Men at Work

Labourers and building craftsmen in the towns of northern England, 1450–1750

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Introduction

Two essentially different types of workmen are considered in this book, labourers and building craftsmen. Although they could often be found working side by side, their position in the labour market and the niches they occupied in urban society were markedly different. Labourers were often called in to assist their more skilled neighbours, but they frequently worked in gangs, large and small, on tasks which did not involve craftsmen: they cleansed the highways, emptied latrine barrels, scoured ditches, removed dead horses from fresh water-channels, and accomplished a thousand and one tasks which did not require specialist skills. They, and their rural counterparts, were the true wage-earners of late-medieval and early-modern England, selling their labour for cash, although it is not to be imagined that, even in the towns, they derived the whole of their incomes from wage-earning. Labourers were usually hired by the day, and provided by their employers with the tools and raw materials with which they worked.

Building craftsmen were a different breed. Strictly speaking many of them were not wage-earners in the modern sense of the term. Master craftsmen were 'small masters' or petty entrepreneurs, possessing their own tools and often supplying the raw materials for the task in hand.[1] In addition to their own labour they were often accompanied by an apprentice and one or more journeymen, who were in a state of dependency, working only for their wages and, in some cases, for their keep. But the position of some journeymen was not permanent, and they could dream of joining the ranks of the town masters or moving to a more independent position elsewhere.[2] In supplying raw materials and the labour of others early-modern building craftsmen

[1] Woodward 1981; Knoop & Jones 1949, 94–5. [2] See below pp. 64–72.

resemble the small-scale jobbing plumbers and joiners of modern times, who make profits from their activities in addition to the 'wages' they receive for the hire of their own time, rather than the true wage-earners who toil on the shop floor. Nevertheless, in early-modern accounts building craftsmen frequently resemble wage-earners pure and simple. This is because of the nature of much building work. A shoemaker, tailor, or candle-maker could incorporate the value of his labour – and that of his assistants – in the selling price of an easily recognised and easily valued final product. Such artisans, working with their own tools in their own workshops and marketing their own products, have long been recognised as small-scale, independent producers: 'the worker is, in a sense, his own employer, making and selling his own product, and retaining for himself any surplus or "net revenue" above the cost of his own materials and his own subsistence'.[3] For building craftsmen things were not so simple. Sometimes they worked by the piece – paving at so much a square yard or casting lead at so much a stone – and sometimes they contracted to build a structure for a set price, but often this was neither possible nor desirable. More frequently, building craftsmen were paid according to the value of the inputs they made, their labour being paid for at a set rate by the day. But the receipt of such a 'wage' did not convert the early-modern building craftsman into a wage-earner in the modern sense. According to the accounts of the larger institutions of northern England, some building craftsmen were employed for weeks or months on end on the same project, and they take on the appearance of wage-earners: but when the same men worked for a day or two repairing broken pews or damaged flagstones in their parish churches they appear in their true colours as independent businessmen, providing raw materials and any extra labour needed.

When discussing building craftsmen historians think of those who set them to work as their employers. But this is to mistake the relationship. Master craftsmen were hired for a particular task by their customers. When jobs continued over long periods, and particularly when the customer provided the raw materials, the craftsman closely resembled a wage-earner, but he did not lose his basic independence. Once the project was complete the craftsman would move on to work for another customer. Of course the journeymen involved remained with their employers, the master craftsmen: such journeymen were true proletarians.

Previous attempts to discuss shifts in living standards in early-

[3] Dobb 1960, 3–4.

modern England have been based predominantly on the mass of wage and price data collected by Thorold Rogers and Beveridge, mostly for the south east. This material, digested for more widespread consumption by Phelps Brown and Sheila Hopkins in the 1950s, demonstrated that, starting from a high point in the later fifteenth century, the living standards of building workers and labourers drifted downwards for much of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries, before recovering somewhat in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[4] The belief that the study of the wage rates of a single segment of the labour market in relation to price movements could stand as a proxy for more general changes in the quality of life has been widely criticised. It has been argued that many workers were not so dependent on their wages as they are today and often derived only a part of their needs from the market. Moreover, we may know a great deal about wage rates, but little about annual incomes since we remain ignorant of the number of days worked each year. Additionally, some workers were cushioned against the full rigours of rising prices by being fed by those who set them to work. The prices used to construct cost-of-living indices are wholesale prices rather than the retail prices which affected ordinary consumers and which rose less steeply during inflationary periods.[5] A further problem, and one not previously confronted, is that the mass of data accumulated for the south-east of England has not been tested against material from other regions. This book will attempt to confront each of these issues through the discussion of large amounts of information derived from the wide range of accounts available for the north of England over the three centuries after 1450.

Readers of this book may wonder why building workers are being subjected to such detailed examination. Have we not heard enough about their earnings and work practices from others?[6] Why not study other groups of urban workers? One answer is that this book is not simply about building workers: there is also a great deal of discussion of labourers, who often worked independently of building craftsmen. Nevertheless, much time is devoted to building workers. This is unavoidable, since information about other kinds of workers is extremely scarce. The research on which this book is based has uncovered information relating to the payments made for many scores of thousands of man-days completed by labourers and building craftsmen, but there are only four references to the wages paid to other types of

[4] Rogers 1882–7; Beveridge 1939; Brown & Hopkins 1981.
[5] For a review of this literature, see Woodward 1981, 29–31; Rappaport 1989, 151–3.
[6] Rogers 1908; Knoop & Jones 1949; Salzman 1952; Brown & Hopkins 1981.

craftsmen: at York in 1538 a tailor helped for seven-and-a-half days making new vestments and copes for St Michael's, Spurriergate, and he was paid 6d a day, the rate the carpenters and tilers were receiving; at Hull in 1585 a fletcher was employed at 9d a day for twenty-nine days, and nearly half a century later a Newcastle fletcher received 16d for a day's work – in each case building craftsmen were being paid at the same rate; finally, 8d was paid 'to the tree-lopper for one day's work' at Hull Trinity House in 1619, which was the standard rate for labourers at the time.[7] It is impossible from such snippets of information to comment on the typicality of the levels of pay received by labourers and building craftsmen, but there seems little reason to doubt that the real wages of many other workers deteriorated during the years of inflation, and that the experiences of labourers and building craftsmen will stand proxy for other manual workers. In a period characterised by generous supplies of labour it is unlikely that most members of the labouring population would have fared significantly better than others for more than short intervals.[8] Moreover, although the evidence she used was not particularly plentiful, this was the position taken by Elizabeth Gilboy: she believed that building-trade wages in eighteenth-century London were not seriously unrepresentative of the manual trades in general.[9]

The variety of projects which involved the hire of labourers and building craftsmen was extraordinarily wide. Some projects were enormous. During the 1540s hundreds of workmen were gathered together for two major projects – the construction of Tynemouth Castle and the erection of new defences on the eastern bank of the river Hull to secure the harbour: unfortunately the detailed accounts of neither project have survived although more than £21,000 was spent at Hull in just over two years.[10] At the other extreme, labourers and building craftsmen were often employed for a day or two, or sometimes for part of a day, to make some minor repair or refurbishment. In 1666 the accountant at Hull Trinity House paid 6d 'for mortaring holes in the sail chamber where rats got in', and in 1720 the churchwardens of St Mary's paid the bricklayer, John Wiseman, 18d for 'paving over Benjamin Blaydes' grave': he got only 6d for the smaller task of 'paving over Mr Wilberforce's child's grave'.[11]

[7] YBI, PR/Y/MS/1, fo. 143v; HCRO, BRF/3/5; TWAS, 659/446; HTH, III, fo. 219r.

[8] A similar comment was made by Joel Mokyr at the conference on pre-industrial consumption patterns held at the Institute of Historical Research, London, on 2 May 1992.

[9] Gilboy 1934, 18–19.

[10] Colvin 1982, 472–7, 682–4; *VCH Hull*, 414.

[11] HTH, V; HCORO, PE/185/35, fo. 3r.

The accounts of churches, large and small, have provided a large amount of information for this project, although most new building and much of the large-scale work related to secular buildings, especially after the Reformation. The spectacular phase of church building was largely over by the later fifteenth century. The most evocative echo of an earlier age is provided by the accounts of the churchwardens for Louth which detail the erection of the church's soaring steeple in the first two decades of the sixteenth century at a cost of nearly £300.[12] But most churchwardens' accounts merely record the daily minutiae of small-scale repair work, or larger projects which could not be put off any longer: in 1657 the churchwardens of St Mary's, Chester, dutifully recorded the long process of mending the steeple and bells 'ruined by fire in the late war'. At the same church one of the most common tasks began to cause difficulty in the late sixteenth century:

> Whereas 12d was paid for a 'leastall' or burial place in the church within the forms, and 16d in the aisles out of the forms, and very many desired to lie in the church because of the small charges; insomuch that great inconvenience has happened, and the church almost filled with new graves, with great danger both to infect the people with noisome smells of dead bodies too timely taken up, and likewise (which is most horrible) to crush in pieces and break asunder with spades the flesh and bones of Christian bodies before they were half rotten.

An additional problem lay in the cost of 'taking up and setting down forms, and paying for tiles and covering graves'. The church authorities took steps to husband their scarce resource by increasing the fee for those wishing to be buried in the church to 3s 4d for parishioners and to 10s for outsiders.[13] The accounts of the cathedrals of Durham, Lincoln, and York also furnish a great deal of the material. At times major jobs were in hand, such as the complete renewal of the lead covering of the roof of Lincoln Cathedral during the 1660s,[14] but as in the lesser churches much of the work involved routine day-to-day repairs.

The records of the civic authorities provide even more information. Town councils spent a great deal of money making urgent repairs to their property and, more occasionally, building new structures. At Carlisle, repairs were frequently made to the town hall, while at Kendal much of the work involved repairs to the town mill and its weir.[15] At the ports of Chester, Hull, and Newcastle large sums had to be spent repairing wharfs, jetties, and staithes. A petition from the Hull

[12] *Louth Accts.* [13] CCORO, P/20/13/1. [14] See below pp. 21, 42, 43.
[15] CUMROC, Ca/4/1–6; CUMROK, WSMB/K.

council to Elizabeth I mentioned expenditure on the jetties damaged 'through the great rage of the water of Humber', and in the mid seventeenth century blame was placed on 'the last raging wind and spring tide which broke forth at the foul south end'.[16] In April 1668 a large band of carpenters and labourers, supplemented for a day by ten soldiers, struggled to close a breach on the east bank of the river Hull. New piles were prepared, and Richard Emerson, the chief carpenter, spent six days 'fitting the gin and setting stages for driving piles'. The whole job, which was completed by the end of May, involved 328 man-days. This was just a small part of the substantial programme of work maintained by the Hull council which included expensive repairs to the town defences: in the twenty-six years after 1653/4 the council spent an annual average on such works of just under £290, ranging from the £52 spent in the first year to £726 spent in 1672/3.[17]

The most spectacular single project mounted by a town council was the rebuilding of Ouse Bridge at York after the wooden structure had been swept away in January 1565. During the hard winter of 1564/5 ice had piled up against the timbers of the old bridge and a sudden thaw on 6 January caused 'such a water that it overthrew two bows with one arch and twelve houses standing upon the same bridge, and by the fall thereof was drowned twelve persons'. Detailed accounts of the rebuilding have not survived, but the summary accounts make it plain that a temporary wooden pontoon bridge 'with ketches lying under the same' was thrown across the river at a cost of nearly £180. Just over £121 was spent for 'making one ark or case [a coffer dam] and a jetty for avoiding the water, that the masons may work Ouse Bridge that was cast down with the great flood'. The cost of the whole enterprise is not known. The new bridge had six arches and was referred to by Camden as 'a stone bridge, with the largest arch I have ever seen', and it continued to excite visitors to the city until it was replaced in the early nineteenth century.[18]

Valuable information has also been drawn from the accounts of the Trinity Houses of both Hull and Newcastle. At Newcastle the accounts do not begin until the 1620s, but they are particularly useful for the 1630s when a substantial rebuilding programme was put in hand. The Hull accounts, by contrast, begin in the 1460s and run to the end of the period in a sequence seriously broken only in the late fifteenth and

[16] HCRO, BRL/1397; BRF/3/20, p. 31. The 'Foul South End' was so called because rubbish was customarily heaved into the Humber at that point.

[17] HCRO, BRF/3/20.

[18] Palliser 1979, 266–7; YCA, CC5, fos. 113–20; *York Descriptions*, 8, 11, 20–1, 23, 25, 33. See also the many references in *YCR*, VI.

early sixteenth centuries. As well as maintaining the fabric of the House and other properties, a great deal was spent on the buoys and beacons which marked the Humber, and on the 'dolphin', a piled stucture in the mouth of the river Hull used to warp vessels in and out of the haven. A new dolphin, which involved the use of 'the gin to drive piles' was built in the summer of 1656 at a cost of £152 12s 10d.[19] Extensive repairs were necessary from time to time when the structure was damaged by the action of the tides or negligence of the ships' masters whose vessels collided with it.

Most of the evidence for this study is derived from the surviving records of public and private institutions, but it seems likely that the bulk of the work of both labourers and building craftsmen was for private customers whose records have not survived. Much of their time was probably spent doing small jobs which involved their moving from site to site, often working in different places during a single week, much as small jobbing building craftsmen do today. Indeed, thin though the evidence is, it must be suspected that for many 'life was a constant round of repairing doors, windows, roofs and pavements'.[20]

Any division of the country into regions is bound to be somewhat arbitrary and for the purpose of this book the north of England is taken to be the area north of a line drawn between Chester and Lincoln. This will upset those who would place Lincoln in the East Midlands, although the town is as far north as Chester, and Hull – regarded by Newcastle folk as being a long way south – is as far north as Preston. Perceptions of what is the north are bedevilled by the behaviour of the Scottish border which runs crazily in a north-north-east direction from Carlisle, leaving Lincoln some 200 miles from its eastern end, but Chester only about 130 miles from its western extremity. Within this northern region towns have not been chosen for study at random, nor for their long-term economic significance: those places which feature prominently in the account which follows appear because of the quality and quantity of their records. The major focus is on towns which were either ancient boroughs – Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Hull, Lincoln, Newcastle, and York – or, like Beverley and Kendal, were incorporated in the later sixteenth century. The bureaucracies of such towns compiled a range of accounts which are not available for towns such as Leeds, Manchester, and Sheffield, which were beginning to make a major impact on the urban hierarchy of the region by the end of the period. The only other northern town which grew to great

[19] HTH, V. [20] Swanson 1983, 31.

significance during the period but rarely features in the following account is Liverpool: its growth came late and it was still small and overshadowed by Chester at the outbreak of the Civil War. Apart from its magnificent Town Books Liverpool does not have the type of records needed for this study.[21]

Some of the places whose records have been studied in detail were important urban centres with an influence which spread far beyond their immediate hinterlands. York was the great jewel of the medieval north, and although by the early sixteenth century it had become a shadow of its former self it was still one of the largest provincial towns in the kingdom with a population of some 8,000 in 1550. During Elizabeth's reign the city recovered and its population rose to an estimated 10,000 in 1600 and to 12,000 by 1630. Thereafter numbers stabilised until the later eighteenth century, although the city remained an important regional capital, providing the focus for the economic and social life of a broad area.[22] Both Newcastle and Hull prospered as ports from the second half of the sixteenth century. Newcastle, which gained enormously from the meteoric rise of the coal trade and the development of ancillary industries, also had important trading connections with the Baltic and its population rose from an estimated 7,500 or less in the early sixteenth century to 10,000 in 1600, and 14,000 by 1700. By the 1730s the population was approaching 30,000, perhaps four times as large as it had been in the late Middle Ages.[23] Hull was much smaller, but its merchants pursued a lively trade with the Baltic and nearby areas of western Europe. The size of the population in the sixteenth century is uncertain, but it stood at around 6,000 in the early decades of the seventeenth century and had approximately doubled by the end of the period, with much of the growth coming in the last few decades. Hull benefited from the growth of overseas trade in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and also from its position at the entrance of an extensive river network.[24] Both Hull and Newcastle possessed excellent harbour facilities and they were both of great strategic importance, playing crucial roles in the Civil War. However, unlike Newcastle, Hull did not change hands during the conflict, holding out for parliament despite two sieges.[25] Chester, with a population of some 5,000 in the early 1560s, was an important regional capital, serving a wide hinterland,

[21] *Liverpool Town Books.*
[22] Bartlett 1959–60, 32–3; Palliser 1979, 1–22, 111–13; *VCH York*, 160–253.
[23] Howell 1967, 2–9; Palliser 1982, 351; P. Clark 1981, 16, 26; Law 1972, 25.
[24] *VCH Hull*, 157–8, 190; Davis 1964; Jackson 1972, 2; Law 1972, 26; R.W. Unwin 1971.
[25] Howell 1967; *VCH Hull*, 102–7.

and a port of modest pretensions. The population grew from nearly 6,000 in 1600 to a peak of nearly 7,500 at the Restoration, before falling back to about 6,500 in 1700.[26] But the growth of population may not have been associated with economic vitality. The city's trade developed modestly in the first four decades of the seventeenth century, although the dynamic new trade in Irish livestock was almost entirely controlled by Irish interests, and after 1660 the port was increasingly overshadowed by the rapid growth of Liverpool.[27] The five remaining towns on which this book is based – Beverley, Carlisle, Durham, Kendal, and Lincoln – were smaller for much of the period and at least three of them had been of more significance in medieval times than they were in the early-modern period. Both Beverley and Lincoln failed to recover losses sustained in the medieval period. Beverley, ranked as the tenth town in the realm in 1377, lost its cloth industry but was said to have had a population of about 5,000 in the mid sixteenth century, which may have made it larger than Hull. However, the town's economic fortunes continued to decline and by the later seventeenth century its population was no more than 3,000; modest growth thereafter may have boosted numbers to about 3,500 in 1750.[28] Lincoln, dominated like Beverley by its great medieval minster, had passed the peak of its fortunes by the sixteenth century: in 1377 it had stood fifth in the list of English towns and was one of the major national centres of the wool trade. In the sixteenth century its population was less than 5,000, perhaps considerably so, and the town remained 'a sleepy little city' into the eighteenth century when its population probably numbered no more than 3,000.[29] Durham, perhaps more than any of the other towns discussed here, was dominated both physically and economically by its massive cathedral and associated ecclesiastical administration. Like Beverley and Lincoln, the town was probably at the peak of its fortunes in the medieval period when it was the administrative headquarters of the Bishop of Durham's great estates, although it remained 'a relatively small market town throughout the Middle Ages'. Its population, which was probably between 3,000 and 4,000 in the sixteenth century had, perhaps, grown to 4,500 by the middle of the eighteenth century.[30] But Durham, no more than fifteen miles from Newcastle, shares with Beverley – which was some eight

[26] Alldridge 1986, 2, 35; Woodward 1970b.
[27] Clemens 1976; Stephens 1969; Woodward 1970c and 1973.
[28] Phythian-Adams 1979, 16; *VCH Beverley*, 80, 83, 85, 87, 105, 107–8, 118–19; Law 1972, 26.
[29] Hill places the population of sixteenth-century Lincoln at *c.* 2000 which Phythian-Adams feels is much too low: Hill 1956, 22–3; Phythian-Adams 1979, 12, 14, 16. For the eighteenth century see Hill 1966, 146.
[30] Bonney 1990, 7; Phythian-Adams 1979, 12; Law 1972, 23.

miles from Hull – the characteristic of being relatively close to a more dynamic centre of economic activity, and it will be interesting to compare the movement of wages in the two sets of towns.[31]

In the far north-west the records of Carlisle and Kendal provide substantial amounts of information relating to the labour process and shifts in levels of remuneration. Neither was large, even by contemporary standards. Carlisle probably housed around 2,000 in 1563 and no more than twice that number in the later seventeenth century. It was, perhaps, a town of 'trivial pretension' when set against the larger provincial towns, but it was 'nonetheless the dominant centre of a topographically secluded area', the regional capital of the far north-west and the traditional English bulwark of the western marches against the warlike Scots.[32] Further south, on the eastern fringes of the Lake District, Kendal, which gave its name to the local woollen cloth or 'cottons' traded throughout the country and overseas, had a population of between 2,000 and 3,000 in the later years of Elizabeth's reign and seems to have been no larger a century later. In the late seventeenth century it 'was still very much a country town', but it experienced considerable industrial development in the following century and its population had about doubled by the later 1750s.[33]

Small amounts of information can also be garnered from the fragmentary accounts of a number of sleepy little market towns in the north of England. They include Appleby and Penrith in the north-west, Louth in Lincolnshire, and Howden and Bridlington in east Yorkshire. With populations of less than 1,500 for much of the period they remained of little economic significance, serving narrow hinterlands, but the evidence derived from their records can occasionally provide a telling example in the account which follows.[34]

The period chosen for this book runs from the late medieval ages to the eve of industrialisation. Substantial changes took place in England: in the size of the national population; in the range of industries practised throughout the country; in the commodity structure and geographical patterns of overseas trade; in agricultural techniques; and in the proportion of the population permanently tied to the soil. Some of these changes affected the towns under consideration: Hull and Newcastle, in particular, developed considerably as their merchants sought to expand their activities. But in many respects pre-1750 England was a

[31] See below pp. 164, 202–3.
[32] Phythian-Adams 1979, 10, 15; James 1951, 137–41; Clark, Gaskin & Wilson 1989, 25–6.
[33] B.C. Jones 1960; Phillips 1981, 57–61; Marshall 1975, 189–223.
[34] Clark, Gaskin, & Wilson 1989, 27–8, 109–10, 179–80, 191–2.

society which altered slowly, and many traditional ways of life and economic organisation continued unchanged from generation to generation. Certainly it is difficult to detect any significant changes in the lifestyles of northern labourers and building craftsmen: their methods of working changed little; firms remained small to the end of the period; and the patterns of their lives altered hardly at all. It is possible to detect some waning in the strength and efficacy of the gilds; in some towns this seems to have occurred in the seventeenth century, in others in the eighteenth century. But apart from this the worlds of the labourers and building craftsmen barely changed, and the major economic and social developments, which pointed forward to the period of industrialisation, were taking place elsewhere. Historians dependent on a study of the lives of labourers and building craftsmen in the towns of northern England would not be aware that the pace of change was beginning to accelerate elsewhere.

This book is arranged in six main chapters followed by a series of appendices which lay out the statistical data on which some of the argument is based. Chapter 2 contains a discussion of the work practices and arrangements of building craftsmen: the types of work they did; the size of their businesses; their relative levels of pay; and other aspects of their patterns of work. The next chapter follows the craftsmen through their life-cycle experiences. The arrangement of the discussion – the apprentice, the journeyman, the master craftsman, and the role of the widow – seems to confirm the traditional view that most skilled men within a particular town followed the same sequence of experiences, ending up as independent masters in charge of their own businesses. But in many of the northern towns entry to the apprentice ranks was tightly controlled in order to limit the number of potential masters, and many journeymen – who had no chance of becoming master craftsmen in the town – were recruited from outside. Their period of service could last some years or just a few months, after which they moved on, either to become journeymen elsewhere or to set themselves up in business away from the regulation of the gilds. If this was the experience of skilled men in other areas of trade, the town labour forces were more fluid than the traditional approach would suggest.

In chapter 4 labourers are dealt with more briefly, since less is known of their activities: frequently they were not named in the accounts, which makes it difficult to recreate their work patterns. However, it is possible to establish the levels of pay they received, and the kinds of work they did. Moreover, we know that the great bulk of

general labouring was done by men: women and children did work, but at a very low level. Chapter 5 brings the labourers and craftsmen together and discusses areas of common experience. Most labourers and building craftsmen worked away from home, although some of the craftsmen – especially the joiners, glaziers, plumbers, and blacksmiths – spent at least some of their time in their workshops. Most of the workmen were paid by the day, the length of which was carefully regulated by national and local authorities: mostly they worked a day of ten to twelve hours, six days a week, when work was available. Some men worked most of the days available in a year, although work for most was highly seasonal with relatively little wage employment being offered in the winter. Two traditional buffers against privation – the acquisition of non-food perquisites and the provision of food and drink at the workplace – are examined in some detail. It is concluded that, despite some notable exceptions, non-food perquisites were not on offer to most workmen (although embezzlement may have been rife) and few workers were given their full diet at work (although small drink allowances were common). Similarly, it seems that those injured at work could expect little financial assistance from those who paid them. The chapter ends with a discussion of the extent to which labour moved from town to town, and from town to the countryside, and a brief examination of the types of supervision exercised over workmen.

In some respects chapter 6 contains the most difficult and the most tentative arguments. The first section lays out the broad changes which took place in northern wage rates over the three centuries and sets them against series for other parts of the country. The picture established for southern England by Phelps Brown and Hopkins is broadly confirmed for the north. Wage rates stagnated down to *c.*1540, but rose thereafter, although they remained at the same level, often for decades at a time, and followed sluggishly the inflation in commodity prices. Wage rates, especially for craftsmen, did not rise to the same extent in the different towns. By the later seventeenth century the northern towns had separated out into two groups: a group of towns in which rates were relatively high – Hull, York, Newcastle, and Beverley – and a group in which rates were relatively low – Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Kendal, and Lincoln. Labourers' rates varied less from town to town. As a result, the traditional ratio of 3:2 between the rates given to craftsmen and those paid to labourers altered in some places – and especially in the high-wage towns – until craftsmen received twice the rates going to the less skilled men. The second part of chapter 6 comprises a tentative examination of the factors which