

## A job for life? Working lives and the historical record in Newcastle upon Tyne

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English roads were crowded with writers in the seventeenth century and most had something to say about Newcastle upon Tyne. Thanks to its famously sooty export, the town was a household name across the country. In 1618, when the 'water poet' recounted his arrival into Newcastle-under-Lyme, he felt his readers might need clarification: '(Not that Newcastle standing upon Tine)/But this Townes scituation doth confine/Neere Cheshiere, in the famous County Stafford'.<sup>1</sup> Apparently the northernmost Newcastle attracted more attention than its namesake, and visitors were often impressed with what they saw. Cheshire gent William Brereton commented in 1635 that it was 'beyond all compare the fairest and richest towne in England: inferiour for wealth and building to noe cittie save London and Bristow: and whether itt may nott deserve to be accounted as wealthy as Bristow I make some doubt'.<sup>2</sup> Daniel Defoe, ninety years later, was outwardly less complimentary, observing 'The situation of the town...is exceeding unpleasant', but for a man of business like Defoe, people and commerce trumped any aesthetic consideration. He praised the town as 'spacious, extended, [and] infinitely populous', and remarked that its outward ugliness was 'made amends abundantly by the goodness of the river, which...makes it a place of very great business'.<sup>3</sup> Defoe knew the town better than most travellers, and his description does seem particularly apt.<sup>4</sup> Newcastle was spacious and extended, spreading out northwards and eastwards to Jesmond, the Ouseburn and beyond, and its trade monopoly stretched further even than that. This gave the impression of an infinite population, which regenerated and turned over so quickly that the authorities found it difficult to keep tabs on individuals.

There can be little doubt that it was Newcastle's coal that gave it national clout, so it is surprising that we know so little about the working population that followed. My general aim has been to account for the specialisation of Newcastle's economy and workforce in the crucial century after 1600, considering the impact of this work on those employed in shifting coal as well as their impression on the town. It has been an enduring limitation on economic historians and historical geographers alike that 'occupational statistics on any considerable scale' are rare before the first official national Census in 1801 – and even the Census was defective in its recording of occupations

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<sup>1</sup> John Taylor, *The pennyles pilgrimage...* (London, 1618), B3.

<sup>2</sup> J.C. Hodgson (ed.), *North Country Diaries, Second Series*, SS 124 (Durham, 1915), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Defoe, *A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain...* (London, 1727), Letter 9.

<sup>4</sup> Defoe had sought refuge in Gateshead from about 1710 to 1716, while 'sorely prest by persecuting foes': MacKenzie, *Newcastle*, pp. 745-60.

until 1841.<sup>5</sup> As a result, historians have often relied on individual local censuses, but such a wealth of detail in a single year can be deceptive: a momentary glimpse is, in isolation, of little use in revealing change and continuity.<sup>6</sup> Historians' use of misleading, incomplete or socially exclusive sources can be just as problematic. Studies for the later eighteenth century might rely on trade directories, which offer a complete absence of workers who belonged to no recognised trade.<sup>7</sup> Studies of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are more likely to use freemen's rolls, which recorded the admission of all freemen to guilds in a town, including their company. They are wonderfully coherent and easy to use, but omit important sectors of work including manual or industrial labour that took place outside the corporate guild structure.<sup>8</sup>

Parish registers provide a much more complete, though still imperfect, picture. They offer a continually changing and relatively inclusive cross-section of society. The Newcastle parish registers are richly detailed and are, therefore, the core of my database and additional work presented here.<sup>9</sup> The registers were principally a record of baptisms, marriages and burials that parishioners could use to prove their origins or 'settlement' in a particular place, often for the purpose of poor relief. It is no coincidence that the spread and preservation of detailed parish registers closely maps the growth of the Elizabethan Poor Law: vagrancy was a politically charged issue, and parish registers and account books were crucial in the management of the poor.<sup>10</sup> While keeping track of the population in geographically large rural parishes presented authorities with problems, it was the busier and denser parishes with a greater turnover in population that struggled most. Paul Griffiths identifies a strict culture of secrecy in managing parish and guild records in seventeenth-century London, in order to monitor their use.<sup>11</sup> It was in monitoring, identifying, and writing down the names of large and changing populations in urban and industrial parishes that more information was required, and therefore that occupations were recorded more consistently. Newcastle's All Saints' parish, for instance, had as many as eight John Thompsons baptising children at the same time. In a parish of perhaps 10,000 people, the clerk needed to record more information in order for him to distinguish between homonymous fathers, so recording 'John Thompson, waterman' instead aided these identifications. It was obviously a time- and paper-

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<sup>5</sup> A.J. and R.H. Tawney, 'An occupational census of the Seventeenth Century', *EcHR*. Vol. 5 (1934), pp. 25-64; E.A. Wrigley, 'The occupational structure of England in the mid-nineteenth century', in *idem*, *Poverty, Progress, and Population* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 129-203; Paul Glennie, *Distinguishing Men's Trades: occupational sources and debates for pre-census England* (Bristol, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Tawney & Tawney, 'Occupational Census', Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Neil Raven, 'Chelmsford during the industrial revolution, c. 1790-1840', *UH*, Vol. 30 (2003), pp. 42-60.

<sup>8</sup> See Sacks, *Widening Gate*; Reed, 'Ipswich'; Langton, 'Residential Patterns', and countless other studies.

<sup>9</sup> For fuller discussion, see Andrew Burn, 'Work and Society in Newcastle upon Tyne, c. 1600-1710', PhD thesis (Durham, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Tate, *Parish Chest*, p. 46; Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c. 1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004), ch. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Griffiths, 'Secrecy and authority in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 40 (1997), pp. 925-51.

consuming process to regularly record occupations on a parish register, and it was only done consistently when external pressure was applied – such as the spike in the 1690s – or when it was absolutely necessary to identify individuals. Despite a generally disappointing level of occupational recording across Durham and Northumberland, Newcastle's parish registers are extraordinarily rich in detail of occupations and sometimes other information such as addresses.<sup>12</sup> There were four principal registers recording in the seventeenth century: St Nicholas' was Newcastle's ecclesiastical parish; St John's, St Andrew's and All Saints' (or Allhallows') were technically chapelries. St Nicholas' register began recording baptisms in 1558 and the others consistently survive from about 1600, running through to the eighteenth century and beyond with very few gaps.<sup>13</sup> The records from All Saints' parish form the core of the database behind my thesis and on which this paper is based. All Saints' was the largest, fastest-growing and poorest of the four parishes, and unsurprisingly its register was the richest in occupational data. In total, there were about 31,000 baptisms and 25,000 burials in All Saints' between 1600 and 1710, and father's occupation was recorded in over 90 per cent of baptism records.<sup>14</sup>

Such extensive coverage of occupations in the baptism register gives a remarkably complete picture of fathers in All Saints' across the entire century.<sup>15</sup> Analysis of the occupational structure here is constructed primarily on the basis of baptisms, for two related reasons. First, a higher proportion of entries record occupations alongside a name – 90 per cent as opposed to 75 per cent on burials – which gives greater confidence that the statistics generated do not misrepresent the population registered. This differential is partly due to life-cycle changes including retirement, which will be discussed in more detail below. Second, baptisms also provide a cross-section, in life-cycle terms, of the adult working population. If we assume that a Newcastle man married and began to have children within a few years of beginning work, and continued having children for a large proportion of his working life, then he will have a continued presence in the baptism register for most of the time he worked. Thus any time period has a chance of including every working man presently baptising children.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Original registers are held at Northumberland Record Office: NRO EP 9/1-7 (All Saints'), EP 86/1-3 (St Nicholas'), EP 13/1-4 (St Andrew's), EP 73/1-5 (St John's). Microfilm copies are held at Tyne and Wear Archives (TWA): MF 249/250 (All Saints'); MF 263 (St Nicholas'); MF 279 (St Andrew's); MF 528 (St John's).

<sup>14</sup> I have compiled all the information from the baptisms and burials, along with related hearth tax and probate inventory information, into the Newcastle Parish Register Database (referenced here as PRD followed by the name of the relevant table). The database is available for consultation on request.

<sup>15</sup> For a fuller study, including explanation of the occupational categories used, see Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 4 and Burn, 'Work Before Play: The Occupational Structure of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1600-1710', in Adrian Green and Barbara Crosbie (eds.), *The Economy and Culture of North East England, 1500-1800* (forthcoming), Ch. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, this has the serious problem of excluding women and working children as well as unmarried men. See Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 4, 7 and 8.

## Occupations from baptisms in all four Newcastle parishes.

		1601-5		1661-5		1701-5	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
<b>Primary</b>		6	1	1	-	108	3
<b>manufacturing</b>	carpentry	39	3	92	3	83	3
	building	39	3	137	5	156	5
	glass	-	-	40	2	38	1
	smiths	70	6	82	3	115	4
	food & drink	65	6	211	8	247	8
	textiles	108	9	248	9	243	8
	leatherwork	107	9	130	5	171	6
	shipbuilding	14	1	146	6	131	4
	surgeons	22	2	57	2	72	2
	household goods	10	1	16	1	20	1
<b>transport</b>	coal transport	107	9	621	24	891	29
	other transport	119	10	210	8	243	8
	total transport	226	20	831	32	1134	37
<b>tertiary</b>	manual labour	115	10	101	4	193	6
	merchant	111	10	201	8	120	4
	professions/service	66	6	130	5	159	5
<b>other</b>	status	158	14	224	9	120	4
	blank/unknown	539	[32]	387	[13]	1153	[35]
<b>total</b>		1693		3020		3326	

Groups directly involved with the Quayside coal trade showed the strongest growth: children baptised to coal transport workers multiplied in number by a factor of eight over the seventeenth century, slightly exceeding the expansion in coal tonnage over the same period. Since coal transport saw few real gains in productivity in this period, it remained a laborious task until the advent of more sophisticated staithes in the early nineteenth century, which loaded boats directly through chutes.<sup>17</sup> Four keelmen (frequently also known as watermen, shovelmen or skippers<sup>18</sup>) would shift as much as 21 tons of coal onto a keel, sailing or oaring it out to the waiting colliers, which often could not venture further up the Tyne than Shields, so clogged was the river with ballast from earlier generations of ships. They then lifted the coal onto the collier through portholes, before returning to Newcastle twelve or fifteen hours later.<sup>19</sup> This was a tough manual job so the growth in the export of coal from the Tyne – which was still tightly controlled by Newcastle's hostmen and so remained within the city – produced a proportional growth in the workforce required to move it. These fathers grew from a peripherally small minority of fathers in Newcastle at the beginning of the seventeenth century to become the largest single group of all workers by the end.

Outside coal transport, it is clear that industries with a direct link to the port prospered alongside shipping and coal, as did others that supplied the growing workforce. In some sectors, the

<sup>17</sup> Nef, *Coal*, I, pp. 387-8.

<sup>18</sup> Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Fewster, *Keelmen*, pp. 3-15.

link with the coal industry was straightforward. Workers involved in shipbuilding were baptising ten times as many children by the end of the century than at the beginning. This was reflected by a growth in the size and prestige of the shipbuilder's guild, which found £500 to rebuild its home in the Wallknoll Tower in 1716.<sup>20</sup> Coal demanded fleets of new ships to fill its growing demand for capacity: already by 1610, the tonnage of coal-trading ships had overhauled that of coastal trading and fisheries, and nearly matched foreign trade.<sup>21</sup> In 1624, the naval commissioners estimated that there were 300 ships involved in the Newcastle coal trade alone, and this would grow to 1,000 by 1700.<sup>22</sup> Glassmaking likewise owed much of its success to coal. An abundance of ballast sand and low coal costs provided the perfect conditions for growth, alongside expanding demand for broadglass and bottles alike, and thick-set green bottles could be manufactured using poor quality, cheap and heavy, coal.<sup>23</sup> Other expanding occupational groups were involved in servicing the growing population which demanded additional provisions. Newcastle's food and drink producers (mostly millers, maltsters, bakers, brewers and butchers) saw an above proportional increase in numbers that was slightly more than proportional. The eighteenth-century historian Henry Bourne noted the proliferation of brewers, bakers and butchers who, along with keelmen and merchants, 'made their living by shipping'.<sup>24</sup>

Newcastle's economy, which since its medieval origins had owed much to the port, depended on it more heavily than ever by 1700. Newcastle was a highly specialised port town even by comparative historical standards. Although differences in the classification of occupations make direct comparisons with other studies difficult, All Saints' was apparently more specialised than either Jeremy Boulton's study of Southwark or Fiona Lewis's work on Liverpool parish registers for the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Although manual work and transport was of crucial importance to St Saviour's in Southwark, making up a third of the baptising fathers, it was even more dominant in All Saints', providing more than half of the fathers. Both Southwark parishes had a higher proportion of fathers working in food manufacture and a variety of typical urban manufactures, including leatherwork and carpentry. Despite these contrasts, the general economic structure in All Saints' was not dissimilar to Southwark. Key characteristics were very little agricultural production, including agriculture and mineral extraction; a large proportion of wage labourers, whether working in boats or in building or similar; and a substantial and reasonably varied manufacturing sector.

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<sup>20</sup> Rowe, *Shipwrights*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Hatcher, *Coal*, p. 471.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473; Nef, *Coal*, I, p. 239.

<sup>23</sup> Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 4; Nef, *Coal*, I, p. 180; Catherine Ross, 'The Development of the Glass Industry on the Rivers Tyne and Wear, 1700-1900', unpublished PhD thesis (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> Bourne, *History*, p. 133.

<sup>25</sup> Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, p. 66; Fiona Lewis, 'The Demographic and Occupational Structure of Liverpool: a study of the parish registers, 1660-1750', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Liverpool, 1993), ch. 3. For more on the methodological difficulties, and for the comparative tables on which this paragraph draws, see Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 4.

Similarly, Newcastle had a smaller population of fathers than Liverpool in all the manufacturing trades, even shipbuilding.<sup>26</sup> Thus as far as comparisons can be made, it is apparent that Newcastle had a larger proportion of its population working in shipping and transport than either Bristol or Southwark in the seventeenth century, or Liverpool in the mid-eighteenth century, when all three areas sustained a large and vibrant water trading culture. Coal was an unusually high-bulk, low-value good, which required a huge workforce to move before mechanisation was fully introduced. Other goods were also moved by hand but the density of coal required a workforce of a different scale entirely. Newcastle, in the process of precocious industrialisation, brought about by the demand for coal, had become a majority proletarian town.

That so many of Newcastle's fathers had become employed labouring on the water has important implications for the structure and practice of work in the town. So far, we have made the implicit assumption that a man's working life can simply be reduced to a single-word tag, and therefore that he can be easily placed in one category or another. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it underestimates occupations that were under-represented amongst the fathers. Second, it oversimplifies the work of wage-labourers in a world where, as Keith Wrightson puts it, 'multiple occupations, or engagement in a series of occupations successively, was a commonplace experience, indeed a necessary expedient'.<sup>27</sup> Just as problematically, many occupations must have had a life-cycle dimension: in Newcastle, heavy lifting for the keelmen is assumed to have made their occupation 'age-specific'.<sup>28</sup> However, it is a real methodological challenge to reconstruct the impact of retirement or multiple occupations in a town with the population turnover of Newcastle. The arrival and departure of individuals, and the substantial overlap of similar and inconsistently spelled surnames, makes 'family reconstitution' from the registers a hazardous task. Such an approach has been applied with some success to large London parishes with the aid of specially designed algorithms which, in particular, allow a computer to perform much of the difficult work of matching names, flagging up where human intervention is required.<sup>29</sup> But it remains difficult work, and what follows is a small-scale reconstruction of individual lives in the town, which will demonstrate a few indicative patterns in occupational change over lifetimes. All Saints' 28,000 seventeenth-century baptisms have been whittled down to about 10,000 individual fathers through

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<sup>26</sup> Depending if the manual labour category is included, as it is not clear how Lewis categorised manual labourers. Perhaps Liverpool did not have any generic labourers recorded, or she perhaps put them into the 'building' category, in which case their numbers must still have been very small.

<sup>27</sup> Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, pp. 308-17.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, 'dynamic society', p. 210.

<sup>29</sup> This is largely a collaborative effort between the Cambridge Group and the Centre for Metropolitan History at the IHR: <<http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/earlymodernlondon/>>. See Gill Newton, 'Family reconstitution in an urban context: some observations and methods', *CWPESH* no. 12 (2013), pp. 12-18

linking their names.<sup>30</sup> One key limitation of this procedure is that baptisms that shared the same father's name have commonly been linked with the help of the occupation. Where the fathers have proved impossible to disaggregate, they have all been entered separately. This undoubtedly caused an overestimate of the total number of fathers, and an underestimate of the scale of mobility between occupations. In order to make some comment on the lives of fathers after their child-bearing age, a random sample of 500 fathers (i.e. just under 5 per cent) were searched in All Saints' burials; 203 (41 per cent) were linked successfully with their burial.<sup>31</sup> The same group was also studied in more depth over their fertile life.

It is clear that Newcastle's industrial workers experienced more occupational intermixing than has usually attributed to them, since historians have consistently emphasised the keelmen's estrangement from the town's other workers. Joyce Ellis wrote of an extraordinary degree of social polarisation in the town, driven principally by its main export.<sup>32</sup> Joseph Fewster, the keelmen's most noted historian, draws the boundary the basis of occupation rather than class:

The keelmen and their families formed a distinct and close-knit community in and near Newcastle. They generally intermarried and many of their sons followed their fathers' education. They spoke a 'singular Tyneside dialect' with a 'strange laughable vocabulary...entirely their own', and could be easily identified by their dress, especially a blue bonnet...<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that historians have painted the keelmen as a 'race apart' that only ever worked on the water, the registers reveal that Newcastle's coal transport workers could be more flexible in their work. This they held in common with labourers in other towns, but it made them notably different from the Whickham coal miners studied by Levine and Wrightson.<sup>34</sup> Newcastle's urban economy set it apart in the region as a place with a broader and more flexible labour market, in common with other northern towns. Donald Woodward notes that building craftsmen frequently required the input of 'brute force'. Each role would have a different title ('barrowman', 'bricky's labourer', or 'free labourer') but none of the roles required any particular skill or training. Indeed, York's council resorted to forcing labourers working at the staithes to purchase their own distinctive clothing, in the shape of 'a harden shirt with sleeves, and the porters likewise harden shirts with hoods' to limit worker turnover and protect their monopoly.<sup>35</sup> Jeremy Boulton identified a pattern of

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<sup>30</sup> Nb. This was a necessary precursor to linking fathers' occupations with hearth tax records, presented more fully in Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Selected using a 'random' number generator from fathers who baptised children between 1620 and 1680, in order to maximise the potential for links forward and backwards. The same sample of 500 fathers was searched in the baptism registers in an attempt to recover both their age at death and their father's occupation. This was much less successful, yielding only 80 links altogether, probably because of Newcastle's 1636 plague, which killed roughly half of the population, causing an abrupt turnover. See Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ellis, 'Dynamic Society', pp. 209-12.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph M. Fewster, *The Keelmen of Tyneside* (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, pp. 227-30.

<sup>35</sup> Woodward, *Men at Work*, pp. 94-5.

changing occupations for twenty individuals in Southwark, which included Henry Stanfield as 'labourer, tapster and plasterer'.<sup>36</sup>

That Newcastle's fathers sustained more than one occupational identity at any one time is a real possibility, but such multiple identities were not recognised by the parish authorities. Few individual records explicitly referenced more than one occupation for a father on the same baptism. In an exceptional case, William Dixon baptised his daughter Jane in June 1695, and was described in the register as 'waterman & glassman', having apparently baptised four previous children in the parish.<sup>37</sup> In all other cases, he was described merely as 'waterman'. This suggests that he worked an unskilled task at the glasshouses while also continuing his role on the water: perhaps he transported glass for the glasshouses, or worked on the keels in the summer and glass in the winter. He would not have been alone: Joseph Reed registered his children at All Saints' as a workman, a skipper, a servant, and a glassman; John Glen was periodically a yeoman, waterman and glassman.<sup>38</sup> Many occupations could coexist with 'labour' or a transport job in a working lifetime. Richard Readhead was recorded on separate occasions between 1602 and 1620 as a carpenter, shipwright and mariner. Cuthbert Grocer, in spite of his surname, baptised five children in the 1660s and 70s as a mariner and one as a brickmaker. William Carnaby was recorded on separate occasions as a shipwright, labourer and a mason. Thomas Thackeray was recorded in the 1670s four times as being a shipwright, with an interval where he was recorded twice as a mariner. William Palmer at the beginning of the 1620s was recorded separately as a mariner and a shipwright and Robert Davison was recorded separately as a labourer, shovelman, joiner and keelman.<sup>39</sup> Although the recording of two occupations at the same time was rare, more than one over a lifetime was more common amongst labourers and watermen. Merchants and very high status professionals seldom had any other recorded occupation. More likely, 'labourer', 'waterman' or 'keelman' was combined with another manual trade. Of those fathers with three or more baptisms to their name whose *most common* occupation was either a waterman or labourer – 1410 men in all – 104, or 7.4 per cent, also held a manufacturing occupation at some point in their fertile lives, and a further five men held extractive occupations as pitmen or quarrymen. The crude methodology used here makes it difficult to be more precise, but it seems there was little pattern in the types of trades that frequently mixed with manual labour.<sup>40</sup> The other recorded occupations for these mixed-occupation fathers included bakers, housewrights, shipwrights, cordwainers, tanners, tailors and barber surgeons. There were

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<sup>36</sup> Boulton, *Neighbourhood*, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> PRD/Fathers/dixon.wm.18.

<sup>38</sup> PRD/Fathers/reed.joseph.1, glen.john

<sup>39</sup> PRD/Fathers/glen.john, readhead.rich, grocer.cuth, carnaby.wm, thackery.tho.1, palmer.wm, davison.rob.1.

<sup>40</sup> See PRD/Qfathers\_modeocc. Note that the crude methodology in doing this (finding the minimum and mode occupational codes, and selecting those with a mode of 2201 or 2301 and a minimum of below 2201) means that some of these men had more than one 'manufacturing' occupation. It would therefore be inaccurate to draw firm conclusions from these data about the most common jobs.



both indoor and outdoor trades, 'dirty' and 'clean'; and included manufacturing food as well as carrying bricks.<sup>41</sup>

A closer analysis of the sample of 500 fathers offers more detail. Here, 40 men, or 8 per cent of the total had a significant job change in their baptising life.<sup>42</sup> If we exclude the 141 men in the sample that only baptised one child in Newcastle, that percentage rises to 11. What are the common themes here? A number of the men moved from a trade to a life on the water. Charles Billing, for instance, had two sons while he was a baker, before switching jobs to become a mariner in the middle of the 1660s. Andrew Pringle, who had a very uncommon name in Newcastle, was a workman then a miller in the 1650s before switching to the water in 1657.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, George Lumsdale transitioned from a shovelman and labourer to become a mariner, a shift that in reality probably meant a move from boats confined to the River Tyne to trading ships that plied the east coast trade or further afield.<sup>44</sup> Twenty years earlier, in the previous substantial coal boom, Stephen Mow shifted from being a labourer to becoming a 'shovelman'. While his living still relied on back-breaking work, he was now associated with the coal industry. John Stagg, over just six children, was recorded with five separate occupations: shovelman, waterman (though these two were virtually synonymous), cordwainer, labourer and mariner.<sup>45</sup>

Thus there was considerable flexibility within and between a wide range of Newcastle occupations. But a common factor between them was that men would be described at some point as either a labourer or a keelman or waterman. Most commonly, these were not highly skilled craftsman, but rather labourers who took the occupational title for or with whom they were working. Such labourers, it should be said, were not entirely unskilled. William Yarrow caused outrage amongst Newcastle bricklayers in 1749 'for saying he had wrought at London with labourers as good as any bricklayers in the company'.<sup>46</sup> Newcastle craftsmen would have expected a certain co-ordinated physical ability with a range of tools, albeit without a certain mastery that only came with acceptance to the guild.<sup>47</sup> Outside the highly organised and meticulously recorded hub of the productive guilds was a community of workers that were not tied to a particular occupation, but nor did they benefit from its security. As Newcastle's economy specialised towards coal across the seventeenth century, the proportion of the town's that specialised in this area grew, but the evidence here has made clear that they were not exclusively tied to one occupation.

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<sup>41</sup> Two men that were watermen and food producers were PRD/Father/mitchelson.wm, bone.geo.1.

<sup>42</sup> Significant in the sense of moving category in my classification, rather than minor semantic differences.

<sup>43</sup> PRD/Fathers/ billin.char, pringle.andr

<sup>44</sup> PRD/Fathers/lumsdale.geo.3

<sup>45</sup> PRD/Fathers/ mow.steph , stagg.john. Both these surnames were unusual, so the links can be quite certain.

<sup>46</sup> Woodward, *Men at Work*, p. 94.

<sup>47</sup> Nb. Craig Muldrew has recently been keen to disentangle 'unskilled' and 'labourer', arguing that their combination is often anachronistic. See Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 19. Cf. the expressly skilful Derbyshire lead miners in Andy Wood, *The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 24, 174.

Switching occupations within a lifetime was not a universal experience by any means, but nor was it entirely uncommon.

Despite this persistent occupational instability, the burial register indicates that the majority of Newcastle men retained their lifetime occupational identity through to the grave. From the sample of 500 fathers, 188 men had occupations recorded in both the baptism and burial registers, and three-quarters of these retained the same occupation at burial as they had in their fertile life. Undoubtedly, old age severely limited the amount of work that men could actually perform, even in ostensibly 'easier' occupations. A capper in medieval Coventry could expect his career to be over by the age of 50, and Adam Smith remarked of London carpenters that they could only manage eight years of 'utmost vigour'.<sup>48</sup> Yet Newcastle's craftsmen typically held on to their craft affiliations at burial, whether they still practised their trade or not, and indeed the guilds themselves were heavily involved in the organisation and regulation of their members' funerals well into the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Brown could feasibly have still been working when he died in 1677, at the age of 55, only three years after baptising his son John: that he was still described as a 'cooper' at his burial is probably an accurate description of his occupation when he died. This seems less likely in the case of George Cram, who was described as a 'mason' on his burial entry in 1695, when he died at the age of 62 after baptising seven children between 1663 and 1676, and even less likely for Thomas Peacock, who recorded as 'shipwright' at his burial in 1695, at the age of 72, and having baptised his last child 24 years before.

As members of Newcastle's guilds grew older, they normally retained their occupational title, but the same cannot be said for the town's poorer workers. Keelmen were less likely to retain the same occupational identity to their burial than any other occupational group. Surely they could sustain work for a shorter span than a London carpenter; there can be no suggestion that shifting coal on the Tyne was a job for old men. It was supremely physical, as we have seen, requiring, in the words of a nineteenth-century commentator, 'a combination of nervous and muscular strength not to be found in any other class of men'.<sup>50</sup> The keel itself was roughly oval in shape, 15m long and 93 wide, with a large open hold and very little deck space, so 'something akin to sea-legs' was required to remain on the boat in rough seas.<sup>51</sup> Working on the water as a waterman, mariner or keelman extracted a death toll that was probably higher than other occupations. Storms could be lethal, and keelmen were particularly hesitant to work near the mouth of the River Tyne, where their small boats were frequently swept out to sea. Death was never far away for keelmen, and by the

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<sup>48</sup> Boulton, *Neighbourhood*, p. 155.

<sup>49</sup> Rebecca King, 'The Sociability of the Trade Guilds of Newcastle and Durham, 1660-1750: The Urban Renaissance Revisited', in Helen Berry and Jeremy Gregory (eds.), *Creating and Consuming Culture in North-East England, 1660-1830* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 57-71.

<sup>50</sup> John Baillie, *An Impartial History of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1801), p. 142.

<sup>51</sup> Fewster, *Keelmen*, p. 2.

eighteenth century it had worked its way into their musical culture, with continuous reference to wives' concern for the husbands' safety. In one example a girl asks after her keelman-sweetheart, only to be met with a macabre response:

Yes, I've seen your bonny lad,  
'Twas on the sea I spied him,  
His grave is green, but not wi' grass,  
And thou'lt never lie aside him.<sup>52</sup>

It would be impossible to be certain of the numbers of keelmen who died but All Saints' burials do offer a few clues. In all, 227 men were recorded as 'drowned' in the burial register, of which 35 were identified as mariners, 34 as keelmen, and 13 as labourers; the rest were given no occupational tag. How many of the watermen and mariners recorded on the burial register were killed in their line of work is uncertain, but it was many more than those explicitly recorded as drowned. Others would have been permanently incapacitated by work, but in the absence of any reliable poor relief records, or registers for the keelmen's self-built hospital, which dates to 1701, this will remain speculative.<sup>53</sup> Andrew Pringle, the miller-keelman, was recorded as 'blind' on his burial, an indication that incapacity kept him from work in his later life.

This danger makes it surprising that coal transport workers were significantly under-recorded in burials compared to baptisms (see bar chart below), a phenomenon that was later echoed in Liverpool amongst the community of sailors. It is difficult to explain. Certainly, as Fiona Lewis argues for Liverpool, a number of mariners were lost without trace at sea, and therefore would remain unrecorded, but this would surely have been rarer amongst keelmen, who remained for the most part within the limits of the River Tyne.<sup>54</sup> In reality the causes of this under-recording were more social and economic. A systematic comparison of the occupational structure of All Saints' baptisms and burials sheds some light on this question. The three areas which were over-represented in burials compared with baptisms were household service, general status terms, and manual labour. The general 'service' group in All Saints' burial record probably also included deceased apprentices: 'John Smith's man' would be classified as a 'servant' but if Smith were a carpenter, the 'man' could in fact have been an apprentice. The over-representation of this combined group can be explained in terms of the life cycle: male household servants and apprentices would usually be young and unmarried, and therefore unlikely to have baptised children. They were more 'at risk' to be buried than they were to baptise children, and so were over-represented in the burial register.

The comparative over-representation of status terms and labourers in the burials was also due to the life cycle. But the sample of 500 fathers makes it clear that these occupational labels were

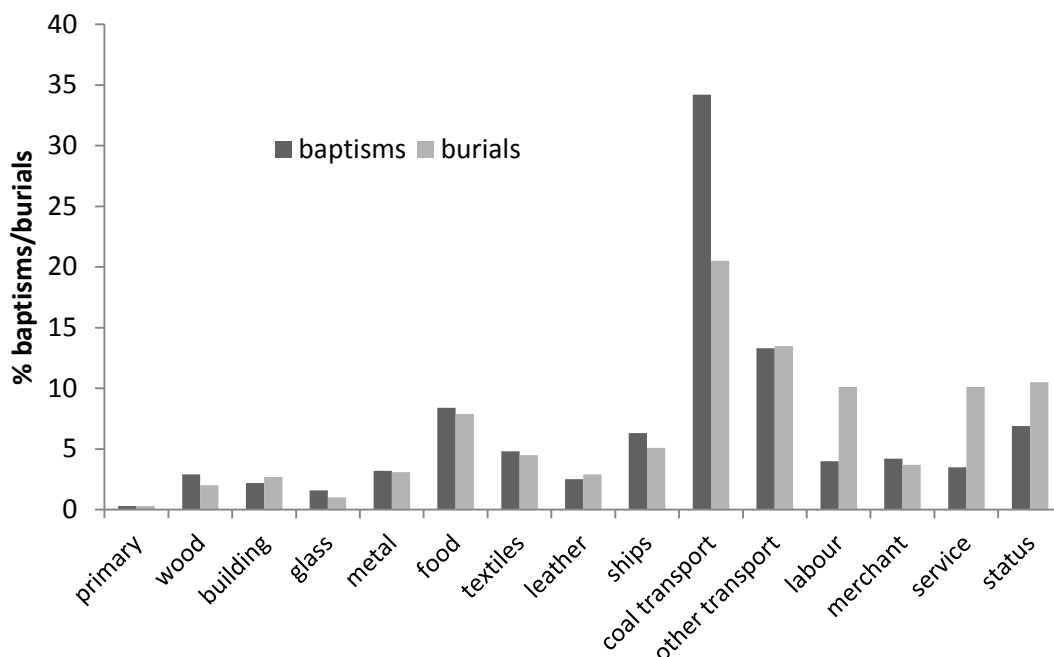
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<sup>52</sup> W.G. Whittaker, *North Countrie Ballads, Songs and Pipe Tunes, For Use in Home and School* (London, 1921).

<sup>53</sup> See Burn, 'Work and Society', Ch. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Lewis, 'Liverpool', p. 56.

Occupations of fathers on baptism register and adult men buried, All Saints' parish, 1600-1700



applied most commonly to older men who had moved on from their previous work. 'Yeoman', a term with a wide range of meanings that was most consistently applied to substantial farmers, seems to have meant something rather different in Newcastle.<sup>55</sup> Here it was the self-description of choice for retired men who did not retain a guild occupational identity. It was frequently used in wills, for example, by men who were identified by others as having a different occupation. John Turner, Thomas Dods and Thomas Hall all described themselves as 'yeoman' in their own wills, but were identified by their inventory appraisers as 'keelman'.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Thomas Roper and David Lee considered themselves yeomen but were designated by their peers as 'labourer'.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps these men felt that the term conferred them a status that their occupational descriptor denied – the fact that they were inventoried after their deaths does, after all, mean that they were better off than most keelmen and labourers. But in reality they joined a substantial proportion of others who were identified by only status terms at their burials: just under a third of the men who switched occupations between having their children and their own death took yeoman as a title. Moreover, they were disproportionately keelmen in their earlier lives. Although, in all, keelmen formed only 35 per cent of the full sample of 500 men, they made up 64 per cent of those who had changed to yeoman by their burial.

In a similar vein, older men who could no longer practise their heavily physical occupations from earlier life would frequently be listed as labourer or workman at their burial. Many needed the money that casual labour afforded to supplement an insufficient parish pension. Despite their

<sup>55</sup> Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, pp. 53-5, 273-89.

<sup>56</sup> Durham University Library (DUL) probate collection: DPRI/1/1625/T6/, DPRI/1/1636/D3/, DPRI/1/1694/H3/.

<sup>57</sup> DUL DPRI/1/1642/L1/, DPRI/1/1691/R14/.

reduced physical power and productivity, older labourers were sometimes kept on at lower pay: the Newcastle Corporation paid a gang of 'old labourers' 2d per ton to shift ballast away from the south shore of the Tyne in the years around 1600.<sup>58</sup> The threat of plague in 1594 led the concerned town council to pay James Redheed 12d 'for goinge aborde of a ship for searching of a man that died, for fere of the plague'. And in 1655, Trinity House hired two labourers for 'a day counting bricks and piling them'.<sup>59</sup> George Pinkney, who had been a keelman in earlier life, was buried as the All Saints' 'gravemaker'.<sup>60</sup> In any of this casual labour, older keelmen who could not afford to simply retire could find other sources of income to keep them and their families in old age. These jobs might not have been regular or consistent, but they all came under the catch-all terms 'labourer' or 'workman'. For this reason, a substantial swathe of Newcastle men in the reconstitution sample moved away from their original occupations towards the more general terms. Of the 47 men who made a substantial change between baptisms and their own burial, 24 (51 per cent) made this change towards a general labouring tag; this was in turn 13 per cent of *all fathers* in the sample for whom the baptisms of their children and their own burial could be traced. Again – as with the shift to yeoman – it applied most commonly to keelmen: they made up 63 per cent of men who changed occupation towards labour. Extrapolated outwards to all fathers in Newcastle, this would be a remarkable life-cycle occupational shift for those men whose ageing bodies no longer allowed them to participate in the most physically demanding work.

This finding has further implications for the use of parish registers to reconstruct occupational structure in towns like Newcastle, whose economy demanded a high proportion of extravagantly physical labour. There is no doubt that both baptism and burial registers distort the whole picture to some extent, but it is clear that the burial register in particular gives an unrepresentative sample of workers. Not only did deficiencies in registration due to nonconformity or the avoidance of burial fees cause some men to be missing from burials, but more importantly, a proportion of men systematically moved away from the occupation practised for much of their lives to another occupation by the time of their death. This is unfortunate in some ways, because the single point provided by a burial is much easier to interpret than the noise of a baptism register where a small but persistent proportion of men regularly changed jobs between children. But a fuller understanding of ordinary labouring work that was practised by increasing numbers in towns like Newcastle across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – and indeed in other towns in England and across the North Sea, as well as further afield – requires us to embrace some of this messy reality.

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<sup>58</sup> Tyne and Wear Archives Service (TWA) 543/19; Woodward, *Men at Work*, p. 94.

<sup>59</sup> TWA 659/449.

<sup>60</sup> PRD/fathers/pinkney.geo.