciated social reformer, Jeannie (Mrs. Nassau) Senior, with the intention of rescuing young women from the scourges of the workhouse and fitting them out for respectable domestic positions.⁹¹ Its main charge was to send volunteer middle-class lady visitors to run interference between employer and employee by befriending the freshly-minted and newly-hired maids. It aimed to alleviate the loneliness and isolation the girls often felt in strange surroundings thus help them adjust more quickly to their new situations.⁹² While the intervention was meant to be mutually edifying, as it would lead to less turnover by soothing the feelings and tempers of both parties and heading off any misunderstandings, it instead had the effect of ruffling the feathers of both maids and mistresses and engendering distrust on both sides. Although the MABYS often met resistance, they carried on with their work. They kept detailed records of their visits with the girls in their care and published annual reports about the girls’ progress.⁹³ Reformers hoped that the girls would be encouraged to remain in their positions longer and would be less likely to become yet another casualty of “the servant problem.”

⁹⁰ Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, 89.

⁹¹ Sybil Oldfield, *Jeanie, An ‘Army of One’: Mrs. Nassau Senior, 1828-1877, The First Woman in Whitehall* (Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic, 2008), 214-218.

⁹² Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, 91-94.; Oldfield, *Army of One*, 228; “Slaveys,” in *Toilers of London*.

⁹³ Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 50-52.

Although Groom was training and placing disabled girls for what was the most plentiful and “natural” female work, he soon realized it was also the least accommodating for any but the most able-bodied. As he later wrote in regard to the plight of the disabled girls in his care, “However much a family might need a servant, a mistress would not take in one of this class; the strong, the active, the capable alone are valued.”⁹⁴ Young women with illnesses or disabilities were less likely to be able to meet the rigors and demands of the daily routine of a Victorian household. Those who had suffered rheumatic fever or tuberculosis, or who, through accidents or neglect, experienced the loss of limbs or sensory abilities, often did not possess the stamina and strength required. Some of the more taxing chores that had to be performed, often by a single maid-of-all-work, included hauling hot water up several flights of stairs into the bedrooms for bathing, and removing the dirtied water; emptying chamber pots and changing bed linens; and sometimes, depending on the size of the household, preparing, serving, and washing-up after the family’s meals. Other daily chores included the seemingly constant maintenance of coal fires, and sweeping away their omnipresent soot, which usually meant moving and lifting furniture and beating carpets, mopping floors, dusting surfaces and polishing *objets*. This was in addition to the many tasks that required finely developed skills and attention to details. Porcelain and crystal and other fragile items needed special attention and were easily damaged through hurried care or momentary distraction. Staircases were steep, halls were dark, rugs were prone to curling and slipping, fires were open, and the edges of knives were unpredictably sharp. In short, there was no end to the hazards and challenges inside the home. Even for the able-bodied, the work frequently resulted in accidents and injury and exhaustion. One domestic, who worked for a family of nine in a

⁹⁴John Groom, *The Romance of the John Groom's Crippleage*, 1919, 12.

household with only two other servants, explained in a statement to the reporters investigating servants' working conditions, that she had had to leave because "the work injured my health." Another woman described the pain she suffered in the course of her daily labor, "I had my knee bad this last six months, and often when I have been obliged to scrub my kitchen I've got up and down screaming, because my knee was so stiff."⁹⁵ A physician noted that the pronounced symptoms had been aggravated because the floor-covering retained water, and the pain worsened each time the woman knelt on it. Yet another woman needed to take two days' unpaid sick leave due to "stiffness" in the ankles aggravated by frequent stair-climbing.⁹⁶ While these symptoms were acquired on the job, for girls and women who started work with impairments already it posed even greater risks. Groom was correct that even when otherwise deemed suitable in terms of temperament or training, girls with recurrent illness, or other conditions that limited their perceived usefulness, did not fare well. There were many such girls.

Evidence from the MABYS reports poignantly records the history of some of the women who prepared to work in domestic situations despite conditions that made doing so difficult or impossible. Among the sites they supervised, the MABYS volunteers kept records on students in the school of domestic service in the West London School District. In that file, I discovered handwritten records regarding young women who had been dismissed or given new placements due to various health problems. Their notes yield many insights as to the nature of the illnesses and disabilities of several of the employed. One young woman with "weak ankles" was unable to train for laundry work because of the long hours of standing and lifting heavy loads; a volunteer expressed hope that

⁹⁵ Editors, "Letters to Commissioners," *Toilers in London*, 1899, 155.

⁹⁶ Greenwood, "Maid-of-all-work," 31.

another young woman--who had had a leg amputated--could be trained to do stocking knitting because it did not require standing for long hours. It is clear from the emphasis on the physical complaints that these impairments caused the volunteers to worry about what would happen to these young women if they were unable to perform satisfactorily in new placements. The records also show that a number of young women were dismissed from situations when they were found to be “unfit for service” due to physical conditions.⁹⁷ Such was the case for twenty-year old Caroline Lee, who, according to notes, “has been very delicate all the year. In June she was sent as a patient to Brompton Hospital [...]. It is very doubtful if she will ever be fit for service.” And Ellen Carney, who, at age seventeen, had been “adopted by a respectable aunt. Her lameness would have prevented her making a good servant.”⁹⁸ It was sometimes noted that an ill employee had been a “good girl” and that the employer was sorry to lose her. This was so for Mary Addison, who was “obliged to leave her place on account of her health to the great regret of her mistress.” Addison was sent to an Invalids’ Home for a “long rest.” Certain medical conditions made domestic work impossible for some, as is seen in the case of Frances Gladwell, who was dismissed at the age of twenty. The investigator noted that Frances was, “A good girl, but has epileptic fits, and this year has twice fallen down and broken her arm.”⁹⁹ For all these women, the future was unclear.

Groom himself was nothing if not adaptable. The failure of the street-selling branch of the Flower Girls Brigade had not shuttered the division that provided flower

⁹⁷ There was a column in the notes where these could be noted by the Lady Inspector, Reports of Girls Under Care of Association from West London (Ashford) School District, West London School District, London Metropolitan Archives LMA, WLSD/459.

⁹⁸ 1886 Report of Girls Under Care of Association from West London (Ashford) School District, LMA, WLSD/459.

⁹⁹ Dec 1886 Report of Girls Under Care of Association from West London (Ashford) School District, LMA, WLSD/459. Gladwell's record is from 1888.

arrangements and decorations, and the proceeds from those orders went back into the mission. The girls he trained for domestic service also received instruction in artificial flower-making—presumably, although it is not stated—to off-set their keep by providing labor for the Brigade.¹⁰⁰ This arrangement is not documented, and it certainly leaves open many questions about the overall training and placement of the girls with disabilities. The Charity Organisation Society investigators did not approve of disabled girls making artificial flowers. Two issues worked in Groom's favor, however. In the first, the flower-making workshop was among the very first workplaces to train women with disabilities.¹⁰¹ In the second: If disabled girls were not fit for service, what would become them?

It was a situation for which an answer often was beyond the reach of even the most concerned, as the poignant case of one young woman shows.¹⁰² Her story is documented in a series of letters held in the archive of the Anglican Church's Waif and Strays Home. In the town of Tunbridge Wells, forty miles southwest of London, Ada, at the age of four, experienced a life-altering event when her father, previously employed as a printer, suffered a sudden onset of mental illness. With the child in his arms, he had jumped onto the railroad tracks as a train approached. Both survived the apparent murder-suicide attempt, but the girl's arm was amputated above the elbow. After the incident,

¹⁰⁰ What would now be called "contractualizing disability" and in the process further isolate disabled workers, Michael Gill, "The Myth of Transition: Contractualizing Disability in the Sheltered Workshop," *Disability & Society* 20 (October 2005), 613-632; 616.

¹⁰¹ Groom claimed, in many of his printed materials, that his was the first, although it is difficult to corroborate.

¹⁰² This is a case from the Waif's and Stray's Archive 2434. The case studies in that archive are referred to by a number and the subjects have been anonymized, replacing their given names with initial letters. In this case file, the subject is simply called, "A." I have since discovered that the girl's name was Ada Agnes Smith. The father was sent to Broadmoor Asylum.

Ada had gone to live for a few years at Miss Keeman's Invalid House in Tunbridge Wells, but she aged out of that institution by 1890 when she turned eleven.

In April of that year, Miss Cameron, a friend of Ada's (the record is unclear as to her relationship to Ada, and it is inconsistent in naming her as well; it seems that more than one person corresponded in Ada's behalf), sent this letter to Edward Rudolf, the founder and Superintendent of the Waifs and Strays Homes, located in London.

Dear Mr. Rudolf, There is a little girl here of eleven years old with one arm in whom I am much interested. The Father is hopelessly insane in an asylum—the mother has four other children and is in wretched health—Could you give me an idea what could be done for her? [...] She is most anxious to earn her living in any possible way. She is well educated—can write well [...] but her arm is taken off above the elbow. Friends would help her maintenance for a while if there was any prospect of her being trained to earn her living? Surely there must be some place in the world for one-armed girls?¹⁰³

It was the first of many letters sent in Ada's behalf over the course of almost two decades in the attempt to find a suitable home for her. Another letter was sent to Rudolf regarding Ada a few weeks later. Cripples' homes intended for children or orphans only accommodated girls until the age of sixteen, at which time other arrangements for their future care and employment had to be made. Pressing for more information and some reassurance that Ada would not be left homeless and jobless, it read:

Do you think that a girl with one arm could ever in any way earn her living? & What would be the wisest [illegible] thing to do for her at 11 years of age? If she had to leave the home at '16'—what would become of her? Is it a case in which she must always depend on friends or go to the workhouse? Please excuse these inquiries, the object is not so much to get her into a Home temporarily as to know what is the possibility of the future, the great advantage of the Home would be the training. Would you advise us to try & get her into the Home to ascertain what she is fit for?¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Waifs and Strays' Archive, Case 2434/2, letter from Miss D. 19 April 1890.

¹⁰⁴ Waifs and Strays' Archive, Case 2434/3, letter from Miss D. 23 April 1890.

Later correspondence reveals the rising level of anxiety for both Ada and her friends, as options were exhausted and the girl's future looked increasingly uncertain.

Dear Mr. Rudolf,
 ... The more I hear of the Case the more I feel for the child, & the more I long that she should have her heart's desire to be of some use in the world. Not being an orphan, no orphanage of course can take her-& it seems that among the numerable Charities of England there is scarcely any provision whatever for a one armed child!

The letters carry with them a sense of desperation as well as frustration. Ada's benefactors tried all sorts of negotiations and pleas. They assured Mr. Rudolf that Ada's annual maintenance would be provided so that the cost of her keep need not be a concern. They wrote that Ada's friends had already equipped her with the all-important service "outfit" – the basic undergarments, simple black dresses, and white pinafore aprons for work, and other personal effects that a girl seeking respectable employment was expected to provide herself. All this was meant to reassure that the expenditure of funds for Ada's care and placement would not be unduly high, as she would not be relying on further charity to provide these essential items. They commended Ada's character and promised that others would speak highly of her as well. When that did not yield any returns, one tried a time-honored persuasive technique and called in past favors:

[...] perhaps the Committee will excuse me under the circumstances if I remind them that before it was opened I had a drawing room sale in my house & sent over £40. We made no claim whatever then & did not wish to do so. Although it was tempting to ask for a special interest in one cot.¹⁰⁵

In other words, as might reasonably be expected, a benefactor to an institution could apply some pressure for accommodation in a situation in which they had a personal

¹⁰⁵ Waifs and Strays' Archive, Case 2434/4, letter from Miss D. 26 April 1890.

interest. It was not a successful attempt in Ada's case, and the contribution of forty pounds seems to have had no influence.

In 1895, Ada returned home to live with her single mother, who was ill, and shortly after she was placed into a Home for Training Young Servants in Tunbridge Wells.¹⁰⁶ Many years later, however, Ada's fortunes had changed little, and her friend wrote once again to the Home for Waifs and Strays, pleading for some advice or solution to Ada's troubles:

I was surprised & greatly disappointed to find A[da] thrown out upon the world & unable to get anything to do. [...] She is most willing to work & most industrious. She could look after & dress children & does as much as many who have both arms. I feel very anxious about A[da] & hope you will see your way to find some employment for her in one of your many houses¹⁰⁷

It was not until January of 1905 that an unequivocal statement was issued in reply:¹⁰⁸

“The Finance Com regrets that it is prevented by Society's Constitution from assisting this case as A[da] is no longer a child.”¹⁰⁹ Although friends had tried to intervene on her behalf, it seemed that no solution could be found.

Among the other photographs and printed materials in one of the archive boxes at the LMA is a black and white publicity postcard labeled “Mr. Groom's Industrial Training Homes for Afflicted, Blind, and Crippled Girls,” and gives the address in Sekforde Street. In it, seventeen teen-aged girls in neat aprons and dresses assembled for the camera. It is undated, but based on the girls' clothing it appears to be from the last

¹⁰⁶ Waifs and Strays' Archive, Case 2434/1, Application to Waifs and Strays' Society 26 April 1890.

¹⁰⁷ Waifs and Strays' Archive, Case 2434/10, letter from Mary Cameron to E. de M. Rudolf, 4 October 1904.

¹⁰⁸ Waifs and Strays' Archive, Case 2434/16, Reply to Miss D. 17 January 1905.

¹⁰⁹ Waifs and Strays' Archive, Case 2434/17, letter to Mr. Fowler.

years of the nineteenth century. The caption along the bottom reads: “A Company of One-Armed Girls—Expert Flower Workers.”¹¹⁰

Ada’s story is all the more touching because there were other girls from Tunbridge Wells at the Flower Girls Mission over the years. Of course, it is impossible to know if artificial flower-making would have offered her any kind of satisfactory answer either. On the face of it, Ada was exactly the type of girl, that is, “the weakest,” with “their physical infirmity being accepted as a plea in their favor,”¹¹¹ for whom the mission was created. To be like the unlucky Ada the one-armed girl, who was dependent on friends, charity, or the rates, and vulnerable to the workhouse or even prostitution, was the fate from which Groom wished to save the disabled girls in the mission’s care. It was girls such as these, “maimed, crippled, and blind girls, [...] who needed help most of all,” if they were to become self-supporting.¹¹² He reminded prospective donors that such girls were not eligible for jobs in service, and that there “seems to be literally no other door open to them save such as this Mission opens.”¹¹³ Ada, and women like her, were the “raw material” Groom sought.¹¹⁴

Crippled Flower-girls into Flower-makers

Although he had already made the investments and trained able-bodied workers for the artificial flower-making scheme, training workers with various physical handicaps required new approaches and new operations. Groom’s project has been counted among the earliest workplaces to specifically deal with the need for specialized training and

¹¹⁰ Undated photographs in box, LMA 4305.

¹¹¹ John Groom, *The Silver Vase or the Gathered Posy* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1891), 49.

¹¹² John Groom, *Forget Me Not*, 11.

¹¹³ Groom, *Forget Me Not*, 10.

¹¹⁴ Groom, *Snow Drops*, 29.

employment of the physically or cognitively impaired.¹¹⁵ When Groom offered an explanation for why he had chosen flower-making as the trade for his disabled students, he stated, “too often the coarse work provided for the poor and helpless is uninteresting and simply repellant.”¹¹⁶ Groom’s experiment in workplace reforms for the “poor and helpless” was unique in a number of other ways. In his case, the girls he wished to train had various physical impairments, and these required accommodations in the way the work was done. One noted historian of disability states that this was an important, and at first isolated, development in the history of education and one that only much later spread to the continent and beyond.¹¹⁷ Although there is no written evidence that explicitly describes how he adapted tools, the photographic evidence shows many girls in the process of making flowers. It appears that blind girls and girls with the use of only one hand were able to use tools or were able to perform some other part of the flower-making work on their own.

One of the most striking innovations was that the industrial training was extended to girls, and disabled girls, at that. “Industrial training” for women generally meant training for domestic service only until much later in the century, but Groom’s program offered training in an actual craft, although it was one that was not uniformly held in high esteem. While there were some contemporaneous placements for the visually impaired, such as the Barclay Workshop for Blind Women, they concentrated only on “weaving,

¹¹⁵ Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 222; Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 121, 210 n.46; Koven, “Remembering and Dismemberment,” 1173 n.15.

¹¹⁶ Editor, “Those Penny Bunches: Flower and Watercress Sellers at Work and Play,” *The Quiver*, January 1901, 1117.

¹¹⁷ Jacques-Henri Stiker, *A History of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 100.

plaiting, and knitting,” but these were not activities that could provide self-support.¹¹⁸

The only industrial training schools for the physically disabled during this time were for boys and men.¹¹⁹ By contrast, Groom’s training was offered to “all the crippled and physically infirm girls from the streets and slums,” and provided “for the most destitute and needy a Home, and gives to every crippled girl a thoroughly practical industrial training, enabling them to earn their own living.”¹²⁰ His plan was to offer training and steady work, but also room and board in a group home, for which the girls paid from their earnings. He offered “sheltered employment” to a number of otherwise unemployable women and took an active role in finding them work and homes after their training.¹²¹ In this way, women could learn a trade and be protected from the vagaries of the market and the perils of the street. Unlike other placements for the disabled or poor, Groom’s did not require an outside benefactor in order to admit a girl. He also believed that, “a girl of average ability who has the power of manipulation will in time become a proficient flower maker.”¹²² But, it was also possible to do more, as “the work gives abundant scope for the development of whatever talent they may possess,”¹²³ and he wrote that talented “pattern hands,” that is, floral designers, were always especially welcomed. This seems to be borne out by notes in the pattern books and the samples in the archive, where new

¹¹⁸ Barclay Workshop for Blind Women, London Metropolitan Archive A/FWA/C/D20/1.

¹¹⁹ For example, National Boy’s Training Home. Marianne Moore, “Social Control or Protection of the Child? The Debates on the Industrial Schools Acts, 1857-1894” *Journal of Family History* 33 (2008), 359-385.

¹²⁰ Groom’s, *Forget-Me-Not*, 28th Annual Report, 1894.

¹²¹ Groom, *Aim and Work*, 11.

¹²² Groom, *Aim and Work* 11.

¹²³ Groom, *Aim and Work* 11.

designs have been added by women in the Groom workshop,¹²⁴ and by the fact that the mission often won prizes in international and national contests.¹²⁵

Another important difference between Groom's and other charity schools or programs was that it was not necessary to have outside family or friends financially sponsor a girl's stay. He did ask that the girl have a lady "friend" who would take an interest in her, but this did not include providing monetary support.¹²⁶ Groom promised training and lodging, in exchange for the girls' labor. This was a generous plan, especially when it is discovered that the girls were paid both during the training and at the "market rate" despite the fact that they were generally slower and paid by the hour not by the piece.¹²⁷ According to the notes kept by the finance committee, "It was decided to pay the one-armed girls 8/- per week minimum and the blind girls 7/- per week minimum plus 6d extra for every 1/- earned above 7/- per week. It was felt more humane to keep the girls on at a serious loss rather than have them face the workhouse." Groom's commitment to keeping women out of the workhouse in spite of the economic cost is evident in this decision to structure the women's pay this way. Although Groom tried, rhetorically and even to some extent, materially, to make the training open to any girl who desired it, there were still many circumstances that, here, too, could rule a girl out of consideration. As practical matters, a girl had to have the use of at least one hand, she had to be free of open sores and communicable illness, she had to be of reasonable intelligence, she had to

¹²⁴ Also, in *Silver Vase* John Groom, says "pattern hands" that is, designers, are always especially welcomed.

¹²⁵ Silver Prize at International Exhibition in Japan, 1912; "for three years in succession in a competition open to the world, they have carried off the prize," "The Crippled Flower Girls' Mission," *Leamington Spa Courier*, 23 February 1912.

¹²⁶ John Groom, *Artificial Flower-Making*.

¹²⁷ Committee Meeting Minutes of 19 May 1914, "It was decided to pay the one-armed girls 8/- per week minimum and the blind girls 7/- per week minimum plus 6d extra for every 1/- earned above 7/- per week. It was felt more humane to keep the girls on at a serious loss rather than have them face the workhouse." LMA 4305/06/67.

be able to sit up, she had to be able to move about either in a wheelchair or with the aid of crutches, she had to be able to see (at least until 1903 when blind girls were admitted for the first time) and she had to be of good enough “moral character” to be able to follow the rules and religious requirements of the mission.¹²⁸

As material, social, and economic processes, there were few similarities between selling flowers on the street and making artificial ones in a workshop. Flower-making of any sort required training and some skill, patience and maturity, and mastering the wide range of tasks involved in creating the finished product. One of the main points of connection was the emphasis on color and design. Groom believed that the girls’ close experience with the real flowers, whether their own, or because “so many of their mothers and sisters” were flower-girls had trained their eyes and natural sensibilities.¹²⁹ Groom maintained that the girls, by virtue of their “afflictions,” brought a special sensitivity to the work and were both themselves enriched by it and lent to it a particular ineffable quality. He wrote about the many ways in which the crippled girls were well-suited for the work. Not only did he argue that the girls were quite eager to work, “The many flowers in their various stages of manufacture, with their bright and natural colours, are an inspiration and incentive to the poor cripple who instinctively desires to join in the work.”¹³⁰ But, he went further in explaining, “These weakly ones...having been so accustomed to flowers, everything associated with them seems to come quite natural to these girls. In some cases, it would almost appear that they instinctively take to the art of

¹²⁸ Groom, *Aim and Work*, Committee Meeting Minutes of 21 July 1914, paralyzed girls excluded. LMA/4305/06/67. A physician’s letter in the files states that a girl is now free of “running sores” and can enter the mission.

¹²⁹ Editor, “Those Penny Bunches,” *The Quiver*, January 1901, 1117.

¹³⁰ Groom, *Artificial Flower-Making*, 6.

forming the leaves and petals of the most delicate flowers.”¹³¹ With these ideas, Groom also suggested that the crippled girls brought a special insight to the flower-making, not simply because of their familiarity with the different varieties of flowers, but, and especially, because of still prevalent beliefs that the loss of one sensory ability could enhance those remaining. For example, this description of a musical recital by blind students praises the “correctness of ear and sweetness of voice granted to those afflicted ones,” suggesting that this musical gift in exchange for their sight “must be indeed a solace to them.”¹³² In this way, Groom conveyed the idea that the crippled girls were not victims nor were they being punished, rather possessed a God-given natural affinity for the work. While ideas about special sensitivities in the disabled were emphasized, ideas about the types of productive work that could be done with people with disabilities were limited. For his part, Groom instead insisted that not only were the girls able to do the type of work he proposed, but he went further and argued that the crippled girls were not working against handicaps, but rather, had a special gift for the work of flower-making. Through their heightened natural abilities and instincts, the crippled girls bring a more refined, or purer artistry and aesthetic ability to the flower-making. This was an idea that others shared regarding the refined aesthetic sense of cripples. Regarding an exhibition of artificial flower made by “the little cripples” of the Staffordshire Potteries, Lady Violet Greville the “Place aux Dames” correspondent for *The Graphic* wrote that the blooms were “so life-like” and “ingeniously crafted” that many people believed them to be real. She, too, was of the opinion that “cripples seem often to possess a peculiarly delicate

¹³¹ Groom, *The Silver Vase*, 50.

¹³² “Industrial Charities,” *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church*, 1 January 1864, 86.

sense of touch and love of colour.”¹³³ Groom blended his conviction that suffering is given by God and that God has reasons with the evangelical idea that those so afflicted have a special calling because they have suffered so much in this lifetime.¹³⁴ Combined with their special talent for artistry, the flowers, in turn, were *gifts* from the hands of these afflicted workers.

Although Groom’s ideas were generally positive and worked to broaden the possibilities of people with disabilities, nineteenth-century observers deployed a wide range of ideas about the senses, “instincts” and proximity to nature of people with disability which made for a conflicted and painful body of thought that was more often limiting and isolating than liberating. Other reformers, such as Mary (Mrs. Humphry) Ward, would also advance the idea that people with disabilities possessed extraordinary artistic talents and should be directed towards occupations that were not merely make-work schemes—oakum-picking for the handicapped—but rather created fully participating independent actors. In a speech she wrote for the Invalid Schools Movement (1900-1903) and delivered in Birmingham in 1902, and elsewhere, as she traveled the nation and spoke in favor of the expansion of programs in the state-sponsored schools for children with disabilities, she wrote, “It is difficult to say but *probably* a somewhat unusual amount of artistic ability among them” in regard to the “cripple or invalid” child. She suggested the need for a special program in such schools for giving time for “artistic subjects” including, flower-making, hand-weaving, art-needlework and “drawing with an

¹³³ Violet Greville, “Place aux Dames,” *The Graphic*, 15 July 1905, 60.

¹³⁴ Davidson, et al, “Images of Disabled Children,”; Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), on pain in evangelical thought.

industrial aim.”¹³⁵ At a conference on Crippled Children in 1900, one committee member, a physician, wrote in his report of July 13 that, “In the case of physically defective children, gifted as these are, with considerable mental capacity and with a power of imagination and artistic sense above the average healthy children,” special accommodations should be implemented.¹³⁶ This was approximately twenty-one years after Groom had started his private training in artificial flower making. Ward probably lacked the evangelical’s certainty that it was all part of God’s plan.

The flowers and the girls themselves drew high praise from observers as Groom toured the UK with them and they provided the decorations for royal affairs and public exhibitions. One writer, after praising the beauty and verisimilitude of the flowers posed the question to any who doubted that such work could be accomplished by “the halt, the maimed, and the blind”:

Who shall say that disabled humanity cannot contribute to the world’s work? Who shall say that their lives are not far more valuable and far more nobly spent than those of thousands physically whole and sound, who belong to the army of wealthy wasters?¹³⁷

This was a strong endorsement, and one that challenged any comers regarding the “usefulness” of these women at a time when eugenicist ideas were entering the discourse.¹³⁸ While Groom had many enthusiastic supporters, it is not altogether unsurprising that his flower-making scheme faced strong censure from the Charity Organisation Society. Just as they had suspected that he had only trained the disabled

¹³⁵ Papers regarding the foundation of an invalid school board. LMA/4524/J/04/004 emphasis in original

¹³⁶ School Board of London School Management Committee, Report on meeting, 13 July 1900, Passmore Edwards Settlement Papers.

¹³⁷ “The Crippled Flower Girls’ Mission,” *Leamington Spa Courier*, 23 February 1912.

¹³⁸ Lucy Bland and Lesley A. Hall, “Eugenics in Britain: The View from the Metropole,” in Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2010), 213-227.

girls for domestic service when the *bonafide* flower-girls had rejected the proposition, the COS inspectors believed Groom had only turned his attention to the crippled workers after he could not persuade enough of the “open-air girls” to take up the flower-making trade once he had begun the venture and invested heavily in it, and instead, “the crippled women and girls took the place that had been prepared for them.”¹³⁹ In a confidential letter to an associate, following his visit to John Groom’s Crippleage, a Charity Organisation Society inspector wrote that while the girls seemed happy, and the factory itself was pleasant and bright. Nevertheless, he was of the opinion that “One would not send any crippled girls to the Groom factory if she were at all capable of being taught [another] trade.”¹⁴⁰

Resistance

Certainly, it was not the place for every girl. In October of 1908, John Groom received a letter from Miss H.E. Grinling, the Honorable Secretary of the Woolwich District Invalid Children’s Committee in reference to a girl named Jessie Badman. Miss Grinling wrote expressing delight that Groom would be able to take Jessie for a trial month at the Crippleage, and that he would be able to keep her there. Grinling explained that she had been trying to find a placement since 1902 for Jessie, but that the girl’s grandmother and aunt had been confounding those efforts. Although the Woolwich agency had referred Jessie’s case to the local Inspector for Cruelty for Children, no action had been taken. Mr. Fowler, from Doctor Barnardo’s had offered to take Jessie, but again the grandmother had refused to allow Jessie to leave. The girl had for some time been

¹³⁹ A confidential letter to HG Willink (possibly from Edward Farish) 14 November, 1902 LMA A/FWA/C/D85/5.

¹⁴⁰ A confidential letter to HG Willink (possibly from Edward Farish) 14 November, 1902 LMA A/FWA/C/D85/5.

under the care of a surgeon at St. Bartholomew's Hospital for a problem with her foot. The surgeon, Eccles, had instructed that Jessie wear a "proper surgical boot" to correct her condition, and he had advised that, in time, she should be able to again walk normally. This was not being done, however, and Grinling indicated that it was the grandmother who interfered with the plan. A subsequent medical inspection at the Invalid School revealed that the child's foot was now "deformed entirely through neglect" and that if she continued to go about without the appropriate instrument "she would be lame for life." Grinling requested that Groom ensure Jessie would visit the London surgeon at St. Bartholomew's to see what could be done. She concluded her letter by saying, "I do sincerely hope and trust you will be able to keep Jessie."¹⁴¹

After a lapse of almost four years, however, the next letter involving Jessie in the case file does not bring good news. The handwritten letter is to Jesse from someone named James Ross in Elgin, where Jessie's father was now living, and where she has been returned. The letter begins:

Dear Jessie, I am shocked and grieved that your conduct has been such that Mr. Groom cannot keep you in the house and is instead sending you back to Elgin. What you intend doing there, God only knows, everybody has done what they could for you but it appears that you have not appreciated what has been done and evidently you do not recognize your position or the folly of your conduct. Neither your Auntie nor I can do anything for you here and you will simply have to fall back on your father.

This friend further advises Jessie to remind her father of her approaching arrival, and warns that "you ought by this time to have enough common sense to keep his house for him but I am afraid, judging from the reports received that you will not be much comfort

¹⁴¹ Letter to Mr. Groom from H.E. Grinling, 23 September 1908 LMA 4305.

to him.” He writes that Mr. Groom and Miss Anderson were very “grieved” to have taken this step, but she had had “ample warning and opportunity to behave and appreciate” what had been done for her, and that there was “no one to blame” but herself.¹⁴² Unfortunately, there are no other details about Jessie’s behavior. Whether it was truly egregious, or simply adolescent acting out is impossible to say.

A few days later, Miss Anderson sent a note to Groom. She confided that Jessie appeared to be out of options. “Perhaps,” she wrote, “it is just as well that Jessie has come to Elgin but what is to become of her I cannot think. Her behavior is very regrettable—I feel so sorry to think of the trouble she has caused the kind matron in the house and all who have done so much for her.”¹⁴³ Since Jessie had been at Groom’s for four years, it is possible he had (even rather patiently) given her many chances to meet the expectations; after all, Groom had dealt with hundreds of troubled adolescent girls over the years. Jessie’s behavior probably finally crossed a line that Groom could no longer support. Jessie’s motivations are unknown. Perhaps the difficulties she struggled with were more complex than the adults around her were able to recognize. Maybe she had wanted to get to Elgin all along. It is worth remembering what had brought Jessie to Groom’s in the first place. According to the people close to Jessie’s case, her grandmother and aunt had failed her over and over, and they perhaps had intentionally prevented her foot from healing properly. It seems clear that Jessie no longer wished to be at Groom’s. Bad behavior would release her from the training program, and at eighteen, she could determine where would go to live. Her behavior was perhaps the one thing completely in her control. Now, on the cusp of adulthood, Jessie may have been making her first

¹⁴² Letter to Jessie Badman (Thompson) from James Ross, 19 November 1912, LMA 4305.

¹⁴³ Letter to John Groom from E.L. Anderson, 23 November 1912 LMA 4305.

independent decision. Whatever the case, Jessie Badman's situation underscores the limits of discipline and social control. The interventions of Mr. Groom were unwanted and Jessie exerted her agency in the way available to her.

III. Critique

Institutions such as the one founded by Groom are now much-contested sites in the history of education and of employment practices for people with disabilities. The way in which such attempts are assessed is complicated by differing interpretations of the work they do. Others maintain that the reforms and experiments carried out by charitable institutions such as Groom's helped—albeit not as radically or fully as desired—to change attitudes and lay the way for the post-war welfare state's attempt to ameliorate poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and social discrimination for people with disabilities.¹⁴⁴

Sheltered work schemes such as Groom's are a divisive *bête noir* in the history of disability. Although they have been viewed as “progressive” improvements by some, others argue that they ultimately only served to exclude and “other” the disabled, and, in the process, “perpetuated the poverty” and social isolation of their working-class pupils. Disability Historian Ann Borsay has written that this type of institutional outlook reproduced the belief that the only type of work suitable for the disabled was the most low-skilled and poorly paid.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Bredberg, “Writing Disability History,” *Disability & Society* 14 (1999), 189-201. This is really the foundational argument of critical Disability Studies as a field—that it has been a history of exclusion and marginalization, a position with which this present study does not fully concur. Important texts include the following but it is a growing field, and this just skims the surface, Stone, *The Disabled State*; Oliver and Barnes, *Disabled People and Social Policy: From Exclusion to Inclusion*; Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy*; Shakespeare, “Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?”

¹⁴⁴ Davidson, et al. “Images of Disability.”

¹⁴⁵ Borsay cites one disabled man in 1923 as saying, “I’m fed up with making silly toys,” but this is much later than Groom’s first venture into work for the disabled girls, in *Disability and Social Policy*, 131.

Along that line of argument is the contention that most of the work which was considered appropriate for the disabled was the so-called “fancy-work” almost always associated with women.¹⁴⁶ Fancy work was typically a leisure activity middle-class women performed in the home at one end of the continuum, unless it was done in a workshop by disabled people. Many considered fancy work to be suitable employment for working-class girls who were unable to walk or perform hard physical labor because it would give meaning to their days, or provide a way to fill “idle hours” and the “depressing” and “unnatural” circumstances of their conditions. It seemed good enough that the work was “pretty, interesting, and full of constant change, so there is never anything wearying or monotonous in it.”¹⁴⁷ For some, this may indeed have been a welcome diversion from illnesses that were all consuming. As a means of earning an income it was woefully inadequate. Typically, they were jobs that could accommodate workers who did not have to rely on skill; they performed by memory once learned. They were also occupations associated with homework and sweated labor, and thus, subject to the enormous abuses associated with those forms of labor.¹⁴⁸ Artificial flower-making was a more complicated than some other trades as it could range from the lowest paid homework to better compensated artisanal work.

¹⁴⁶ Beverly Gordon, “Victorian Fancywork in the American Home: Fantasy and Accommodation” In Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne, eds., *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1988), 48-68.

¹⁴⁷ John Groom, *Aim and Work*. LMA43054/4. Similar rhetoric is interspersed throughout all of his materials regarding the “benefits” of artificial flower-making.

¹⁴⁸ The historiography on homework and sweated labor during this period includes classic works by Eileen Boris, among them, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the US* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Judith Coffin, “Social Science Meets Sweated Labor: Reinterpreting Women’s Work in Late Nineteenth-Century France,” *The Journal of Modern History* 63 (June 1991), 230-270.

Conclusion

In the context of his time, the work Groom did was not meant to impoverish—financially, intellectually, or spiritually—his clients. Much of the self-concept of reformers such as Groom was connected to liberating the poor or the sick from the very limited choices confronting them. The evidence suggests that Groom’s efforts were directed by compassion and, in many cases, were at the forefront of much needed change. His institution continued to evolve over the years to adapt to changing perceptions of disability and the needs of the disabled. Although it could be argued that John Groom’s fell squarely and resoundingly into the categories of paternalistic and overbearing maintenance, surveillance and circumscription of women and in particular, of disabled girls and women—a perfect manifestation of Foucault’s “age of confinement” – Groom’s also represents an example of an embrace of modernity and a radical set of ideas. Examining the ways in which Groom experimented with education and workplace reform recasts some present debates by illuminating them with historical insights and should be useful in understanding both the legacy of the past, and how to move forward. Groom and the sort of innovations we see here actually challenged prevailing notions about disability and work and put into practice many accommodations which were scoffed at by his peers, but which ultimately led to reforms and new practices, the effects of which, for better or worse, are still apparent today. Through his commitment to independence for women and girls with disabilities, he expanded the range of possibilities through workplace reforms and innovations. The work of the mission was carried on by his eldest son through the twentieth century, and it continued to offer quality-of-life improvements and independent living options for people with disabilities. Later, in the 1960s and ‘70s,

Groom was recognized as a leader in the building of specially-adapted housing flats and vacation cottages for the disabled (and their families or caregivers). None of these developments was without controversy, and they remain at the heart of debates about efforts to reform special education, employment, and housing. As for the girls and women themselves, it is possible to see evidence of their exercise of agency and choice, albeit within a narrow sphere of options.

Chapter Four
Missionary Capitalism:
John Groom's Moral Economy

*All charity ought to be conducted on a good business basis*¹

On the fourteenth of August 1915 John Groom delivered a speech at a picnic lunch held in joint celebration of his seventieth birthday and the fiftieth anniversary of the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission.² As he so often did in many of the mission's publications, on that occasion he chose words that reflected his belief that the mission was both a business venture and one grounded in his strong evangelical faith. On that happy day, he could "rejoice to say," that the hard work of his many years had "been a financial success."³ Groom had begun his charitable life's work as he entered adulthood—his personal triumphs and failures were the mission's and vice versa, and whatever setbacks and achievements the mission experienced he felt as deeply as if they were his own.

In 1879, at the personal request of Angela Burdett-Coutts, who had offered to pay his salary, he had turned over the running of his silver-engraving business to his brothers so that he could run the mission full-time. An offer such as that, to "engage in full-time Christian work" was one he could not refuse.⁴ Thus, he may have felt more keenly a reason to keep the mission's many branches in good working order. Yet it had left him in a position straddling both worlds of business and religion that may have sometimes been

¹ John Groom in "The Crippled Flower Girls' Mission," *Leamington Spa Courier*, 23 February 1912, 5.

² There was a bit of fudging on the dates, the mission officially started in 1866 and Groom was born in 1845, but he had been very ill recently, and perhaps all felt that it was best to make hay while the sun was still shining.

³ John Groom, Typescript of 70th birthday speech, August 1915, LMA 4305.

⁴ R.H. Campbell, "A Critique of the Christian Businessman and his Paternalism," in *Business and Religion in Britain*, ed. David J. Jeremy (Aldershot, UK: Gower, 1988) 27-46; 31.

a challenge to balance privately and publicly.⁵ Many evangelicals believed that they had a personal and moral obligation to serve as stewards to society's economic life.⁶ Often this led to accusations of hypocrisy or suspicion of their motivations.⁷ It was, however, for some, another facet of the commitment they made in their conversion and part of their life emulating the life of Christ. Giving to, or supporting charity was not enough.⁸ Evangelicals were not alone in this blending of the philanthropic and entrepreneurial, the charitable and profitable. Other nonconformist groups, notably the Unitarians and the Quakers had combined great success in business with philanthropy.⁹ Success in business was both an obligation, and a confirmation of one's own grace and election, and it was lashed with great helpings of paternalism as well.¹⁰

In his work with artificial flower-makers, Groom combined several elements from the world in which he lived, worked, and worshipped to create a moral economy that operated according to its own dictates, with its own sense of financial priorities and proprieties, standards of behavior and beauty, and ethics of consumption and production.¹¹ What were the elements that made it missionary capitalism according to

⁵ Campbell, "Christian Businessman," 31.

⁶ Jane Garnett, "Evangelicalism and Business in Mid-Victorian Britain," in John Wolfe, ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780-1980* (London: SPCK, 1995), 59-80. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁷ Campbell, "Christian Businessman," A responsible Christian could not support unfettered economic efficiency, 31-32.

⁸ Garnett, "Evangelicalism and Business," 63.

⁹ Examples included the Cadbury and Fry families, Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*. Garnett, "Evangelicalism and Business."

¹⁰ Campbell, "Christian Businessman."

¹¹ David M. Craig, *John Ruskin and the Ethics of Consumption* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 4-8. I am using Craig's definition of ethics of consumption meaning "the obligations that consumers incur to other people and to the world," but adding production to both shift the balance back to a nineteenth century concern with production and one which would have resonated with Groom and to mean the obligations that capitalists have to their workers and the world, or, in the Baptist minister's view, to God.

this worldview? Some of his principles included: Work should not brutalize anyone, or turn them into a machine, or rob them of their dignity; Ideally, work should maintain the division of masculine and feminine, with women doing and light and pretty work; Girls needed special looking after; and, finally, charity should operate like a business. In this statement from his major written work, *The Silver Vase, or, The Gather Posy*, which was published in 1890, Groom perfectly summed up his guiding principles in explaining the how he approached the work he believed he was called to do: “while the most Christian influence is brought to bear upon the women, girls, and children whom it shelters and cares for, its methods of assisting them are eminently practical and business-like.”¹² A close reading of this statement reveals much about his moral code, and perhaps what he thought would resonate with his like-minded contemporaries, and others who would be inclined to open their hearts and purse strings for the charitable work of the mission. Groom believed that in order to be successful in this endeavor he would have to run it “on business lines.” Like others in his social, religious, and cultural order, he also believed that there was a clear boundary between the realm of the masculine and the realm of the feminine and this should be reflected in the work they do.¹³ He believed that his endeavor had to be a “good” business. The workers had to be paid fairly, they had to have dignity in their work, and they had to be able to live in a way that accorded with his moral principles, and his religious ones as well. These business and moral values also applied to the products, to the way in which he promoted them, and to the way the mission handled its public and private affairs. Some of the choices and decisions he made

¹² John Groom, *The Silver Vase or the Gathered Posy*. With Introduction by Lady Savory [Lady Mayoress, City of London, 1890-1891.] (London: Morgan and Scott, 1890-1891).

¹³ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 414; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 35.

were novel. Some seem hypocritical or inconsistent, but often have a logic of their own within the framework of the moral economy in which he operated. The first of these contested ideas was what it meant to run a charity on business lines.

Blurred Lines

Groom maintained that the Industrial Brigade (as the flower-making arm was sometimes called) was run on “business lines.” The commonly used refrain “business lines” does not seem to have had one set definition, but, rather, was a kind of gentlemen’s agreement based on cherished British notions of fair play and free trade. Always, the issue above all else was that “charity must not enter into competition with legitimate trade.”¹⁴ To some of Groom’s contemporaries, however, just the very idea of “charity” suggested that special measures already were being taken that guaranteed the enterprise would succeed, at the expense of its unsubsidized competitors. Thus, to be clear in his meanings, he wrote that there was to be there could be no “underselling” ; “no sweating of crippled labour”; the work undertaken had to be one “that would commend itself to men of business”; and one that would be “suitable to the capacity of these afflicted girls.”¹⁵ By employing the trope of working on “business lines” Groom hoped to satisfy skeptics about the unconventional work the mission had undertaken. While Groom insisted that his charity indeed was operating on these business lines, it was much contested on several grounds. The two things that seemed to be raised by contemporaries and the COS the most were: first, that Groom was “underselling the trade,” and second, that the mission did not circulate a statement of its accounts.

¹⁴ John Groom, *The Romance of John Groom’s Crippleage*, 1919, 11-12.

¹⁵ Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 11-12.

In 1902, the COS received a letter from a Mr. E. Price, who sought COS officer Helen Bosanquet's knowledge on the flower-making firms in the Clerkenwell district. Bosanquet was well-known for her research on women's labor, and Price wanted information—for reasons he did not disclose in this letter--on the "methods" that Groom used in his workshop. Bosanquet replied to the letter, saying that she herself had not surveyed the firms in question, but that Miss Ashe, a former COS investigator in the Clerkenwell territory had visited "nine or ten" local flower manufacturers and she would put Ashe and Price in direct contact. She added that, according to field notes Miss Ashe had left on file, "Flowermaking used to be open to lame girls—but no firms will take them since the passing of the employers' liability act as they fear the responsibility—Mr. Groom, Sekford Street takes them, but he *does not work on business principles and undersells the trade.*"¹⁶ Bosanquet concluded, "This is corroborative evidence, is it not?"¹⁷ Although it is not clear what it is meant to be in evidence of, the letter leaves no doubt that Mrs. Bosanquet is convinced that Mr. Groom is not working on business lines, moreover, he is hiring disabled girls and underselling the other firms according to Miss Ashe. It is not specified on what basis Miss Ashe had come to the conclusion that Groom "undersold the trade." The always present suspicion that the charity might be receiving preferential treatment and being "enabled by charitable subsidies," thus upsetting the essential balance of fair play could have spurred the COS to send investigators "a great many years ago" to interview competing flower-makers in the Clerkenwell area in

¹⁶ Emphasis added.

¹⁷ Helen Bosanquet writes this letter on April 11, 1902 to Mr. Price, who had enquired, in confidence, about the working of the mission. About Bosanquet's long career in social policy administration, see A.M. McBriar, *An Edwardian Mixed Doubles: The Bosanquets versus the Webbs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). José Harris, "Bosanquet, Helen (1860–1925)," M. C. Curthoys in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. David Cannadine, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/article/37208>.

response to their “outcry” to find evidence of that. They may also have reasoned that Groom’s overhead was lower than other firms since “crippled girls took the place that was prepared” for the street selling flower girls, and he could therefore pay them lower wages. Or, and that he had favorable concessions on the rates since he was operating as a charity. Or, that his product—in materials and workmanship—was “not of a very high class.”¹⁸ They could then easily enough come to the conclusion that in addition to all manner of special treatment and advantages, the unfair conditions also involved being unscrupulously underselling other manufacturers when the flowers were sold to wholesalers. However, according to the report filed by another COS Investigator, of all the local businessmen with whom they spoke, not a single one admitted that Groom was underselling them. To the contrary, noted the investigator, many spoke very highly of Mr. Groom. In fact, one manufacturer remarked that Groom must “be a man with a very good heart” and that he had once observed him “at a place away from London supporting a crippled girl.” The jaundiced eye of the COS investigator came to the conclusion that it was likely the same incident the investigator he had himself witnessed (at the seaside town of Clacton), but he believed it had been done for show.¹⁹ Another investigator noted that of the thirty girls he saw, some were “cripples” and some were “deformed,” but were “all clean and very orderly and seem to take an interest in their work,” and that the matrons were pleasant and tidy; that Mr. Groom was unusually accommodating.²⁰ As for the manufacturers interviewed by COS, was there nothing to tell or were they simply

¹⁸ A confidential letter to HG Willink (possibly from Edward Farish) 14 November, 1902. LMA A/FWA/C/D85/5.

¹⁹ Report on the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission, (Illegible signature) 13 August 1896. COS Archives, LMA FWA.

²⁰ Report of 17 April 1896 Edward Farish. COS Archive LMA FWA.

keeping mum. True, it may have been in their best interests to keep their financial and business arrangements in confidence. The COS was not a beloved organization by any stretch of the imagination, but what would the competing businessmen have to gain by keeping Mr. Groom's secrets, if he had any. The COS was not convinced by the lack of evidence; and they did not hesitate to mention that Mr. Groom undersold the trade, even when not directly asked.²¹

Groom's efforts at establishing a charity "that was not a charity" but a self-supporting business that operated on "business lines" was complicated by the fact that contemporaries did not fully trust charities to be operating on business lines.²² In fact, much of the entire *raison d'être* of the COS is to sniff out fraud among charities and their benefactors. The spectre of the cunning beggar never quite goes away, and in some ways, only heightened as new technologies allowed ever more distance between the parties. Charitable reformers were plagued by investigations regarding the legitimacy of their operations.²³ The integrity of directors was always in question, and potential donors sought assurances that they were supporting worthy endeavors, and that the large part of their donation would go to the truly (deserving) needy rather than to corrupt or inept officials, or to maintaining bloated bureaucracies. Other critics questioned the financial infrastructure of charities. An article written in 1875, while generally commending the

²¹ In response to Miss James, who had commented about the flowers being "excellently well made," C.S. Loch wrote, "We have been informed on good authority that he undersells the trade." Letter from Miss James to CS Loch, 26 March 1902; CS Loch to Miss James, 14 April 1902 COS Enquiry Files Archives, LMA FWA.

²² John Groom, *Artificial Flower-Making*, 1904, 4.

²³ Frank Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988); Michael J.D. Roberts, "Charity Disestablished? The Origins of the Charity Organisation Society Revisited, 1868-1871," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54 (January 2003), 40; Madeline Roof, *A Hundred Years of Family Welfare: A Study of the Family Welfare Association (Formerly Charity Organisation Society) 1869-1969* (London, Michael Joseph, 1972); Daniel Siegel, "Charity and Condescension: Victorian Literature and the Dilemmas of Philanthropy," *Victorian Studies* 56 (Winter 2014), 284-286.

intentions of members such as Octavia Hill, nevertheless issued the following admonition:

At present, the Charity Organisation is a new broom; all its present supporters are fresh disciples; but when the thing gets old, when it sinks inevitably into the routine of a society, charged with certain business, we fear there will be more than enough of “committee business,” of favouritism, of sharp dealing here, and carelessness there, of enormous expenses in management, and small funds for charity; in short, charity will sink into a trade, and be carried on as companies often do carry on trade.²⁴

This last concern ran so deep, that even the self-appointed guardians of the public purse, the Charity Organisation Society, fell prey to these suspicions. Few allegations against a charity were so damning however, as to associate them with “trade.” At the same time that charities were supposed to operate on vaunted “business principles,” any comparison with “trade” and its associated evils could be damning. The COS was sharply critical in the evaluation of a charity’s slip into crass commercialism, or if it saw any indication of a charity taking unfair advantage, or a step away from purely philanthropic scruples.

Perhaps the one thing worse than being associated with trade, was the accusation that a charity operated for the benefit of its operators alone. To be sure, this contradiction would put charities such as Grooms, which tried to combine philanthropy and business into a bind: to give the appearance of operating as a proper business without appearing to be conducting trade.

Doing the Books

Charged as they were with surveillance of wayward charities, the archives of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) overflow with inquiries, some of which the COS

²⁴Editor, *Women and Work*, 41, 13 March 1875.

itself solicited from the unsuspecting public in blind classified advertisements. Indeed, it maintained an entire Enquiry Department solely to handle the flood of letters which came from both concerned citizens and from affiliated organizations.²⁵ Correspondents requested information from the COS regarding the legitimacy of a particular charitable organization and sometimes included the entity's publicity materials for reference. The COS encouraged concerned parties to send such materials to their attention so that their surveillance operation would be brought to bear.

Wary potential donors turned to the COS to inquire about Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission and the queries were often directed to COS President C.S. Loch. The COS's advice was sought even by some whose inclination was to support the mission, but who were hesitant because of trepidation about flower-making, or "parading cripples," or perhaps about charities of any sort. Or--as was often the case--about the accounting, and the supposed lack of a statement of accounts. One writer, after receiving a satisfactory reply to her inquiry, and in order to show her appreciation for the response from the COS, which typically consisted of a *pro forma* note from C.S. Loch, and a copy of its printed (negative) report on the charity in question, sent word that, "she is much obliged for the information sent to her about the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission. She is very glad to be prevented subscribing to a society which appears to be so little deserving of support."²⁶ Another writer, who initially seemed favorably disposed towards subscribing after having visited an exhibition of the girls' work, expressed that she

²⁵And, according to historians of the COS in a recent article in the *Journal of British Studies*, the COS actively sought such letters in a sly and clever manner by running simple classified advertisements requesting that anyone having received literature from any charity should forward it to the officers of the COS. In this way, the COS covertly gathered information on charities. Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe, "The Charity-Mongers of Modern Babylon: Bureaucracy, Scandal, and the Transformation of the Philanthropic Marketplace, c.1870–1912," *Journal of British Studies* 54 (January 2015), 118-137.

²⁶ Letter from Miss Perkins to CS Loch, COS Enquiry Files Archives. LMA FWA.

wished to “make up my mind with regard to this mission [...]” She described the “extraordinary crowd” the show had drawn, and wrote, “The flowers are excellently well made.” In spite of this glowing appraisal, she added the fatal stroke of doubt with her closing statement, “I cannot see that the Mission circulates any Balance Sheets and Statement of Accounts.”²⁷ The charge, leveled at the mission, that it did not circulate a balance sheet or statements of account was simply untrue, and one the COS did not correct that until 1902. As early as 1890 the WFGM Annual Reports, as well as freestanding pamphlets pertaining to other branches, did in fact carry an accounting of the expenses and balances, in addition to subscriber lists and itemized lists of income.²⁸ The mission published a freestanding booklet which contained the balance sheet for the year 1894-1895 with an itemized accounting. Although the COS had an ethical, if not legal, obligation to set that record straight, they did not do so for many years. When they finally admitted that “he does publish accounts,” they offered no reason other than “the Watercress and Flower Girl Mission is entirely under his own management” as to why it was “not an agency that we should recommend for support.”²⁹

Referring to one of Groom’s published annual reports, in which a narrative description of the balance sheet is also included, a COS investigator wrote, “the information therein given is extremely vague and sentimental. The actual work of the Mission is shrouded in obscurity.”³⁰ Copies of these reports now in the archives of the COS are riddled with handwritten notes and questions and underlines--“How many girls were actually fed? How many were repeat customers? What was the cost per meal?”

²⁷ Letter from Miss James 26 March 1902. COS Enquiry Files Archives. LMA FWA.

²⁸ In the Watercress and Flower Girls Archive is a copy of the report that was circulated to anyone who wrote to the COS Enquiry Department regarding Groom from 1892 on. LMA 4305.

²⁹ CS Loch to Miss James, 14 April 1902 COS Enquiry Files Archives. LMA FWA

³⁰ Edward Farish 17 April 1896 COS LMA/FWA

And so on. Red pens and exclamation points underscore their frustration. The tensions between the two groups are visibly drawn in these marked-up tracts—Groom’s broad and romantic claims for his organization’s many good works across the world’s largest city, and the COS’s dogged insistence on numeracy. This vivid graphic example captures in images what the COS would have been loath to admit in words. To the COS members, it was not only that men such as Groom were maddening in their methods, but there on the page is evidence that they also were able to induce the otherwise rational and “scientific” social workers to record their own intense affective response in black and white and red. They strenuously objected to the very premise of Groom’s enterprise, and the man would not budge.

There were frustrations on both sides. When a COS investigator visited the workshops in 1897, he reported that Groom, “complained of not receiving fair play” as recently a friend of his had written to them for a report and had been sent one five years old without any information as to when it was drawn up. I informed him that I thought he had made a mistake and that the date was always given.”³¹ Groom had, of course, had made no mistake.³² The COS sent out the 1892 report for many years—although many charities grew and changed and improved over the years. Groom may have said nothing more on the subject, but he had made his point. Some sensed that for the COS, “fair play” only went one way. They often said as much. The weekly periodical *Fun* seemed to especially excel in ridiculing the agency: “Oh Charity! What Crimes are Committed in thy Name!” began one piece. “The Charity Organisation Society is not a Charity,” it declared at learning that an heiress had bequeathed it £300. “It is a body of self-elected,

³¹ Report of 14 July 1896. (Illegible signature) COS Archive LMA FWA

³² There is a copy of the COS report on the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission from 1892 in their files, so Groom obtained it somehow. It is where I obtained my copy. LMA4305.

self-satisfied Pharisees, who take a delight in meddling with and intercepting Charity.”

One week they printed a letter from a reader suffering from a “spinal complaint” who had waited for hours to see a COS officer to petition for some relief, only to be told to apply to the parish because “the society only assisted those who could assist themselves.” The editor at *Fun* replied, “Those who can assist themselves most, and who therefore come in for the chief benefits of the Organisation, appear to be the Organisation’s own officers.” He ended by pointing out that this was far from the only letter they received describing the “selfishness and intolerance” of the “so-called” Charity Organisation Society.³³

In 1902, a letter sent to Loch appears almost to be designed to ensnare him in some way. It was from the Liverpool Central Relief Office and Charity Organisation Society, on its engraved letterhead, neatly typewritten, and signed by its secretary, W. Griswood. In the letter, Mr. Griswood asked for information regarding Mr. Groom and the Watercress and Flowergirls’ Mission. Griswood made careful note of the following points, (in fact, he practically shouted them): That one half-year ago, in June of 1901, he had asked for a report on the mission, and had received, in response, a copy of a report dated January 1892. He wished to know if: “you have made a more recent enquiry, or if you consider it well to do so, or whether we may take the report of January 1892 as still representing the opinion of your Society?” He said he had received many enquiries in light of the fact that they would be hosting the mission at an event at St. George’s Hall which would be opened by the Lady Mayoress. He found that the mission received in subscriptions and donations about £7,000 and that they appeared to be doing “a large and varied work.” He noticed that they had a “responsible Council” and that “F.A. Bevan

³³ *Fun*, 25 July 1874, 35; *Fun*, 5 September 1874, 100.

Esq., 54, Lombard Street” is the Treasurer.” (So as not to be confused with *another* F.A. Bevan, Esq. perhaps).³⁴ Whether or not C.S. Loch answered this letter, I do not know because I did not find his response in the file. Either way, Loch held firm in his conviction that the mission was not worthy of support, and clearly believed that the report of 1892 should stand, as the COS continued to mail it out well into the next decade.

Indicative of his lack of trust in the COS, while Groom did offer to show the books to all who inquired, when the COS investigators asked to see them he declined, citing “trade secrets.”³⁵ Groom actually had patented the process for preserving the “maiden-head” fern, a widely used foliage filler in bouquets and floral arrangements. Anyone who wished to produce it had to first get permission from the WFGM, and all the profits went back into the Crippleage.³⁶ As in any business that depends on variety and fashion trends, a premium was placed on innovation; new designs were prized. Manufacturers closely guarded their processes and plans for upcoming seasons. Of course, this was also a convenient rationale to keep prying eyes from the books, which might have shown other arrangements Groom would have preferred to keep to himself. It appears from the minute books of the mission that Groom perhaps did engage in some “creative” bookkeeping. He frequently reallocated funds from one project to the next in a way that would not have been approved by the COS or the auditors. Yet, the COS was not an agent of the state or a law-enforcement agency. The minutes are full of brief notes that show Groom took money from one account and moved it to another, depending on

³⁴ He was indeed a respectable Treasurer, an important supporter of the mission, an Anglican evangelical from an well-known banking family. He also gave away much of his fortune to charity. Leslie Hannah, ‘Bevan, Francis Augustus (1840–1919)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action, An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era*. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 222.

³⁵ Report of 14 July 1896 (Illegible signature) COS Archive LMA FWA

³⁶ *The Garden*.

the fortunes of the various branches at any particular time. Groom also subsidized areas of the mission with his personal funds if it was required. One entry indicates that the Industrial Brigade branch of the Mission finally repaid Mr. Groom in the amount of £311 in March of 1893. This was the amount he lent to the mission in 1879 when the Flower Girls' Brigade closed and he took over the stock.³⁷ Even the auditors whom the Mission's finance committee had engaged to review the books refused to certify them, noting the many "errors and omissions."³⁸

The main criticism from the COS in this regard is that Groom did not itemize his expenditures and income in as precise a manner as they would like, and he drew money from one line and deposited it into another. According to their set of practices these were grave violations. In Groom's view of things, these monies were entirely fungible. If the tea money pays for bread today; the bread money will pay for tea tomorrow. Yet if Groom were so concerned with appearing principled and moral, why would he engage in such sloppy and potentially embarrassing bookkeeping? Although it seems slightly hard to imagine now, even well into the late-nineteenth century principles of accounting were not fully established, and modern practices "were accepted only slowly."³⁹ Principles are determined based on the goals of organizations, and, in the nineteenth century, the ways in which to do this were not yet uniform, nor agreed upon. According to one historian of that era's asset accounting, "it is only natural to find differences in accounting practices

³⁷ Letter to Committee detailing original arrangements vis-à-vis Burdett Coutts and Groom. Oct 1888. LMA 4305.

³⁸ Committee Meeting Notes, LMA 4305; subsequent accounts were audited by Thomas Mogg, Public Accountant and Certified as correct. Report of 17 April 1896 Edward Farish COS Archive LMA FWA.

³⁹ Richard P. Brief, "The Origin and Evolution of Nineteenth-Century Asset Accounting," *The Business History Review* 40 (Spring 1966), 1-23; 1.

during the nineteenth century.”⁴⁰ “Amateurishness of management” and “introverted family groupings” are the phrases another historian uses to describe the accounting practices that “still dominated most British firms” except for public utilities, insurance companies, and larger banks before 1914.⁴¹ Account books were idiosyncratic and messy; double-entry bookkeeping “was slow to be utilised.”⁴² The world’s largest iron company, a family-owned concern, did not even have a profit-and-loss statement until 1860. A professional journal, *The Accountant*, ran an article in 1892 that began, “it is extraordinary ... that in these days of advanced education so many concerns (some of considerable importance) will persist in adhering to the old system, if system it can be called of single entry ...”⁴³ This raises the question then, if major companies were keeping jumbled accounts, and professional accountants were struggling with their clients’ books, how was it that the Charity Organisation Society, and its patrons, had become such discerning evaluators of accountancy? Is it likely any charity—often managed by busy volunteers--would have had books that met their exacting standard? Moreover, given the fact that theorists explain that accounting practices are best understood not simply as abstract columns of profits-and-losses, but rather, as schemes that must factor in the goals and rationales of a given concern, such an understanding may help to explain why Groom, whose formal mathematics education ended at the age of ten, may not have found it especially problematic to shift money from one branch of the mission to another. In addition, the same historian writes, “since an arbitrary set of accounting rules is not likely to have the same value to all firms,” in the nineteenth

⁴⁰ Brief, “The Origin and Evolution of Nineteenth-Century Asset Accounting,” 2.

⁴¹ Derek Matthews, *A History of Auditing: The Changing Audit Process in Britain from the nineteenth Century to the Present Day* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 9.

⁴² Matthews, *A History of Auditing*, 9.

⁴³ Matthews, *A History of Auditing*. Passage quoted from *The Accountant*, 1892, 9-10.

century, detailed-profit and-loss statements were not premised upon the same set of values.⁴⁴ As an example, if the orphanage branch needed money for a new schoolroom, and the industrial branch was flush, the money could simply be moved over a column. Groom believed if his books squared in the end, that was good enough. It was all doing God's work, after all. The COS accountants were splitters; Groom's accounting, to use their own term, was "lumpy."⁴⁵ This was not the position of the COS, and, in their estimation, hardly working on business lines.

In the report that they sent to anyone who asked about the mission, the COS outlined their full concerns about Mr. Groom and the mission. They believed the work to be exaggerated and were certain that it was "to a large extent wasted." No doubt some was. They also took issue with the fact that "Several members of the Committee of the Mission stated to the Society's Inquiry Officer that they believed Mr. Groom received no remuneration for his services, and he is described as Hon. Superintendent. It has, however, been ascertained that the item 'Management Teacher's Wages £208 p.a.' really represented the salary paid to Mr. Groom."⁴⁶ The report also repeats the suspicions of underselling the trade, but adds "the evidence is conflicting, and the Charity Organisation Society are not in the position to determine the question."⁴⁷

When it came to other types of accounting, however, Groom appears to have taken a harder line, as is partly revealed in the case of a longtime missionary who departed

⁴⁴ Brief, "The Origin and Evolution of Nineteenth-Century Asset Accounting," 2.

⁴⁵ Edward Farish 17 April 1896 COS LMA/FWA

⁴⁶ The £208 p.a is the payment Angela Burdett-Coutts had promised him in 1881. There are several letters and documents pertaining to this in the Minute books. There is a long letter that outlines the details of the arrangement in the Minute book from October 1888. It is not clear why those Committee Members would have been unaware of that. C.S. Loch's signed Report on the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission, 1892, COS Archive, LMA FWA .

⁴⁷ C.S. Loch's signed Report on the Watercress and Flower Girls' Mission, 1892, COS Archive, LMA FWA.

under mysterious circumstances in 1889. In that same year, *The British Weekly* had published a section of its series, “Toilers in London” which examined the lives of the city’s flower-sellers. The story turned to the neighborhood of Clerkenwell, and to one Mr. Lynes, a longtime missionary who “has ruined his health in the work,” and even so, “goes from beat to beat, speaking a kind word or taking a tired woman into a shop for a cup of tea.”⁴⁸ Mr. Lynes, however, had come to be a troublesome entry in the minute books of the Mission. On 4 July of that year, the Committee asked Mr. Lynes to hand over his diary. In October it was reported that, “Mr. Lynes’ journal [has been] examined. Fuller account [is] suggested of special cases met with. Committee expressed sympathy with Mr. Lynes ‘in his weakness’ and left the matter of his duties in the hands of Mr. Groom.” Without specifying exactly what the cause, by December Groom had concluded that, “Mr. Lynes’ ‘affliction’ leaves him totally unfit for service.”⁴⁹

Charities such as Groom’s, subject entirely to public opinion and dependent on subscribers for their survival, could not afford even the suggestion of moral impropriety. Groom would have been aware of the well-publicized and damaging allegations that had beset fellow philanthropist Dr. Barnardo in 1877,⁵⁰ and certainly would wish to avoid such a scandal in his own homes. Whatever the virtues or failings of Mr. Lynes, his threat to the organization outweighed his value. The sentence passed on Lynes—“unfit for service”—echoed the one often used to describe the women cared for by the mission.

Personal transgressions were not the sole domain of any one group, but it was precisely

⁴⁸ Anon, “Flower Girls,” *Toilers of London*, 29-32.

⁴⁹ After his resignation, the committee gave Lynes a gift of £20 in recognition of his many years of service LMA/4305/6/67 Minutes of Committee 1888: 4 July. 5 October, 3 December.

⁵⁰ In her study of prostitution in nineteenth-century England, Judith Walkowitz writes of the struggle against temptation that bedeviled some reformers. Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*. (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 103-105.

this type of non-“scientific” complication the COS deplored and found particularly objectionable. It was just one of the many ills—in their opinion—produced by charities that practiced indiscriminate giving based on emotion. In their reports, the COS enumerated the many personal faults they found with Groom, they complained frequently about his personal style, especially in his use of “cant.”⁵¹ In their view, Groom, his product, and the women who produced it, did not rise to a standard high enough to be considered of any aesthetic value, or even to regard the workers as skilled craftswomen. Appearances mattered.

Raised to Noble Womanhood

Aside from the obvious connection to flowers, it appears that little else connects selling flowers on the street to making them in a workshop. In the flower-making workshops Groom hired men only to do the very heavy work of cutting dyes and stamping out of fabric, as was typical practice. The men did the masculine work and the women did the feminine work, from designing to shaping, painting, and assembling the flowers in a “light and airy” space, in keeping with the idea of “light and pretty” work being morally superior.⁵² Even the supervisors were women. Thus, it makes sense that he would choose artificial flower-making as a business, even though he knew nothing about it himself when he began the venture. The belief that women’s work should above all be domestic and feminine shaped all of the choices Groom made regarding the types of work he chose for the women to do, from the narratives and mailings he created, to the names

⁵¹ “Cant” a type of affect that the COS officers found insincere and ingratiating perhaps, with an overabundance of religious emotion mixed in. It did not bother everyone in equal measure. Those in the same camp found it inspiring and called it something else. See *Slumming* for Seth Koven’s interpretation, 94-95.

⁵² The only part of the process in which men were involved.

of the buildings in the orphanage and babies' villa. It is reflected in the images he chose to present of reformed flower girls in neat dresses and tidy workspaces. In one article about the mission, Groom claimed that one of the reasons he chose flower-making was because the girls already knew so much about flowers from watching their mothers, who were street-sellers, make bouquets. This also linked it with a discourse of domesticity with the domestic service that he could never quite shake. The flower-sellers, the artificial flowers and domestic service all fit into a realm of exclusively feminine labor.

Artificial flowers were not new in the nineteenth century, but it was the Victorians who embraced their use in unparalleled ways. Throughout the period, women's clothing and hats were covered, sometimes to the point of absurdity, with fabric blossoms. As early as 1840, the bridesmaids in Queen Victoria's wedding wore dresses whose folds were "caught up" with bunches of white satin roses, and the decorative blossoms became larger and more fantastic over the years, employing countless women in their creation.⁵³ While taste-makers sniffed at the poor quality of mass-produced doo-dads, and social critics decried the exploitation of the "girl in the garret" who crafted luxury goods for flower-mad consumers, artificial flower making remained an important industry through the long nineteenth century. The flowers were produced along a labor continuum that stretched from the artisanal workshops of Paris, small factories, and sweated labor of homeworkers in industrializing cities throughout Europe and the U.S., and to Groom's make-work scheme. Situated on the border between industry and art, flower-making intersected with images of the "light and cheerful" workroom, the sedate middle-class

⁵³The classic work on flower-making is Marilyn J. Boxer, "Women in Industrial Homework: The Flowermakers of Paris in the *Belle Époque*," *French Historical Studies* 12 (Spring 1982), 401-423. Clerkenwell flower-makers figure in George Gissing's *The Nether World*. Thanks to Michelle Allen-Emerson for pointing out this reference.

home, and the exploitation of women and children in sweated labor and industrial homework.⁵⁴ Handcraft, fancy work, and factory production of decorative objects also posed a dilemma for observers in that it reproduced the fault lines that divided these labor processes along class divisions. Flower-making could be a leisure hobby for the middle-class woman to pass the time or a family labor that included children just old enough to follow directions eking out a subsistence wage. In France, artificial flower-makers underwent a considerable training that included botany as well as classes in crafting the flowers. Industrial schools offered the training and once completed, a woman had a *metier*, that is, a skilled craft and a life's work.⁵⁵ French women came to the occupation with what was considered a finer aesthetic sense and higher degree of talent and preparation as artisans and their product was valued highly. As historian Marilyn Boxer describes in her classic article on the flower makers of Paris, the French flowers were regarded as far superior to others made anywhere else.⁵⁶ The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 was a historical event that exerted a major influence on the overall direction and the future of the mission. The English flower-making industry enjoyed a surge in the wake of war between Germany and France, where the trade had up until then been dominant.⁵⁷ French flowers were considered to be better, largely because the English flowers were indeed made with less expensive materials. And, *caché* was also attached to the French product. As was observed by a reporter from the *Daily News*:

⁵⁴ Marilyn Boxer, Judith Coffin, "Social Science Meets Sweated Labor: Reinterpreting Women's Work in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *The Journal of Modern History* 63 (June 1991), 230-270.

Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-wear & Ready-to-work: A Century of Industry & Immigrants In Paris & New York* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) have written about different aspects of the artificial flower-making trade in Europe and the United States. I know of no scholarly analysis of British flower-makers—either as home-workers or factory laborers.

⁵⁵ Boxer, "The Flowermakers of Paris in the *Belle Époque*."

⁵⁶ Boxer, "The Flowermakers of Paris in the *Belle Époque*."

⁵⁷ Editor, "Art Work for Women," *Woman's Gazette, or News About Women's Work*. Vol 2 June 1877.

The best of West End milliners will not use flowers that come from London, not because they are many of them not extremely good, but for the same reason that people of the most cultivated artistic tastes will not adorn their homes with pictures that are turned off in large quantities from the printing machine.⁵⁸

This problem was easy enough to get around, as Groom himself admitted, by simply affixing a “made in France” label.⁵⁹ Except in the case of the most expensive couture flowers, the everyday product could be duplicated in London quite easily once the necessary equipment was in place and the skills acquired. The notion of a French *madame artiste* seems to have depressed the English effort somewhat. In England, artificial flower-making occupied an ambiguous position. Unlike in France, the English flower-makers remained low paid, little respected, and their product a supposed poor relation to its French cousin. It was only the occasional British worker who possessed the ability or desire to commit to a permanent career. Many of the women engaged in it saw it as a somewhat temporary position, not a life’s calling, and one that would be given up should better options appear. Like many other occupations populated predominantly by women, its technical complexity and creative execution were minimized and downplayed. In Paris, where the stakes were higher, it was recognized as a trade for “the strong, the talented, the well-trained, the aggressive.”⁶⁰ These character traits were not well appreciated among the ranks of Britain’s flower-makers. Some contemporaries in Britain recognized this and called for training programs in the UK that would elevate flower-making to a similar status as that of France. They called for better and longer training and higher standards and wages.⁶¹ Numbers of both labor and factory reformers

⁵⁸ Editor, “Artificial Flowers A Visit to a Manufactory,” *The Daily News* (London) 9 June 1896.

⁵⁹ John Groom, *Artificial flower-Making*, 1904.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Boxer, “The Flowermakers of Paris in the *Belle Époque*” 423.

⁶¹ Editor, “Art Work for Women,” *Woman’s Gazette*.

and capitalists saw an opportunity to increase production in Britain and give a boost to “home industry.” Over the years, they made calls to raise its profile as an artisanal occupation, and to strengthen the skills of workers and the trade overall.⁶² Some reformers, who saw its economic potential, argued that flower-making was indeed skilled labor and should be remunerated and respected accordingly.⁶³ In spite of their reformers’ efforts, flower making remained under-appreciated as a skilled trade. Moreover, it was usually conducted using the cheapest materials and the quickest methods.⁶⁴ In Britain flower-making remained in its neither-here-nor-there position. It never became a highly skilled trade as it did in France, nor did it quite sink to the absolute depths it did elsewhere, notably in the U.S. and Italy where it was truly the work of the most desperately impoverished.⁶⁵ There was a range of abilities and quality of products and a corresponding wage. In Britain, many poor and homebound women did take in homework in flower-making and were poorly paid as a consequence, further downgrading its attractiveness as a skilled vocation.

Representations

Yet, it was also one of the largest female employers and made many appearances in the culture at large. “Artificial flower making was one of the few respectable jobs available to women before 1918,” wrote Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*.⁶⁶ As early as 1868, the comedic playwright Colin Hazlewood featured flower-makers in his

⁶² G.M. Oakeshott, “Artificial Flower-Making: An Account of the Trade, and a Plea for Municipal Training,” *The Economic Journal* 13 (March 1903), 123-131. *Daily Express* on promoting “home industry,” that is, national domestic production.

⁶³ Editor, “Art Work for Women” *Woman’s Gazette*.

⁶⁴ Oakeshott, “Artificial Flower-Making,” *The Economic Journal* 123-131.

⁶⁵ Green, *Ready-to-wear & Ready-to-work*.

⁶⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929).

Lizzie Lyle or Flower Makers of Finsbury. In this play, a scheming sexual predator falsely accuses two of the girls of stealing from their mistress, and they consequently lose their jobs and meager lodgings. The young workers are sympathetic characters, and all is set right by the end. The play is evidence of the cultural reach and the public's conception of flower-makers by this time. Judging from the play, the large numbers of girls and women who were employed in London as flower-makers were fodder for popular entertainment, and whose predicaments and misfortunes could be played for comic effect. Even so, the flower-girls maintained their grasp on respectability. So much so, that it was considered genteel enough to be appropriate work for even girls of a higher social position to undertake. Both flower-making, and the workshops in which it occurred were frequently described as "all light and cheerful," not only by Groom, but by many other observers as well.⁶⁷ In an analysis of some of trades that were available to be taken up by girls in the nineteenth century, labor historian Carol E. Morgan writes, "A light and airy atmosphere was indicative not only of a respectable workplace, but the workers themselves were then said to take on the characteristics of the establishment, projecting a 'cheerful and respectable appearance'."⁶⁸ It was certainly an important factor in John Groom's philanthropic fables about the transformative effects of the work and of the influence of nature, light, and beauty. One of the girls--Sue, in the fable of *Kit and Sue*, learned "the art of flower-making" and found that it was "light, pleasant, and full of unlimited possibilities." Because she took such a deep interest in her work "she soon felt lifted

⁶⁷Groom, *Artificial Flower-Making*, 6.

⁶⁸ Morgan, "Work for Girls? The Small Metal Industries in England, 1840-1915," 83-98; here, 88. Carol E. Morgan *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Sland, and Christina Benninghaus, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

above her affection, her health wonderfully improved.”⁶⁹ Here, the benefits of light and “lift” even bring the girl above her difficult and painful illness and transform her physically and spiritually as well as economically.

In *The Soul Market*, Olive Christian Malvery, a middle-class journalist, and a celebrity mistress-of-disguise, also wrote about the pleasant environment in the flower-making workshop. Malvery concurred that flower-making was a much more agreeable occupation than many others available to women—such as the notoriously noxious matchmaking, or some of the other trades she investigated, including jam-making and fur-pulling, which do indeed sound dreadful.⁷⁰ In contrast with the nauseating and grisly labor of those jobs, and the grimy toil of the maid-of-all-work, flower-making certainly seemed to be the “light and pretty” job many praised. Malvery, whose exposé journalism also explored the labor of flower-girls, glimpsed into the lives of a mother and her crippled daughter who were employed in making artificial flowers from home. Their home, though poor, is “one of the neatest and brightest.” The crippled girl makes violets, one of the most poorly paid of all flowers, and is paid one and a half pence per gross, which Malvery has reminded readers is a dozen dozen. The mother is equally hard-pressed, but together, working almost nonstop, they earn about fifteen shillings a week. Their only complaint is that they sometimes do not have enough work. Their greatest dread is the workhouse, so any slack time could be their undoing, but it also makes them susceptible to accepting the lowest wages offered, and to unscrupulous factory owners.⁷¹

The rhetoric surrounding flower-making did lend it a more aesthetically appealing air as well. Its closeness to what were called “luxury trades” had the dual consequence of

⁶⁹ John Groom, *Kit and Sue*. 14-15.

⁷⁰ Olive Christian Malvery, *The Soul Market*, 189.

⁷¹ Malvery, *The Soul Market*, 191-192, August, *Poor Women's Lives*, piece workers, 96.

making it desirable work, but also raised skepticism about its continued popularity and future opportunities. Importantly, however, flower-making was often considered to be a job where a woman could support herself. Fine needlework, for example, while appreciated as respectable and light, did not pay a wage high enough to make it suitable for women who would depend on it for their full economic support. The high demand for the product, and the mass-production techniques involved in flower-making, helped to insure that skilled workers could earn enough—perhaps—to get by. Moreover, one of the benefits of flower-making was that it was often paid for by the hour and not by the piece.⁷² In short, in the late nineteenth century, English flower-making employed women of some skill for a short time in a job preferable to service, but did not command the necessary qualities to elevate the English product above the commonplace or to raise the status of its workers.⁷³ Perhaps most crucially for Groom, is that it was a womanly mode of work.

Flower-making was not confined to the workroom however. The Victorians had raised the crafting and display of artificial flowers to a new level of appreciation. Wax and other materials were used for making artificial flowers, and it became a popular hobby for women of the leisured classes.⁷⁴ Displays of hand-crafted flowers were signifiers of domesticity and privileged idleness in middle-class parlors.⁷⁵ The pursuit of such “fancy work” in itself offered the elevation—or the appearance of elevation—of one’s class status. Flower-making, along with other types of intricate handcraft, when done by

⁷² August, *Poor Women’s Lives*, on pieceworkers, “higher rates were paid to those working in workshops than to home workers,” 96.

⁷³ Oakeshott, “Artificial Flower-Making,” 123-131.

⁷⁴ Mary Scott, “Wax Flower Making in Victorian Times” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 19 September 1924, 704-705; Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 174-175.

⁷⁵ Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 169-170.

unpaid middle-class girls and women, though not valued as work having any artistic merit, *per se*, was nevertheless the epitome of nineteenth-century respectable womanhood.⁷⁶ Non-remunerative fancy work was held in sharp distinction from the paid labor of the working classes, however, but also from the products made by the skilled craftsmen who were embraced by the middle-class aesthetes.⁷⁷

That the flowers created by “angels in the house” were a joy to behold, while those manufactured in a workshop were devalued, reveals the paradox of the symbolic weight placed on objects in the Victorian mind. It offers an example of the material experience of class, that is, middle-class women and girls make handicrafts but not commodities. The handcraft of lower-class and working women could never be anything but commodified, mass produced, and aesthetically uninteresting. Much like the women themselves, the *paying* work of handcraft was not held in high regard. These ideas would contribute to the view held by some that this sort of work was of little importance and that it was essentially for the unskilled laborer, and that “the industry, except in its highest walks is a poorly paid one.”⁷⁸ The same could be said of domestic service in its commodification of household labor. The household labor of bourgeois women was held in high regard, but when it was performed by working-class women it was not. The thousands of girls that Groom trained in the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission to take

⁷⁶ Beverly Gordon, “Victorian Fancywork in the American Home: Fantasy and Accommodation,” in Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne, eds., *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1988).

⁷⁷ Emily Coit, “This Immense Expense of Art”: George Eliot and John Ruskin on Consumption and the Limits of Sympathy,” *Nineteenth Century Literature* 65 (September 2010), 214-245; Amy Woodson-Boulton, “Industry Without Art is Brutality’: Aesthetic Ideology and Social Practice in Victorian Art Museums,” *Journal of British Studies* 46 (January 2007), 47-71.

⁷⁸ A confidential letter to HG Willink (possibly from Edward Farish) 14 November, 1902 LMA A/FWA/C/D85/5.

on jobs as domestic servants in the hopes of a better, more womanly mode of life might have had something to say about the value of their labor.

Unfortunately devaluing of women's work was foregrounded in much of this discourse and it exposed the paradox of both necessitating women and girls to support themselves, but to do it in a way that met with the approval of a broad range of critics who found fault with each possibility.⁷⁹ At the same time the Charity Organisation Society was decrying flower-making as work suitable only for women too needy to do anything else, the Duke of Argyll, upon seeing an exhibition of Groom's flowers, remarked that the craft was so refined and so suitable for young women that it was a shame that more "of our little girls" were not encouraged to do it.⁸⁰ If women were selling flowers on the street, then they were dangerously close to prostitution. If they were indoors making flowers, then they were only there because they were unfit for service. Some believed that flower-making was so poorly paid an occupation that the women could only get by if they were supported by charity. If the business were supported by charity, however, then they were benefitting from unfair competition with other flower manufacturers. In the complicated discourse surrounding women and flower-making, there were no solutions but only problems.

Groom's many supporters evidently found the work turned out by the girls in the workshop to be lovely enough so that it was able to garner awards, crowds, and Royal commissions, as indicated by this report, "The Masonic Hall yesterday afternoon was the sight of a strikingly beautiful exhibition of artificial flowers made by the crippled and

⁷⁹ Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), Deskillling of women's labor.

⁸⁰ Editor, "Artificial Flowers," *The Western Daily Press* (Bristol), Reprinted from *The Lady*, 12 April 1902, 6.

deformed members of the Watercress and Flowergirls Christian Mission,” wherein, “several crippled children, seated in the middle of the room, with a quantity of cleverly formed roses, carnations and chrysanthemums before them, gave a visible demonstration of the work by which they earn their living.”⁸¹ Records also show that in addition to creating exhibitions such as those, which were intended to keep the flower-makers in the public eye, and of course, to sell products as well, the Crippleage was often commissioned to provide the decorations for a number of other, establishment, events. Some of those events included a, “pressing invitation received from the Countess of Bective for the Crippled Girls Branch to have an exhibit at the International Exhibition at the White City” and one also from the managers of the Women of All Nations Exhibition at Olympia in August.”⁸² More opportunities arrived when, “The Lord Mayor and Mayoress requested that the girls of our homes decorate the Guildhall for the Mayor’s banquet on November 9th,” and gratitude was shown in a “Letter of thanks from Mayor and from Queen of Norway congratulating on the decorations.”⁸³ These were just a few of the many engagements over the decades, and they continued to be highly visible events, as indicated by the minutes of March 19, 1907, where it was noted, “Princess Christina agreed to open floral exhibition at Royal Albert Institute Windsor on Monday, April 15,”⁸⁴ an occasion that would have attracted many gardening enthusiasts and potential subscribers to the Mission. The Superintendent of the Coster’s Mission of Hoxton, in a greeting to Groom on his seventieth birthday, recalls warmly their first long-

⁸¹ Editor, “Crippled Flower-girls work in Birmingham,” *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 February 1901.

⁸² April 6 1909 September 17 1906 LMA 4305/06/69

⁸³ November 27, 1906. LMA4305

⁸⁴ Groom Archive LMA4305.

ago meeting in Lord Shaftesbury's home. In his conclusion he writes of Groom's Mission, "It is a *beautiful* work – one that angels might envy."⁸⁵

Moral Economy

In the choices Groom made, he argued that it was necessary that the work conform to a set of moral principles to which he subscribed: It had to be respectable. It had to be clean. The work had to rise above the level of drudgery and not turn the worker "into a machine." Workers paid fairly and equitably even if the mission took a loss. "They needed permanent help—not cold charity," as he pointed out.⁸⁶ In earlier contemplating the work he would train the young women for, he had rejected projects that he thought banalized workers, such as matchbox-making, "the monotonous sameness of which practically turns the maker into a human machine."⁸⁷ Instead, he actively sought and promoted—publicly and frequently—opportunities and venues for these young women to be employed in work that was aesthetically engaging. They entered contests where they might. It is also clear that he believed this work of flower-making to be of high moral value through which women would cultivate taste and grow in character as they became more skilled in the trade and self-sufficient. Groom promoted the idea that flower-making provided not only spiritual and material uplift, but since it required intellectual involvement, and skills refined over years of practice, it was also aesthetically uplifting.⁸⁸ Of the craft he wrote, "It can neither be mastered nor carried on without the mind being

⁸⁵ Letter to Groom 14 August 1915, President of Hoxton Coster's Mission, Orsman. Emphasis in original. LMA 4305.

⁸⁶ Groom, *Artificial Flower Making*, 4.

⁸⁷ Groom, *The Silver Vase*, 51.

⁸⁸ Groom, *The Romance of John Groom*; Groom, *The Silver Vase*.

much exercised, nor without the taste of the artificer in some degree cultivated.”⁸⁹ He pointed out that “much art is needed” to make the flowers since each species was different and therefore required the maker to “exercise the greatest taste and skill.”⁹⁰ In Groom’s discourse, flower-making resisted the unsettling idea of the *machine*, the result of industrialization and of harnessing nature for mass production. For Groom, flower-making was an aesthetically valuable handcraft, and not the alienated brute labor of much of the working class. He wanted to look out for their well-being, also, “having once taken such in hand, it would never do to allow of their going to the wall or even to suffer more than is possible on account of physical infirmity,” he wrote.⁹¹ It was important to insure that the homes that they lived in were clean, and that they had “good food” and “regular habits.” Two weeks’ at the seaside each summer was part of the training program.⁹²

Despite his claims that “the lot of the flower-maker is a more favoured and happy one,”⁹³ the contemporary impression of flower-making held by arbiters such as the members of the COS, was that it was closer to the sweated labor of the unskilled and exploited than to an artisanal workshop. With his influential supporters as co-signatories, he publicly responded to accusations of exploitative labor practices. In 1912, Mission committee minutes recorded that, “*The Daily Herald* attacked us on account of ‘sweating’ and a suitable reply was sent.”⁹⁴ And again, in 1913 when, “John Bull alleges sweating in workshops and is given *carte blanche* to go over the workroom; the charge of

⁸⁹ Groom, *The Silver Vase*, 50.

⁹⁰ Groom, *The Silver Vase*, 44.

⁹¹ Groom, *The Silver Vase*, 50.

⁹² Groom, *Artificial Flower Making*, 4.

⁹³ Groom, *The Silver Vase*, 51.

⁹⁴ LMA 4305 06/67, 21 May 1912.

sweating was withdrawn unreservedly.”⁹⁵ In spite of the many positive appraisals of flower-making, there was a much darker side as well. Among those to draw attention to the more unsavory aspects of the flower-making trade was James Greenwood, the famed journalist, who, in an 1869 work entitled, “The Seven Curses of London,” singles out the flower-makers with his blend of dark wit and pointed critique. Despite their youth, and their evidently “light” work, the young girls—just barely beyond the age of fourteen, were already marked with signs of the fate that awaited them.

Like other trades, such as matchbox-making and millinery work, that used toxic substances—phosphorous and mercury, for example—that could lead to disfigurement and death, flower-making for a time, was also counted among them. Regarding the young flower-makers whom he saw pouring out of the workshops at the end of the day, he explained, “Their teeth are discoloured, and there is a chafed and chilblainish appearance about their nostrils, as though suffering a malady that were best consoled with a pocket-hand kerchief.”⁹⁶ Greenwood is commenting not only on the age and spiritedness of these girls, for whom the prospect of school and a proper home were long lost, but the thick green mucous that sounds as though it is the product of a particularly bad upper-respiratory viral infection, which actually comes from using arsenite of copper, “that deadly mineral being of a ‘lovely green,’ and much in favour amongst artificial florists and their customers.”⁹⁷

Contemporaries were aware that such chemical exposures were occurring and that they could have fatal outcomes, as is evident from the 1861 death of a young flower-maker, nineteen-year-old Matilda Scheurer. It was reported that she “was in the greatest

⁹⁵LMA 4305 06/67 20 May 1913.

⁹⁶James Greenwood, “Artificial Flower Makers,” *Seven Curses of London*, 1869.

⁹⁷James Greenwood, “Artificial Flower Makers,” *Seven Curses of London*, 1869.

pain until she became insensible,” after ingesting the coloring agent used in leaf-making. The girl had “taken ill and complained of a pain in the side and intense thirst. She was seized with vomiting and the refuse of the stomach was a greenish color.” Tragically, as her mother told authorities, Matilda’s sister had met the same fate not long before, also dying of arsenic poisoning. The owner of the factory claimed that he had instructed the workers to wear face masks during the dyeing process (which involved sprinkling arsenic-containing powder onto freshly-molded wax leaves), but they complained of the heat, and instead covered their mouths with pieces of muslin.⁹⁸ Regarding the case, *Punch* wrote, “An inquest was held on the body of a young woman who poisoned herself by arsenic; and the jury returned a verdict which set forth that the deceased had died 'accidentally from the effects of mortal disease in her stomach and other organs, occasioned by arsenite of copper used in her employment,'” even though, “It was proved by medical testimony that she had been ill from the same cause four times within the last eighteen months.” The writer concluded that under such circumstances, “death is evidently about as accidental as it is when resulting from a railway collision occasioned by arrangements known to be faulty.” The journal then lampooned the shallow consumers who went on demanding such verisimilitude, even at the risk of the flower-maker’s life.⁹⁹

Although these health hazards were well-recognized, the practices continued. The fears that Greenwood had highlighted about the grotesque effects that arose as a result of arsenic poisoning remained. The anxiety about the safety of artificial flowers had not yet been put entirely to rest as late as 1896 when a manufacturer boasted that, “‘We use nothing but anelyn dye now, and you might drink any of the colors we use without

⁹⁸Editor, “Poison in Artificial Flowers,” *Lloyd’s Weekly London Newspaper*, 1 December, 1861.

⁹⁹Editor, “Pretty Poison-Wreaths,” *Punch*, 7 December 1861.

injury.”¹⁰⁰ The reporter noted that leaves were instead highlighted with purple-colored potato flour to simulate the dust, or “bloom,” and that “there seems to be now nothing injurious to the health of the hands employed.”¹⁰¹ More stubbornly, flower-making was frequently equated—and too often rightly—with sweated labor and home-work. So, the idea that it was light and pretty was much more complicated; it was still a factory job where speed and skill and the ability to make an exact reproduction were valued.

Conclusion

Many of these women, Groom noted, could not work elsewhere due to their disabilities and therefore this was not only a “justification” for the mission’s existence but “the necessity for its increase.” The flower-making branch was so popular and so successful, he claimed, that all “any profits [went] into the general funds ... to support its benevolent works among the children, flower women, Orphange, and Junior Crippleage.”¹⁰² Not only did Groom offer training, but he retained the women, who otherwise had very few prospects for employment, even when it meant operating at a loss, as “It was felt more humane to keep the girls on at a serious loss rather than have them face the threat of the workhouse.”¹⁰³ What Groom stressed in many of the promotional pieces, speeches, newspaper items, and other publicity, was not the importance of the religious transformation or conversion alone, but also the economic one. Such as Sue, the little crippled girl, who had taken such deep interest in her work

¹⁰⁰*Nb*: A really bad idea.

¹⁰¹Editor, “Artificial Flowers; A Visit to a Manufactory,” *The (London) Daily News*, 9 June 1896. Anelyn dye was derived from the distillation of coal tar. These new dyes, among them, mauve and Perkins green, were late-c19 sensations, creating millionaires of chemists and virtually destroying the Indian indigo subsistence farming. The improvements they made in workers’ health were one of the positive results, although they have been linked to other illnesses, among them bladder cancer.

¹⁰² Groom, *Romance of John Groom*, 13.

¹⁰³Committee Meeting Minutes, May 19 1914, LMA 4305/ 06/ 67.

with her improved health, and with the money she earned, she was able to support herself “though a cripple.”¹⁰⁴ For Groom, there is no contradiction between earthly economic lives and spiritual ones. The two were mutually constituted in his moral economy. Some of the girls, in addition to being able to support themselves and remain off the streets, were even able to “earn enough to keep a little home of their own,” most likely with another family member or a friend. How many were able to realize this is unknown, but it was presented as an achievable goal and must certainly have been attractive both to the girls who joined the training and to the supporters who would have been inspired by the stories of accomplishment. This was the dream proffered to Rose, a girl with a reprobate mother (it was also dependent on the mother becoming “a real Christian,” and renouncing drink, unfortunately). Like Rose, other girls, with the help of “kind friends” could find a way to “hope, pleasure, and profit.” And here, the mission employed its best tagline: “A rose made, and a rose saved.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Groom, *Kit and Sue*. 14-15.

¹⁰⁵ John Groom, *Rose*, 15.

Chapter Five
“The Wild Rose of Charitable Action”:
Fundraising in the Postbox and on the Street

On the morning of the twenty-sixth of June, 1912, Londoners awoke to a spectacular sight. Overnight, the city had been bedecked with scores of pink and white flowers. Buildings and automobiles, horses' bridles and market stalls, were festooned from top to bottom with artificial roses. A veritable army of “respectable women”—over 10,000 in all—costumed in white dresses and straw bonnets, canvassed the streets, railway stations, restaurants, theaters, and public squares, bearing baskets laden with manufactured blossoms. Fifteen million handmade fabric roses had been procured for the event and were traded from dawn until late in the evening, ranging in price from as little as a penny to as much as twenty-five pounds. All of the proceeds from the day were to be donated to London's charity hospitals. To heighten the emotional impact of the exchange, the flowers had been made by the blind and afflicted girls who lived and worked in John Groom's Crippleage. Few who traversed the metropolitan center that Wednesday escaped purchasing a gentleman's buttonhole corsage or a small bouquet.¹

The event, the first Alexandra Rose Day, was a decisive moment in the way

The phrase is a play on the expression “white flower of a blameless life,” and according to the author of an article covering the inaugural event, “we shall, on Alexandra Day begin to speak of ‘The wild rose of charitable action,’” in “Alexandra Day,” *The Globe*, 26 June 1912, 7.

¹ Coverage from 1912 includes articles in “Duchess Flower Seller,” *The Daily Mirror*, 7 June, 1912, 5; “Alexandra Day,” *The Times*, 27 June 1912; “Wild Rose Day,” *The Daily Mirror*, 27 June, 1912, 7; “Rose-Day,” *The Saturday Review*, 29 June, 1912, 804-805; “Alexandra Day in London,” *The Sphere*, 29 June, 1912, 290; “London's Roses—Not By Any Means Wild,” *The Sketch*, 3 July 1912, 405; “The Woman About Town: Alexandra Day,” *The Sketch*, 3 July, 1912, 433; “The Sportswoman,” *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 6 July 1912, 912; A.A. Milne, “The Sign of the Rose,” *The Sphere*, 6 July, 1912, 24; Editor, “It Was Roses, Roses, All the Way,” *The Tatler and Bystander*, 13 July, 1912, 14-15; and these details were widely reported. Press coverage grew in subsequent years as the event gained in popularity.

charitable giving was to be constructed from that point on.² It was the first of its kind, and it changed expectations about the relationship between giver and receiver in the philanthropic exchange.³ It also caused controversy in ways its creators could not have imagined. This celebration would be re-staged each year, into the second decade of the twenty-first century.⁴ From the pink and white cambric roses of this inaugural event, to the red paper poppies of Remembrance Day, to the ubiquitous colored ribbons worn today in support of special interest causes, material symbols of charity have become everyday artifacts of giving. Not only did this event establish the linking of emblems such as flowers and flags with charity, but Alexandra Rose Day gave birth to the very idea that something material was to be given to the donor in exchange for their charitable contribution. For the first time, a visible and tangible acknowledgment of one's generosity could be easily and publicly on display. This would have a tremendous influence on the ways in which the philanthropic giving would be performed from that day forward.

Perhaps its significance has been overshadowed by other events, such as those with a more robustly masculine nature or a more pronounced nationalistic flavor that developed surrounding in the years of the First World War. Scholars have given Alexandra Rose Day only passing remarks, usually in relation to the personal charitable

² The day was variously called Alexandra Rose Day, Alexandra Day, Wild Rose Day or just Rose Day.

³ As Paul K. Longmore writes, regarding the US, "In the first half of the twentieth century, charity became a business," *Telethons: Spectacle, Disability and the Business of Charity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 10. Diana Condell and Jean Liddiard, *Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War, 1914-18*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).

⁴ In 2009, Alexandra Rose Day was held on 17 June in the UK. In the mid-2010s Rose Day was replaced by a new program that benefits low-income families with children, from the website, Alexandra Rose Charities.

works of the Queen Consort for whom it was named.⁵ As a particularly *feminine* spectacle it requires an analysis of how gender shaped this event. In the many ways it drew materially and emotionally upon women's work, both paid and unpaid, and appealed to feminized traits of purity and beauty, it amply demonstrates what philanthropy scholar F.K. Prochaska calls the “feminization of philanthropy.”⁶ It also invites comparison to other spectacles of female engagement. In its unfolding, Alexandra Rose Day touched on some of the nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century's largest occupiers of women's energy and on some of their most dominant representations.

The charitable artifacts themselves--artificial flowers in the cases discussed here--whether in cardboard boxes delivered with a so-called begging letter to one's own postbox, or as the lapel pins of Alexandra Rose Day, also offer vivid evidence of the ways in which ideas of disability and dependence and class and gender have been constituted. They allow insight into the changing contours of the performances of need and their embeddedness in objects of visual and material culture. At the same time, their role in the production of spectacle helped to challenge or complicate accepted ideas about sexuality and gender among the middle and upper-classes as well among the working classes. In its blurring of boundaries of class and concepts of authenticity, Alexandra Rose Day heightened or created tensions between those it was meant to help, and those who wished to help. Significantly, it also renewed long-standing cultural fears about imposture, beggary, theft, and the trustworthiness of charities in general.

⁵For example, David Duff, in *Alexandra: Princess and Queen* (New York: William Collins and Sons, 1980), 260-261, describes the event but does not offer any analysis. It is not mentioned at all in F.K. Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), although he does describe the charitable work of Edward VII and Alexandra at length.

⁶Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, 117.

A Rose Made is a Rose Saved

The new arrangement, vis-à-vis charity, and the very visible and public means by which it was done, was unprecedented. Flower days, and their (yet-to-be-born) sibling, flag days, occurred in an especially rich field of cultural precepts, from which charitable organizers drew support. In calling upon already existing cultural touchstones to lend it legitimacy, Alexandra Rose Day is a perfect example of what Eric Hobsbawm has called an “invented tradition.”⁷ Insofar as it burnished the royalty's image through good work, while at the same time reinforced the aim of limiting state intervention in the administration of the private hospitals, it met the political needs of the monarchy for which it was conceived. At a time when national insurance and legislation for state subsidized feeding and medical inspection of necessitous children transformed the relationship between health care, the state, and its most vulnerable citizens, its gesture towards supporting charity which could only partially meet those challenges could be read as purely cynical or merely benighted. Because it relied on hundreds of poor and disabled women to provide its material aspect and to serve as a visible symbol of its goals, and made temporary street beggars of the very women most removed from any activity of the sort, it brought, paradoxically, both opprobrium and appreciation from a divided public. Its cultural work went beyond the application of “social control” as a simple fundraising strategy that bolstered the *status quo*, to encompass a broad range of experience and political exigencies.

⁷Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Tradition,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). In this classic work, Hobsbawm puts forth the thesis that many of a culture's most revered are of recent invention and serve political and social ends, 1-14.

The celebration was held in honor of Queen Alexandra and the fiftieth anniversary of her arrival in London. As a young woman in 1863, she had come to England from her native Denmark to be the bride of Queen Victoria's eldest son, the Prince of Wales. Alexandra had been wildly popular, first as the long-standing Princess of Wales, and then later, as the Queen consort to Edward VII. Like other members of the royal family, one of Alexandra's public duties was to lend support to her selected charities.⁸ She may be best remembered now for the attention she brought to Joseph Merrick, the "Elephant Man." It was her visit to his London Hospital bedside in that had launched his celebrity.⁹ Although she was the official royal sponsor for a variety of causes, Alexandra's interests tended towards hospitals and to charities that aided people with disabilities.¹⁰ During Edward's lifetime, and continuing after his death in 1910, Alexandra's kindness and generosity were widely acknowledged.¹¹ She won admiration for her frequent appearances in support of charity and for her sizable donations. These qualities were sometimes a point of dispute or embarrassment among her advisors, as when she overspent her allowance on questionable needy causes or "handed out large sums of cash."¹² The public rewarded her with the continued devotion she had enjoyed from the start. Now, in her dotage, Alexandra herself was suffering the effects of prior illnesses and increasing old age,

⁸ Prochaska, in *Royal Bounty* traces the relationship between royal family and charity in a mutually beneficial relationship.

⁹ Duff, *Alexandra*, 148-149, Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, 125.

¹⁰ Duff, *Alexandra*, 147-148.

¹¹ Alexandra exerted her considerable influence in 1901 when she insisted that the London Hospital implement the "Finsen lamp" from her native Copenhagen in the treatment of tuberculosis of the skin. It proved to be effective. Finsen later won the Nobel Prize and Alexandra's statue at London Hospital commemorates her contribution. Duff, *Alexandra*, 150-151.

¹² Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, 151. This was in addition to her more closely monitored and recorded official donations. Prochaska also writes that she was "capricious and feather-headed" and "pursued charity to the point of recklessness," 124. She has been described by others as generous to a fault, nearly bankrupting herself, Duff, *Alexandra*, 200.

including the gradual loss of her hearing due to a congenital disorder.¹³ She curtailed her once frequent public engagements, and she spent more and more time in private. These personal struggles may have made her more aware than ever of the unmet needs of the ill and disabled.¹⁴

The fiftieth anniversary celebration was to be at once in recognition of the Queen's lifetime of good works and a furthering of those goals. To commemorate the public and private milestone, Alexandra wished to do something that would contribute to the welfare of her favorite causes.¹⁵ Near the top of her and Edward's list had been the support of the charity hospitals. The extent to which hospitals, as voluntary institutions, were responsible for much of the fundraising energy expended in this period must be stressed. Voluntary hospitals were supported in large part by subscriptions and donations from across the social spectrum—a phenomenon hard to fathom now. Much of this external support was driven by the desire to limit state intrusion into the running of the hospitals. The maintenance of authority was particularly desired by private physicians—some of whom were intimate associates of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. Thus, shilling on behalf of the voluntary hospitals was an important part of the social and political life of many well-connected patrons.¹⁶

With its nostalgic harkening to Alexandra and Edward's much-celebrated marriage during Victoria's reign, and the golden age of philanthropy over which the

¹³ Duff, *Alexandra*, 83.

¹⁴ Alexandra was also the grandmother of the little-remembered Prince John. The child had epilepsy and died at the age of thirteen. It was said that grandmother and grandson enjoyed an especially close relationship, Duff, *Alexandra*, 272-273.

¹⁵ Duff, *Alexandra*, 260.

¹⁶ F.K. Prochaska, *Philanthropy and the Hospitals of London: The King's Fund Prochaska, 1897-1990*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); *Royal Bounty*, 151-168.

former monarch had presided, the anniversary celebration was meant to evoke sentiment as well as donations--which would be turned over to the hospitals and the Queen's other favored charities. The floral emblems, once produced, were to be traded by thousands of "idealized flower girls" who, in pairs, and dressed in summery white frocks, would throng the city from early in the morning until night. It turned out to be a splendid day by most accounts, and one of triumph for John Groom and the three hundred or so young women employed as flower-makers in his Clerkenwell-based workshop in the Crippleage and Industrial Training Home.¹⁷

When John Groom received the order for the millions of artificial flowers to be made by the physically disabled and blind women of his homes, it must have been a rich validation of the decades of dedication to organization he had served.¹⁸ The responsibility for supplying such an enormous quantity on such an auspicious day had to be a moment of elation, although the record does not reveal his response. The first entry which mentions the event simply reads: "Secretary has been approached regarding the making of Alexander [*sic*] roses to a total of four million and upwards."¹⁹ If he had doubts about the ability of his workers to produce so many flowers on short notice they are not evident in the minute book. This was not his first large-scale fundraiser, and he had acquired experience orchestrating grand events. In addition to the exhibitions he mounted across the country, the girls in his employ also produced floral decorations for many royal and

¹⁷ His name, and that of the Industrial Branch, is spelled incorrectly, as "Groome" in some of the official publicity. From the material held by the Alexandra Rose Charities, Surrey, Kent, UK. Photocopy in author's collection.

¹⁸ The 16 July 1912 Committee Minute Book entry reads, "financial position was worse than usual for this time of the year, but when payment has been received for the Alexander Roses things would be far better than usual," LMA/4305/06/67.

¹⁹ Committee Minute Book, 19 March, 1912, LMA/4305/06/67.

society functions.²⁰ Moreover, Groom had been at the forefront of creating and adapting new fundraising campaigns that increased both revenues and visibility. He had in fact, pioneered an earlier technique that had been met similarly with both excited joy and cantankerous loathing by the public, and which had required the production of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of flowers, as well. Similarly, this fundraising tradition continues today, and still provokes strong feelings, more than a century after it first appeared.

An Unwanted and Embarrassing Gift

In December 1896, John B. Hysom, the Rector in the parish of Yeovilton, received an unexpected package in the daily post.²¹ He had been sent a box of artificial flowers made by the “afflicted” girls of the John Groom’s Watercress and Flowergirls’ Crippleage and Industrial Training Home. Inside the cardboard box he found a small “silk” nosegay, and with it, an appeal for a donation to the Training Home in order that it could continue its beneficial work, the fruits of which now lay in the reader’s hands. Hysom was so delighted by the surprise floral gift that he composed a poem, praising both the gift and the giver for the “silent pleading flowers” that penetrated “the deep recesses of the inmost soul.”²²

While some were moved to poetry, other recipients found less to be pleased about, and instead voiced their distress to the public. A letter, published a few years later in *The*

²⁰ Among them, The Royal International Horticultural Exhibition, 1912 LMA/4305/3/83; decorating Guildhall for the Mayor’s banquet November 1906 and the arrival of the Norwegian royal family, and the 1907 Floral Exhibition at Royal Albert Institute, LMA/4305/06/067.

²¹ Rev. John B. Hysom to Groom’s, 4305/4/13, LMA. According to *Crockford’s Clergy* of 1899, Hysom was Rector of Yeovilton from 1894.

²² “Appealing Flowers,” Rev. John B. Hysom, 4305/4/13, LMA.

Standard, and signed by “Clericus,” plays the cranky flip-side to Hysom’s joy. “To-day,” he wrote, “in addition to all the customary appeals to help [...] I received, with postage to pay (as having been re-posted to me), a cardboard box of artificial flowers...The sender, of course, depends on the trouble he will give me if I return them, for my forwarding him a subscription instead.”²³ He adds that he has learned, “a great number of similar boxes have been distributed through our local post-office,” and while, “it is evidently a clever coup of a Secretary who will be much commended by his Society when it brings in the returns which he expects,” he himself has no intention of supporting this charity, one of the many which solicit his interest, nor does he have the time to “re-post such embarrassing presents.” The actual wording of the enclosed solicitation, however, asks that the recipient *not return* the flowers if they are unwanted, but instead they should be made a gift to someone who might happily receive them. “Clericus” evidently does his own bit of interpretation regarding the request itself. Resentful that his time and money have been so presumptuously earmarked, and lest such impositions increase, “Clericus” implores, “I would earnestly beg everyone to discourage the attempts which are now made to force contributions by importunity.” In his huff, he writes, “I will spare the feelings of [any] benefactor by not telling him how I have solved the difficulty.” It is easy to imagine that the unwanted flowers met with a bad end. “Clericus” concludes with the plea: “But I do trust that all officials who are interested in really deserving institutions will stand aloof from such devices, which will inevitably, if persisted in, kill the kindly feelings which are thus traded upon.”²⁴

²³ “Clericus,” Letters to the Editor, *The Standard*, 19 December 1899.

²⁴ “Clericus,” Letters to the Editor, *The Standard*, 19 December 1899.

In spite of these exhortations, such “devices” continued. “Clericus” could not know that over the next century there would be an extraordinary expansion of this form of philanthropic direct marketing. Appeals, delivered by post, together with a gift-presumptive, have included everything from commemorative stamps to greeting cards, to buttons, pens, seeds, calendars, address labels, a wide variety of knick-knacks, and even Rosary beads (which could presumably pose a moral obligation or dilemma for the dissenting) all of which were designed indeed to “trade upon kindly feelings”—inspiring both outpourings of generosity and prompt dispatches yet today. While he is evidently quite put out by the box of flowers and its somewhat obsequious note, it is hard to know precisely which aspect of the mailing most roused his indignation. This solicitation was still at the time a novel technique and one that was dependent on a number of recent changes in technology, transport, and social mores before it could travel so freely through the Royal Mail. “Clericus” may simply have been overwhelmed by its manifest boldness.

The first mention in the Groom records of the flower-box appeal was in 1888.²⁵ It had been a difficult year; one that had seen the notorious Whitechapel “Jack the Ripper” Murders and the surprising strike of the Bryant and May match-girls against their oppressive employers. The strike, with its exposé of the toxic matchmaking environment, and the gruesome killings of five women had all occurred in the East End slums of London, not too far—geographically or imaginatively—from where Groom had set up his workshop, and, more pointedly, bore very close ties with the overarching aim of the

²⁵ Minute Book of Committee Meeting, 1888-1896 vol.1, LMA 4305/1/3.

mission.²⁶ These shocking events were within the physical and psychic purview of the Crippleage. Only the narrowest distances separated the girls in the Crippleage from these sister women of 1888. The women who were the victims of the Whitechapel murderer were all known to have sold sex, and to have lived a “rough” life of the streets.”²⁷ While the girls and women of the flower-making branch of the WFGM were sheltered indoors, the mission still very actively aided the street-selling flower-girls who were its first, and best-known, clientele. Although the match-girls may have had the benefit of indoor employment, the conditions under which they worked were not only abusive and exploitative, but life-endangering as well. This was due to the use of white phosphorous in the making of the match heads which could lead to the horrific and disfiguring illness, “phossy jaw,” a necrosis of the facial bones, the only cure for which was amputation of the jaw.²⁸ These social and physical differences marked these women as tainted if not ruined. The street-sellers stalked by the unidentified serial killer, and the white wage “slaves” of the Bryant and May Matchmaking Company, shared the bonds of gender, class, and geography that consigned them to a specific category of women and to a particular sort of embodied experience that emphasized their status as outcasts.²⁹

²⁶ See Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), for discussion of match girls as social problems analogous to flower girls and bourgeois interventions, 77-95, 115; Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 191-228, on the social impact of the murders.

²⁷ “Amongst the middle class, street selling was a byword for unacceptable behaviour. Jack the Ripper’s victims, it was noted, included street sellers,” John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-century working-class Entrepreneurs* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 114.

²⁸ Montagu Williams, “Match Girls,” *Round London: Down East and Up West* (1894), 13.

²⁹ Annie Besant, *Annie Besant: An Autobiography* Second Edition (London: T. Fisher and Unwin, 1893), 331-338; Williams, “Match Girls,” 12. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 221-222, and on the events as geographically constructed, 76-80; 195. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

The popular interest in these extraordinary events was enormous, bringing attention to the working and living conditions of both sweated laborers and sex workers.³⁰ Throughout that summer and fall, this attention could only have brought into sharper focus the necessity and importance of the work done by John Groom's Crippleage. From the outset, its intent had been to rescue girls and women from the Great Social Evil of prostitution, and Groom had long condemned the matchmaking trades as malignant places for young women and had actively sought both a less toxic trade and a more remunerative one that depended on a higher degree of skill and engagement.³¹ For every girl employed in the Crippleage there were many others who were far less fortunate.

Perhaps interest and funds had been diverted by other needy cases, because Groom expressed concern about "the financial position of the mission and falling off of subscribers," in that year.³² Judith Walkowitz writes that the unsolved murders and the surrounding shock and outrage at the perceived lack of attention to curtailing violent crime in the most dangerous and poorest areas of the capital had "stimulated a legion of philanthropic activities, including large increases in charitable donations to the London poor, religious missions, college settlement houses, housing reform, Peoples' Palaces (cultural centers) and massive social surveys."³³

With increased attention to the manifold problems of the poor came more competition for the philanthropic donation. Perhaps the crises of the destitute women

³⁰ Koven, *Match Girl and the Heiress*, 89-95; Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 191-228. Walkowitz has an extended discussion on the press's attention to the murders and how it shaped and reworked the discourse.

³¹ Also see previous chapter in this dissertation for further discussion of Groom's interpretation of his social obligation.

³² Minutes of 3 December, 1888, Minute Book of Committee Meeting, 1888-1896 vol.1, LMA 4305/1/3.

³³ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 44.

now seemed more urgent than ever and showed the necessity of redoubling the Mission's efforts during "the autumn of terror." These events presented an opportunity to reaffirm how desperate the need and how important the work of the mission. On such terrain it was necessary to stand out among all the requests for support that the average citizen received each day.

At a monthly meeting of the Committee in the fall of 1888, Groom proposed his idea to send samples through the post of the Crippleage's artificial flower work to current and potential contributors. Unfortunately, the details of that proposal and any Committee discussion around it do not appear in the minutes of the meeting, as the minute book only notes a "falling off of subscribers, send specimen flowers with appeal and Report."³⁴ It is possible that a sense of urgency accompanied the decision, and it was an *ad hoc* and extemporaneous plan and decision. It is recorded only that, "The committee authorized Mr. Groom to use what [*sic*] means to awaken interest in the mission and approve of his plan sending specimen flowers together with report of the mission,"³⁵ They also approved his application for £200 for "the purposes of the Brigade."³⁶ The launch of Groom's new mailing initiative is not given any more elaboration than that, and the number of boxes ordered for the first effort is not recorded. In its initial roll out, it seems as if it was less the occasion of an exciting innovation that the mission was anxious to unveil, and simply more an attempt to restore the coffers in any way possible—even if untested and costly, and also a bit rash. By December of 1891, however, the committee recorded that "the best

³⁴ Minutes of 3 December, 1888, Minute Book of Committee Meeting, 1888-1896 vol.1, LMA 4305/1/3.

³⁵ Minutes of 3 December, 1888, Minute Book of Committee Meeting, 1888-1896 vol.1, LMA 4305/1/3.

³⁶ Minutes of 3 December, 1888, Minute Book of Committee Meeting, 1888-1896 vol.1, LMA 4305/1/3.

way of securing an increased income” was through the specimen flower gifts,³⁷ and in April of 1892 they paid their £200 balance due with the publisher Morgan & Scott for the printing of *The Silver Vase*.³⁸ The number of flower boxes sent by John Groom’s would soon top 25,000 for each year’s Christmas Appeal and grow to 100,000 over the following years.³⁹ It also seems likely that the first year’s appeal would have been of a smaller quantity than in subsequent years, especially in light of the fact that Groom had not secured the Committee’s approval until December. There would not have been time to launch a more ambitious project and ensure its delivery by Christmas—the busiest mail period of an already busy year. Nor would it have been possible to send such a package in such impressive numbers had it not been for a series of fairly recent developments. The most significant of these was the innovation of the penny post, which had opened the floodgates of letter writing and sending like never before, and triggered an explosion in the way the mail system was used to solicit money for schemes both genuine and illicit.

Begging by Post

The mail was a serious thing indeed.⁴⁰ At its peak in 1908, some dwellers in central Londoners received the post as many as twelve times a day between the hours of

³⁷ Minutes of 21 December, 1891, Minute Book of Committee Meeting, 1888-1896 vol.1, LMA 4305/1/3.

³⁸ Minutes of 1 April, 1892, Minute Book of Committee Meeting, 1888-1896 vol.1, LMA 4305/1/3. Groom ordered five thousand copies of *The Silver Vase* in July of 1891, Minutes of 31 July 1891, Minute Book of Committee Meeting, 1888-1896 vol.1, LMA 4305/1/3.

³⁹ In April of 1910 22,000 boxes ordered and in October of that year, the 1911 order was for 25,000. Minutes of 12 April, 1910 and Minutes of 17 October, 1910. LMA 4305/06/07. Minutes of 21 October 1919 refer to the number 100,000 as “ordinary” amount LMA 4305/06/07, in 1920, 83,000 were ordered, Minutes of 16 November 1920 LMA 4305/06/07. The numbers are lower during the First World War.

⁴⁰ Groom would make other use of the post office. One proposed scheme involved collecting stamps in 1893, according to notes in the Minutes of 4 March 1892. He was “desirous of obtaining the consent of the post office authorities” on behalf of the orphanage work, LMA4305/1/3 Minute Book 1888-1896 vol 3. I was not able to find enough information on it to include in this chapter. The ways in which charities used

seven in the morning until ten minutes of nine in the evening!⁴¹ This frequency speaks to the volume of the mail, the efficiency with which it was handled, and the importance with which it was viewed. Groom himself had been using the mail for years to promote the mission's projects. An Act of Parliament in January, 1840 allowed the institution of the penny post under the stewardship of Sir Rowland Hill, the postal reformer and one of the era's "serious Christians,"—men who combined "religious, commercial, and scientific ideologies," in their efforts to institute progressive change.⁴² The uniform penny post is hailed as a profound change in communications—in fact, it is considered as momentous as the digital "information revolution" of the 21st century.⁴³ A number of scholars have shown the great impact made by the democratization of the post through its lower cost and the greater ease of accessibility.⁴⁴ They have assessed the ways in which new methods of postal communications helped to change or redefine notions of intimacy and have considered its effects on personal relationships.⁴⁵ The penny post had opened the door to a new population of letter writers and letter receivers. For the first time, the class and income barriers limiting access to the mail received a hard blow. Now, a letter or

the post office for fundraising is a promising area for research and engages with a growing historiography on the intersection of the post office and the state, the post office and technology, and other emerging interests. See Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Duncan Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post: The Authorized History* (London: Penguin, 2012).

⁴¹ Adrian Steel and Peter Sutton, "The biggest, and ... one of the most advanced, enterprises in the country': The Royal Mail Archive and the Contemporary Historian," *Contemporary British History* 21, (March 2007), 111-131.

⁴² Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 27.

⁴³ Catherine J. Golden, *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009,) 61.

⁴⁴ Works on the penny post and the modern post office include Howard Robinson, *Britain's Post Office: A History of Development from the Beginning to the Present Day* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), M.J. Daunt, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (Athlone Press, 1985).

⁴⁵ Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* Translated by Kevin Repp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), esp. 115-116.

paper bundle, providing it weighed less than half-an-ounce, could be mailed anywhere—including the colonies—for just a penny. As Catherine Golden points out in her recent study of nineteenth-century letter writing, although this was remarkable in one respect, a penny was still a significant amount of money for the working class, when a loaf of stale bread that would feed an entire family could be had for that amount, and a cup of hot cocoa, tea, or coffee cost the same.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the pre-paid penny postcard, the subsequent half-penny postcard, and innovations such as the gum-sealed envelope, furthered hastened the acceptance of the post as an important development in communications and placed it within reach of a growing number of people. Within one year the volume of mail increased 112.4 percent.⁴⁷ It was both a blessing and a curse in the eyes of many. A dominant theme of the discourse of the penny post was, according to Golden, “that it brought the innocent and unsuspecting into dangerous contact with criminal elements in society.”⁴⁸ Time and distance between writer and reader were considerably and reliably narrowed.

When the long-wished-for-changes took place they also led to the creation of the enormous quantities of what we now know as “junk mail,” or, in its more official rendering, direct mail.⁴⁹ With the advent of the penny post, advertisers, of all different types, embraced this effective way to broadcast their wares. Much of what the Victorians considered junk mail were the mass-produced “circulars” that replaced or supplemented the newspaper advertising that had previously served as the main source of commercial

⁴⁶ Golden, *Posting It*, 61.

⁴⁷ Golden, *Posting It*, 154.

⁴⁸ Golden, *Posting It*, 154.

⁴⁹ Christopher M. Keirstead, “Going Postal: Mail and Mass Culture in *Bleak House*,” *Nineteenth Century Studies* 17 (2003) 91-106; has discussion on direct mail, 92.

communication before the penny post.⁵⁰ Newspapers had been prohibitively expensive for many to acquire, due to paper and other taxes and the high cost of delivering them to subscribers.⁵¹ Circulars instead were single-sheet printed mailings sent in large numbers, and with some frequency, to prospective customers independent of the newspapers. The first mass-mailings, circulars were cheap, easily distributed, and proved a boon to the business of solicitation.⁵² Although many were from legitimate concerns, some recipients intensely disliked the content of these mass-produced mailings, and believed the advertisements to be an encroachment and a distasteful and relentless commercial tactic.⁵³

In addition, these new postal forms complicated the meaning of personal connections. Circulars posed a further affront by depersonalizing the recipient, as they could be delivered to an address alone, and did not require that they be directed to a named individual.⁵⁴ This was a breach of protocol in a society that continued to cherish personal relationships and formal introductions--even as forces of industrial capitalism and urbanization were making such feudal holdovers obsolete. In the daily flood of correspondence, contemporaries--among them such nineteenth century pundits as Henry Mayhew, James Greenwood, and the beleaguered Charles Dickens-- grappled with the consequences of the reformed post as the volume of mailings steadily increased.⁵⁵ Worse

⁵⁰ James Greenwood, *Seven Curses of London* (London: S. Rivers, 1869), 190.

⁵¹ T.R. Nevett, *Advertising in Britain, A History* (London: Heinemann, 1982). It is not clear as to whether advertisers actually realized any savings using circulars. Such an analysis would have to take many difficult to quantify factors into consideration.

⁵² Dauntton, *Royal Mail*, 51.

⁵³ T.R. Nevett, *Advertising in Britain, A History* (London: Heinemann, 1982).

⁵⁴ Siegert, *Relays*, 115-116.

⁵⁵ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and London Poor* volume 4 (1851), 403-412, 441-446.; James Greenwood, *Seven Curses of London* devotes an entire chapter; Charles Dickens, "The Begging Letter

than the nameless circulars, for many, including Dickens, who had been famously hoodwinked by one, were the “begging letters” addressed to prominent or wealthy individuals who might be counted on to lend financial support or to the distressed correspondent.⁵⁶ According to the historian Scott Sandage, “the curious practice of epistolary begging began in England about 1815.”⁵⁷ With the postal changes, begging-letter writers, whose business was to pen pitiable tales of hardship received a great incentive.⁵⁸ The letters had increased at an alarming rate with the birth of the penny post, but they had been a long-standing bane of the well-to-do and the gullible, or as one contemporary put it, “where there is a conjunction of the softest heads and softest hearts.”⁵⁹

The begging letter, as the name suggests, was a handwritten plea in which, typically, an unknown person sought the generosity of the letter’s recipient. The term “begging letter” was widely applied, and came to signify not simply the hand-written letters mailed to a select prominent few by some enterprising con artists, but comprised as well the much more sophisticated literature and images produced by established charities, well equipped with budgets and boards of directors, and mailed to a broad swathe of prospective donors. Begging letter writers most often requested cash, and came

Writer,” *Household Words*, 1850. See Keirstead, “Going Postal,” for extended analysis of Dickens and his novels and personal life vis-à-vis begging letters.

⁵⁶ Lionel Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds: Vagrant Underworld in Britain, 1815-1985* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 1988), 34.

⁵⁷ M.J.D. Roberts, “Reshaping the Gift Relationship: The London Mendicity Society and the Suppression of Begging in England, 1818-1869,” *International Review of Social History* 36 (1991), 201-231; Scott Sandage, “Gender and the Economics of the Sentimental Market in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Social Politics* 6 (Summer 1999), 105-130; here, 111.

⁵⁸ M.J.D. Roberts, “Reshaping the Gift Relationship”; Lynn MacKay, “The Mendicity Society and Its Clients: A Cautionary Tale,” *Left History* 5 (1997), 39-65; and Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds* discuss the effects of postal change on the increase in letters. For such a widespread phenomenon, it has received very little scholarly attention.

⁵⁹ “The Old Trade of the Begging Letter Impostor,” *The Times*, 20 April 1860, 9.

from individuals or concerns—such as dilapidated parish chapels needing restoration—ordinarily outside of one’s personal or intimate sphere. (Although another version of the begging letter capitalized on loose business connections or family ties—real or imaginary—between the parties.) Others, more inventive, pled for intervention “to prevent a home being sold up, to establish a boy in business, to buy appliances for invalids, to float a new invention, to publish a book or start a newspaper.” One bold writer even asked for the funds needed in order to, “gratify the yearnings of his artistic soul,” as he had never been to an opera or a concerto.⁶⁰ Understandably, begging letters were considered a scourge of modern life, an intrusion on privacy, and were associated almost inexorably with fraud. Dickens called the writers “the scum of the earth.”⁶¹ They were also outside of the reach of the vagrancy laws that curtailed street begging.⁶²

The mail, now vastly aided by the registries that listed the names and addresses of potential customers—such as clergy members and the aristocracy—became a cost-efficient and speedy method of reaching the target audience.⁶³ This too resulted in a seemingly all-day-long barrage of pleas and requests for those whose address or occupation identified them as prospects.⁶⁴ As Golden writes, the inexpensive post had the effect of facilitating “mass mailings of radical organizations and allowed solicitors, pranksters, fans, fundraisers, and scam artists to communicate with strangers.”⁶⁵ It seems that as an income-generating activity, it was a sufficiently lucrative practice in order for it

⁶⁰ Hugh B. Philpott, “Our Beggars,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* (June 1906), 617-626; 621.

⁶¹ Quoted in Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, 34.

⁶² Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, 33.

⁶³ Among them: *Crockford’s Clergy*, *Debrett’s Peerage*, *London Directory*, *Red Book*, *Hart’s Army List* and *Parliamentary Companion*, per Arthur A. Beckett, “Begging Letters,” *London Society: An Illustrated Magazine* (February 1886), 172.

⁶⁴ Steel and Sutton, “The Royal Mail Archive,” 112.

⁶⁵ Golden, *Posting It*, 234.

to continue for so many years, with impostors writing as many as “a thousand begging letters each day in London alone,” as early as 1830, a number that increased over time.⁶⁶

As these missives were delivered in a pre-existing culture of heavy charitable obligation, many who received letters indeed were “weak enough” to fulfill requests. Many cases did present apparently compelling situations—whether or not they were authentic or certifiable—and so moved their recipients to give aid.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, these communiqués were so commonplace that they were even characterized—albeit, sardonically—as a sort of third-rate literary genre, their authors as “subterranean littérateurs.”⁶⁷ Another report drew comparisons between the beggar of literature and the beggar of real life, but also made many references to the “peculiar form of literature” in which is revealed the “fertile imagination of a master of fiction.”⁶⁸ Contemporaries became adept at categorizing and discerning different genres of begging letters. They organized letters and their writers according to the presumed level of education, the quality of the paper or handwriting, the originality of thought, the nature of the help being sought and other variables in order to assess the veracity of each claim. Writers also exploited familiar concepts and ideals about femininity and dependency in highly-gendered communications, and it was thought that women outnumbered men in the trade. One recipient, “found by far the larger part of the pile emanated from ladies. Letter after letter bore the signatures of governesses in distress...”⁶⁹ A study of a collection of letters bears out this suggestion that women

⁶⁶ Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, 56.

⁶⁷ “Begging Letters,” *All the Year Round*, 2:52 (December 1889), 620.

⁶⁸ Philpott, “Our Beggars,” *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 622.

⁶⁹ Beckett, Arthur A. “Begging Letters,” *London Society: an illustrated magazine of light and amusing literature for the hours of relaxation*, 29 (Feb 1886), 17.

outnumbered men in begging-letter writing, although whether or not they were written by impostors is difficult to say. Investigators estimated that somewhere between sixty and eighty percent of the letters they received were fraudulent.⁷⁰

Corporate Begging Letters

The begging letters or circulars issued by Groom reproduced many of the standards of the typical missive. In his letters he typically spelled out the misfortunes of the mission's clientele and the problem that it addressed, that is, "poor crippled girls, some of whom have lost one or two limbs [...] are suffering from partial paralysis, hip disease, curvature of the spine, etc." The letters fit within a genre that soon developed in begging-letter writing--the emergence of what were known as "corporate beggars." When Dickens wrote *Our Mutual Friend* in 1864-65, he described them as "professional fund-raisers for charity or for less reputable causes."⁷¹ Organizations, charitable and otherwise, which had risen to meet the increased demand for reading materials--created by the broad expansion in literacy--also found the postbox a convenient way to reach an audience. These "corporate" begging-letters--or, "circulars"--typically detailed the good works of a mission or institution and the urgent need for donations. Individuals in high places, the recipients of most of them, lodged complaints against this type of solicitation. One exasperated correspondent to *The Times* expressed that he was quite tired of receiving "indiscriminate begging letters," and demanded to know, "why, because I write M.P. after my name, should I be considered fair game by every religious body, every

⁷⁰ Lynn MacKay, "The Mendicity Society and Its Clients: A Cautionary Tale," *Left History* 5 (1997), 39-65; 50, 51.

⁷¹ Keirstead, "Going Postal," 92.

benevolent association, and almost every necessitous individual within a radius of six miles from St. Paul's?" He acknowledged that while he would expect to be called to duty by members of his own constituency, he does not understand why his heart must 'expand at this festive season' at the call of every struggling charity, and the bare mention of every phase of unrecognized merit." He noted that,

since I have come to town, I have been called upon to support (inter alia) three decayed curates, two deserving but destitute authors, four promising theological students, a society for the suppression of improper photographs, a society for the protection of women and children, a refuge for fallen women, a home for strayed dogs, a church in Natal, a manse in Canada, a mission in Liverpool, an organ in Sheffield, and a musical young lady from South Wales.⁷²

Even Lord Shaftesbury weighed in, condemning the writers as "parasites."⁷³

Contemporaries became adept at recognizing the more amateurish attempts, or blatantly false appeals, such as one lampooned in *All the Year Round* which revealed itself through its slipshod production, "an introduction of some kind is scribbled off, the document is printed in the cheapest style."⁷⁴ On the other hand, critics complained of the increasingly slick promotional materials distributed by charities. "Muckraking" journalist James Greenwood enumerated many of the efforts to which some went, including the enclosure of photographs with taglines such as, "Children to Save!"⁷⁵ At the same time, however, a more lavish production, enhanced with beautiful illustrations, and glossy papers conveyed both legitimacy and solvency—which meant success, and lessened the possibility of imposture. All of these inducements and encouragements took money to

⁷² M.P., "Letter to the Editor: The Begging Letter Nuisance," *The Times* 21 January 1879, 11.

⁷³ Quoted in Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, 34. From the 1853 debate on Juvenile and Vagrancy Bill in *Hansard* (Lords), 5/7/1853.

⁷⁴ "Begging Letters," *All the Year Round* 2:52 (December 1889), 620.

⁷⁵ A tactic broadly employed, well into the twenty-first century, and one which Groom used too. See Koven, *Slumming* Chapter Two *passim*.

produce. The risk in not presenting a professional public image was to be seen as merely another begging-letter fraud. Charitable organizations and their fundraisers faced this paradox wherein they needed both to establish credibility in a highly competitive marketplace, and, at the same time, not appear to be using the donated income in a frivolous or wasteful manner, or, worse, for their own aggrandizement. The individuals and groups involved in raising money for charities understood that it took money to make money, while many others railed against this sort of spending.

Some begging letters blurred the boundary between legitimate charities and those who were able to prepare reasonably convincing facsimiles and readers were on the alert for imposters. One reader undertook his own analysis. Arthur Beckett began by pointing out that one letter he had received was “inclosed in an envelope adorned with a crest, combining the symbols of Faith, Hope and Charity,” as well as “a number of ‘honorary officers’ printed on the heading.” This was a typical style of letterhead paper issued from charities, and the impressive roster of gentlemen bore an “imposing array of letters added to their names,” and included, “two surgeons, a physician, a standing counsel, a solicitor, and four clerical visitors,” suggesting, presumably, both respectability and a seriousness of purpose. As more evidence of *bona fides*, a letter-writer might additionally include other printed materials, as did this mailing, which contained “a prospectus” with “several testimonials from divines and others, witnessing to the fitness of the Foundress of the Asylum to undertake the duties of Lady Manager.” The letter included all of the elements of successful solicitations—from its elegant writing paper, to its worthy supporters, and its respectable request. In the end, however, he concluded, “Altogether, it struck me that the writer, although anxious to secure a comfortable home for pages out of place, was equally

desirous of securing a comfortable berth for herself.”⁷⁶ While the cause itself sounds a bit sketchy, it was not outside of the range of charities supported during this time. Although it perhaps should not be read as a straightforward example of an actual solicitation, it nevertheless underscores the difficulty recipients experienced when confronted with similar pleas. Beckett’s skeptical suggestion that the Lady Foundress was plumping her own pillows was of the type leveled at genuine fundraisers, whether or not it was fair.

Beckett’s passage demonstrates another dilemma such mailings presented. The author of the passage highlights the way in which such mailings raised the very real fear of being taken for a fool by a duplicitous schemer who employed the ordinary sales tactics and methods of persuasion common to both legitimate and bogus solicitations. Groom employed many of the same techniques, with letterhead that bore the mission’s illustrated logo that juxtaposed a ragged and crippled street-seller next to a tidy girl at a worktable, with the caption “From street struggles to Christian charity,” and listed the name of its respectable bankers, as well as the treasurer--a well-regarded public figure. The name of its most notable benefactor, the Earl of Shaftesbury, was printed in boldface at the top of the letter with the year the mission was founded (suitably far removed from the present, a testament to its longevity). Another strategy, and one which Groom also used, was to enclose a response card in the mailing, along with a self-addressed envelope. Some letters used a script typeface to give the impression they had been individually and personally penned rather than mass printed. The subscription list, in which “various members of the aristocracy appeared as having given large sums of money,” was

⁷⁶ Arthur A. Beckett, “Begging Letters,” *London Society: an illustrated magazine of light and amusing literature for the hours of relaxation*, 29 (Feb 1886), 176-177.

frequently provided as a “further inducement.” Keeping up with the wealthy, or the desire for a bit of recognition surely spurred some generosity.

Of begging letters, and begging in general, there could not have been more opprobrium. Constant reminders over the course of the century often went along these lines, “Many who recognize the duty of ‘considering the poor’ may forget how much successful, but dishonest, appeals tend to discourage industry and provident habits.”⁷⁷ Giving aid to beggars was described as the road to ruin for all involved, and “to throw a sixpence to a street-beggar is an act compounded of good nature, selfishness, and indolence.”⁷⁸ The elevation of begging from spoken word into prose did nothing to polish the apple. In his letters, Groom did not shy away from raising the spectre of begging. In fact, he used it to argue that by contributing to the mission, one would be helping to reduce begging. Some letters poignantly spoke of the young girls, “to whom the flower-selling is but a pretext for begging,” and the “poor crippled children who are sent into the streets that their afflictions may excite sympathy and so become a source of gain to their guardians.” This was quickly shown not to be the fault of the girls themselves, but rather the result of unfortunate circumstances and heartless families. The very helplessness, rather than the deviousness, of the girls and the cripples further removed them from the offense. So as not to dwell on the begging aspect, it was quickly asserted that the girls in the “Industrial Branch”—the name alone suggesting diligent work—were learning to be self-supporting. The begging letter sent in their behalf thus was not truly begging *per se*, but was, rather, asking the reader to join in helping to put an *end*

⁷⁷ C.S. Loch, “Letter to the Editor: Begging Letter Impostor,” *The Times*, 12 December 1876, 6.

⁷⁸ Philpott, “Our Beggars,” *Macmillan's Magazine*, 624.

to begging. This was much the same as the idea that charity in the interest of avoiding charity was, in itself, not charity. In other words, the mission's project of training crippled girls for artificial flower-making meant that they would not need charity in the future—Groom put it, “the charity is used to enable the afflicted to be independent of charity.”⁷⁹ His letters explained that through the contributions of friends, the girls were preparing for “hopeful and happy” independent living, so as to be “permanently delivered from the dread of the Union” and not, “a helpless burden upon others.”⁸⁰ Begging letters with the goal of ending street-begging were thus redeemed. The mission enclosed copies of their lavish pamphlets, detailing the success stories of some of the girls, such as *Limping Ferret*. These were printed on glossy paper with multiple illustrations and an engaging narrative.

Groom's use of the postal system as a method for raising awareness and funds did not stop with paper and print. At some point it occurred to him that the most convincing argument for the talent and ability of the girls in the Industrial Branch was in holding the product in one's hands. Just as he had mounted exhibitions across the country to showcase the flowers and the girls who made them, the gift boxes offered incontrovertible proof of the success of the training and the quality and type of the available product. As he wrote in one of the appeals, “That you may better judge of the nature of this work and the capabilities of the these crippled girls, the ladies of the council have sent this small spray of flowers, of which they sincerely ask your kind acceptance ...Trusting therefore that you will accept the spray sent and that you will give

⁷⁹ “Dear Sir,” letter December 1902, LMA/4305.

⁸⁰ “Dear Sir,” letter December 1902, LMA/4305.

this special urgent appeal your kindest consideration, I remain your obedient servant.”⁸¹

Groom was hoping that seeing would be believing. Groom pushed the meaning of begging letter to new limits, however, when his came bundled not only with a pamphlet, but with a surprise gift of flowers made by the crippled girls themselves.

“Clericus,” the aggrieved recipient of the unbidden box of flowers from the Crippleage, was not alone in his consternation regarding the volume of mail received each day, and the “begging letters” that made up the bulk of the “customary pleas for help,” although he was a latecomer to the chorus of lamenters. As Dickens had fumed in 1848, begging letter writers were “public robbers,” who, with their constant stream of begging letters confused potential donors, leading them to disregard all pleas, and in that way, to miss out on, and deny, the legitimate charities and worthy cases.⁸² A commonly voiced objection to begging letters insisted that, “Real charity is driven to the wall by the very force of that pressure which affords it no rest—gives it no power to discriminate between the real and the false.”⁸³ The outpouring of enmity directed at begging letters hints at the depth of emotion they provoked. Something of a counter-attack was mounted in the press, both in editorial and epistolary form. Unlike Dickens, who had a public soap box, other aggrieved recipients, such as Clericus, found a bully pulpit of their own in the “Letters to the Editor” sections of newspapers, and in the hands of the Charity Organisation Society’s investigators. The Charity Organisation Society was a long-time denouncer of begging letters, and Members of the Society were charged with determining the legitimacy of the thousands of letters that were forwarded to them by the respectable

⁸¹ Letter to subscribers, no date, signed by John Groom. LMA 4305. This appeal was handwritten. Similar, shorter appeals are also in the files, with similar pitches.

⁸² Dickens, “The Begging Letter Writer,” *Household Words*.

⁸³ S.G.O., “Letter to the Editor,” *The Times*, 30 November 1860, 7.

class who had received them. Indeed, it maintained an entire Enquiry Department solely to handle the flood of correspondence redirected to them from both concerned citizens and from affiliated organizations.⁸⁴ Since the Society's own value—and the continuing support of its patrons—depended upon their success in revealing the unworthy, begging letters were given intense investigation.⁸⁵ In fact, the COS itself solicited from the unsuspecting public in blind classified advertisements and encouraged concerned parties to send such materials to their attention so that their surveillance operation would be brought to bear.⁸⁶ Loch publicly stated that it would be “most arrogant” for an individual to think they could take on the job of determining which charities were genuine.⁸⁷ Recipients of begging letters were always alert to the possibility of fraud, importunity, or imposture, and delight in finally exposing the fraudulent letter-writer was a common theme in much of the discourse around begging-letters.

Groom did not escape the judgement of the COS, nor was he an exception to many of the deplored excesses described here. Over the years, the Mission turned out scores of letters in the melodramatic narrative style that the COS called “cant,” accompanied by costly pamphlets and photocards meant to enhance its image and

⁸⁴C.S. Loch, “Begging Letter Writing,” Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 13 March, 1905, 11. According to historians of the COS in a recent article in the *Journal of British Studies*, the COS actively sought such letters by running simple classified advertisements requesting that anyone having received literature from any charity should forward it to the officers of the COS. In this way, the COS covertly gathered information on charities. Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe, “The Charity-Mongers of Modern Babylon: Bureaucracy, Scandal, and the Transformation of the Philanthropic Marketplace, c.1870–1912” *Journal of British Studies* 54 (January 2015), 118–137. This view seems confirmed by Loch’s letter.

⁸⁵ The Mendicity Society (the precursor to the Charity Organisation Society), had been formed in 1818, and took a special interest in damming the outward flow of donations. Already in 1821, a special office of the Society was formed solely for the investigation of begging letters, Lynn MacKay, “The Mendicity Society and Its Clients: A Cautionary Tale,” *Left History* 5 (1997), 39–65; 41.

⁸⁶ C.S. Loch, “Begging Letter Impostors,” Letters to the Editor, *Times*, 12 December, 1876, 6.; “The Marquis of Lorne on Charity Organization,” *The Times*, 23 January 1884, 12.

⁸⁷ “The Marquis of Lorne on Charity Organization,” *The Times*, 23 January 1884, 12.

prestige. How Groom measured his response rate is unknown. It must have worked reasonably well in his judgment to continue doing it. In fact, he found new ways to exploit it. In spite of the efforts of the COS, and the outcry from part of the public, with the penny post, charitable fundraisers had found a way to adapt the outright solicitation of funds by strangers through the mail to its needs. The anonymous beggar had swept right into the parlors of the middle class.

Parcel Post

By the late-nineteenth-century, the penny post was well established, as were the daily begging letters and circulars. But new innovations were on the horizon. The parcel post, which enabled such approaches as the Christmas Box did not begin in the UK until 1883. When it did, the long-anticipated service marked another new epoch in communication and expectations. Mailing of samples of manufactures was one of the anticipated uses of the parcel post and it was hoped that commerce would be stimulated as a result.⁸⁸ I argue that Groom's use of the parcel post was among the earliest, if not the first, to exploit the parcel post for fundraising rather than purely commercial interests. Although some historians of philanthropy note the use of postcards and other souvenirs being deployed by fundraisers, this technique of mailing samples, and the use of the

⁸⁸ I have found, for example, a drapers' who sent paper patterns to customers as an enticement, it also appears that books were commonly sent and even wine by an enterprising wine merchant. One apparently frequent practice occurred with the birth of a child. Following the publication of a birth announcement in the newspaper, the new parents often received "gifts" of manufactured socks from unknown persons. An attached card expressed good wishes for the new family member and asked for a small recompense to defray the cost of the socks and the postage. In "The Plague of Circulars," *The Saturday Review*, 21 April, 1877, 475-476 and "Circulars," *The Graphic*, 30 July, 1881, 106.

postal system in general, is not included among the techniques they enumerate.⁸⁹ While there has been recent scholarly work regarding the post office and the social, cultural, and technological changes in its wake, almost no attention has been paid to the parcel post, which arguably, also made a lasting impact and shaped forms of communication and commerce in the coming century. The parcel post, with its early attempts at standardization of shipping materials and methods, opened the way for mail order catalogs and today's massive electronic retailing economy. It seems that the opportunity for further research into this neglected area of commerce is a rich vein awaiting its historian.

Before the passage of the parcel post reforms, items other than letters had been shipped through the mail, but as early as 1844, anonymous and disgruntled critics of the new penny postage system remarked that the post had become a ““parcel and conveyance delivery company, a public general carrier, a kind of flying bazaar”” both endangering the public and tarnishing its image of being ““a safe and effective instrument of conducting the correspondence of a great commercial empire.””⁹⁰ Postal Acts in 1864 and 1870 *inter alia* made the transport of many of items illegal. The Post Office Act of 1870 forbade, among other hazardous things, dead bodies, live lobsters, gunpowder, Lucifer matches, and explosive materials. Other explosive matter, figuratively if not literally, included indecent or obscene materials. Earlier Acts (1864) had excluded from the mail seeds and

⁸⁹ John M. and Diane Winston, eds., *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002). In a recent article in *Enterprise and Society* on early premium incentives, Wendy Woloson does not mention this technique among others that she highlights, “Wishful Thinking: Retail Premiums in Mid-Nineteenth Century America,” *Enterprise and Society*, 13 (December 2012), 790-831.

⁹⁰ Golding, *Posting It*, 158, quoted from an anonymous 1844 pamphlet critical of postal reforms, “Administration of the Post Office,” from the Introduction of *Mr. Rowland Hill's Plan of Penny Postage up to the Present Time*, (London, 1844).

vegetation, manure, and various fresh meats.⁹¹ Clearly there were abuses of the system. The much-anticipated creation of the parcel post in 1883 built on the sense of anxiety and the existing fears about the possibilities and practicalities of being able to send virtually anything through the post,⁹² as new rules opened the way for quick, cheap, and frequent deliveries of parcels. Golden suggests that this was mostly symbolic, as the post had already been transporting—if unwittingly and despite proscriptions—all sorts of objects, including living, stinking, and potentially exploding ones. Private delivery companies and the railroads had much to lose and had applied pressure over the years to forestall this development, but the desire for lower shipping prices and an expansion of delivery area in the government’s parcel system eventually led to the new system under the Postmaster General, Henry Fawcett, an economist and Liberal Party Parliament member.⁹³

Whether a merely symbolic act or not, the 1883 initiation of the parcel post sparked a reaction among the public. The number of parcels carried each year was staggering. In the first four days of the new parcel, thirty thousand parcels were delivered in London alone; the number collected in the metropolis was over seventy thousand.⁹⁴ During the year 1886, over twenty-six million parcels were delivered through United Kingdom Post-offices.⁹⁵ The idea of low-cost shipping caught the imagination of writers and cartoonists and led to humorous printed pieces that showed British citizens grappling with exactly what could be expected to arrive at one’s door. The beleaguered postman with his ludicrously large delivery detail loaded with the whimsical postings of mail-mad

⁹¹ Golden, *Posting It*, 172, 170.

⁹² At the same time transforming “letter carriers” into “postmen,” according to Golden, in *Posting It*, 172.

⁹³ Lawrence Goldman, *The Blind Victorian: Henry Fawcett and British Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁹⁴ *Evening News*, 11 August, 1883.

⁹⁵ W., “The Post-Office,” *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, October 1886, 773-775; 773.

public was a typical image invoked by social commentators and cartoonists.⁹⁶ It would take some time and experience to know what was appropriate to send through the post and how it should be done, and commentary addressed the frustrations patrons encountered. In Dublin in 1886, the Returned Letter Office detained parcels containing two hens, eight mice, and two hedgehogs. One of the hens was ill and was *en route* to a veterinarian in London. Despite being “carefully attended to” in the mail office, she died before she could be returned to her owner.⁹⁷ Even live flowers were sent through the parcels post service, so Groom’s idea of sending an artificial flower would be situated within an already existing set of expectations about receiving a floral gift through the mail.⁹⁸ The question of how to ship it would be less complicated than sending fresh ones, but accommodating such a large order would nonetheless require a mailing strategy.

If prescriptions of what might safely and suitably be shipped remained unstable, the packaging of items was no less a concern, and uniformity and regularization in the forms of containment took some time to emerge. Clerks had to be trained on the new regulations and had to enforce them by checking each package individually that came across the counter.⁹⁹ The parcel post also led to standardization of shipping rates and norms, as it grew into a mass technology. Volume mailers, such as Groom, with his tens of thousands of uniform parcels were among the first to see the potential. The revolution in postal communications itself depended on the use lightweight and inexpensive shipping materials. Paper had been used to wrap goods for centuries. But early papers

⁹⁶ “The Parcels Post—Safety and Economy,” *Fun*, 8 August, 1883, 63; “The Parcel Post,” *Judy: The London Serio-Comic Journal*, 8 August 1883, 70.

⁹⁷ W., “The Post-Office,” *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, October 1886, 773-775; 774.

⁹⁸ Editor, “Flowers by Parcels Post,” *The Field*, 1 March, 1884, 300.

⁹⁹ Editor, “By Parcels Post,” *All the Year ‘Round*, 22 December, 1883, 108; Editor, “How a Girl Posts a Parcel,” *Answers to Correspondents on Every Subject under the Sun*, 6 April, 1889, 293.

were made from cotton, and were expensive to produce, and thus not suitable to be used for everyday transactions. In the nineteenth century a number of inventions made paper both cheaper and more abundant, which was in turn used more widely to wrap items for sale and delivery—an essential step in sending letters and packages through the post.¹⁰⁰ In the march of nineteenth-century technological innovation, three processes had first to be developed in order to facilitate the inexpensive shipment of goods through the postal system: the paper-making machine, the wood pulping process and lithographic printing. The 1800 invention of strawboard, which consisted of layered and pressed sheets of cheap pulp paper, opened the way to the more rugged paperboard that could be substituted for wood. Paperboard was used to fabricate boxes that could be relied on to hold—and ship—a wide variety of items. By the early 1800s, small boxes were being made to hold things such as pills, matches, and cigars. It was not until 1870 that a more economical system for producing paperboard allowed it to be more widely used in the wide production of boxes.¹⁰¹ Groom depended on the “rigid set-up box,” manufactured in his own workshops, for the packaging of the Christmas roses, and other floral samples were sent in similar boxes. The boxes made by hand from paperboard cut to size by a knife and then glued and taped at the joints to hold it together. An order for 25,000 Christmas roses to be sent to friends of the organization thus entailed 25,000 handcrafted mailing boxes. Although Groom himself described work such as box-making as soul-

¹⁰⁰ Material here from Diana Twede, “Cereal Cartons, Tin Cans and Pop Bottles: Package-Converting Technologies that Revolutionized Food and Beverage Marketing, 1879-1902,” *CHARM Meeting Proceedings*, 2009, 267-276; and Diana Twede, “The Origins of Paper Based Packaging,” *CHARM Meeting Proceedings*, 2005, 288-300.

¹⁰¹ Milner Gray, “The History and Development of Packaging,” *Royal Society of Arts Journal* 87 (May 1929), 633-654; 638, 639, 641-642.

crushing in that it “practically turns the worker into a machine”¹⁰² in comparison with the more aesthetically pleasing flower-making, he nevertheless needed paperboard boxes to complete this project each year, and an unknown number of the girls and women were set to making boxes. Presumably these would be girls in some way not suited to making flowers. Many young women found low-paid employment in box-making for various products—from fancy chocolates to cheap matches, with varying levels of skill involved. A woman making match-boxes, working ten hours a day could earn ten shillings a week or less.¹⁰³ On the other hand, could take as many as three years of training to learn how to make the fancier boxes, with commensurately higher wages.¹⁰⁴

Whatever prompted Groom to mail the first of the Christmas Roses in 1888, receiving a an unanticipated package caused comment, as did one author in this essay published in *The Girls' Own Paper* in 1891 who remarked, “Your spare cash is demanded for every conceivable object and in the most ingenious ways.” In addition to the well-known begging letters, the author notes that one now receives, “Heart-rending appeals also reach you by post from people you have never seen, and for objects for which you have no sympathy.”¹⁰⁵ Although it is not specified what those objects are, it is conceivable that among those ingeniously demanding, heart-rending objects may well have been one of the 25,000 boxes of Christmas roses, or the hundreds of thousands of

¹⁰² John Groom, *Silver Vase*, 51. James Cassidy, “An English Match Factory,” *The Gentleman's Magazine*, (Feb 1897), 149-159, wrote, “the match-box factory has a two-fold aspect, hundreds of thousands of match boxes being made outside the factory, in the homes of the industrious and decent poor of the East-End of London,” 152.

¹⁰³ This, according to Charles Booth, *Life and Labour in East London*, in Cassidy, “An English Match Factory,” 152.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew August, *Poor Women's Lives: Gender, Work, and Poverty in Late-Victorian London* (Madison, NJ, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 91.

¹⁰⁵ C.M. Finn, “Your Money or Your Life,” *The Girls' Own Paper*, 31 January 1891.

variations on that winning formula that followed in subsequent years. The flower boxes appear to have been a crowning success, despite some grumbles. The committee reported in 1919, “the result of the annual Christmas appeal showed that contributions were £470 more than last year and £150 more than ever received before.”¹⁰⁶

Predictably, C.S. Loch was not cheered; he wrote that he wished Groom would find a different way of raising money than sending the Christmas flowers through the post.¹⁰⁷ As Clericus had so pointedly underscored, the inconvenience or uselessness of the unwanted gift was one thing. It was the presumption on the part of the giver, who expected a donation in return, that truly ruffled his feathers. The ground on which the charity game had been played was shifting under foot.

Tens of Millions of Roses Ordered

With the inauguration of Alexandra Rose Day, as with the gift boxes of flowers he sent to subscribers and prospects, John Groom was at the forefront of another novel fundraising scheme. As with the flower box, the simple gesture of offering a gift to the giver challenged ideas about the relationship between the donor and the recipient of charity. Alexandra Rose Day also stirred controversy about the funding of charity itself and the inequities it maintained in the process. Although the Crippleage turned out hundreds of thousands of a variety of flowers annually, this new order presented a challenge. Roses were the most complex flowers to produce, and competent rose makers

¹⁰⁶ Although the number of contributors was down overall. Minutes of 27 January 1919. LMA 4305 06/67. They also only sent out 25,000 boxes that first post-war year, rather than the “100,000 ordinary.” Minutes of 21 October 1919 LMA 4305 06/67. The Christmas appeal in 1920 took “the form of a flower in a box with suitable literature for 83,000 subscribers and others.” Minutes of 16 November 1920 LMA 4305 06/67.

¹⁰⁷ C.S. Loch, A/FWA/C/D85/4 LMA.

were paid the highest wages. Typically, many steps were involved in creating an artificial rose. In terms of technique and material, however, the Alexandra Roses, created especially for the day, were comparatively very simple. The flowers manufactured for the day were the cheaper and inferior product that was subject to the most critique—the sort of ornament that would adorn the cook's hat, but not the lady's. They were designed to mimic the popular “dog rose” that grew wild in hedgerows across England. It was intended that the emblems would sell for as low as a penny (although the plan was to angle for much more) and still turn a profit.¹⁰⁸

To keep costs low and production high, the finished Alexandra Rose was made of pre-colored and stamped cotton (instead of being individually hand-tinted to mimic the shade and detail of a natural blossom as would have been done with a higher end product). Rather than the usual multiple complex layers of petals, the Alexandra Rose was composed of only one layer, attached with a spray of yellow centers representing the stamen, to a thin wire stem.¹⁰⁹ Ordinarily, almost as much care would have gone into fashioning the leaves and stems of a rose as the actual blossom; but Alexandra Roses were a different product from the detailed work most “rose girls” usually produced. In any event, the Alexandra Rose represented a streamlined and fairly abstracted item with low production values—rationalized, mass-produced, and cost effective. This was a departure both from the finely detailed and ornate work so cherished in this period, and also a striking example of the power of British industry and the ability to mass-produce items in great quantity. Newspaper coverage repeatedly stressed the number of roses to be

¹⁰⁸ “No change given,” was the directive, Editor, “Alexandra Day,” *The Globe*, 26 June 1912, 7.

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Mirror* has details about Alexandra Roses including images. A sample is attached to the letter Mrs. Lowenfeld sent to the King's Fund, LMA/A/KE, 1912.

made each year, commonly citing figures as high as thirty million.¹¹⁰ They also were designed to be disposable, or, as one critic remarked, they amounted to “the deliberate manufacture of rubbish and trash.”¹¹¹ In any event, it was a model whose time had come, and was to be replicated into the untold numbers in years ahead.¹¹² Supplying the flowers was just one of the many logistical problems to solve in order to mount this spectacle. Surprisingly little documentary evidence remains of what was an enormous public works undertaking. The paper trail left by the Alexandra Day Organization headed by Miss C. May Beeman, which took headquarters at Earl's Court, has largely been lost or destroyed. Only a few odds-and-ends remain of what must have been a sizeable amount. Newspaper articles described the great piles of flowers on workers' tables at the Crippleage stacked high in preparation for the sale and the complexity of coordinating for the annual one-day event: tens of millions of emblems, upwards of 20,000 volunteers, hundreds of collecting depots, thousands of pounds in donations, and an elaborate Royal procession through many sections of London.

Alexandra is credited with imagining the broad contours of the day, which is variously said to be based on a Danish story about a King (perhaps even Alexandra's own father, King Christian IX of Denmark who participated in a similar event in her homeland, as has been suggested by one of her biographers) who handed coins to the

¹¹⁰ Twenty million roses reportedly made in 1913, Editor, “Royal Roses, Alexandra Day and How the Blooms are Prepared,” *Answers*, 28 June, 1913, 87.

¹¹¹ An M.P.'s Wife, “Correspondence: Rose Day and Hospital Finance,” *The Saturday Review*, 19 July 1913, 79-80.

¹¹² Newer techniques include self-adhesive materials, but the original rose was a prototype for others such as the Remembrance Day poppy. Information from my meeting in July 2009 with Bill Kay the general manager of The Poppy Factory in Richmond, where the Remembrance Day poppies are produced each year.

poor one day each year.¹¹³ This appears to be largely apocryphal, however. The true origin of the event probably lies with the social ambitions of the theater impresario, investor, and bigamist, Henry Lowenfeld, and his second wife, Frania, Jewish emigrés from what was then part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire. It was Lowenfeld who declared the day's festivities would be the "the most gigantic advertisement any charity ever had."¹¹⁴ Although they have been almost completely expunged from the record, notwithstanding some correspondence that clearly places them at the very center of the events in their initial unfolding.¹¹⁵ In correspondence from Mrs. Lowenfeld to R.H. Maynard, Secretary of King Edward's Hospital Fund, she wrote, "I am by no means the originator of the idea, which was started some years ago in Denmark, and worked there most successfully, and also in France, Germany and Austria."¹¹⁶ Early newspaper reports also credit Mrs. Lowenfeld, who was "anxious to improve her social position," with being the first organizer.¹¹⁷ Groom would have been an obvious choice for supplying the roses once the idea had turned to artificial--rather than natural--roses. The association

¹¹³ Another version involves a priest who collected money for the poor. Duff, *Alexandra*.

There existed flower days, such as Primrose Day in honor of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, but they were on an entirely different order and scale.

¹¹⁴ Correspondence with Lowenfeld and King's Fund, LMA A/KE. His name appears nowhere in the official surviving printed material. Reference is made only to the "first organiser." He owned the Prince of Wales Theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue and had earlier owned the Apollo Theatre.

¹¹⁵ Contemporary newspapers corroborate this, "Mrs. Lowenfeld, who devised and organised," in "About Woman's Sphere and Interests," *The Sphere*, 6 July 1912, vi; She is identified as the Honourable Organizer in "The Metropolitan Boroughs," *The Shoreditch Observer*, *Hackney Express*, *Bethnal Green Chronicle*, and *Finsbury Gazette*, 27 April, 1927, 2 and "the organiser of the festival," in "Alexandra Day," *The Globe*, 26 June 1912, 7. Mrs. Lowenfeld appears in some early reports but later is completely removed as being the organizer, or as even being involved.

¹¹⁶ Mrs. Lowenfeld corresponded with the King's Fund, 28 February, 1912, LMA A/KE. This is just one of a several letters. Newspaper article reports that she "set up a system which was used on the Continent to collect money for charity," "Alexandra Day: Action Against Mrs. Lowenfeld," *The Globe*, 25 February 1913, 5.

¹¹⁷ "The organiser started the movement in order to 'get into society'," asserts an An M.P.'s Wife, in "Correspondence: Rose Day and Hospital Finance," *The Saturday Review*, 19 July 1913, 79-80. "Alexandra Day: Action Against Mrs. Lowenfeld," *The Globe*, 25 February 1913, 5. There appears to be a scandal attached concerning the payment of her assistant and the costs of the event. More research is needed.

between Groom and the Royal Family had been a long and positive one. The Groom's archive contains correspondence from Charlotte Knollys, the Queen's close friend and companion, and other letters from various others close to the Alexandra, offering thanks to Mr. Groom for providing decoration for different events in the years prior and acknowledging that the Queen wished to sponsor the mission. A letter to Groom from Alexandra's secretary in 1891, when she was Princess of Wales, read, "after mature consideration and hearing that the work done by the Guild answers so well, she will be happy to allow her name to appear as Patroness of the London Flower Girls' Guild. ... this patronage extends to all the Sections of the Guild and not only to the one first stated."¹¹⁸

Press accounts of the actual day were relayed in excited prose. Images do suggest a carnival atmosphere surrounded the event. A motor car parade had to be postponed because of unanticipated heavy crowds and traffic problems and newspaper stories relate many incidents of behavioral mores being suspended for the day. In a particularly enthusiastic report it was said, "Twenty thousand flower fairies, gowned in summer white took complete possession of its crowded streets. [...] Wherever you went, there was a dainty figure in white..."¹¹⁹ Alexandra Rose women breached the Houses of Parliament and the Baltic Exchange.¹²⁰ The *Times* reported, "A revolutionary rumour that ladies had actually been seen on the floor of the Stock Exchange was contradicted [...] The Baltic was braver. For the first time in its history ladies were permitted to enter that

¹¹⁸ Letter from Princess of Wales' Residence to Groom, 11 April 1891, LMA 4305/3/58. Other letters from Charlotte Knollys and Ida Bradford, ladies-in-waiting are here as well.

¹¹⁹ Editor, "London a Vast Fair of Wild Roses," *The Daily Mirror*, 26 June 1913.

¹²⁰ Editor, "London as a City of Roses," *The Times*, 25 June 1914.

Exchange in business hours.”¹²¹ They climbed ladders and hopped on busses.¹²² Men who were accustomed to not carrying their own money, such as Lord Kitchener, Winston Churchill and Prime Minister Asquith, were caught off-guard when accosted and asked to buy a rose. Even the famed Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, in London after the Paris premiere of his sensation-causing new ballet, *Afternoon of a Faun*, donned a cluster of the roses for his evening performance of *Le Spectre de la Rose*.¹²³ Alexandra, apparently much moved by the display, sent a note of thanks to the people of London and recorded that it would be a day that would live forever in her memory.¹²⁴

The dozens of similar flower and flag days it spawned and its century-spanning longevity, would prove its worth as a fundraising strategy. Despite the grumbling that arose in response to its many imitators, Alexandra Day maintained its place as the first, and perhaps only, such event which was anticipated with something other than a feeling akin to dread. In the newspaper coverage, it was often pointed out that the annual event employed over three hundred crippled and blind women who would not otherwise find employment and it was billed as a “double charity.” The fact that the flowers were made by blind and crippled girls became a key point in the promotion of the day. *The Daily Mirror* reported that by the beginning of June the girls at John Groom's Crippleage had already made eight million blooms. Annie Beck, a blind worker who had been at the Crippleage for six years, asked the reporter, with “great pathos, 'Are the flowers very pretty? I can only feel them. Are they like real roses? I hope everybody in London will

¹²¹ Editor, “Alexandra Day,” *Times*, 27 June 1912.

¹²² Editor, “Three Queens in City of Wild Roses,” *The Daily Mirror*, 25 June 1914.

¹²³ Editor, “Wild Rose Day in London,” *The Daily Mail*, 27 June 1912, 7.

¹²⁴ Editor, “Queen Alexandra,” *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 1912.

buy one.”¹²⁵ The fact that “the cripples engaged in making the flowers will enjoy a steady income for several months,”¹²⁶ may have helped to make it more palatable for some who protested about the comparatively high cost of producing the event. As for the effect that fact would have on the real flower girls, whose wages were cut, first by Alexandra Day, and then by all the subsequent Forget-Me-Not and Geranium days and flag days and so forth in the months to come, it was likely cold comfort.

The real flower sellers, those who had prompted the formation of Groom's Mission and the training of the artificial flower-makers in the first place, were largely overlooked in the excitement. Under the headline “Rose Day Sufferers,” the author wrote, “I wonder how London's professional flower-girls will get on to-day with so many amateur rivals on the streets...After the first Alexandra Day two of the girls told me that they had hardly taken a copper between them.”¹²⁷ It was said that some of the flower-girls simply chose to take the day as a holiday (unpaid, of course), and that “street sellers of the real articles, in spite of obvious rivalry, were all wearing Queen Alexandra's emblem.”¹²⁸ In the “diary” of an Alexandra Day seller, purported to be a minute-by-minute record of the days' activities, it is noted that a real flower-girl asked her how she was “going on.” We can imagine the weight her response would have in determining the real flower-girl's next move that day.¹²⁹ Others' voices found their way into the press, and expressed what may have been their collective anxiety, “We don't mind standing out a bit for one day and for Queen Alexandra and the hospitals. But where shall we be if ladies

¹²⁵ Editor, “Duchess Flower Seller,” *The Daily Mirror*, 7 June 1912.

¹²⁶ Editor, “Alexandra Day: Preparations for Festival,” *The Times*, 16 May 1913.

¹²⁷ Editor, “Rose Day Sufferers,” *The Daily Mirror*, 24 June 1914.

¹²⁸ Editor, “Roses Everywhere,” *Times*, 22 June 1916.

¹²⁹ Editor, “A Rosemaiden's Diary,” *The Daily Mirror*, 26 June 1913.

are going to sell flowers in the street every other day?”¹³⁰

Contemporary estimates maintained that the daily business in cut flowers in London was £5000; the total amount of the trade handled by street selling flower-girls each day was thought to be about £500.¹³¹ The first Alexandra Rose Day had raised over £18,000.¹³² Slim as it was, the expected daily take of £500, spread among the approximately 3,000 real flower girls, was likely not collected that day.¹³³ The flower-girls Groom had worked so hard to aid were now faced with another hardship: competing almost daily with a new version of their product, albeit in a sanitized and whitened form. Moreover, it was one which bestowed the wearer with an acknowledgement of his beneficence—and at the very least, allowed free passage on London streets for the rest of the day. The rose was considered one's “receipt,” and it granted immunity from further solicitation.

In time, a Rose Day material culture and even a Rose Day humor evolved. Cartoons and jokes satirized the day, including one that both poked fun at the celebration itself and maligned the Scotsman's reputation for frugality.¹³⁴ After the Alexandra Rose Day of 1916, some notice had been made of the difficulties faced by the real flower-girls competing for work that day. In a gesture that was reminiscent of earlier monarchs distributing coins among the poor, Alexandra had two hundred half-crowns given to the flower girls in the Covent Garden area.¹³⁵ For some observers, this could only have been

¹³⁰ Editor, “Rose Day Rival,” *The Daily Mail*, 27 March 1915.

¹³¹ See chapter two for extensive details about flower girls and flower trade.

¹³² Editor, “Alexandra Day: Action Against Mrs. Lowenfeld,” *The Globe*, 25 February, 1913, 5.

¹³³ Using contemporary estimates, on that first Alexandra Rose Day, there would have been three Rose Day sellers to each real flower girl.

¹³⁴ C. May Beeman, “The Funny Side of a Flag Day,” *The Daily Mirror*, 1 March 1916.

¹³⁵ Editor, “Queen Alexandra's Gifts to Flower Girls,” *Daily Mirror*, 19 July 1916.

an affirmation of the pauperizing tendencies of this sort of charity. Those who objected were opposed to indiscriminate giving to undeserving poor who were unlikely to improve their situation, and regretted the effect such displays had of encouraging importuning beggars.

COS in particular looked upon Alexandra Rose Day and its imitators with disfavor. As a method of fundraising it was undesirable in that it brought soliciting—quite like the rattling of the collection tin—back into the streets, along with the fears of imposture. Indeed, the collecting ladies were even fitted with decorated tins in which to collect the donations. Objections were raised from the start by those who found the “gaily decked human rosebuds” lacking in dignity. The writer expressed his hope that “the apparent success of the movement will not lead to a repetition or extension of the experiment.”¹³⁶ The feeling of being beset by flower days would intensify in the years to come, as more proliferated, but the initial fun that was had, and the money collected, seemed to outweigh the drawbacks. The immediate adoption of the method by other charities and the widespread use of the idea would indicate how successful it was in spite of the rising voice of complaints.¹³⁷

The amount of effort and expense ordinary people invested in the day is hard to gauge. Homes and businesses and vehicles—especially those along the procession route—were decorated with flowers. Workers at Groom's created enormous initial-letter A wreaths that were displayed among the various London districts through which the Queen

¹³⁶ Nigel Bond, “A Protest: to the Editor of *The Times*,” *The Times*, 28 June 1912.

¹³⁷ *The Saturday Review* was among the most critical “Correspondence: Rose Day and Hospital Finance,” *The Saturday Review*, 19 July 1913, 79-80.

passed.¹³⁸ A romantic aura attached to the press coverage of the event, with accounts of the streets being covered in a fluffy white debris, like the petals of apple blossoms and snow.¹³⁹ In all, much was made of the beauty of the event. The delicacy of the flowers, the loveliness and femininity of the sellers, the whiteness of the dresses and petals, all these lent to the occasion a symbolic effect that could not be missed.¹⁴⁰

Its use as a way to cement an “imagined community” cannot be overlooked.¹⁴¹ At home and abroad Rose Day took on meaning as a way in which bonds of national sentiment were strengthened, there was even a call to make it a national holiday.¹⁴² British ships on the high seas agreed to fly the Alexandra Day Rose.¹⁴³ The day itself was put to use in the enactment of Britons' imperial fantasies. In London, areas were designated as zones belonging to the represented Dominions, with Canada, South Africa, and Jamaica taking part. The press gave much coverage to Alexandra Rose Day events that were held outside the metropole as well, uniting the far-flung settlers in a common day and a common cause. There were future plans to observe the day in India, and in the “white Dominions” much effort was expended in describing the events in London as an empire-wide and empire-affirming celebration.¹⁴⁴ In Jamaica, an effort was launched to create a Flag Day which was explicitly a copy of Alexandra Rose Day.¹⁴⁵ Through

¹³⁸ In front of Mansion House was a large A, Editor, “Alexandra Day,” *The Globe*, 26 June 1912, 7.

Liberty of London and other stores also decorated, as did others on parade route.

¹³⁹ Editor, “Rose Girls to Storm London,” *The Daily Mirror*, 24 June 1914.

¹⁴⁰ Editor, “Alexandra Day,” *The Globe*, 26 June 1912, 7.

¹⁴¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983, Reissued Verso, 2016).

¹⁴² Editor, “Alexandra Day: Suggested National Holiday,” *The Times*, 31 May 1924.

¹⁴³ Editor, *The Times*, 7 June, 1912.

¹⁴⁴ Editor, “Alexandra Day: Suggested National Holiday,” *The Times*, 31 May 1924. Editor, “Queen Alexandra's Wish,” *The Daily Mail*, 10 March 1914.

¹⁴⁵ Editor, “Rose Day Scenes in London: Flag Day to be Jamaica's Counterpart,” and Editor, “Flag Day,” *The (Kingston, Jamaica) Gleaner*, 21 July 1915, 13.

participation one could show their “Britishness.” Across the empire, wearing a rose on Alexandra Day (and participating in similar flag days) became a way to identify with the nation's imperial goals. In the midst of political and social turmoil, this day, which commemorated a venerated past, paid homage to the tropes of femininity with its sacrifice and purity, and was said to unite all Britons in a common goal was the expression of long-held but much contested emotions and beliefs.¹⁴⁶

In terms of actual money raised, which--after all--was one of the stated goals, the outcome is more muddled.¹⁴⁷ One report in 1913 stated that “out of every penny paid for a rose on Wednesday of this week, approximately 3/4d will go to the hospitals, the other 1/4d going to the maker of the flower.”¹⁴⁸ This in no way takes into consideration any of the other costs involved in such a large-scale event of course—from the signage to the collecting cans to the salaries of employees in subsequent years and so forth. Since this was the first time such an arrangement had been made, the costs were viewed by many to be too high from the outset, and raised objections in any case.¹⁴⁹ Fears of corruption and abuse were ever present, and new ones emerged with each form of fundraising. In the end, the committee claimed that although--by necessity--much money was used in

¹⁴⁶ As a spectacle, Thomas Richards describes the “sign system of commodities” after Guy Debord, as “a state of signification in which much of society becomes a theater for the fictions it has created about its commodities,” *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1990), 111-112.

¹⁴⁷ Difficult to determine the actual numbers since they vary widely from report to report and year to year. Mrs. Lowenfeld may have laid out the money for the flowers the first year and was subsequently sued for nonpayment of one of her employees. It may not be possible to find out the exact money spent. “Alexandra Day: Action Against Mrs. Lowenfeld,” *The Globe*, 25 February, 1913, 5. Voluntary Action History Society, “The Origins of Flag Days,” <http://www.ivr.org.uk/vahs3.htm>, 5. This article has numbers, but I am reluctant to put much faith in them because of all the irregularities in reporting by contemporaries.

¹⁴⁸ “Royal Roses: Alexandra Day and How the Blooms are Prepared,” *Answers*, 28 June 1913, 87.

¹⁴⁹ A debate unfolded in *The Saturday Review* correspondence section almost immediately about the expense, “Rose-Day” *Saturday Review*, 29 June 1912, 804 and “Correspondence: Rose Day and Hospital Finance,” *The Saturday Review*, 19 July 1913, 79-80.

preparation, the rest was delivered, as promised, to the hospitals and other charitable institutions. In any event, despite the controversy it stirred, the idea was widely embraced and replicated, and there is no doubt that it did indeed contribute to the financial health of many institutions. Spending money to make money was an idea that only lately arrived to charitable schemes. Demands for a full accounting of the event's finances were made, not least by the Lord Mayor of Finsbury.¹⁵⁰ The objection to the high cost of the rose emblems would continue, but at the same time, the supporters emphasized again that this was a double charity in that it sustained the disabled workers at John Groom's (and elsewhere as the order grew over the years).¹⁵¹ Of course, this remains a highly controversial question in charitable fundraising today. A more complex issue is that the amount of good will a spectacle such as Rose Day generates is extremely difficult to quantify. In terms of the other support it raises for charities, and, as was the case here, for the monarchy, it is well-nigh priceless.

The explicit visible commodification of charitable concerns was in its infancy, and it began with events such as Alexandra Rose Day. Perhaps the first sign of the commodification was in the decision to stamp onto the flower the initial A.¹⁵² In this way, it became the official—indeed branded—symbol of the cause. In 1914 a necktie was manufactured and sold to support the day, and in 1924 “Ashes of Roses” perfume was offering a special promotion.¹⁵³ Both claimed to be giving part of the profits to the

¹⁵⁰ *Times*, Letter to the Editor, March 1925.

¹⁵¹ “Alexandra Day: Suggested National Holiday,” *The Times*, 31 May 1924.

¹⁵² “Queen Alexandra's Wish,” *The Daily Mail*, 10 March 1914.

¹⁵³ Editor, “The Official Tie for Alexandra Day,” *The Daily Mirror*, 19 June 1914. Editor, “Alexandra Rose Day and Ashes of Roses” advertisement, *The Daily Mirror*, 25 June 1924. David M. Higgins, “‘Forgotten Heroes and Forgotten Issues’: Business and Trademark History during the Nineteenth Century,” *Business History Review* 86 (Summer 2012) 261–285. “Trademarks are beginning to receive

Alexandra Rose Fund. Linking their products to charitable concerns was a way for businesses to capitalize on the coat-tails of events such as this. It was a canny way for advertisers who could link their name to a good cause and burnish their image with the royal association. With this innovation, we see a very early, if not the earliest, example of products made solely to promote a charitable event. It led the way for the further commodification not only in the near-term but also as this model was embraced well into the next century.

In the late nineteenth century, coronations and jubilee celebrations themselves had been opportunities for private business and charities to raise funds amid the national outpouring of affection and patriotism.¹⁵⁴ One difference here was in the symbolic meaning embedded in the flower emblem. The money raised was for a charitable cause and not merely in the fulfillment of a personal desire to hold a piece the material evidence of the day. While its identification with affection for the Queen consort was indeed part of its effect, it also represented the beneficiaries of the double charity. It was a visible material reminder of the sick, the poor, the blind and the crippled. In wearing a flower, there was a performance of need and of benevolence. How much individual wearers of the rose identified with these sentiments or goals, we cannot know, but it was certainly a point that was emphasized in the discourse.

Equally important, one's participation, evidenced by sporting an emblem, demonstrated to all the execution of duty, if not convictions. As one reporter pointed out, the man who avoided ostentatious display as a rule and thus avoided purchasing a flower

the attention they deserve," 261.

¹⁵⁴ David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 101-164; 125, 137; Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, *passim*.

emblem, needed on the contrary to wear the rose in order to avoid ostentatious display of resistance. Whether by choice or coercion, donning a rose meant that one performed sympathy with the cause, along with its multiplicity of intended and unintended messages. Of importance also is the way in which it made the donation public as never been before. It allowed, perhaps unprecedentedly, a widely democratic participation. Since the price was so low, a great many could spare the amount; moreover, the amount spent was a secret. Donations were dropped directly into a specially-made box, and no change was given. Reports of the amount of money taken in lower denomination copper coin were always emphasized, sometimes in the same sentence as the large sums of paper money the wealthy had contributed.¹⁵⁵ Much was made of the ability of the day to bring together everyone—across class and political lines. By bringing the masses into the exchange, it was evidence that the hospitals reached across class lines and served not only the well-to-do residents of London, but its less fortunate as well. In its broad appeal across class lines, the observation of Alexandra Rose Day points towards the increasing importance of the masses as a social and economic entity. With its mass production of tens of millions of emblems—purchased and worn in one day—it may have been the first such a demonstration of mass consumer action. It is no accident that the rise of spectacle and the consumer coincided with the desire for the expansion of the franchise. The event stirred comparison to other June days when women had crowded the street. Rose Day was so similar to earlier spectacles held by Suffragists, notably in June of 1911, that it drew comment from onlookers and the press. They wrote of one “mean ruse” to avoid buying a rose, “Are you a militant suffragette?” the would-be donor asked the ladies

¹⁵⁵ Editor, “The Rose Girls’ Takings: £12,000 in Pennies Alone,” *The Daily Mail*, 28 June 1913.

selling the emblems. Of course not they would reply “then I’m afraid I cannot buy anything,” he responded.¹⁵⁶ In this way goals of both the suffragettes and the charity workers are belittled, as women once again are put back in their place. At the same time, it joined the “spectacle of women” with its overlapping visual vocabulary. Similarities between the events were evident in the description of the women in white dresses and red sashes. If this spectacle called to mind the movement of women into politics, the public space, and the appeal of mass movements is unclear. The visual elements which comprised this vocabulary were markedly similar: the dresses, the hats, the red sashes, the aspect of femininity and flowers (as many of the suffragists carried floral representations) and tropes of whiteness and purity.¹⁵⁷ The tens of thousands of women in white, “beautiful workers for charity,” out in the street in support of the needy; and the millions of roses pinned *en masse* to people in solidarity, gestures towards the increasing desires and expressions of the masses and their consummation in a consumer exchange.¹⁵⁸

Temptation in the City

Women had played an increasingly prominent role in nineteenth-century charity organization, and with Alexandra Rose Day they had now taken their semi-private

¹⁵⁶ Editor, “Three Queens in City of Wild Roses,” *The Daily Mirror*, 25 June 1914

¹⁵⁷ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), “the suffrage relation to ‘invented traditions’ was complicated”, but, “the suffragists developed a new kind of political spectacle,” part of which was in their “costume” and such visual representations as the “fading prettiness” and “elegant clothing” of the conventionally feminine participants, 56, also 222-225 on the relationship to purity. Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), on the repeal of the 1860s Contagious Diseases Acts and Edwardian suffragist movement, 255.

¹⁵⁸ Editor, “London a Vast Fair of Wild Roses,” *The Daily Mirror* 26 June 1913. Erica Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) on the rise of mass consumption in this period.

fundraising functions into the public eye and public space in a most visible display.¹⁵⁹

Although they were doing this work in the service of others, in its public, almost political demonstration, it was outside of some of the usual bounds of bourgeois Edwardian femininity and must have offered a bit of freedom from convention for some women. As noted above, women's daring escapades were a highlighted part of the event. Although they were denied the vote, and even entry inside the Houses of Parliament on voting days, the women had managed to cross that threshold on Alexandra Day.

Evidently participating in the event was an enjoyable one, as the number of sellers doubled after the first year from 10,000 to 20,000, and climbed higher in subsequent years.¹⁶⁰ Many of the Rose Day flower sellers were culled from the ranks the society pages, among them Mrs. Asquith, the “charismatic and bohemian”¹⁶¹ wife of the Prime Minister, Mrs. Churchill, and a fair representation of royalty family members, in addition to the many “society women” who participated. It is not possible to know who participated exactly, and what their ages were, but at least one report enters into speculation on how age influenced the success of individual Rose Day sellers.¹⁶² Was a married woman of thirty-five better or a single woman of twenty-four. Who was the most beguiling?¹⁶³ Age was a way to talk about sexuality without doing so overtly. Miss Beeman tactfully remarked, “Certainly the admittedly pretty girl often takes less in a day

¹⁵⁹ F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Dorice Williams Elliott, *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* (University of Virginia Press, 2002).

¹⁶⁰ Editor, “London a Vast Fair of Wild Roses,” *The Daily Mirror*, 26 June 1913.

¹⁶¹ *Née* Margot Tennant, Koven, *Slumming*, 183. She was an author and wit and early champion of box-factory girls, Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 53.

¹⁶² C. May Beeman, “The Funny Side of a Flag Day,” *The Daily Mirror*, 1 March 1916, “I have often been asked if the prettiest girl makes the best seller.”

¹⁶³ Editor, “The Two Best Sellers,” Editor, “Where the Married Woman Excels,” *The Daily Mirror*, 27 June 1913.

than her plainer sister who is blessed with a greater charm of manner.”¹⁶⁴

Revealing their awareness of the sexual overtones inherent in this economic exchange, some wrote in almost breathless tones how exciting it was to be seduced into buying the roses,

First, a smile that made you feel a man of some importance, then a voice like the ripple of running water. 'Do by a rose—oh! Do buy a rose,' that made you want to throw all your money on the tray. Then the purchase, and last and best of it all—the pinning on. That was worth a good deal in ordinary coin of the realm. It is not easy to describe this pinning on of a flower by a woman's hands.¹⁶⁵

Others found the “sight of ladies, some of them very young, selling goods to every passer-by in the street is perhaps a sign of the times, [...] and to express dislike of it is, I suppose, only to invite for oneself condemnation as hopelessly old-fashioned.”¹⁶⁶ A photo captioned “temptation in the city” showed a young woman pinning a buttonhole on a man's lapel.¹⁶⁷ Flower-girls as objects of sexual fantasy and this play-acting in the name of charity teased with the idea of easy sexual availability. Ironically, it was just this notion Groom had worked so hard for decades to dispel, only to have it reinforced at the moment of the greatest success of the mission's goal of providing disabled women with safe and dignified paying work.

Fearful of the dangers that the Rose Day flower-girls might face, the organizers required that no seller be under the age of sixteen, and that they travel always in pairs.¹⁶⁸ The vulnerability and safety of the sellers were concerns for bourgeois sexuality in a way that they were not for the actual street sellers who endured far worse than a festive public

¹⁶⁴ C. May Beeman, “The Funny Side of a Flag Day,” *The Daily Mirror*, 1 March 1916.

¹⁶⁵ Editor, “The Rose Girls,” *The Daily Mail*, 26 June 1913.

¹⁶⁶ “A Protest: Letter to the Editor of *The Times*,” *The Times*, 28 June 1912.

¹⁶⁷ Editor, “East and West Pay Tribute to the Rose Day Girls,” *The Daily Mail*, 25 June 1914.

¹⁶⁸ Editor, “Alexandra Day: Preparations for Festival,” *The Times*, 16 May 1913.

on a June day. Public reports of the event gushed many thanks to the Rose Day sellers who had started their day in the very early hours and had toiled, some of them, for as many as fourteen hours. Few seemed to take note that this was the daily course of events for most of the real flower-girls.

Conclusion

As a dress-up day with costumes and banners and emblems, this spectacle—sanctioned from on high—Alexandra Rose Day gave expression to a range of new and old social stresses. The spectacle of society women slumming as flower girls underscored at once the limited range of women's political participation, their commodified sexuality, and the hypocrisy of donning a new costume for a one-day effort at helping the needy. A writer for the *Daily Mirror* column “Women and Work,” pointed out that women did not understand the workings of capitalism, and by extension, civilization. The proof of this was that on “the day of artificial roses” they had declared “work is not so important as roses,” while the more rational businessmen grumbled about the lost revenue, and the waste of time: “Civilisation, commercialisation, work: all destroyed for a day by roses!”¹⁶⁹ Lurking beneath the rather silly complaints about the trampling of the more important matters of the day lay the dread of artifice and deception of which women were capable. The disingenuous woman with her “artificial sentiments” and her artificial flowers were also interpreted as a seduction to lead men astray. Their artificiality, heightened in this discourse, emphasizes their shallow concerns, their unpreparedness to join men in the real business of the world, and their associations of fragility and in fact,

¹⁶⁹ Editor, “Women and Work,” *Daily Mirror*, 25 June 1914.

uselessness, are underscored by these emblems.

Interestingly, in the early days of the John Groom's Mission, a distinction was made between what he called the *bonafide* flower-girls and the interlopers. Interlopers were the women who sold flowers while the sun was shining. Their lack of professionalism was damaging to the *bonafide* flower-girls he tried to shelter. Groom warned contemporaries away from imposter flower-girls who might offer a low-quality-or worse, diseased--product, who might overcharge, and who might use the money they earned for drink. Thus, precautions were taken so that the Alexandra Day sellers would not be confused with imposters of any stripe. They wore and displayed various insignia that identified them as sanctioned Rose Day flower sellers, and the police arrested several who were impersonating official flower-sellers.¹⁷⁰ These measures insured that the Alexandra Rose Day seller was a respectable woman collecting money for charity for the sick, and not an imposter trying to defraud the charity. It also meant that she was not a working street-seller earning money for her own survival. Much as the corporate begging letters sanitized and brought the lower-class beggar into the middle class parlor, Alexandra Rose Day sanitized the street selling flower-girl and denatured her product, too.

That this concern with artifice and impostors should have been present alongside the fascination with artificial flowers offers further areas for analysis. In purchasing an Alexandra Rose from an official seller, one could be reasonably sure the money would go to charity; it guaranteed that the rose purchased was the genuine artificial product.

Artificial flowers conceal a desire to defy the limits imposed by nature and to manipulate

¹⁷⁰ Committee Meeting Minutes April 17 1917, "Young girl prosecuted and placed on two years' probation for soliciting orders flowers." LMA/4305/06/67. There are other newspaper reports of similar incidents. Collectors wore sashes that identified them as official, and carried official (and unopenable) collecting cans.

its produce. Its contradictory messages were only heightened by the constant threat of impostors and fallen women—oddly, the deceit is inhered in the product itself. The flowers themselves also carried darker messages than a simple floral tribute to a beloved Queen. Whether they were the poison-harboring product emanating from the “East End nightmare of sweated labor,” or were made by “Some of the poorest and most pitiable objects in the domain of humanity,”¹⁷¹ it was impossible to escape that they all were in some way brushed by disease and disability and misfortune. Few products of the age became so fraught with associations of women's paid and unpaid labor, with imposters and masquerade, with nature and artifice, with beauty and ugliness, and with poverty and wealth.

Despite the usual criticism that charged that his product was of inferior quality, and his workers, at best, low-skilled and reluctant, it is clear that the women of the Groom Crippleage took pride in their work and enjoyed the attention. One of Groom's students, proud to have been assigned to the prestigious position of rose-maker, wrote in a postcard to an aunt that she should not search for her among the many girls shown in the photograph: “This is the big workroom but I am not in there. I am in a better one with rose girls and you no [*sic*] we don't get up to no tricks.”¹⁷² With the arrival of Alexandra Rose Day, all capable workers would, at least for part of the year, be pressed into service as Alexandra Rose girls.¹⁷³

Alexandra Rose Day succeeded in spite of its many critics because it reinforced

¹⁷¹ John Groom, *Snow Drops*, 1894, 29.

¹⁷² LMA/4305/7/16. Front of postcard reads “One of the Workrooms.” Handwritten note, no date, no name.

¹⁷³ Committee Meeting Minutes of 16 June 1914, “Alexandra Day very successful both in London and provinces. Other manufacturers called in to help,” LMA/4305/06/67; Committee Meeting Minutes 21 March 1916 “Alexandra Rose Order increased to 21 million,” LMA/4305/06/67.

much of what the British people believed about themselves as generous and dutiful. It also solidified ties of nationhood, asserted a strong statement for the limits of state control, did, in fact, raise needed funds, especially for the charity hospitals provided for the poor. It educated consumers about difference (gender, economic, political, and social), about civic duty in the public sphere, and about consumption itself. Finally, like the gift of flowers that arrived in contributors' postboxes, it contributed to the commercialization of need, and led charity consumers to expect a reward (no matter how useless or disposable) and a return on their generosity (no matter how large or small). It created desire for something, which before that day, no one had known they wanted.

Conclusion

The Rosebud Garden of Girls

In a photograph, taken in 1982, Charles, the Prince of Wales and his wife, Princess Diana presented their newborn son, William, for the cameras. William was born on the 21st of June, and on Charles's lapel he wore a tiny pink fabric rose in recognition of Alexandra Rose Day, which honored his great-great-grandmother, the Queen Consort, the wife of Edward VII. Like the ceremonial wearing of the red paper poppy on Armistice Day (November 11, also known as Poppy Day), donning the floral tribute was a link with the past, a bittersweet reminder that 1912 was growing ever more distant, both in real time, and in ways we cannot measure in days. Sometime between 2010--when I was invited to visit their offices--and 2016, Alexandra Rose Charities ceased holding their annual Rose Day collections at the Tennis Championships at Wimbledon. In fact, they have completely changed the public face of the organization. Its only reminder of Rose Day is on a History page which has a short narrative and some black and white images. There is one photograph, taken in the mid-twentieth-century, it is labeled "Making Alexandra Roses at John Groom's Crippleage." That is the only indication that the day, or the charity, once had anything to do with disability. Today, their focus is on a program called "The Rose Vouchers for Fruit & Veg Project" which "helps parents with young children on low incomes to buy fresh fruit and vegetables while developing the skills and confidence to give their families the healthiest start." The program is being tested at three boroughs in London where there are "significant gaps in the life expectancy of individuals according to how rich or poor they are." What is especially

interesting is that the vouchers can be used only at “street markets, fruit and veg stalls and veg box schemes.” In this way, the project is also supporting the outdoor fruit and vegetable markets—the entrepreneurial inheritors of the costermongers and baked-potato-sellers, hawking fruits and vegetables on the streets in the unfashionable parts of the city, to some of its poorest families.¹

It seems fitting that it reaches back into the past to these green grocers, albeit in a roundabout way, and likely unintentional way, because so much of this story about flower-girls and flower-making, maids-of-all-work and beggars, cripples and vegetable sellers all seems so deeply imbricated. The way in which several contemporary fears and anxieties were mapped onto flowers and flower-girls continued to fascinate me as I wrote this dissertation. As this story unfolded, the hungry and poor beggars and flower-sellers on the street transformed over time into fundraising society ladies rattling tin cans for others. In every bouquet lurked a possible deadly disease and every cripple could be a fake. Or maybe the flowers were not even real, but artificial, meant to fool the eye, but made by cripples ... or girls *pretending* to be cripples.... Perhaps it all could be cleared up if people could have *seen* only the crippled girls for themselves. That, however, would be considered “parading cripples” and exploiting their disabilities only to raise money. Suspicions regarding authenticity and inauthenticity along with the fear of beggars and imposters and contagion seemed to hide everywhere in a deeply anxious fashion. It was in this atmosphere of general distrust unease that John Groom attempted to create his “good business” with the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission.

¹ Alexandra Rose Day charities website <http://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/>

In transforming ragged street sellers and disabled girls into uniformed domestic servants, respectable flower-girls, and self-supporting artificial-flower-makers, Groom's physical and spiritual transformation of the women valorized (that is, sanitized, domesticized, and Christianized) their honest and clean labor, thus effectuating the "good work" of the mission. This process signified the objects and services the women produced under the mission's auspices. He did this in several ways. One way was to have consumers participate in a way that elevated their acts of consumption from an act of self-indulgence or fulfillment of a need to a gesture of charitable generosity. For example, when a customer purchased a floral display or décor for a party from the Groom flower-girls and let it be known (through advertising placards or newspaper social notices) that it was made by the blind and afflicted girls, this gesture worked on several registers. By purchasing the work from Groom's, rather than from another florist, one helped keep the enterprise working. This in turn kept the girls employed and off the charity rolls. The profits from the work were turned back into the mission so that more girls across the country could be trained and housed. Displaying the girls' beautiful work not only was a showcase for the mission's great success in training the disabled in useful work, but it also served as advertisement for further orders. The notices from the press that applauded the use of the girls' work as a gesture of philanthropic good will further benefitted all parties involved. Purchasing something which one actually needed from a charity--such as floral decorations for a wedding or banquet--rather than a straw hat at a bazaar--was an ingenious way to turn the mission into a going concern. Moreover, because the mission was a self-sustaining enterprise, one that was built on all-important "good business principles," its multiple successes—including awards, patents, and royal

commissions—demonstrated the commercial value and economic soundness of supporting the mission’s employment and education schemes. This was further reflected as it re-invested profits in the continued growth, new projects, and ever-expanding reach of the mission. That this rankled the Establishment’s sense of charity’s purpose and scope is undoubted.

The work he undertook in the mission, with the help of field missionary women and paid staff, was ambitious and wide-ranging. From homes for orphans to workshops for women with disabilities to savings-and-loan schemes to free summer beach holidays for city children, all of these projects required organization, determination, and drive. Due to the lack of records that remain in the Groom archives, the details how each project was administered are not known. So it may be that he headed all of these projects himself and oversaw all or most of the details. With Groom as its guiding force, the mission became a complex social welfare agency and advocacy group with an extensive reach into the community of flower women and their children that touched on their lives in many phases, from birth-to-burial for some.²

And none of this would have happened had it not been for the women of the mission, the “raw material”, the “rosebud garden of girls.” The young women who signed on for the artificial flower-making training took a leap of faith. Many left families and homes and lives that were familiar, if not comfortable. They learned a new skill and an uncertain trade. They negotiated new spaces and struggled with heavy tools and tall staircases and other impediments. Yet, thousands stayed the course, likely believing that their life’s chances were better for it than without it.

²The COS disputed some of this in its 1892 report, but they offered no evidence either. There is a copy of the report in the Watercress and Flower Girls’ Mission Files. LMA4305.

Bibliography

Secondary Sources

- Abberley, Paul. "The Concept of Oppression and the Development of a Social Theory of Disability." *Disability, Handicap & Society* 2:1 (1987): 5-19.
- Abberley, Paul "The Limits of Classical Social Theory in the Analysis and Transformation of Disablement." In L. Barton and M. Oliver, eds., *Disability Studies: Past, Present, and Future*. Leeds: The Disability Press, 1997: 25-44.
- Adams, James Eli. *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 1983 2016.
- Andersson, Peter K. "How Civilized Were the Victorians?" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20 (October 2015): 439-452.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986: 64-91.
- August, Andrew. *Poor Women's Lives: Gender, Work, and Poverty in Late-Victorian London*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999.
- Auslander, Leora. "Beyond Words." *American Historical Review* 110 (October 2005): 1015-1045.
- Barton, L. and M. Oliver, eds. *Disability Studies: Past, Present, and Future*. Leeds: The Disability Press, 1997.
- Bashford, Alison and Philippa Levine, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Bebbington, D.W. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Benson, John. *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-century working-class Entrepreneurs*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983.
- Bland, Lucy and Lesley A. Hall, "Eugenics in Britain: The View from the Metropole." In Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010: 213-227.
- Boehm, Katharina and Josephine McDonagh, eds. "Introduction. New Agenda: Urban Mobility: New Maps of Victorian London." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 15 (August 2010): 194-200.
- Boris, Eileen. *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the U.S.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Borsay, Anne. *Disability and Social Policy in Britain Since 1750: A History of Exclusion*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2008.
- Bowpitt, Graham. "Evangelical Christianity, Secular Humanism, and the Genesis of British Social Work." *British Journal of Social Work* 28 (1998): 675-693.
- Boxer, Marilyn J. "Women in Industrial Homework: The Flowermakers of Paris in the Belle Epoque," *French Historical Studies* 12 (Spring 1982): 401-423.

- Bredberg, Elizabeth. "Writing Disability History: Problems, Perspectives and Sources." *Disability & Society* 14 (1999): 189-201.
- Bremner, *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1994.
- Brief, Richard P. "The Origin and Evolution of Nineteenth-Century Asset Accounting." *The Business History Review* 40 (Spring 1966): 1-23.
- Bronstein, Jamie L. *Caught in the Machinery: Workplace Accidents and Injured Workers in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory" *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Autumn 2001): 1-22.
- Brown, Kenneth D. "An Unsettled Ministry?: Some Aspects of Nineteenth-Century British Non-Conformity." *Church History* 56 (June 1987): 204-223.
- Cannadine, David. "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983: 101-164.
- Campbell, R.H. "A Critique of the Christian Businessman and his Paternalism" in *Business and Religion in Britain*, ed. David J. Jeremy (Aldershot, Gower, 1988) 27-46.
- Campbell-Smith, Duncan. *Masters of the Post: The Authorized History*. London: Penguin, 2012.
- Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 2002.
- Childs, Michael J. "Boy Labour in Late Victorian and Edwardian England and the Remaking of the Working Class." *Journal of Social History* 23 (1990): 783-803.
- Church, Roy. "Advertising Consumer Goods in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Reinterpretations." *Economic History Review* 53 (4/2000): 621-645.
- Clark, Anna. "The 'New Poor Law' and the Breadwinner Wage: Contrasting Assumptions." *Journal of Social History* 34 (2000): 261-283.
- Coffin, Judith G. "Social Science Meets Sweated Labor: Reinterpreting Women's Work in Late Nineteenth-Century France." *The Journal of Modern History* 63 (June 1991): 230-270.
- Cohen, Deborah. *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Cohen, Deborah. *Household Gods, the British and Their Possessions*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Coit, Emily. "This Immense Expense of Art": George Eliot and John Ruskin on Consumption and the Limits of Sympathy." *Nineteenth Century Literature* 65 (September 2010): 214-245.
- Condell, Diana and Jean Liddiard. *Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War, 1914-18*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.
- Cox, Jeffrey. "Were Victorian Nonconformists the Worst Imperialists of All?" *Victorian Studies* 46 (Winter 2004): 243-255.
- Cox, Roger. *Shaping Childhood: Themes of Uncertainty in the History of Adult-Child Relationships*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Craig, David Melville. *John Ruskin and the Ethics of Consumption*. Charlottesville, VA and London: University of Virginia Press, 2006.

- Crocker, Ruth. "I Only Ask You Kindly to Divide Some of Your Fortune with Me': Begging Letters and the Transformation of Charity in Late Nineteenth-Century America." *Social Politics* (Summer, 1999): 131-160.
- Damon, William and Susan Verducci, eds. *Taking Philanthropy Seriously: Beyond Noble Intentions to Responsible Giving*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Daunton, M.J. *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840*. Athlone Press, 1985.
- Davidoff, Leonore, and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Davidson, Iain F.W.K.; Woodill, Gary; and Bredberg, Elizabeth. "Images of Disability in 19th Century British Children's Literature." *Disability & Society* 9:1 (1994): 345.
- Davin, Anna. "Waif Stories in Late Nineteenth-Century England." *History Workshop Journal* 52 (Autumn 2001): 67-98.
- Davin, Anna. "Loaves and Fishes: Food and Households in Late 19th Century London." *History Workshop Journal* 41 (Spring 1996): 167-192.
- Davin, Anna. "City Girls: Young Women, New Employment, and the City, London, 1880-1910." In Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Sølund, and Christina Benninghaus, eds., *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana: IUP 2005, 209-223.
- Davis, Lennard J, ed. *The Disability Studies Reader*. Third Edition. NY and UK: Routledge, 2010.
- Delap, Lucy. *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Dickey, Brian. "'Going About and Doing Good': Evangelicals and Poverty c. 1815-1870" in John Wolffe, ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980*, ed. London: SPCK, 1995: 38-58.
- Doolittle, I. G. "Age of baptism: further evidence" *Local Population Studies* 24 (1980): 52-55.
- Duff, David. *Alexandra: Princess and Queen*. New York: William Collins and Sons, 1980.
- Durbach, Nadja. *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.
- Elliott, Dorice Williams. *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England*. Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 2002.
- Erickson, Joyce Quiring. "Perfect Love": Achieving Sanctification as a Pattern of Desire in the Life Writings of Early Methodist Women" *Prose Studies* 20 (1997):
- Esmail, Jennifer and Christopher Keep. "Victorian Disability: Introduction." *Victorian Review* 35 (Fall 2009): 45-51.
- Flegel, Monica. *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2009.
- Fowler, Simon. "The Origins of Flag Days." Voluntary Action History Society <http://www.ivr.org.uk/vahs3.htm>
- Freedgood, Elaine. *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press 2010.
- Frost, Ginger. *Victorian Childhoods*. Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2009.

- Gagnier, Regina. *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Gamber, Wendy. "A Gendered Enterprise: Placing Nineteenth Century Businesswomen in History." *Business History Review* 72 (Summer 1998): 188-218.
- Garnett, Jane. "Evangelicalism and Business in mid-Victorian Britain." In John Wolffe, ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals in Society in Britain 1780-1980*. London: SPCK, 1995: 59-80.
- Giggie, John M. and Diane Winston, eds. *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- Gilbert, Alan D. *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change*. London: Longman, 1976.
- Gill, Michael. "The Myth of Transition: Contractualizing Disability in the Sheltered Workshop." *Disability and Society* 20:6 October 2005 613-623
- Gillard, Ruth E. *More Than One Mountain to Climb: The Story of John Grooms 1896-1996 and Beyond*. London: John Grooms Association for Disabled People, 1996.
- Gladstone, David. ed. *Before Beveridge: Welfare Before the Welfare State*. London: Civitas, 1999.
- Gleeson, B.J. "Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View." *Disability and Society* 12 (2/1997): 179-202.
- Gleeson, B.J. "Recovering a 'Subjugated History': Disability and the Institution in the Industrial City." *Australian Geographical Studies* 37 (July 1999): 114-129.
- Gleeson, Brendan. "Domestic Space and Disability in Nineteenth-Century Melbourne, Australia." *Journal of Historical Geography* 27 (2001): 223-240.
- Gleeson, Denis. "School Attendance and Truancy: A Socio-historical Account." *The Sociological Review* 40 (August 1992): 438-490.
- Golden, Catherine J. *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing*. University Press of Florida, 2009.
- Goldman, Lawrence. *The Blind Victorian: Henry Fawcett and British Liberalism*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Godfrey, Esther. *The January-May Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Gorham, Deborah. *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Gordon, Beverly. "Victorian Fancywork in the American Home: Fantasy and Accommodation." In Motz, Marilyn Ferris, and Pat Browne, eds., *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1988: 48-68.
- Grassby, Richard. "Material Culture and Cultural History." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35 (2004): 591-603.
- Gray, Milner. "The History and Development of Packaging." *Royal Society of Arts Journal* 87 (May 1929): 633-654.
- Green, Nancy L. *Ready-to-wear & Ready-to-work: A Century of Industry & Immigrants In Paris & New York*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

- Harris, José. "Bosanquet, Helen (1860–1925)." M. C. Curthoys In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed., edited by David Cannadine, 2004.
<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/article/37208>
- Harrison, Brian. "Philanthropy and the Victorians." *Victorian Studies* 9 (June 1966): 353–374.
- Healey, Edna. *Lady Unknown: The Life of Angela Burdett Coutts*. Sidgwick & Jackson: 1978.
- Heasman, Kathleen. *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962.
- Hempton, David. "Evangelicalism and Reform c. 1780–1832." In John Wolfe, ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780–1980*. London: SPCK, 1995: 17–37.
- Henkin, David M. *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Higgins, David M. "'Forgotten Heroes and Forgotten Issues': Business and Trademark History during the Nineteenth Century." *Business History Review* 86 (Summer 2012): 261–285.
- Hilton, Boyd. *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Hindmarsh, D. Bruce. *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Hodder, Edwin. *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*. London, Cassell & Company, Limited, 1888.
- Holmes, Martha Stoddard. *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.
- Honeyman, Katrina. "Doing Business with Gender: Service Industries and British Business History." *Business History Review* 81 (Autumn 2007): 471–493.
- Howat, Irene. *Streets Paved with Gold: The Story of the London City Mission*. Ross-shire, Scotland and London: Christian Focus and London City Mission, 2003.
- Huff, Cynthia. "Towards a Geography of Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities: An Introductory Essay." *Prose Studies* 26 (2003): 1–16.
- Humphreys, Robert. *Poor Relief and Charity, 1869–1945: The London Charity Organization Society*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.
- Humphries, Jane. "Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution." *Economic History Review* 66 (2013): 395–418.
- Huneault, Kristina. "Flower-girls and Fictions: Selling on the Streets." *RACAR* 23 (1–2 1996): 52–70.
- Israel, Kali. *Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- Jackson, Lee. *Dirty Old London: The Victorian Fight Against Filth*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Jankiewicz, Stephen. "A Dangerous Class: The Street Sellers of Nineteenth Century London." *Journal of Social History* 46 (Winter 2012): 391-415.
- Jones, Christine. "Disability in Herefordshire, 1851-1911," *Local Population Studies* 87 (Autumn 2011):29-44.
- Joyce, Patrick. *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Joyce, Patrick. *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Keirstead, Christopher M. "Going Postal: Mail and Mass Culture in Bleak House." *Nineteenth Century Studies* 17 (2003): 91-106.
- Keith, Lois. *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk: Death, Disability, and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Keirstead, Christopher M. "Going Postal: Mail and Mass Culture in *Bleak House*," *Nineteenth Century Studies* 17 (2003): 91-106.
- King, Steven. "Constructing the Disabled Child in England, 1800-1860." *Family and Community History* 18 (October 2015): 104-121.
- Kirby, Peter. "A Brief Statistical Sketch of the Child Labour Market in Mid-Nineteenth Century London." *Continuity and Change* 20 (2/2005): 229-245.
- Kopytoff, Igor. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process." In Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 64-91.
- Koven, Seth. "Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain." *American Historical Review* 99 (October 1994): 1167-1202.
- Koven, Seth. *Slumming: Social and Sexual Politics in Victorian London*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Koven, Seth. *The Match Girl and the Heiress*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Kriegel, Lara. *Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Laqueur, Thomas. *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and English Working Class Culture 1780-1850*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976.
- Leslie Hannah, 'Bevan, Francis Augustus (1840-1919)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Levitan, Kathrin. *A Cultural History of the British Census: Envisioning the Multitude*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Lewis, Donald. *Lighten their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860*. London: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Lewis, Jane. "The Voluntary Sector in the Mixed Economy of Welfare." In David Gladstone, ed. *Before Beveridge: Welfare Before the Welfare State*. London: Civitas, 1999, 10-17.
- Light, Alison. *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008.

- Light, Alison. *Common People: In Pursuit of My Ancestors*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Logan, Thad. *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Longmore, Paul K. *Telethons: Spectacle, Disability and the Business of Charity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Lown, Judy. *Women and Industrialization: Gender and Work in Nineteenth Century England*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.
- MacKay, Lynn. "The Mendicity Society and Its Clients: A Cautionary Tale." *Left History* 5(1997): 39-65.
- Machann, Clinton. "The Construction of Masculinity in Victorian Autobiography." *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 26 (Fall 1999):
- Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Martin, Nancy. *A Man with a Vision Faith in Action Series* Exeter and Oxford: Religious and Moral Education Press, 1983.
- Matthews, Derek. *A History of Auditing: The Changing Audit Process in Britain from the nineteenth Century to the Present Day*. Oxon: Routledge, 2006.
- Maynes, Mary Jo, Birgitte Sølund, and Christina Benninghaus, eds. *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- McBriar, A.M. *An Edwardian Mixed Doubles: The Bosanquets versus the Webbs*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
- Meade, Teresa and David Serlin, "Editor's Introduction." *Radical History Review* 94 Special Issue on Disability Studies (Winter 2006), 1-8.
- Mohun, Arwen P. *Steam Laundries: Gender, Technology, and Work in the United States And Great Britain, 1880-1940*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Moore, Marianne. "Social Control or Protection of the Child? The Debates on the Industrial Schools Acts 1857-1894." *Journal of Family History* 33 (2008): 359-387.
- Moore, Michael J. "Social Work and Social Welfare: The Organization of Philanthropic Resources in Britain, 1900-1914." *Journal of British Studies* 16:2 (Spring 1977): 85-104.
- Morgan, Carol E. "Work for Girls? The Small Metal Industries in England, 1840-1915" 83-98 *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960*. Edited by Mary Maynes, Mary Jo, Birgitte Sølund, and Christina Benninghaus. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Morgan, Simon. "Material Culture and the Politics of Personality in Early Victorian London." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17 (Jun 2012): 127-146.
- Motola, Shirin. "Organising Capabilities of Street Traders Particularly Women." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 78 (2008): 208-219.
- Motz, Marilyn Ferris, and Pat Browne, eds., *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1988.
- Murdoch, Lydia. *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, And Contested Citizenship in London*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006.

- Nead, Lynda. *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Nenadic, Stana. "The Social Shaping of Business Behaviour in the Nineteenth-Century Women's Garment Trades." *Journal of Social History* 31 (Spring 1998): 625-645.
- Nevett, T.R. *Advertising in Britain, a History*. London: Heinemann, 1982.
- Nevett, Terence. "Promotional Practices of British Retailers in the 18th and 19th Centuries." *CHARM Meeting Proceedings*, 1991: 285-297.
- Nord, Deborah Epstein. *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Oldfield, Sybil. *Jeanie, an 'Army of One': Mrs. Nassau Senior 1828-1877, the First Woman in Whitehall*. Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2008.
- Oliver, Mike. "Social Policy and Disability: Some Theoretical Issues." *Disability, Handicap & Society* 1:1 (1986): 5-17.
- Oliver, Mike and C. Barnes, *Disabled People and Social Policy: From Exclusion to Inclusion*. London: Longman, 1999.
- O'Rourke, P.J. "Third Person Singular" *The Atlantic* (December 2000).
- Owen, David. *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Penner, Barbara. "'A World of Unmentionable Suffering': Women's Public Conveniences in Victorian London." *Journal of Design History* 14 (2001) 35-51.
- Peterson, Linda. "Collaborative Life Writing as Ideology: The Auto/biographies of Mary Howitt and Her Family" *Prose Studies* 26 (2003): 176-195.
- Picard, Liza. *Victorian London: The Tale of a City, 1840-1870*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2005.
- Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1988.
- Plotz, John. *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Pottle, Mark. "Groom, John Alfred." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2004-2007. Online edition.
- Pritchard, David G. "The Development of Schools for Handicapped Children in England During the Nineteenth Century." *History of Education Quarterly* 3 (December 1963): 215-222.
- Prochaska, F.K. "Charity Bazaars in Nineteenth-Century England." *Journal of British Studies* (Spring 1977): 62-84.
- Prochaska F.K., *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Prochaska, Frank. *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988.
- Prochaska, F.K. *Philanthropy and the Hospitals of London: The King's Fund, 1897-1990*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Prochaska, F.K. *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Prochaska, Frank. *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

- Rappaport, Erica Diane., *Shopping for Pleasure Women in the Making of London's West End*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Richards, Thomas. *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Roberts, Michael J.D. "Charity Disestablished? The Origins of the Charity Organisation Society Revisited, 1868-1871." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54 (January 2003): 40-
- Roberts, M.J.D., "Reshaping the Gift Relationship: The London Mendicity Society and the Suppression of Begging in England, 1818-1869," *International Review of Social History* 36 (1991): 201-231.
- Robinson, Howard. *Britain's Post Office: A History of Development from the Beginning to the Present Day*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1953.
- Roddy, Sarah, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe. "The Charity-Mongers of Modern Babylon: Bureaucracy, Scandal, and the Transformation of the Philanthropic Marketplace, c.1870–1912." *Journal of British Studies* 54 (January 2015): 118-137.
- Roll-Hansen, Nils. "Eugenics and the Science of Genetics." In Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Rooff, Madeline. *A Hundred Years of Family Welfare: A Study of the Family Welfare Association (Formerly Charity Organisation Society) 1869-1969*. London: Michael Joseph, 1972.
- Rose, Lionel. *Rogues and Vagabonds: Vagrant Underworld in Britain, 1815-1985*. Oxon, UK: Routledge, 1988.
- Rose, Lionel. *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain: 1860-1918*. Oxon, UK, Routledge, 1991.
- Rose, Sonya O. *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.
- Ross, Ellen. *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Ross, Ellen. *Slum Travelers Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920*. Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Royle, Edward. "Evangelicals and Education." John Wolffe, ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals in Society in Britain 1780-1980*. London: SPCK, 1995: 117-137.
- Rubinstein, David. *School Attendance in London 1870-1904: A Social History* Hull: University of Hull, 1969.
- Sandage, Scott A. "Gender and the Economics of the Sentimental Market in Nineteenth-Century America." *Social Politics* (Summer, 1999): 105-130.
- Schaffer, Talia. *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth Century Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Scott, Mary. "Wax Flower Making in Victorian Times." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 19 (September 1924): 704-705.
- Seed, John "Did the Subaltern Speak? Mayhew and the Coster Girl" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 19 (2014): 536-539.

- Shakespeare, Tom. "Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?" *Disability and Society* 9:3 1994. 283-299.
- Sheldon, Nicola. "Families in the Firing Line: Prosecutions for Truancy in Coventry, 1874–1899," *Local Population Studies* 83 (Autumn 2009).
- Siebert, Bernhard. *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* Translated by Kevin Repp. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Simey, Margaret. *Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth-Century Liverpool*. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1992.
- Smith, James Allen. "In Search of an Ethic of Giving." In William Damon and Susan Verducci, eds. *Taking Philanthropy Seriously: Beyond Noble Intentions to Responsible Giving*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006: 13-26.
- Snell, K.D.M. "Sunday School Movement in England and Wales." *Past and Present* 164 (August 1999): 125-168.
- Stansky Peter. *Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1880s, and the Arts and Crafts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Stedman Jones, Gareth. *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982*. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press: 1983.
- Stedman Jones, Gareth. *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Steedman, Carolyn. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Steedman, Carolyn. "Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust." *American Historical Review* (October 2001).
- Steedman, Carolyn. *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Steel, Adrian and Peter Sutton, "The biggest, and ... one of the most advanced, enterprises in the country': The Royal Mail Archive and the Contemporary Historian." *Contemporary British History* 21, (March 2007): 111-131.
- Stiker, Jacques-Henri. *A History of Disability*. University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Stone, Deborah. *The Disabled State*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1984.
- Strange, Julie Marie. "Fatherhood, Providing and Attachment in Late Victorian and Edwardian Working-Class Families." *The Historical Journal* 55 (December 2012): 1007-1027.
- Stubenrauch, Joseph. "Silent Preachers in the Age of Ingenuity: Faith, Commerce, and Religious Tracts in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Church History* 80 (September 2011): 547-574.
- Swain, Shurlee. "Sweet Childhood Lost: Idealized Images of Childhood in the British Child Rescue Literature," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 2 (Spring 2009): 198-214.
- Tankard, Alex. "The Victorian Consumptive in Disability Studies." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 5 (2011): 17-33.
- Tate, Andrew. "Evangelical Certainties: Charles Spurgeon and the Sermon as Crisis Literature." In Linda Woodhead, ed., *Reinventing Christianity: Nineteenth Century Contexts*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001: 27-36.

- Tickner, Lisa. *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988.
- Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Tosh, John. *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Tosh, John. "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914." *Journal of British Studies* 44 (April 2005):330-342.
- Tosh, John. "Home and Away: The Flight from Domesticity in Late-Nineteenth-Century England Re-visited." *Gender and History* 27 (November 2015): 561-575.
- Twede, Diana. "Cereal Cartons, Tin Cans and Pop Bottles: Package-Converting Technologies that Revolutionized Food and Beverage Marketing, 1879-1902," *CHARM Meeting Proceedings*, 2009, 267-276.
- Twede, Diana. "The Origins of Paper Based Packaging," *CHARM Meeting Proceedings*, 2005: 288-300.
- Twede, Diana. "Basket, Barrel and Box: The Secret Role of Crafted Wooden Containers in the History of Marketing" *CHARM Meeting Proceedings*, 2003, 151-161.
- Van Reyk, William. "Christian Ideals of Manliness in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries." *The Historical Journal* 52 (December 2009): 1053-1073.
- Vickery, Amanda. "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History" *Historical Journal* 36 (June 1993): 383-414.
- Walker, Pamela J. *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.
- Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Walkowitz, Judith R. "The Indian Woman, the Flower Girl, and the Jew: Photojournalism in Edwardian London." *Victorian Studies* (1998/1999): 3-46.
- Walkowitz, Judith R. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*. Cambridge, UK and New York: 1980.
- Werner, Alex and Roy Porter. *London Bodies*. London, 1998.
- West, Andrew. "The Education of Henry Adams: A *Bildungsroman*" *South Central Review* 25 (Summer 2008): 91-108.
- Whitehead, Andrew. "Clerkenwell Tales." *History Workshop Journal* 68 (Autumn 2009): 247-250.
- Winston, John M. and Diane, eds. *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- Winter, James. *London's Teeming Streets, 1830-1914*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Wolffe, John, ed. *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980*. London: SPCK, 1995.
- Woloson, Wendy A. "Wishful Thinking: Retail Premiums in Mid-Nineteenth Century America." *Enterprise and Society*, 13 (December 2012): 790-831.

- Woodhead, Linda, ed. *Reinventing Christianity: Nineteenth Century Contexts*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001.
- Woodson-Boulton, Amy. "Industry Without Art is Brutality": Aesthetic Ideology and Social Practice in Victorian Art Museums." *Journal of British Studies* 46 (January 2007): 47-71.
- Zelizer, Viviana. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Primary Sources

Archives and Libraries

London Metropolitan Archives
 National Archives (Kew)
 British Library
 Alexandra Rose Charities, Surrey, Kent, UK.
 The Children's Society Records and Archives
 The Poppy Factory, Richmond, UK

Online Sources

archive.org
 www.victorianlondon.org
 www.victorianvoices.net

Newspapers and Periodicals

All the Year Round
Answers to Correspondents on Every Subject Under the Sun
Bentley's Miscellany
Birmingham Daily Post
Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine
The Bucks Herald
Bournemouth Daily Echo
Chambers Journal of Popular Literature Science and Arts
The Charity Organisation Reporter
Chatterbox
The Children's Treasury and Advocate of the Homeless and Destitute
The Christian
The City Press
Crockford's Clergy
Daily Express
The Daily Herald
The Daily Mail
The Daily Mirror
The Daily News
Daily Telegraph
The Derby Daily Telegraph

The Dover Express and East Kent News
The Economic Journal
The Edinburgh Evening News
The Evening Telegraph and Post
Every Week: A Journal of Entertaining Literature
The Field
Fun
The Garden
The Gentleman's Magazine,
The Girls' Own Paper
The (Kingston, Jamaica) Gleaner
The Globe
Good Words
The Graphic
Hampshire Advertiser
Household Words
Illustrated Police News
Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News
Islington Gazette
Judy: The London Serio-Comic Journal
Leamington Spa Courier
Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper
London City Press
London Journal
London Quarterly Review
London Society: an illustrated magazine of light and amusing literature for the hours of relaxation,
The Ludgate Monthly
Macmillan's Magazine
The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church
The New Monthly Magazine
New York Times
The Nineteenth Century and After: A Monthly Review
The North American Review
Nottingham Evening Post
Pall Mall Gazette
Punch
The Practical Teacher
The Quiver
Ragged School Union Quarterly Record
The Ragged School Union Magazine
Royal Society of Arts Journal
The Saturday Review
The Shoreditch Observer, Hackney Express, Bethnal Green Chronicle, and Finsbury Gazette
The Sketch

The Sphere
The Standard
The Strand
St. James Gazette
The Sunday at Home A Magazine for Sabbath Reading
The Tatler and Bystander
The Times
Toilers in London
The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine
The Western Daily Press
Woman's Gazette

Select Works by John Groom

The Silver Vase or the Gathered Posy With Introduction by Lady Savory [Lady Mayoress, City of London, 1890-1891.] (London: Morgan and Scott, 1890-1891).
A Brief Record of These Forty Years: Evangelistic and Pastoral Work in Clerkenwell.
Pastor John A. Groom's Diamond Jubilee (60th) Birthday, 1905.
The Romance of John Groom's Crippleage and Flower Girls' Mission, 1866-1919.
70th Birthday Speech, 1915.
Emily Loan Fund
Artificial Flower-Making, 1904
Aim and Work
Kit and Sue
Rose
Dumpty Rose
Crippled Dot
Limping Ferret
City Flowers, Twenty-Seventh Annual Report, 1892-1893
Snow Drops, 1894
Forget-Me-Not, Twenty-Eighth Annual Report, 1894

Other Select Primary Works

Gissing George, *The Nether World*. London: Smith Elder and Co., 1889.
 Hollingshead, John. *Ragged London in 1861*. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1861.
 Philips, Mrs. *A Dictionary of Employments Open to Women*. London: Women's Institute, 1898.
 Rev. D. Rice-Jones. *In the Slums, Pages from the Note-book of a London Diocesan Home Missionary*. London, 1884.
 Ryan, P.F. William, "At Piccadilly Circus: London's Flower Girls," in George Sims, *Living London*. London, 1902.
 Shaw, George Bernard *Pygmalion*, 1914.
 Sims, George. *Living London*. London, 1902.
 Whiteing, Richard. *No. 5 John Street*. London, 1899.
 Wright, George Arthur. *Hip Disease in Childhood: With Special Reference to Its Treatment by Excision* London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887.