

Education in the working-class home: modes of learning as revealed by nineteenth-century criminal records

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The transmission of knowledge and skills within the working-class household greatly troubled social commentators and social policy experts during the first half of the nineteenth century. To prove theories which related criminality to failures in working-class up-bringing, experts and officials embarked upon an ambitious collection of data on incarcerated criminals at various penal institutions. One such institution was the County Gaol at Ipswich. The exceptionally detailed information that survives on families, literacy, education and apprenticeships of the men, women and children imprisoned there has the potential to transform our understanding of the nature of home schooling (broadly interpreted) amongst the working classes in nineteenth-century England. This article uses data sets from prison registers to chart both the incidence and ‘success’ of instruction in reading and writing within the domestic environment. In the process, it highlights the importance of schooling in working-class families, but also the potentially growing significance of the family in occupational training.

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The family has proved to be an elusive agent in the transmission of knowledge and skills amongst the working classes in nineteenth-century England. Contemporaries were convinced of its importance. Until at least the 1860s, the moral condition of the working-class family was held responsible for a range of social ills, from popular insurrection to rising crime rates (Godfrey & Lawrence, 2005; Wiener, 1990). But despite attention devoted to the subject by the new statistical societies and a growing number of social policy ‘experts’, the extent and nature of education (broadly defined) within the home remained largely hidden from view. Social historians have been similarly aware of the presence of the family and the need to explain its role in instructing its members in useful and essential skills. Large quantitative sources,

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such as census enumerators' books, parish registers (births, marriages, deaths), settlement examinations and apprenticeship indentures, reveal much about family structure, but tell us little about relationships, communication, forms of nurturing and teaching. These gaps and silences have led historians at different times to be both emphatic about and dismissive of the educative role played by the family (Anderson, 1972; Lane, 1996; Levine, 1979; Mitch, 1992; Snell, 1985; Vincent, 1989).

Using qualitative or descriptive sources, namely accounts by working-class men (and a handful of women) of their lives, either written on their own impetus or given in response to investigations conducted by journalists, social investigators and officials, historians have been able to present a convincing outline of the 'domestic curriculum' in the working-class household. Some of what was learnt by family members was incidental, largely the result of absorption, observation or imitation, for example, learning to crawl or speak, developing an awareness and later knowledge of identity and community, and cultivating and expanding the imaginative faculties. Of those skills and forms of knowledge that required direct tuition, we have been told that moral values were imparted and literary skills increasingly taught, but that sons were sent away from the home to learn a trade (Humphries, 2010; Vincent, 1989). There are, however, significant problems in the use of such sources. The representativeness of the authors, as typically male and from a particular social group (autodidacts) is questionable, and the narrative conventions employed cast some doubt on their accuracy.

My research, based on a quantitative source—the Registers from Ipswich County Gaol in Suffolk—provides new insight on the content of the domestic curriculum. Between 1840 and 1870, every man, woman and child brought to Ipswich Gaol, having been convicted of or awaiting trial for a crime committed in the administrative district of East Suffolk, had personal information recorded in the Register. Over the course of the 30 years, the Registers were filled with 14,026 records about 10,441 offenders and 14,368 separate charges (or 12,885 unique offences). Just about every prison in England during this period had registers to capture information about inmates, but the registers designed for the two County Gaols in Suffolk (Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds) seem to have been fairly unique in terms of the quantity of information recorded about each incarcerated individual. Moreover, at Ipswich Gaol the officials demonstrated a substantial level of commitment to the collection of information and the amount of detail they included was exceptional. Thus, for every prisoner, we are told their name, residence, occupation (and if a trade where they learnt it), age, height, complexion, health, distinguishing marks, place of birth, father's name and residence, marital status, spouse's residence and means of subsistence, number of offspring and their ages; we are given information on their offence, trial, punishment and previous crimes; and we are told whether they had served in the armed forces, could read and write, and had gone to school and for how long. Alongside this information about individuals, the Registers tell us about families, namely 255, where multiple members had committed offences, mostly together but also separately.

The potential offered by these Registers appears enormous, but caution must be exercised in the use of such data to expose patterns in the experience of the general population. Offenders who came into contact with the nineteenth-century criminal justice system were overwhelmingly male (in the case of Ipswich Gaol, 86% of offenders were men), and typically aged between 16 and 30 (63%; or in comparison with the 1851 census, 71% of prisoners were aged between 16 and 30 compared with 25% of the county's population). They were also most likely to come from the poorest levels of society; 59% of offenders at Ipswich were unskilled workers (or the daughters of unskilled workers), overwhelmingly described as 'labourers'. To put this in context: the 1851 census found that 28% of the population in Suffolk worked as labourers (agricultural and general), or 40% of those aged between 15 and 30; in comparison, 62% of the male prisoner cohort for 1851 worked in unskilled occupations, or 70% of those males aged between 15 and 30. Most of the offenders in the Ipswich Registers cannot be described as members of a 'hardened criminal class'. The great majority were arrested for: petty thefts (35%), a crime which could often be described as a strategy to supplement meagre incomes or cope with periods of unemployment (Davis, 1989; Gatrell, 1989); poaching (10%), a possible exertion of customary rights but at the very least action largely condoned by the local community (Glyde, 1856; Hay, 1975; Osborne & Winstanley, 2006); low level assaults (9%), a traditional method of dispute resolution (Wood, 2004); public order or moral offences (4%, and not including damage to property), many of which were new crimes under laws enforced by new police forces; and crimes associated with poverty (18%), such as vagrancy, misbehaviour in the workhouse, and failure to maintain one's family. Despite the 'ordinariness' of their criminal behaviour, it remains a challenging task to isolate those characteristics associated with their criminality and those common to Suffolk's labouring poor.

Moreover, like most nineteenth-century sources which appear to lend themselves to quantification, the data are far from perfect. The design of forms and compilation of statistics were in their infancy in the mid-nineteenth century, and terms used in categories were often variable (Cullen, 1975; Dobraszczyk, 2009). Therefore a degree of data wrangling is required to extract usable statistics from the Registers. To further complicate matters, 18% of offenders appeared more than once (but usually no more than twice) in the Registers, and there is a degree of fluidity in the profiles of a substantial number, either because their lives had changed (they had married, moved parish, changed occupation or acquired or lost literate skills) or because errors were made, by the clerk or prisoner, deliberate or accidental, in the collection of information.

In spite of all these caveats, this article will use the unique collection of data on the family, literacy, schooling and occupation contained in the Ipswich Registers to expose several important aspects of the domestic curriculum while testing existing theories about the role played by the family in instructing its members. It sheds new light on the role of domestic instruction in the transmission of literacy, of

occupational skills and of criminal expertise at least in the rural county of Suffolk, and potentially in England more generally, during the nineteenth century.

I. Literate skills

Alongside improvements in public health, religiously-sponsored elementary education was regarded by social policy experts as a panacea for a range of social ills, including rising crime rates. As Vincent has written, ‘those who campaigned for intervention, by church and then state ... based their appeal on a denunciation of training provided in the homes of the labouring poor’ (Vincent, 1989, p. 73). Contemporary campaigners collected statistics on the educational attainments of criminals in order to justify and increase government expenditure on elementary education. However, these proved more difficult to interpret than expected. When examined against marriage register evidence, as well as local studies of literacy within working-class communities, the prisoners’ skills broadly matched those of the communities from which they came (Crone, 2010; Nicholas, 1990; and see BRO Q/SO20; Mayhew et al., 1862).

Literacy rates generally in the primarily rural county of Suffolk lagged behind national figures for most of the nineteenth century. With regard to the prisoners at Ipswich Gaol, although the literacy rate of the men was well below that of the county for the period 1840–1870 (determined by the marriage registers), this difference was expected given the over representation of the labouring poor in the sample, the prisoners’ literacy matched the steady increase of that of Suffolk’s males over the course of the 30 years (Suffolk from 52% to 69%; prisoners from 25.7% to 53.7%, or prisoners of average marital age from 24.5% to 53.4%), and the prisoners’ literacy always exceeded the benchmarks for unskilled occupations provided by scholars such as Vincent (1844–1849, 42.2% compared with 31%, 1854–1859, 44.9% compared with 41%, 1864–1869, 55.7% compared with 51%). The small numbers of women in each yearly cohort of prisoners, especially those of marital age, generate variable results, but the average rates of literacy for women aged between 21 and 30 across five year periods also compare favourably with those of the daughters of unskilled workers analysed by Vincent (1844–1849, 23.8% for the prisoners compared with 33%, 1854–1859, 47.9% compared with 48%, and 1864–1869, 62.1% compared with 61%) (Vincent, 1989, pp. 97 and 102). Moreover the average rate of literacy amongst the female prisoners overtook that of the male prisoners at roughly the same time as in the county population (late 1850s).

Awareness of the similarities between prisoners’ literacy rates and those of local labouring populations led members of the nineteenth-century statistical societies to establish a new dividing line between those who could neither read nor write, who could only read, or who could read and write *imperfectly*, and those who could read and write well, or who had a superior education, the rationale being that the former group had not attended school, or had not attended *for long enough* to have received a proper, moral education. The new dividing line produced the desired result, as

few prisoners (and probably few working-class men and women) could be said to have received a superior education (Fletcher, 1843, 1847, 1849; Porter, 1837; Rawson, 1841).

The intense focus on the level of skills achieved as an indicator of schooling led a number of enthusiastic individuals—gaol chaplains, surgeon superintendents on convict ships, and officials in charge of specific prisons—to compile their own sets of data on the schooling history of those under their care (see, for example, TNA, ADM101/13/9, ff.2–5, ADM101/16/2, ff. 12, MT32/2; BRO Q/SO 24 & 25, 1854–1857). Matched up with information on the skills acquired, these data sets have the potential to reveal a great deal about the schooling of the labouring poor in the 100 years preceding the 1870 Education Act. The County Gaol at Ipswich was one institution where such data were collected. Incarcerated men, women and children were questioned not only about their elementary skills, but also about where they had been to school and for how long. A wide variety of information was entered into this category by the gaol clerks. Not only do the Registers tell us about the men, women and children who had learnt to read or read and write at church-sponsored day schools, free schools, grammar schools, dame schools, Sunday schools and so on (52% of males and 63% of females), but they also draw attention to those who had learnt their skills as adults, for example, in military schools and prison schools, and, most importantly, reveal those who exclusively learnt their skills in informal settings (predominantly the home) or who ‘taught themselves’.

Historians have placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of the family in imparting literate skills. Vincent has argued that literacy was an increasingly ‘common element in the overall [domestic] curriculum as the nineteenth century progressed’, though also acknowledges that ‘it always had to compete with a wide range of skills which had equal or greater priority’ (Vincent, 1989, p. 56). Vincent and Raey have used nineteenth-century surveys to highlight the substantial presence of books in working-class homes, not only religious texts but also primers and spelling books (Raey, 1991; Vincent, 1983, 1989). Most recently, Humphries, on the basis of evidence in working-class autobiographies, declared that a crucial strategy for education was home teaching, and foremost among the domestic instructors were mothers, who were both ‘more available’ and more ambitious for their children. Brothers, sisters and grandparents ‘also taught basic literacy, strengthening sibling and inter-generational ties’. But notably absent in many cases were fathers, which led Humphries to conclude that although ‘some fathers taught their children ... many were too busy earning their family’s living to provide instruction, and in the throes of the industrial revolution less time became available’ (Humphries, 2010, p. 320).

Admittedly, the presence of the family continues to loom large in the records of those prisoners where there is no direct reference to it. Some 261 prisoners with at least one literate skill failed to provide any information about how they had acquired their ability, and a further 30 specifically stated in response to the question of where they had been schooled, ‘not any where’. Given the level of detail on the overwhelming majority, it is difficult to make assumptions about the role played by

the family in these cases. Furthermore, attending school was not a bar to domestic instruction. One female offender, arrested in 1840 for an unknown crime but not convicted, claimed that although she had been at church school for a short time, her father had taught her to read (Suffolk Record Office, A609/1(31) ff.57). Fifteen offenders on different appearances at the gaol claimed to have been to school and to have taught themselves the literate skills. In some cases it is clear that they learnt to read at school and later taught themselves to write. Others might have re-taught themselves skills they had previously learnt at school but lost through a lack of practice. A significant number of prisoners who attended school (just under 40%) claimed they went for periods of two years or less, and it is conceivable that many of these had some familial support. Similarly, those who described long periods of schooling may have only attended intermittently and had parents who helped fill the gaps. The poor quality of instruction delivered at many schools was emphasised by autodidact autobiographies and social commentators (Glyde, 1856; Griffin, 2013).

However, explicit evidence on the family contained in the Registers calls into question the role it played in imparting the literate skills. First, data on the presence of the skills within the 255 family groups identified confirmed the haphazardness or randomness with which literate skills were passed from parents to children, a state of affairs which Levine also identified in his study of Shepshed, Leicestershire, at the turn of the nineteenth century. Not all literate artisans, tradesmen and labourers could arrange for all their children to acquire these skills (Levine, 1979; Vincent, 1989). All sorts of combinations of literacy were present amongst groups of family members at Ipswich Gaol. In the case of the Dranes, convicted for poaching in 1867, father James could read and write but his son had neither skill (Suffolk Record Office, A609/26 ff.396, 397). Similarly, with regard to members of the Williams family, arrested for stealing items from a dwelling house in 1853, father John could read and write but both his daughters, Mary Ann and Ellen, were wholly illiterate (Suffolk Record Office, A609/14 ff.366, 367, 368). And brothers John and Robert Steggall, convicted for poaching in 1841, also had different literacy profiles, the former wholly illiterate, the latter able to read and write (Suffolk Record Office, A609/1(31) ff.316, 317). Parallel examples are littered throughout the Registers across the whole period.

Parents made decisions about whether their children would acquire the literate skills. The Ipswich Gaol Registers tell us that when they decided in the affirmative, they invariably made use of local schools. Of the 68% of offenders who possessed at least one of the literate skills (for our purposes, we shall refer to both the partially literate and fully literate as 'literate'), more than 90% had attended school for a period of time. A handful of illiterate prisoners also claimed to have attended school, a reminder of the potential fragility of the literate skills.

The flip side of this is that very few prisoners claimed to have acquired their literate skills through informal forms of education *exclusively*. The level of detail contained in the Registers allows us to be quite specific about their experiences. Fifteen prisoners claimed to have been instructed in the literate skills while 'in

service', either during an apprenticeship, or as a servant, or as a 'bound' labourer. Although informal, because this type of instruction was linked with work, these prisoners cannot be included in an analysis of 'domestic education'. Barely 1% of 'literate' offenders, or a total of 90 men and women, were entirely 'home schooled', meaning that these prisoners explicitly stated that they had been taught to read, or to read and write, by family members (66) or friends (23), so not just within a domestic environment but also by instructors with whom they had intimate relationships. Some 167 offenders, roughly 2.5% of those who were 'literate', claimed to have taught themselves the literate skills. These men and women would likely have acquired their skills during time away from work, probably within a domestic environment, and most likely with the help of family and friends. Moreover, during the 1860s, it is likely that those who were 'home schooled' were described as 'self taught' by the gaol officials, as direct references to home schooling disappeared from the Registers in this period. At least one repeat offender who claimed to have been home schooled when arrested in 1850 was subsequently described as 'self taught' on his return to the gaol in 1859 (Suffolk Record Office, A609/9 ff.395). It seems sensible then, while acknowledging key differences between the home schooled and self taught, to consider these two categories together in the analysis.

While it is true that the small numbers in both risk the sample being statistically insignificant, it is still possible to draw some conclusions from the offenders' experiences. Proportionately, more 'literate' females were home schooled than 'literate' males, but the margin separating the genders was slight: for example, in the case of 'literate' males, around 1% were home schooled and just over 2% were self taught, while in the case of 'literate' females, just over 1% were home schooled and around 3% were self taught. Occupation did not seem to be related to home schooling either. Those in unskilled occupations (or with unskilled fathers) were slightly over represented among the home schooled (67% compared with 59% in the Registers as a whole). In contrast, the occupational breakdown of those 'self taught' roughly matched that of all offenders (self taught skilled being 22% compared with 25%, and unskilled self taught 52% compared with 59%). There was no correlation between home schooling and domestic instruction in occupational skills; 81% of those who were taught a trade at home were sent out to school to learn their literate skills, an almost identical proportion to those who served an apprenticeship outside the home (83%). Similarly, just under 2% of those who learnt their trade at home also learnt their literate skills at home, and only 1% of those who were sent away for their apprenticeship learnt their literate skills at home.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of offenders home schooled, 'self taught' and sent to school in each birth cohort (where available). At first glance, these figures highlight the decline of home schooling from the 1830s onwards, matching a growth in the proportion sent to school (which reached a plateau of around 60%). Other sources also suggest that the foundation of elementary schools increased in Suffolk from the 1830s onwards (*Digest of Parochial Returns*, 1819; *Education Enquiry*, 1835; Glyde, 1856). However, these statistics need some contextualisation to be analysed correctly. Small numbers in several birth cohorts—1760s (10),

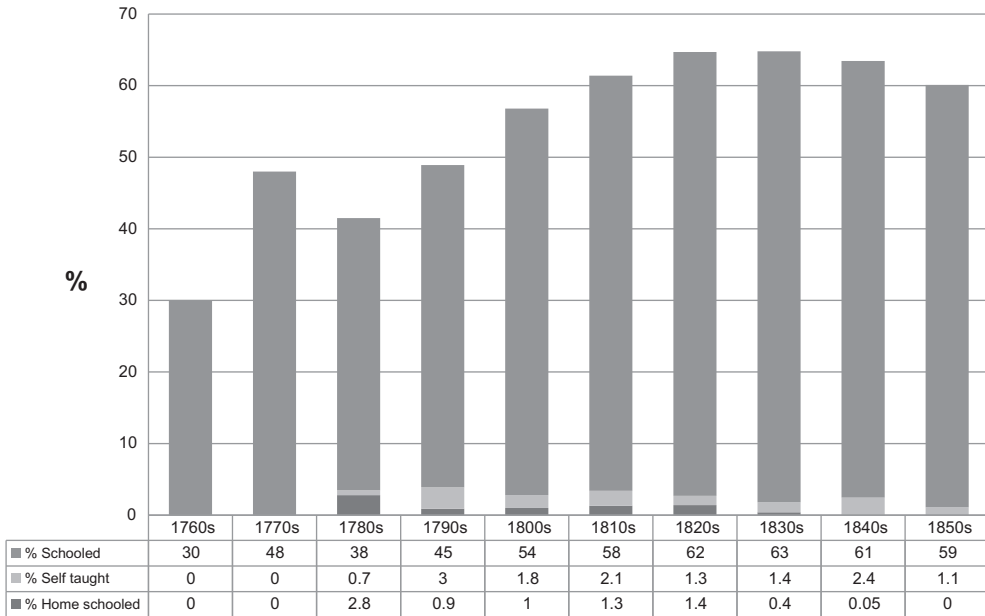


Figure 1. Type of education matched with birth cohorts of offenders

1770s (29) and 1780s (140)—skew the data and should be disregarded. The proportion of those ‘self taught’ needs to be taken into consideration. Those imprisoned during the 1860s were most likely to have been born in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s; the growing proportion of those self taught in these three decades alongside the decline in the number ‘home schooled’ confirms that a significant number who were home schooled in these decades were described by officials as self taught. Thus, if we add together the proportion home schooled and self taught across the period 1790–1859, the percentage of offenders who learnt their skills outside the classroom (and probably at home) was remarkably consistent, hovering between 2 and 3%. The growth of schools and expansion of literacy made little difference to this steady group.

Location information provided by offenders—place of residence, birth, father’s residence and schooling—can be used somewhat to help us understand the decisions made by parents in the schooling of their offspring. It is by no means perfect. The offenders, on the whole, were a mobile group. Of those born in Suffolk, 48% were resident in a different parish from that in which they were born. However, more than 60% of schooled offenders were sent to a school in their birth parish; 63% of offenders aged 15 and under were still resident in their birth parish; and the profiles of repeat offenders who were married with children aged 10 and under did show a greater tendency to stay resident in the same parish (63% did not move parishes between appearances). Therefore it seems reasonable to try to understand what factors might have encouraged home schooling by looking at the state of education within offenders’ birth parishes.

Two nineteenth-century education censuses—in 1818 and 1833—provided lists of schools that existed in each parish of Suffolk (*Digest of Parochial Returns*, 1819; *Education Enquiry*, 1835). Information on schools in parishes in which home schooled offenders were born (more specifically, those who would have been home schooled in childhood) was extracted from each census. That from the 1818 census was examined alongside the schooling data of all offenders born in the relevant parishes between 1780 and 1818, and that for the 1833 census was similarly examined alongside those offenders born between 1820 and 1839. Both cohorts contained examples where home schooled offenders came from small parishes which had no schools. Similarly, the schooling profiles of all offenders compared with the 1833 census suggested that the capacity of the existing parish schools could also be an important factor (Iken had just one Sunday school, and only one of 15 offenders were schooled in the parish, compared with Weybread, which had four day schools and one Sunday school, and 6 of 10 offenders were schooled in the parish). Although it could be argued that these circumstances created a need for exclusive home schooling, the presence of offenders from the same birth cohorts who were sent to schools in neighbouring parishes prevents us from making any generalisations. Religion could have played a part in parents' decision to home school their children. The home-schooled offenders from Barham and Mendlesham, parishes which had Church of England Sunday schools, were Dissenters. Again, we cannot generalise from the experiences of this man and woman, though a larger study on the schooling of offenders who were Dissenters might prove or disprove a pattern of active avoidance of establishment schools. In sum, the even split between the presence of the home schooled in parishes with high levels of illiteracy and no schools and parishes with high levels of literacy and multiple schools, suggests that individual circumstances and choices, rather than overarching social conditions, seem to have been the primary determinant for home schooling.

Finally, the Registers provide evidence on the quality of instruction received at home and the likely identity of the instructor. The majority of the home schooled only learnt to read and not to write (72% and 28%, respectively). Compared with all 'literate' offenders (of whom 34% could only read and 66% could read and write), readers were over represented amongst the home schooled. With regard to those self taught, the reading skill was still dominant (52%), but not to such a great extent, particularly among males (48% could only read). While it is true that the achievements of the pupil were limited by the skills of the instructor (Vincent, 1989), it is impossible to demonstrate with the available data (prison and marriage registers, not to mention autobiographies) that the partial literacy of parents was a correlative for home schooling amongst the working classes. It is conceivable that those parents who had found that the reading skill was both useful and adequate might have been content to pass on that skill to their children but have seen no reason to send their children to school to learn to write, especially where resources were tight. Or that restrictions on time within the domestic environment necessarily restricted instruction to the skill of reading. These are suppositions. Yet we can argue that the overwhelming proportion of readers amongst the home schooled

again emphasises the marginality of exclusive home schooling during the nineteenth century. From mid-century, an increasing number of institutions were instructing pupils in both skills. This matches data from gaols across the country which show that the partially literate were a rapidly shrinking group from the 1850s onwards (Crone, 2010). If exclusive home schooling was more widespread or common, we might have expected the partial literates to show a greater resilience.

According to the evidence in the gaol Registers, the transmission of the literate skills occurred primarily within the nuclear family (of the 90 home schooled, only three identified instructors from the extended family, an aunt, an uncle and a grandmother). Also, the direction of that transmission was predominantly downwards, as skills were passed from one generation to the next (only two prisoners claimed to have learnt to read from their children, and four offenders to read, or to read and write, from their siblings). Six husbands learnt to read (three) or to read and write (three) from their wives, but no husbands taught their wives the literate skills. This matches the gender inversion with regard to literacy that existed in rural counties such as Suffolk (Vincent, 1989). Most importantly, 47 of the 90 offenders claimed their parents had been their instructors, and 30 identified a specific parent. Their evidence suggests that fathers did teach their sons (17 of 20); and only three daughters were exclusively taught by their fathers. Mothers also taught their sons (8 of 10); and there were only two examples of daughters exclusively taught by their mothers. In fact, if we look at the 19 women who were home schooled, all bar one were taught the literate skills by their parents, and most often both parents played a role. This is in contrast to the male offenders in the group, whose profiles overall were more diverse, but where men were taught by their parents it was more likely that one parent took responsibility for their instruction. This evidence links rather neatly to that on formal schooling. Although proportionately more female offenders had attended school than male offenders (63% compared with 52%), males who attended school were substantially more likely to learn both literate skills than their female counterparts (69% compared with 52%). In other words, where resources were allocated to the education of males, either within or outside the home, the outcomes were more substantial.

II. Occupational skills

Occupation by itself was not regarded as a cause of crime by contemporaries; rather, a refusal to work, as well as a preference for profligate lifestyles which encouraged the misuse of any honest earnings, were defined as the principal characteristics of criminality (Godfrey & Lawrence, 2005). Parents were held responsible for failing to instil a good work ethic. Commentators and experts thus had little to say about the acquisition of occupational skills within the home, though many believed that instruction in a trade was an essential rehabilitative mechanism, especially for juvenile offenders.

Historians have been similarly vague about the nature of occupational instruction within the working-class home in part because of a lack of evidence, but also because most unskilled jobs did not require labourers to have an existing skill set: children were sent out to work from an early age, and often what they needed to know was learnt on the job. With regard to skilled occupations which did require specific training typically through apprenticeships, historians have afforded a role to parents in selecting a trade for their sons and sometimes even a master under whom to serve, but have stressed that it was relatively rare for sons to complete their apprenticeships at home. Parish settlement laws dictated that artisans and tradesmen could only acquire legal settlement by their own right through apprenticeship outside their father's parish of settlement. Hence apprenticeship to one's own father led to a failure to settle in their own right (Snell, 1985). Moreover, rather than passing on the family business, fathers often found it more useful to place sons in complementary trades, or, in the case of traditional handicrafts where sons sometimes did succeed their fathers, there remained a tendency to send boys away for their apprenticeships in order that they might learn the latest techniques. Humphries concluded that such practices were a testament to 'English apprenticeship's resilience to entropy. It was an outward-looking institution which allowed boys to advance themselves and not just fill their fathers' boots' (Humphries, 2010, p. 273). Apprenticeship indentures suggest that some parents looked to place their sons with extended family members as this could be both easier and cheaper (Lane, 1996). However, through close examination of working-class narratives, Humphries found that the vast majority, around 76% of apprentices, served under masters outside the family (compared with 9% under their own fathers), and that those boys apprenticed to either distant kin or non-relatives went on to achieve greater success (Humphries, 2010).

The Ipswich Gaol Registers provide new insights on occupational training within the home. Offenders who arrived at Ipswich Gaol were not only asked how they earned a living, but, in the case of artisans and tradesmen, they were also asked where they learnt their trade and from whom. Not all provided details of their apprenticeships; 44% of those in skilled and 13% of those in semi-skilled occupations gave this information to the clerks. This is not necessarily an indication of how many tradesmen served apprenticeships, even though this was a period in which apprenticeships were in decline and many semi-skilled trades did not require apprenticeships to be served. Only three offenders across the 30 year period specifically stated that they had not served apprenticeships. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that the family, as a provider of occupational training, is hiding in the gaps and silences. Of those skilled and semi-skilled offenders who did not provide any apprenticeship information, only 8.5% and 14% respectively shared the same occupation as their fathers.

In practice, 1284 offenders (including six females) served 1289 apprenticeships. The disparity between these figures arises from the fact that six offenders claimed they had served multiple apprenticeships, two in the same trade, one in a related trade and three in different trades. Some 212 offenders (16%) specifically stated

that they learnt their trade at home, primarily from their father (only eight learnt from brothers and one from a grandfather), while 525 (41%), who gave the names of masters together with places where they served their apprenticeships, had obviously been sent away. Some 552 (43%) only gave the name of the parish in which they learnt their trades. However, using surrounding information about these offenders, we can make some adjustments to the figures. Of those who were sent away, 19 shared the same surname as their masters, so it is likely that these men were sent to extended family members (following Lane's interpretation of apprenticeship indentures (Lane, 1996, p. 10)). Of those who gave only the name of the parish where they served their apprenticeship, 72 were not only in the same occupation as their fathers, but also served their apprenticeship in either their parish of birth or their father's parish of residence. That these men learnt their trade from their fathers is a reasonable assumption; the profiles of repeat offenders confirm this—while on one visit to the gaol these men stated that they had been apprenticed to their fathers, on other visits (either earlier or later) only the name of the parish in which they served was given. Some 193 went into a trade which was different from their father's. With this evidence the Gaol Books tell us that 54% of skilled tradesmen (100% of tradeswomen) were apprenticed out, 22% were apprenticed to their fathers and 2% were sent to relatives (leaving the circumstances of 22% unknown).

This 22% (even 16%) is not an insignificant proportion. Furthermore, it could still be an underestimate. One of the six offenders who claimed to have served multiple apprenticeships was Frederick Read, a shoemaker who hailed from Framlingham. On his first conviction in 1846 aged 22, Read stated that he had learnt his trade from his father, but on his second conviction in 1848 he said that he had been apprenticed to King at Framlingham (Suffolk Record Office, A609/5 ff.414, A609/7 ff.268). This contradiction could be the result of prisoner error, but there was neither an obvious motivation nor more general evidence to suggest that some prisoners provided false information. So Read might very well have started his apprenticeship at home and finished it under a non-relative. Unfortunately, the Registers cannot tell us how common that practice might have been.

The proportion of offenders who served apprenticeships within their immediate families far exceeds that of other studies, namely Humphries (2010) (9%). It could be argued that those who learnt their trade at home were over represented in the prison population, further proof of Humphries' conclusion that those apprenticed to strangers fared better in life. If this were the case, we might expect to see an increase in the number apprenticed to their fathers among the 239 repeat offenders who gave details of their apprenticeships, but there was none (24%). In the absence of other quantitative studies on apprenticeships within the home it remains difficult to prove either way.

Proceeding on the basis that the prisoners' experience of apprenticeship was broadly representative of that of tradesmen generally, the data in the Registers reveal some important patterns. Table 1 shows the proportion of men apprenticed within and outside the home for each birth cohort captured by the Registers. The

Table 1. Apprenticeship patterns in each birth cohort of offenders

Birth cohort	Total number	% apprenticed to non kin	% apprenticed within the nuclear family	% apprenticed to extended family
1760s	3	66	33	0
1770s	5	40	40	0
1780s	17	71	6	6
1790s	45	40	22	4
1800s	108	60	17	2
1810s	221	58	18	1
1820s	416	55 ^b	26	2
1830s	288 ^a	52 ^c	29	1
1840s	163	49 ^d	21	0
1850s	17	59	18	0

Notes: The table excludes offenders (five in total) whose birth cohorts were unknown. For the six offenders who served multiple apprenticeships, details of all their apprenticeships are included in the data.

^aOne offender taught his trade in prison not included in this decade.

^bIncluded are two offenders who learnt trades at the workhouse.

^cIncluded are seven offenders who learnt trades at the workhouse.

^dIncludes one offender who learnt his trade at the reformatory.

decades 1760s–1790s and the 1850s contain too few offenders to provide robust statistics. However, a pattern is evident between the years 1800 and 1849, whereby the proportion of those instructed within the nuclear family increased matching a decrease in the proportion sent away for apprenticeships. The decrease is expected. Although historians disagree on the cause and precise dates, and significant regional variation existed, it is clear that apprenticeship had fallen into decline by the early nineteenth century (Lane, 1996; Snell, 1985). However, historians have been largely silent on alternative means by which tradesmen acquired their skills; for example, few, if any, have suggested that the home became a more important training centre.

The 1284 offenders came from a diverse range of occupations, 155 different trades to be precise. Many trades were very specialised or unusual and so were represented by just one or two offenders, for example, screw cutters, scale beam makers, pipe makers, anchor smiths, and so on. With regard to those trades which were represented by 10 or more offenders, even where the proportion of men who were sent to members of the extended family was taken into account, there was not one trade where the proportion of offenders who were taught within the family exceeded the proportion sent to non-kin.

Finally, Figure 2 plots the proportion of offenders apprenticed out and instructed at home from the six most prominent trades across the period 1800–1849 (the dates representing the prisoners' birth cohorts). The small numbers which result from scattering the offenders in this way created some very noisy data. At least one trade, shoemaking, showed no clear pattern whatsoever. Still, there were some significant trends of which we should take note. In the case of both blacksmiths and tailors, the proportion sent away to serve an apprenticeship

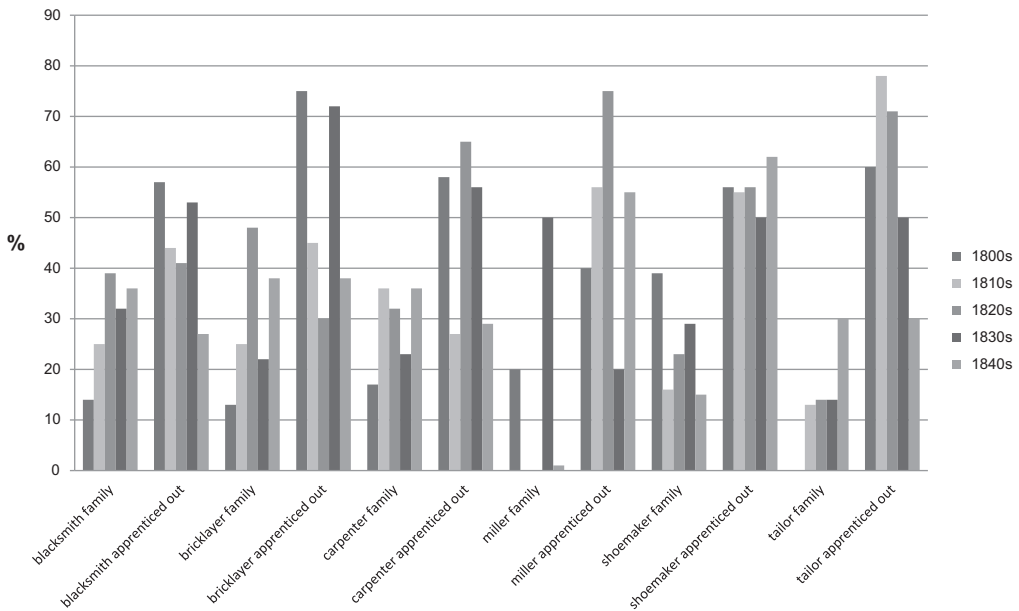


Figure 2. Apprenticeship patterns in six trades across five birth cohorts

declined over the period, while the proportion kept at home demonstrated a matching increase. The data for the carpenters were more difficult to interpret, but we could argue that the nuclear family became more important in providing apprenticeships to its members if the 1830s represents an anomaly. The 1830s also appear to have been an anomaly for millers and bricklayers. With regard to the former, disregarding the 1830s revealed a pattern of sending sons out for apprenticeships. As for the bricklayers, the general downward curve in indentured apprenticeships, which was not matched by a rise of the family as provider, could be indicative of the worsening state of the trade. Bricklayers were victims of industrialisation and deskilling, as many agricultural labourers took to bricklaying when work was available, and hence we might expect some instability in the data concerning those who continued to learn the trade (Snell, 1985).

Because the data on the 1284 offenders tells us about the experiences of those who served apprenticeships, and not about those tradesmen or artisans who did not, the Ipswich Gaol Books cannot tell us about the speed of the overall decline of apprenticeship in nineteenth-century Suffolk. But if we take the decline for granted, the Gaol Books do tell us something about the shape and character of this decline. Crucially, they suggest that the role of the nuclear family, in providing instruction in trades, gradually increased as the number of men sent away to serve apprentices slowly declined. This, together with the significant overall proportion of those who served apprenticeships (predominantly) under their fathers (more than one-fifth), strongly indicates that more attention needs to be given to the transmission of occupational skills within the nineteenth-century working-class home.

III. Criminal skills

As noted above, the evidence drawn on in this study was produced in response to contemporary fears about the moral condition of the working-class family, or, more specifically, the lack of moral instruction delivered by parents to their children which encouraged the latter to indulge in idleness, enjoy profligate lifestyles, and commit crime. Some commentators even went so far as to argue that criminal parents produced criminal children, not only through the bad examples they set, but also by schooling their offspring in criminal techniques (Glyde, 1856; *Select Committee*, 1828, p. 48; Wiener, 1990). Research by social historians has shown that, on the contrary, moral instruction was a key part of the 'domestic curriculum' (Raey, 1991; Vincent, 1983, 1989). The homes of criminals were not an exception to the rule. In their accounts of their offending behaviour, adult prisoners rarely held their parents responsible, and more often than not emphasised the efforts of parents to provide moral (typically religious) instruction and guidance (Browning, 1847; Joseph, 1853; Kingsmill, 1854). The statements made by juvenile offenders to penal officials during the 1830s similarly suggest that delinquency was rarely a product of specific parenting styles or corruption. Instead, where a correlation between family life and crime seemed evident, offending behaviour was caused by parental neglect which resulted from external stresses on family life, such as poverty, unemployment, death, disease and poor housing (Shore, 1999). The sole historical study on intergenerational offending patterns, which traced the ancestors and descendants of 68 persistent offenders (>five convictions) who appeared before the Petty Sessions Court at Crewe, Cheshire, between 1880 and 1940, also found that criminal parents did not necessarily produce criminal children. The transmission of offending behaviour between generations was more likely incidental, the product of the effects of social upheaval (Godfrey, Cox, & Farrall, 2007).

Evidence from the Ipswich Gaol Registers supports these conclusions while adding yet another specific dimension—that the working-class family was not a site for criminal instruction. This was demonstrated primarily through the analysis of information on accomplices in the Registers. Between 1840 and 1870, just over 8% of crimes in the Ipswich Gaol Books had multiple suspects attached to them (1153). Of that 8%, only 18% (198) were committed by groups of family members, or groups containing family members. In terms of familial relationships within those groups, the overwhelming presence of the nuclear family is, again, impossible to ignore. Although familial relationships between offenders were retrospectively identified, and therefore reliant on the details of *immediate* family provided in individual records (name and occupation of father, ages of children, circumstance of the spouse, and so on), allowing for this did not change the outcome. For example, only 34 additional groups contained members with the same surname. In 20 of these, the individuals most likely had an immediate familial relationship; the level of detail provided was not specific enough to confirm the relationship beyond doubt. Of the remaining 14, in only one case did the familial information supplied strongly suggest an extended familial relationship: in 1843, Elizabeth Bailey was

arrested with her (probably) daughter in law, for stealing pork from a dwelling house at Rickinghall. Neither was convicted for the crime (Suffolk Record Office, A609/2 ff.97, 98). Still, if we defined all 14 as extended family groups, and added these, together with the additional likely 20 immediate family groups to the total number of family groups within the database (the 254 mentioned at the opening of this paper), the extended family groups only amount to 5% of family groups, or barely over 1% of all groups of accomplices in the Registers. This is a tiny proportion which would be unlikely to increase dramatically if we could identify those groups of extended family members who did not share the same surname.

Moreover, the information on the crimes committed by these family groups, as well as the offending history of group members, provides very little evidence to support the idea that criminal skills were passed between family members. Of the 198 familial groups, only 22 contained family members who had committed multiple crimes, thus having the potential to demonstrate transmission, or cause and effect (e.g. that an existing offender goes on to commit a like offence with a relation, and the latter commits further similar crimes). Few of these, if any, showed evidence of domestic instruction in crime: offending histories were often mixed and seemed unrelated to the crime undertaken in partnership, beyond the vague possibility that one family member had set a bad example for the other. It may well be that fathers schooled sons, or elder brothers instructed younger brothers, on specific criminal skills, but never committed (or were never caught committing) crime together. Moreover, there are many crimes where the need for specialist skills or some degree of pre-planning is a moot point: for example, assaults, which were often related to unpredictable events or specific circumstances, or thefts, which could be opportunistic. The possible exception to this was poaching. In the case of this crime, more than any other, we might have expected to see some evidence of instruction, especially within family groups. But given that poaching was a crime typically committed by groups of men, and poaching together would be one of the best forms of instruction in the crime, it is significant that there was only one case between 1840 and 1870 which showed any evidence that one family member potentially initiated the other. In 1846, the Jarrard brothers were convicted for poaching. The eldest, John, had two prior convictions for poaching (and was convicted again for poaching in 1847). On the other hand, the youngest, George, had no criminal record, but went on to be convicted for poaching again in 1855 (Suffolk Record Office, A609/5 ff.188, 189, A609/16 ff.260, A609/1(32) ff.230, A609/2 ff.186, A609/18 ff.18).

IV. Conclusion

Data on family life and relationships in the Ipswich Gaol Registers suggest that some revisions need to be made to our current understanding of direct instruction within the working-class home during the first half of the nineteenth century. First, as the incidence of exclusive home schooling was small, and where it did occur, the level of skill acquired was low, historians have probably overestimated the role

played by the family in imparting the literate skills. Second, the Registers indicate that historians might have overlooked the occurrence and function of apprenticeships served with immediate family members, predominantly fathers. Third, the Registers confirm that instruction in criminal skills for crimes such as burglary, theft and poaching (which of all crimes were most likely to need it) was rare. Finally, the shape of the family that consistently appeared from the data in the Registers was a nuclear family. This cannot be explained away as a quirk produced by the collection of the data by the clerks, by its arrangement or cataloguing, or by the nature of the calculations on it. Adjustments made to compensate for any biases produced by these methods did not afford the extended family any greater presence. The Registers re-emphasise the importance of the nuclear family as the dominant family group against an historiography that has recently sought to re-establish the importance of kin (e.g. Raey, 1996), and point to the changing significance of that nuclear family as an educational agent.

Finally, a cautionary note. Data from the Registers tell us about those labourers and tradesmen who lived in Suffolk, and, in the majority of cases, were born in Suffolk. In fact, because so many of the offenders were born in Suffolk (75%), performing the same queries as above on these offenders only made no difference to the results. Conversely, the range of birth places of those not born in Suffolk generated variable results which were difficult to interpret with certainty. As early as 1972, Michael Anderson warned researchers of family life to beware of local peculiarities which prevent national generalisations being made from regional statistics (Anderson, 1972). It may well be that conditions in Suffolk encouraged sons to establish their own, separate homes, hence increasing the importance of the nuclear family *in this county*. Similarly, in his study of mid-century Suffolk, John Glyde drew attention to the large number of labourers' wives who were employed in field work. Glyde wrote that the consequence of this was the destruction of home comforts and the transformation of the labourer's cottage into a night shelter for family members (Glyde, 1856). The practical consequence might have been that in Suffolk both parents had little time for instructing their children in the literate skills. Thus, more than anything, the Ipswich Gaol Registers show that more research is needed on the domestic curriculum.

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