

The apprenticeship indentures were impressive documents, often about a yard wide. Copies were made for all the parties concerned. The occasion was serious and important with obligations agreed on all sides. There were many signatures and seals --- the four Brabin's Trustees signed, the boy and his Parent or Guardian, the master who was to take the boy, and witnesses. Sometimes the boy was able to sign his name, but his parent or his master could not, and merely put a cross.

In the contract the apprentice agreed he would not marry or commit adultery, or keep evil company, frequent alehouses, or gaming houses, play cards or dice etc. He also had to promise to keep the master's secrets and obey his lawful commands. He had to live in the master's family, in effect as if he was one of the family. He couldn't travel without permission. Indeed it was only after the contract ended that the apprentice became a "journeyman" and was free to leave and find work where he wished.

The master had to promise to teach and instruct the boy and provide him with wearing apparel, washing and lodging, and wholesome food and drink, and at the end of the apprenticeship fit him out with clothes at least as good as those he arrived in.

The Charity supplied the apprentices with clothing for starting work. Sometimes in the accounts this is described in detail, and sometimes just as their "parcel". In other cases the materials to be used by a tailor to make the clothes are listed and even items for a particular trade. For example, in 1740, George Hodgkinson of Leagram was given lengths of kersey (coarse woollen cloth), and canvas and silk cloth, coat and breast buttons, thread and tape, a hat and a skin. William Hayhurst, in 1741, was given similar items and also a brat.

The apprenticeship system may appear rather an upheaval for 14 year olds, but the Trustees did show some compassion. Many boys were apprenticed to members of their own family. For example, in 1856, William Marsland, was sent as apprentice to his uncle John Marsland in Warth, Rossendale, to become a machine maker. In 1820 James Walne of Chipping was apprenticed to his father William Walne, cordwainer. In 1827 John Bond son of Ann Bond of Chipping, was bound to his grandfather, John Bond of Chipping, iron turner. In such cases the payments to the "master" would probably help the family as a whole.

Some masters had once been Brabin's apprentices themselves and perhaps could be readily persuaded by the Trustees to take boys. In 1811, Thomas Coats was apprenticed by the Charity to become a clogger. By 1856 this same Thomas Coats was a clogger in Bury and took a Brabin's apprentice, Charles Wilson, son of James Wilson of Chipping, labourer.

The apprenticeship system explains changes of address and fortune. Most boys worked in the Chipping area, but some travelled away and never returned to work locally.

According to the surviving documents, the farthest a boy was apprenticed was Ashton-under-Lyne, where George Ellison, son of Thomas Ellison, labourer, went to train as a plumber, glazier and painter with John Ellison (a relation?) in 1850. Some married in the district where they had been apprenticed. Henry Procter, son of Michael Procter of Chipping was apprenticed to shoemaker Charles Dunderdale of Barnacre in 1841. Seven years later, having completed his apprenticeship, he married Frances Dolphin at Garstang. We wonder what happened to Henry Knowles after 1733 when his father made an unusual arrangement with the Brabin's Trustees. Henry was given materials for clothing, and paper to the value of five pence, and sent "to the writing school (clerical and commercial training) and from thence to sea from Liverpool".

A.R. & M.Lord.

*Brabin's Charity apprenticeship indentures are at the Lancashire Record Office, ref. DDX 1174 6/1-109. Chipping Local History Society has an index to these documents.*

