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**SOCIAL RELATIONS IN THE VICTORIAN
COUNTRYSIDE: HIRING FAIRS AND THEIR CRITICS
IN THE EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE c. 1840-1880**

GARY WILLIAM MOSES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of The
Nottingham Trent University for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

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CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.	iii
Preface	iv
List of Figures and Maps	v
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter 1</u>	28
Agriculture and Social Change in the East Riding c. 1750-1880	
<u>Chapter 2</u>	75
East Riding Farm Servants c.1840-80	
<u>Chapter 3</u>	114
The Development of Hiring Fairs as Centres of Collective Bargaining	
<u>Chapter 4</u>	154
The Development of Hiring Fairs as Centres of Popular Recreation	
<u>Chapter 5</u>	190
The Church of England's Critique of Hiring Fairs in the East Riding	
<u>Chapter 6</u>	231
Reforming Hiring Fairs: The Church of England 1850-70	
<u>Chapter 7</u>	273
The Final Phase of Reform: The Church of England and Farmers' Organisations 1870-80	
<u>Conclusion</u>	310
<u>Bibliography</u>	325

ABSTRACT

This thesis builds upon research undertaken for a Masters' degree dissertation entitled: 'Farm Servants Hiring Fairs and Moral Reform: York and East Yorkshire c. 1850-1880'. Although limited in its scope and tentative in its conclusions this dissertation has provided the framework for this study.

The central focus of this investigation is a campaign of moral reform and abolition conducted by Church of England clergymen against hiring fairs in the East Riding of Yorkshire during the years 1850-1880. In this respect the thesis offers a contribution to the study of nineteenth-century rural popular culture and the nature and course of attempts to reshape that culture during the mid-Victorian period. Hiring fairs were significant as rural festivals but they were also important as labour markets for farm servants. Although often regarded as a pre-modern and pre-industrial institutions both farm service and hiring fairs remained common in northern England throughout the nineteenth century. Both were, however, reshaped within the context of economic and social change. This study locates, therefore, both hiring fairs and the campaign that was conducted against them within the context of changes that had taken place within rural economy and society in the East Riding from the late-eighteenth century. It also examines the manner in which this process of economic and social change prompted a reshaping of both farm service and the hiring fair. Of major importance to the investigation is the manner in which these changes came into contradiction with the religious and social agenda of a major social and political institution - the Anglican Church. It is argued here that a prime reason for the Anglican campaign against hiring fairs during the mid-Victorian period is a contradiction between the institutional aims of the Church of England and the changing nature of farm service and the hiring fair. In developing this argument, examining the nature and course of the campaign and evaluating its success it is hoped that the study has realised an interesting body of knowledge and made a significant contribution to the history of nineteenth-century rural society.

*Technical note: periodically throughout this thesis the final footnote's text appears as the first item in the footnote frame of the following page. This is a consequence of a technical problem within the software which, the author has been advised, cannot be rectified.

PREFACE

I am grateful to a number of individuals and institutions for the assistance I have received in preparing this thesis. Above all my thanks go to Dr C.P. Griffin and Prof. J. Hill from The Nottingham Trent University for their support and guidance. In recent months the assistance and patience of Prof. J. Hill has been particularly appreciated. I would also like to record my appreciation of the invaluable and kindly help and advice received from the late Dr B. A. (Jim) Holderness in the early years of my research. I must also thank the staff of York City Archives, York, the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York, the York Minster Library, York, the Brynmor Jones Library at the University of Hull, the East Riding Record Office Beverley, the John Morrill Library at the University of York and the Hallward Library at the University of Nottingham. I am also extremely grateful for the assistance and helpful advice that I received from the staff of the Local Studies sections of Hull Central Library, Beverley Public Library, York City Library, and Bridlington Public Library. The patience and support of Jane, my partner and Jonathan, my son has also been greatly appreciated.

LIST OF FIGURES AND MAPS

Table 1

The Number of Farm Labourers, Farm Servants, in the East Riding, 1851-81.

Table 2

Total Attendance at East Rising Hiring Fairs as Estimated by the East Riding Constabulary.

Map 1

The East Riding and its vicinity.

Map 2

The East Riding of Yorkshire: Main Agricultural Regions in the mid-19th century.

Map 3

The East Riding of Yorkshire: Hiring Fairs in the mid-19th century.

Introduction

This thesis examines a campaign of moral reform and abolition conducted by the Church of England against hiring fairs in the East Riding of Yorkshire during the years 1850-1880. Hiring fairs were annual gatherings which provided the occasion for the hiring of farm servants. The title 'farm servant' denoted a specific group of predominantly young male and female agricultural labourers. These workers were hired annually and in return for a range of labour tasks, received board, lodging and a cash payment at the end of their term of service. Farm service was a traditional means for rural youth to enter the world of full-time work. As such, it represented a transitional institution marking a stage of life between childhood and adulthood. Service could begin at an early age: nine or ten years. By the mid-nineteenth century however, twelve to fourteen years was closer to the norm.¹ In the East Riding, farm servants' contracts terminated together on 23rd November, 'old' Martinmas Day. This was followed by a week's annual holiday. The majority of farm servants were engaged around this time at one of a number of hiring fairs. These fairs combined the functions of a labour market with those of a popular festival in that servants not only sought employment, but also used them as an opportunity for leisure and recreation: a moment of pleasurable diversion from the rigours of the world of work. In the East Riding, the hiring fairs were the first major festive occasion after the harvest and offered many farm servants their first opportunity for an entire day away from their master's household since Christmas. Thus, as Malcolmson has emphasised, hiring fairs combined market and recreational functions: 'Statute fairs functioned most obviously as labour

¹ P Laslett, *The World we have lost*, Methuen and Co., London, 1968, pp. 11-15; A Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 3-4; A. Armstrong, *Farmworkers in England and Wales: A Social and Economic History, 1770-1980*, B.T. Batsford, London, 1981, pp. 21-3; Idem 'II Systems of

exchanges, but the evidence suggests that they were at least of equal importance as social occasions'.² The Church of England campaign against hiring fairs in the East Riding was concerned with both aspects of the hiring fair in that it sought to reform, erode and eventually end, both the market and recreational functions of hiring fairs.³

In focusing on this attack upon hiring fairs, the thesis offers a case-study in the 'social control' of popular culture in that it examines a national institution with a noted reputation for social elitism attempting to reshape and even abolish a popular event. This type of study enjoyed a degree of fashionability in the 1970s and 1980s with the appearance of a number of books and articles on popular recreations such as fairs, feasts and festivals, and attempts to control and suppress them by local and national elites.⁴ In general, these studies tended to portray attacks upon popular recreations as an adjunct of the class struggle. Elite attempts to suppress and reform popular events were interpreted as part of a broader project of disciplining and ordering a working-class culture that was regarded as an economic, social and political threat:

All middle-class reform movements concerned with the altering of popular leisure and culture evoked two images of the working man: as he was and how he might become after 'treatment'. The goal was clear: the English working man was to be morally sanitised (and politically neutralised in the process) by an extensive reworking of his character structure.⁵

Employment' in G. E. Mingay, ed. *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. VI*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 672-77.

² R.W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1750-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973, p. 23.

³ G. Moses, "'Rustic and Rude": Hiring Fairs and their Critics in East Yorkshire c.1850-75', *Rural History*, 7, 2, 1996.

⁴ Examples of such studies include: A. P. Donajgrodski, ed., *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Croom Helm, London, 1977; E. and S. Yeo, eds, *Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590 - 1914*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1981; R.D. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Croom Helm, London, 1982; S. Cohen and A. Cohen, eds, *Social Control and the State: Historical and Comparative Essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983.

⁵ R.D. Storch, 'The Problem of working-class Leisure. Some Roots of middle-class Moral Reform in the Industrial North: 1825-50', in A.P. Donajgrodski, ed., 'Social Control', p. 139.

Such studies have, in recent years, fallen out of favour. A prime reason for this has been the recognition that the concept of 'social control', which was central to many of these studies, has proved problematic when utilised by modern social historians. It is a concept derived from anthropology and sociology and it is primarily concerned with explaining how societies maintain order and stability, in that, in its broadest usage, it refers to 'a complex system of unplanned and largely unconscious mechanisms which seek to counteract deviant tendencies'.⁶ The nature of the concept and particularly the manner in which it was 'eagerly and almost greedily adopted by historians' has attracted criticism.⁷ F.M.L. Thompson, who has possibly done more than most to undermine this concept and its use in social history, complained for example, that by the late-1970s: 'the phrase is almost on every historian's lips'; he then proceeded to argue that:

The frequency of its use, however, has not contributed a great deal to its precise definition, and acceptance, as an analytical tool. It is generally used to denote the imposition of opinions and habits by one class upon another; but it is not very clear whether this is a matter of the intentions of policy-makers, moralisers, and organisers of social agencies regardless of the practical efficacy of their efforts; whether control mechanisms, like bits of engineering machinery, are historically significant in the main only when they can be shown to have worked; whether a desire to legitimate authority, and ensure that the desired behaviour is subsequently willingly given without fear of sanctions, is a necessary ingredient of social control; whether the unintended results of economic, political, and legal systems, the behavioural side-effects for example of wage-earning, job discipline, or administrative arrangements, are part of the concept; and whether the line at which socialization ends and social control begins can be at all firmly drawn.⁸

⁶ T. Parsons, *The Social System*, The Free Press, New York, 1951, p. 321, cited in Donajgradzki, ed., 'Social Control', p. 9.

⁷ F.M.L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, XXXIII, 1981; Idem, 'Social Control in Modern Britain', in A. Digby and C. Feinstein, eds, *New Directions in Economic and Social History*, Macmillan, London, 1989.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 190.

Although somewhat 'scatter gun', a number of valid points are being alluded to. The concept of social control was developed within a basically conservative strand of sociology known as 'structural functionalism' which emphasised that all societies have a general propensity towards order and stability. Structural functionalism suggests that this equilibrium arises through the agency of informal and formal processes and institutions which deal with deviant behaviour. In this original sense, the concept is essentially descriptive and static in that it describes the mechanisms through which societies socialise individuals into accepted rules and customs and thereby maintain equilibrium.⁹ When this concept is appropriated by social historians concerned with processes of conflict and change, as was generally the case in the 1970s and 1980s, and made the rubric for the analysis of inter-class relations it can lead to distortion. The original use of the concept was one that sought to describe how basically homogeneous societies exerted what might be termed 'self control': what Thompson refers to as 'the social "potty training", or social conditioning, which is perpetually going on so that society can reproduce itself'.¹⁰ Historians are, therefore, offered an all-embracing concept which, in its broadest usage, seeks to identify forces acting for the control of deviance throughout society. As Thompson indicates, this can make the concept so vague and generalised as to be practically meaningless as an explanatory tool because the concept of social control becomes conflated with the process of socialisation.¹¹ The distortion that has occurred within the social history that has employed, or been informed by, this concept flows from this vagueness. Social historians tended to remove the concept from the context of homogeneous static societies exerting socialisation upon themselves, and re-deployed it as an explanatory tool which explained how elites imposed social control within societies that were

⁹ Thompson, 'Social Control in Modern Britain', p. 182.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 184.

¹¹ Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', p. 189.

increasingly characterised by division and change. The all-embracing nature of the concept, and its implication that social control is all-pervasive, tended to remain, however. As a consequence there was a propensity to magnify the impact of social control in ways that its original usage, within conservative sociology, did not intend. It was, for example, often employed to explain a non-event; the absence of a proletarian revolution within nineteenth-century Britain:

Successful manipulation of the levers of social control by the ruling class and the middle class seems to provide an explanation of the working-class masses, after a few scaring episodes of disorder and insubordination like Peterloo and Chartism, were tamed and conditioned to accept their role at the bottom of the class structure of 'modern society'.¹²

As Thompson indicates, the original imperative of the concept drives the interpretation within its new context and almost all tendencies within subject groups which appear not to threaten the prevailing social order are ascribed to the efficacy of the machinations of elite individuals and agencies.

Even if such desires on the part of social elites can be demonstrated to have existed, however, it is potentially misleading to assume that they were successful in their outcomes. Imputing, for example, the increased stability of nineteenth-century society to external forces of social control, may exclude, or at least underplay, the possibility that this increasing propensity towards order and stability may have been generated from below: from within the subject group itself. The possibility that the intended recipients of these morally improving overtures resisted or renegotiated their content and impact to such an extent that they lost much of their original 'social control' imperatives can also

¹² Thompson, 'Social Control in Modern Britain', p. 186.

be neglected by the over-zealous adaptation of this concept.¹³ The tendency of this analytical framework is, therefore, to exaggerate the effectiveness of 'power groups' in devising mechanisms of social control and to underplay the role that the less powerful may have played in generating their own, autonomous, 'self control'.¹⁴

A similar critique of the social control approach has been offered by Gareth Stedman Jones. He has suggested that the end result of the use of this framework by social historians has been 'non-explanation and incoherence'.¹⁵ He also focuses upon the structural-functionalist origins of the concept, which he suggests, tends to promote the formation of interpretations of popular recreations which presents them as forms of temporary deviance which are ultimately tamed and integrated into the social order. Thus, even when utilised by historians of an ostensibly Marxist persuasion, the employment of the concept of social control tends to produce 'functionalism by default'; largely because the broader framework of analysis which has bequeathed the concept to the historian, structural functionalism, regards equilibrium as the norm. The result, according to Stedman Jones, is a 'one sided' interpretation of the class struggle conducted by 'capitalism and its representatives' which charts, after a brief and episodic conflict, the decline of traditional popular recreations and the triumph of 'a methodical capitalist rationality'.¹⁶ Thus, although Stedman Jones was at this time writing as a Marxist historian, his regard for the concept of

¹³ Idem, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', p. 189 and passim. For a similar analysis of the limitations of this approach see J.M. Golby and A.W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England, 1750-1900*, B.T. Batsford, London, 1985.

¹⁴ Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', p. 199.

¹⁵ G. Stedman Jones, 'Class Expression Versus Social Control? A Critique of Recent Trends in the Social History of Leisure', *History Workshop Journal*, IV, 1978, p. 80.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 78.

social control is similar to the non-Marxist Thompson, in that he believes it is best avoided.¹⁷

What these criticisms suggest, is that although the concept of social control may have had some use in providing an integrating framework for the analysis of a diverse number of activities such a music hall, festivals and sports; and although it may also have assisted in the development of interpretations of elite attitudes to and actions against them; a tendency, inherent in the concept itself, of failing to distinguish between intentions and outcomes has promoted an exaggerated and over-simplified interpretation of the nature and course of cultural change.

I

Many of the studies that employed a broadly social-control approach combined this with the concept of 'popular culture'.¹⁸ This concept achieved widespread recognition and usage in historical studies after the publication of Peter Burke's text: *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*.¹⁹ Burke offered an anthropological definition of culture as 'a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which they are expressed or embodied'.²⁰ Like many others before and since, he defined popular culture in terms of what it was not: the way of life and practices of 'ordinary people'. A way of life, distinct from, and existing below, the culture of the political, economic and social elite. He suggested that this culture was shaped over time through a process of social and cultural polarisation as social elites withdrew from the culture of the lower classes. As a consequence, by the

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 80.

¹⁸ Much of the analysis that follows draws upon the surveys offered by: T. Harris, ed., *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850*, Macmillan, London, 1995, Introduction and Chapter 1; and Golby and Purdue, 'Civilisation', Introduction.

¹⁹ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Temple Smith, London, 1978.

early-nineteenth century: 'two cultures, separated by profound differences in world view' existed in contrast and in opposition to each other.²¹ This 'two-tier' model which regards English society as being increasingly divided, in cultural terms, by a binary opposition of elite and popular cultures has been very influential. As was the case with the concept of social control, the two-tier model was incorporated within a social history paradigm which sought to broaden the scope of historical enquiry, and, by placing the experience and practices of 'ordinary' people at the centre of this, realise a genuine 'history from below'. In general, this approach has regarded and explained changes in popular culture in England from the eighteenth century onwards, as being informed by an interrelated process of separation and confrontation, between elite and popular cultures. Three broad interrelated forces are cited as being primarily responsible for this process: the effect of economic and social changes such as commercialisation, enclosure and urbanisation which encouraged social and cultural polarisation; an attack upon popular culture from above, by moral and religious reformers concerned that popular culture was irreligious and immoral; and an attack upon popular culture motivated by a secular concern that popular culture was detrimental to economic efficiency and social order.²²

One of the criticisms of this approach is that because it regards both elite and popular cultures as being internally coherent, it presents an overly-homogenised model of cultures which may ignore, or underplay, the diversity of identities and beliefs within both traditions.²³ As a consequence, important divisions within cultures, in the form of, for example, gender, politics and religion, may

²⁰ Ibid, p. 270.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Harris, 'Popular Culture', p. ix; Golby and Purdue, 'Civilisation', p. 41.

²³ Harris, 'Popular Culture', p.11; This problem is also discussed in B. Scribner, 'Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?', *History of European Ideas*, 10, 1989, passim.

be ignored or marginalised.²⁴ One serious oversimplification which can result from the application of this model, for example, is that of presenting attacks and criticisms of popular culture as the product of a shared hostility on the part of the elites towards the practices of the poor, who, in turn, are represented as resisting such attacks. In presenting conflicts over the content of popular culture in terms of this popular/elite dichotomy, the two-tier model is, therefore, prone to a social reductionism which represents these disputes as part of the class struggle. In fact, as many studies have demonstrated, this is too simplistic, since neither elites nor masses were uniform in their attitudes towards popular culture. Both the attackers and the defenders of popular culture came from all social groups.²⁵ This suggests that social position, even if significant, may not have determined attitudes towards popular culture to the extent that the class orientated two-tier model implies.

A related criticism of this approach is that it tends to portray popular culture in an overly static fashion. For example, studies of nineteenth-century popular culture are often placed within the context of 'pre-lapsarian' model of the eighteenth-century popular culture. It is conceptualised as being part of a 'traditional society': a system of practices and beliefs which had existed in largely unchanged form until undermined by the more recent, and more dynamic, economic and social forces associated with industrialisation.²⁶ Once again, as is often the case with the concept of social control, an overly functionalist interpretation creeps in. In fact, as Stedman Jones argued, the eighteenth century was neither static nor traditional it was 'a society of innovation and flux'.²⁷ The adoption of the functionalist concept of 'traditional society' tends, therefore to underplay the dynamic and creative nature of

²⁴ Harris, 'Popular Culture', p. 11; G. Stedman Jones, 'Class Expression', p. 77.

²⁵ Golby and Purdue, 'Civilisation', p. 195.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 11.

popular practices at that time.²⁸ It is not only the background context which is being distorted here. This overly-static conceptualisation of popular culture also informs the analysis of the process of change thereafter. As a consequence, the capacity for innovation adaptation and resistance within that popular culture may be underplayed. The end result is a one-sided explanation of changes in popular culture, which focuses, in exaggerated fashion, upon the external forces that overwhelm it. Popular culture becomes a passive victim of the historical process rather than being located within and constitutive of that process itself. As a result, the interactions between the two cultures are either underplayed, or are portrayed in unidirectional form, in terms of elite actions shaping the culture of those below them. The danger of this occurring is, as was suggested above, especially salient if the two-tier model is combined with the concept of social control, as both approaches have a tendency to underplay the possibility that popular culture may be able to resist, control and even initiate change from below.

A final problem associated with both with the social control and the popular culture approaches, is the danger that cultural practices may be reified as an object of exaggerated importance. In focusing upon fairs, festivals, and sport and leisure in general, as an arena of struggle, historians may, it has been suggested, exaggerate their significance in the historical process. Stedman Jones, for example, has suggested that many of the struggles fought around leisure were 'epilogues' of other deeper and more fundamental conflicts, such as those over work, which had much greater social, political and historical significance.²⁹ At its extreme, such an approach may lapse into a form of idealism, where culture becomes nothing other than a system of ideological

²⁷ Stedman Jones, 'Class Expression', p. 85.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 86.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 88-89.

meanings. Indeed, the prevailing trend in the last decade, has been one which has seen increased recourse to an approach which focuses upon cultural practices as part of a symbolic system, which, rather than reflecting, or revealing, facets of their social and historical context, create meanings, identities and attitudes independent of them. This abandons a central assumption of both the social control and the two-tier approaches, which, although attempting to broaden the scope of social history into the field of culture, retained its tendency to explain past practices through recourse to a prior social (and in the last instance, material) context. The ontological assumption of this is, that 'social being', through the process of 'experience', created 'social consciousness'. A consciousness which is empirically observable in the behaviour of past peoples, including those present at fairs, feasts and festivals. Within the new epistemology, however, popular practices are analysed, using techniques appropriated from cultural anthropology, in terms of their internal structures and systems of meaning. Structures and systems which exist, not as ciphers of a prior, more fundamental, social experience, but as autonomous and generative processes originating and operating within the field of culture itself.

II

Initially, this recourse to the approaches and methods made available by cultural anthropology was a tremendous fillip for historians who sought to broaden the scope of social history and write 'history from below'. Historians found such methodologies liberating because they offered a more wide-ranging and adventurous approach than that offered by the economic interpretation of history that had dominated labour and social history up to the 1960s.³⁰ The social history of popular culture was enriched, and in many respects founded, by studies which utilised anthropological concepts and methods. Most of the

³⁰ R. Samuel, 'Reading the Signs, 1', *History Workshop Journal*, 32, 1991, p. 225.

pioneering historical studies of popular culture, for example, examined festivals, carnivals, ceremonies and other recreational activities of the poor through the adaptation of concepts and methods drawn from cultural anthropology.³¹ In adopting this approach, social historians realised a new interpretative freedom which enabled them to move 'from facts to meaning' and 'explore the expressive aspects of human behaviour'.³²

In general, however, as has already been indicated, these pioneers adapted the concepts within an orthodox social-history framework; especially the two-tier model which placed popular culture within the context of socially and culturally divided societies. Crowd behaviour at festivals, fairs, and other popular gatherings, for example, being interpreted in relation to changes and conflicts generated by the development of capitalism. The anti-rationalist and anti-materialist thrust of an analytical paradigm increasingly dedicated to 'reading the signs', rather than locating them within a given societal context, was ignored or by-passed, by historians, who, in their usual eclectic manner, adapted anthropological concepts into what remained a rationalist and materialist framework.³³

In recent years, however, the 'linguistic turn' within the social sciences has made this an increasingly difficult position to maintain. The shift towards a more fundamental linguistic determinism within cultural anthropology based

³¹ Studies of this kind include those of Burke, Malcolmson and several of the contributions to the collections edited by Donajgrodzki mentioned above, and, for example: N.Z. Davis, 'The Reasons for Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth Century France', *Past and Present*, 50, 1971; idem, 'Religious Riot in Sixteenth Century France', *Past and Present*, 59, 1973; E.P. Thompson, "'Rough Music": Le Charivari anglais', *Annales: Economies, Societies, Civilisations*, 27e, Annee, 2, 1972; D. A. Reid, 'Interpreting the Festival Calendar: Wakes and Fairs as Carnivals' in R.D. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, Croom Helm, London, 1982; A. Howkins and L. Merricks, 'The Ploughboy and the Plough Play', *Folk Music Journal*, 2, 1991.

³² R. Samuel, 'Reading the Signs, II, Fact-grubbers and mind-readers', *History Workshop Journal*, 33, 1992, p. 227.

upon what Clifford Geertz has called the 'text analogy' has tended to undermine the once peaceful coexistence between social history and cultural anthropology. This 'semiotic challenge' which has seen cultural anthropology 'become progressively saturated with poststructuralist concepts of textuality' has had profound consequences for social history because it involves the adoption of 'a language-model epistemology, which views language not as a reflection of the world, but as constitutive of that world, that is "generative" rather than "mimetic".³⁴ This undermines the notions of context and experience that are at the heart of social history, because social and cultural practices are detached from any social context. In the words of one of the more moderate exponents of this approach: 'the relationship thus established is not one of dependence of the mental structures on their material determinations. The representations of the social world themselves are the constituents of social reality'.³⁵

Thus, the 'linguistic turn' not only challenges the two-tier model of popular culture and those social historians that have employed it; it threatens the idea of social history itself. Because there can be no external reality, the notion that cultural events and practices are shaped, reflect, or even interact with a prior social experience or that they need to be located within a historical context is rejected. Within the language-model epistemology they have no explanatory role and are therefore irrelevant. The logical consequence of accepting this model is therefore to accept the end of social history and its model for the study of popular culture.³⁶

³³ Ibid, p. 228.

³⁴ G.M. Spiegel, 'History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 65, 1990, p. 66, p. 60.

³⁵ R. Chartier, 'Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories', in D. LaCapra and S.L. Kaplan, eds, *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, Ithaca University Press, New York, 1982, p. 30.

III

Those who have attacked the methodology of the social history paradigm have justifiably highlighted the manner in which, despite its objective of offering a totalising and inclusive history, it has in fact tended towards a form of social reductionism which ultimately privileges material factors in its analysis of culture. As Joyce has pointed out: 'However "culturalist" this history became, the basic idea remained that class and politics were rooted in the realities of material life'.³⁷ One need not go as far as Joyce's celebration of the end of social history to recognise that its approaches have, in some cases, tended to overplay the role of class and underplay the role of ideas and ideology in explaining cultural change.³⁸ Social historians studying popular culture need, therefore, to be mindful of the fact that ideas and ideology are both important, and, not necessarily reducible to, class position: a point that has been emphasised by non-Marxist historians for generations.³⁹

This need not, on the other hand, entail a total departure from a social-history approach onto the path demanded by the followers of the linguistic turn. This approach also has its problems and difficulties. One is that although its protagonists criticise social historians for employing a totalising and deterministic model of social action, what is offered in its stead is equally, and possibly more, 'totalitarian' in its implications. This is because it argues for an approach based upon linguistic determinism through which the influence of all non-linguistic factors are discounted. Such an approach is vulnerable to the

³⁶ Samuel, 'Signs II, p. 232; Spiegall, 'Social Logic', p. 63; P. Joyce, 'The end of social history?', *Social History*, 20, 1, 1995.

³⁷ Joyce, 'The end', p.75.

³⁸ R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 421, p. 413.

³⁹ As illustrated in the the approaches of: E. Halevy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol.1, England in 1815*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987 edn, this text was first published in England in 1924; G.M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age*, Oxford University Press, London, 1936.

charge of what might be termed 'academic imperialism' because the level of ventriloquy involved places unprecedented levels of control and agency within academe and, therefore, exposes the history of past peoples to the enormous condescension of academic posturing. The use of historical context can be overbearing, but it does offer a location in which people's actions and agency can play a role in shaping the interpretation of the past. This is generally absent from an approach that regards people's consciousness as being determined by linguistic structures which only an academic elite can fully discern:

To judge popular culture purely in terms of the formal structure of its discourse is actually to intellectualise it, and subject it to fundamentally academic ways of thinking. Much of the meaning which specific texts possess depends on the contexts in which they are created and understood. ... In short, in order properly to gauge the meaning of texts for their participants it is necessary to examine how and why they were constructed, and how they are interpreted. This involves moving beyond the formal analyses of languages they contain to the concrete social situations which mediate their production and reception.⁴⁰

Retaining some degree of historical and social context also preserves other positive aspects of the social-history paradigm which are dismissed or underplayed by the language-model epistemology: an emphasis upon change over time and its explanation. The semiotic approach tends to be synchronic rather than diachronic. In order to deploy its techniques, it removes the object of study from its temporal context and treats it as a static event to be described and illustrated. This can be valuable and beneficial, but on its own it cannot respond to the needs of all historians. Historians are not only concerned with illustration and description; they are also concerned with the chronology of events, discerning processes of change, and explaining them. The interpretation of causes and the evaluation of their retrospective significance remains central to

⁴⁰ M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 18.

the nature of history. These concerns require that variables other than linguistic systems need to be introduced, in the form of, for example, historical context. As E.P. Thompson stated many years ago when he warned historians against the 'raw' use of anthropological and sociological concepts without contextualising them within their past situations: 'Only when the evidence is studied within its whole historical context ... can it bring fruitful results. ... The discipline of history is, above all, the discipline of context'.⁴¹

The absence of an economic and social context in studies of popular culture has been lamented by other historians who have themselves sought to integrate an anthropological approach into their own work. Bob Scribner, for example, complained in the 1980s that:

Many recent discussions of 'popular culture' have placed too much emphasis on 'cultural values', and neglected study of activities and material objects, or else these have been considered only in subsidiary form as the bearers of values. Too often the material conditions and relationships which constitute the basis of human subsistence have ignored, possibly because they appear too mundane or perhaps for fear of falling into a reductive materialism. This has led to neglect of routine patterns of daily life and to greater attention to symbolising practices which reflect significant breaks in it - rituals, festivals, popular entertainments, literature, art or religious cult - on the assumption that they structure and provide meaning for the routine and the mundane.⁴²

A number of studies have suggested, in contradiction to the assumptions of linguistic determinism, that the material context of popular culture is a factor that influences its content and nature. Scribner, for example, cites the work of David Underdown who has emphasised the differences in the popular culture of arable

⁴¹ E.P. Thompson, 'Anthropology and the Discipline of Historical Context', *Midland History*, 1, 1972, p. 45.

⁴² B. Scribner, 'History of Popular Culture', pp. 181-2.

and pastoral regions: differences informed by geography, settlement pattern and agricultural practices.⁴³

Given the discussion above, it would seem that what is needed is an approach, or theoretical model, which retains some notion of economic and social context but which also allows for a degree of complexity and autonomy for ideological and cultural processes. At the same time, this model would also have to avoid imposing a gulf between economic and social contexts and ideological and cultural processes, so that a sense of their mutually dependent or 'recursive' character is retained.⁴⁴

IV

One response to this problem has been to adopt a more flexible model based upon the concept of 'cultural hegemony' derived from the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.⁴⁵ Gramsci attempted to develop a more sophisticated approach towards the relations between classes within capitalist societies than that offered by the reductionist Marxism of his day. In a manner not dissimilar to the social-control and two-tier approaches, this form of Marxism, tended to assume, or at least imply, that the strategy of the dominant class was that of imposing its own values and culture upon the subordinate classes. Within this model, the dominant economic class, the 'bourgeoisie', was regarded as a belligerent force which sought to erode working-class culture and impose, in its place, its own 'bourgeois' values. Gramsci argued instead, that the dominant

⁴³ D Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion, Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660*, Oxford University Press, 1985, cited in Scribner, 'History of Popular Culture', p. 182.

⁴⁴ Savage and Miles, 'Remaking', p. 18.

⁴⁵ The following discussion of the salient aspects of a Gramscian approach is indebted to: Q, Hoare and G. Nowell Smith eds, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971; T. Bennett, 'Introduction: Popular Culture and "the turn to Gramsci"', in, idem, ed., *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1986; R. Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, Lawrence

class, in order to rule effectively, sought 'hegemony' or 'leadership' through a process of winning the active consent of subordinate groups to its own world view. A process that was characterised, on the part of the ruling elite, not by coercive imposition, but as a more sophisticated process of negotiation, compromise and modification. Historians who have adopted this approach have regarded the sphere of popular culture as being critical in this process of securing cultural hegemony. Popular culture is regarded as an important site for the interactions through which hegemony may be secured, or lost, by the dominant class. Within this framework popular culture is regarded as a field of interaction, contestation and negotiation within which there is an ongoing struggle for cultural hegemony. This concept offers, therefore, a more sophisticated and flexible framework for the analysis of popular culture than either the social-control or two-tier models, because it is less likely to slip into the assumption that the values of the dominant class are imposed upon the subordinate classes. It suggests instead, that the active consent of the subordinate groups has to be continually sought and articulated to the interests and values of the dominant elite. It also emphasises that this is unlikely ever to be completely realised and that, as a consequence, the process of negotiation is continuous.

This Gramscian model also provides a more dynamic model of cultural interactions than the social control and two-tier approaches. This is because although it retains a degree of economic and social determination in terms of the origins of the actors involved being fundamentally social, in regarding popular culture an area of exchange within an ongoing dialectical process, it allows for continual 'two-way flows' between the cultures of the dominant and subordinate groups. This framework also allows for the relationship of social

and Wishart, London, 1982; T.J Jackson Lears, 'The Concept of Cultural Hegemony:

groups towards popular culture to be presented and analysed in a more flexible and more varied fashion than is often allowed by the social-control and two-tier models. As we have seen, these tend towards an 'essentialist' view of cultures which regards them as embodying the attitudes of homogenous classes. Classes whose social position determines their attitude towards popular culture. These are often presented as actors within a zero-sum drama in which one triumphs over the other. Although Gramsci presented cultural relations as ultimately functioning within a struggle for hegemony between the two fundamental classes of capitalist societies - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat - his framework allows for compromise between them. It also allows for ideological and cultural divisions within these groups so that this compromise may be achieved. Through such alliances and compromises on particular issues, a broader and more fundamental cultural hegemony may be maintained. One example of this is the alliance of 'respectability' embodying both middle and working-class elements which can be found to have occupied a position of hostility towards the rougher and less edifying aspects of certain forms of popular recreation in the nineteenth century. Thus, although social determination in the form of antagonistic class interests, remains the ultimate underpinning of Gramsci's model, it does enable greater flexibility, in that, divisions within classes, in terms of, for example, gender, ethnicity and religiosity, can be accommodated, and if necessary, emphasised. This framework allows, therefore, for the possibility of cultures and classes being segmented into sub-cultures and that these may be significant in determining the broader pattern of cultural relations between the fundamental classes. It also allows for a greater autonomy for ideas and ideology in that they may exist independently of, and even transcend, class positions and interests.

Problems and Possibilities', *American Historical Review*,. 90, 1985.

It must be conceded, however, that the Gramscian framework, for all its vaunted flexibility, is still fundamentally reductionist. This is because although ideology may be generated independently of classes and their interests, its appropriation and articulation is ultimately related back to an underlying class interest. In the last instance, therefore, this approach prioritises class interests as the ultimate force shaping cultural attitudes and relationships. Its prime concern is, in fact, similar to that of the social control approach, in that it seeks to explain a non-event: the failure of the working class to develop a revolutionary consciousness and places struggles over the content of popular culture at the centre of this explanation. Although this is a valid reminder that this framework, like the social control approach, can be vulnerable to criticisms of offering a teleological explanation of popular culture. It needs to be remembered that the Gramscian approach, in outlining the requirement for hegemony, does not assume that this is realised. It may not be, and even if it is, it may be contested, breakdown and even be reversed by counter-hegemonic tendencies. Retaining a degree of social determinism also has the merit of avoiding an overly reified view of popular culture. The imperative for cultural hegemony on the part of the dominant class is rooted in their relationship to the means of production. This, and the fact that popular culture is regarded as one of a number of sites through which cultural hegemony may be realised, means, therefore, that it is located within, and related to, the wider context of the broader system of social relations within society.

V

This study will employ a broadly bi-polar framework of cultural analysis which regards its main subject matter - hiring fairs - as being part of rural popular culture. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that is that hiring fairs were primarily, though not exclusively, an occasion with the greatest

significance and resonance for a section of the rural population whose status and way of life placed them outside of the social and political elite: the young male and female farm servants. These farm servants, it will be argued, should be regarded as fraction or sub-section of a rural proletariat. This justification for conceptualising hiring fairs as a form of popular culture rests therefore upon the argument that East Riding society had, by the mid-nineteenth century, become socially divided by a process of class formation and that this process of class formation had created a working-class sub-culture. A sub-culture, within which the hiring fairs and their economic and social functions were central. The second justification for employing a two-tier model of analysis follows on from this. For all its faults, the notion of a popular culture with its emphasis upon it being distinct from, but existing in relation to, an elite culture, facilitates the delineation of this culture and its internal characteristics and functions. Elite perceptions of, and relations to, this culture can then be examined.

In an attempt to mitigate at least some of the overly homogeneous, static and passive representations of popular culture sometimes associated with the two-tier model, however, this study will try to modify this approach. Principally this will involve aligning it with a Gramscian approach. It will be emphasised for example, that hiring fairs, whilst having special significance for farm servants and their way of life, were also a site for the negotiation and reshaping of the broader pattern of economic and cultural relations between farm servants and other social groups. One obvious way in which this occurred was the manner in which hiring fairs developed as sites for the negotiation of wages and conditions of work. Thus, although the two-tier model which emphasises a cultural dichotomy between elite and popular culture is retained, there will also be an emphasis upon regarding the hiring fairs as a site for two-way flows between these cultures. Emphasis will also be made of the fact that hiring fairs

were not discrete 'cultural' events set apart from the material existence of those involved. It will be suggested that they were linked in a recursive manner to changes within the agricultural mode of production. It will also be suggested that there were important divisions within the farm servant sub-group, in the form of, for example, gender roles and that these also were related to changes in the nature of East Riding agriculture. Within this modified framework then, emphasis will be placed upon regarding hiring fairs not as a static form of traditional culture but as a dynamic form of popular culture at the heart of processes of economic and social change.

This study will also regard the campaign directed against hiring fairs as an attempt to exert 'social control' on the part of the Church of England. Although historians have become understandably wary of problems associated with the concept of social control, it is the argument of this thesis that it might still have a role in analysing the contested nature of cultural change. The mindfulness of the criticisms made of this approach will, however, be reflected in a number of adaptations. Here the concept of social control will be employed in a relatively narrow sense which focuses upon the institutional basis of mechanisms of social control rather than regarding these as being inherent in society. Mid-Victorian rural society was characterised by inequalities of wealth and power and this gave certain individuals and institutions at least the potential opportunity to intervene in and affect the content of popular culture. The Church of England was undoubtedly such an institution, and the Church campaign against hiring fairs in the East Riding was an attempt to exercise social control. It involved a powerful institution in a concerted attempt to reshape, and even abolish, a form of popular culture that it increasingly regarded as deviant. In this thesis, however, the concept of social control will be utilised in conjunction with the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony. It will be suggested that

although this attempt to reform and abolish hiring fairs, can be regarded as an attempt to exert social control it needs also to be regarded as one element within a broader attempt to secure cultural hegemony for the Church of England. In this instance Church of England clergymen, who were at the centre of this activity, will not be interpreted primarily as 'organic intellectuals' seeking to secure hegemony on behalf of a specific class or alliance of classes, but rather, as the advocates of a narrower agenda designed to promote the Church of England as a social institution. The world view advocated by Anglican clergymen, with its emphasis upon the value of hierarchy and paternalism, might be regarded as an attempt by organic intellectuals to secure hegemony on behalf of the landed interest. However, although the ideological predilections and the social background of many clergymen placed them closest to the landed interest; it will be argued in this thesis that by mid-nineteenth century they increasingly resembled 'traditional intellectuals' - the organic intellectuals of a former mode of production, who are becoming increasingly autonomous and independent.⁴⁶ Their advocacy of the need for social control will be regarded as stemming not so much from a desire to bolster the prevailing economic and social order, but from a need to assert the primacy of the Church of England as a viable institution in an increasingly competitive environment. Accepting that there was a desire on the part of the Church to exert social control, need not entail that it, or the broader objective of achieving institutional hegemony, succeeded.

In order to understand the objectives and evaluate the impact of the attempt to promote a reformation of popular culture this study will locate the initiative within the broader economic and social framework of the rural East Riding. It will be suggested that there was a conjuncture between the renewed social

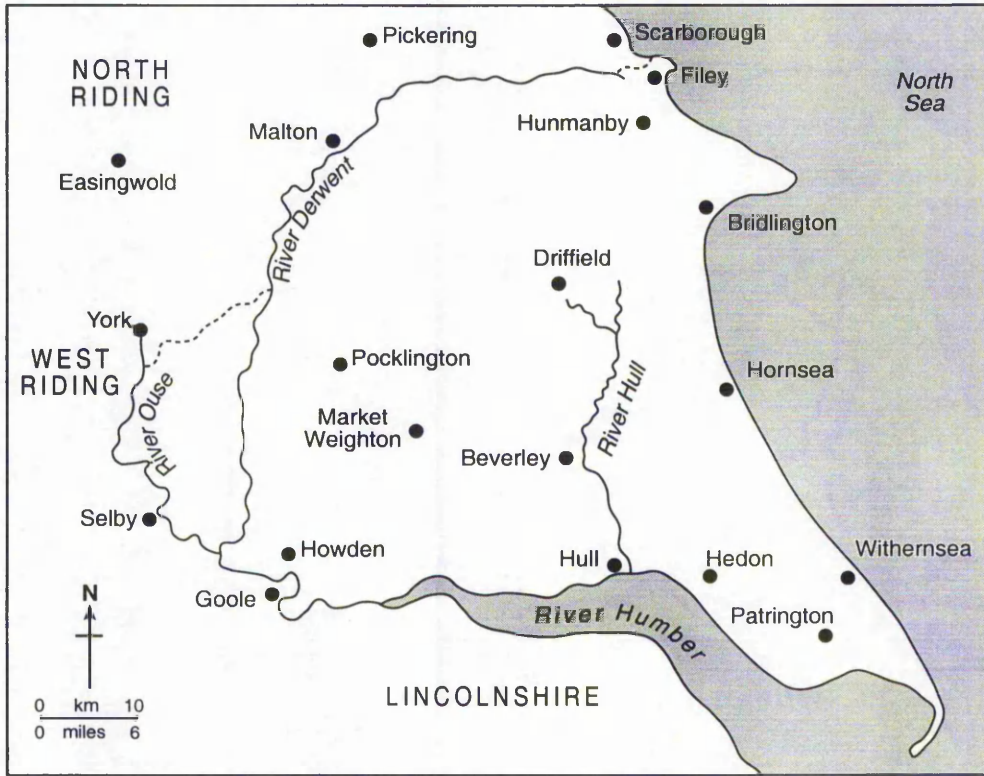
⁴⁶ On intellectuals, see Hoare and Nowell Smith, 'Notebooks' pp. 3-23.

activism of the Church of England and the course of economic and social change in the East Riding from the late-eighteenth century. In particular, the campaign directed against hiring fairs, it will be argued, needs to be placed within the context of a two-phase agricultural revolution in the East Riding which had the effect of both sustaining and reshaping the institution of farm service. This, it will be suggested, presented problems for the Church of England, and especially its agenda of re-asserting itself as an hegemonic institution in rural society.

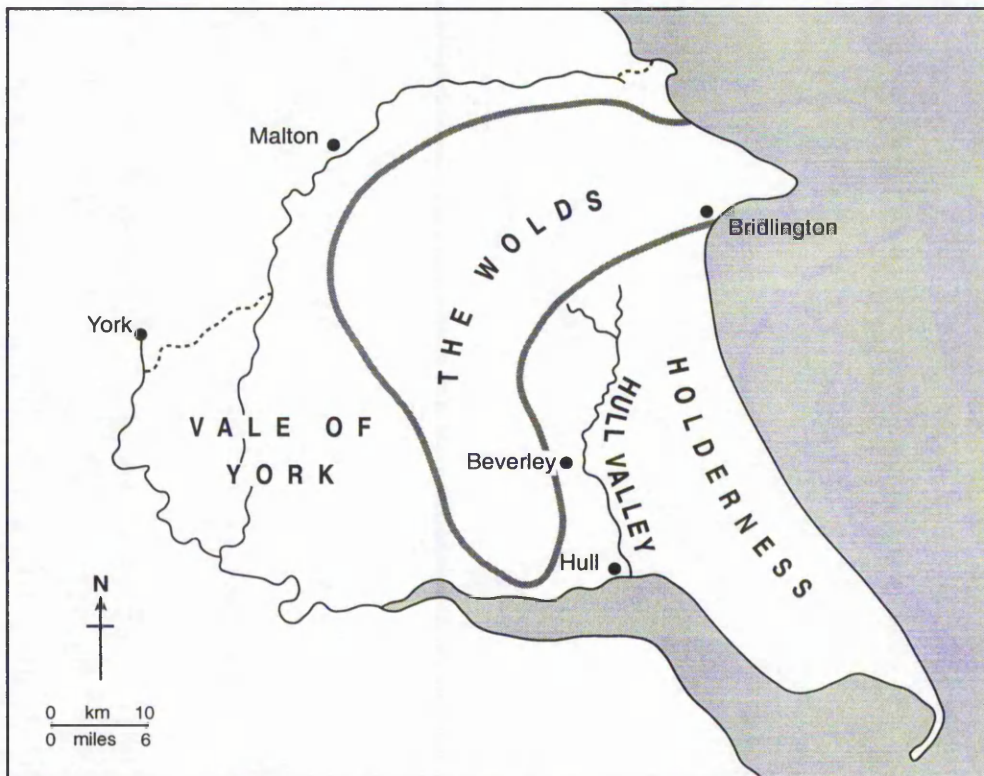
V

The structure of the thesis will take the following form. **Chapter One** will outline the nature and course of a two-phase agricultural revolution in the East Riding. It will also focus upon the manner in which this agricultural revolution involved the continuation and adaptation of farm service. The social implications of this will be explored in **Chapter Two**. Here it will be suggested that agricultural modernisation prompted changes in the nature of farm service which entailed the proletarianization of the farm servant. **Chapters Three and Four** will examine the functions of hiring fairs as labour markets and recreational festivals within the context of the economic and social changes discussed in chapters one and two. **Chapter Five** delineates the critique of hiring fairs developed by the Church of England during the mid-Victorian period and examines its underlying motivations. **Chapters Six and Seven** will examine the reforms that the Church of England attempted to impose upon hiring fairs. **Chapter Six** focuses upon the two major phases of reform in the 1850s and 60s; **Chapter Seven** upon a final phase of reform in the 1870s. This chapter will also examine the manner in which this final phase led to increased tension between farmers and clergymen on the issue of hiring fairs: a tension which led farmers to attempt own campaign of reform. This

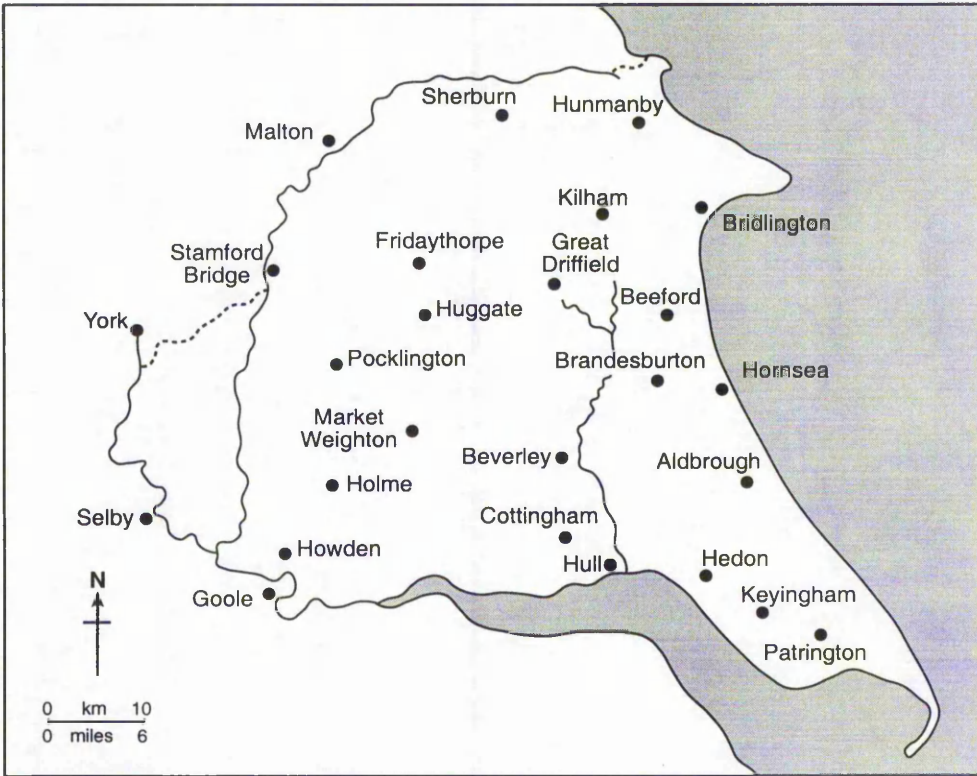
campaign will also be examined. The **Conclusion** will evaluate the impact of these campaigns upon hiring fairs during the mid-Victorian period and place them within the context of other more piecemeal changes that occurred at this time.



Map 1. The East Riding and its vicinity



Map 2. The East Riding of Yorkshire: Main agricultural regions in the mid-19th century



Map 3. The East Riding of Yorkshire: Hiring Fairs in the mid-19th century

Chapter One

Agriculture and Social Change in the East Riding c. 1750-1880

This chapter will outline the course of agricultural change in the East Riding from the mid-eighteenth century to the late-nineteenth century. The East Riding can be divided into three agricultural regions: the Wolds, Holderness and the Hull Valley, and the Vale of York (see map 1). The majority of the hiring fairs studied in this thesis were in or close to the Wolds area (see map 2). Agricultural and social changes here will, therefore, form the main focus of this chapter but salient developments in the other two areas will also be discussed.

From the mid-eighteenth century the nature of agriculture in the East Riding was transformed by changes in land use and cultivation which altered the appearance of the East Riding's landscape.¹ This was the first stage of the agricultural revolution in the East Riding.² At the heart of this process of change was the enclosure of open fields and their replacement by individual consolidated farming units which in turn permitted the adoption of new husbandry techniques. Prior to the onset of Parliamentary enclosure in the 1730s, some significant changes had already taken place in the East Riding through the growth and consolidation of farms, the subdivision and piecemeal enclosure of open fields, and some enclosure of open-fields commons and wastelands.³ Despite these developments, which allowed for pockets of change, innovation

¹ O Wilkinson, *The Agricultural Revolution in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: No. 5, 1956; A. Harris, *The Rural Landscape of the East Riding of Yorkshire 1700-1850*, Oxford University Press, London, 1961.

² The notion of a two stage agricultural revolution is derived from F.M.L. Thompson, 'The Second Agricultural Revolution', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, XXI, 1968. Here Thompson distinguishes between a first agricultural revolution based upon enclosure and new techniques of husbandry which occurred in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century and a second agricultural revolution based upon increased inputs in the form of artificial fertilisers, animal feeds and mechanisation which occurred with the emergence of 'high farming' from the 1830s.

and even complete transformation, much of the medieval farming system remained, with approximately 40-50 per cent of the Riding still being farmed under the open-field system in the early-eighteenth century.⁴ This 'old regime' was most entrenched on the Wolds with only one third of the district being enclosed in 1730.⁵ In this sparsely populated area, continuous cultivation was generally confined to open fields, close to each settlement. Away from the settlement, shifting cultivation was practised in which marginal land was cleared, ploughed, and when exhausted, allowed to revert to its fallow state. The proportion of arable cultivation here was small, therefore, and the Wolds was distinguished primarily by its concentration on the rearing and fattening of sheep: the greater part of agricultural land being taken up with common pasture and sheep-walk.⁶ For most of the eighteenth century, agriculture on the Wolds was regarded in a poor light, rents were low, the population of the area was declining and although improved rotations were being introduced in some of the infields, the extent and productivity of arable agriculture remained limited. Cultivated land petered out beyond the village settlements and much of this open countryside was empty except for rabbit warrens.

Agriculture in Holderness and the Hull Valley and the Vale of York was in a more advanced state than the Wolds in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Vale of York was at this time regarded as the leading agricultural region in the East Riding: about three-quarters of its cultivated land was enclosed and it was the only area in which the old system had been almost entirely eroded.⁷

³ K J Allison, *The East Riding of Yorkshire Landscape*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1976, pp. 126-130.

⁴ A Harris, *The Open Fields of East Yorkshire*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: No. 9, 1966, p. 3; J. Crowther, 'The Incidence and Chronology of Parliamentary Enclosure', in S. Neave and S. Ellis eds, *An Historical Atlas of East Yorkshire*, University of Hull Press, Hull, 1996, p. 66.

⁵ Crowther, 'Incidence', p. 66.

⁶ Harris, 'Open Fields', pp. 3-9.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9.

Close to two-thirds of the cultivated acreage in Holderness was enclosed.⁸ Thus, whilst East Riding agriculture could not be described as being entirely stagnant in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth century, it was far from being at the leading edge of agricultural progress. Important barriers to change were the limited extent of enclosure on the Wolds and the poor drainage of much of the Vale of York and parts of Holderness. Improvement, in the form of convertible husbandry 'involving the alternation of arable and grass in place of the ancient division of the cultivated area between permanent arable and permanent grass which tended to undermine the fertility of both' existed within the East Riding at this time but its adoption had been fitful, comparatively late and limited.⁹

I

A fundamental transformation of the agriculture and landscape of the East Riding began in the mid-eighteenth century when there was a significant acceleration in the pace of parliamentary enclosure. The peak eighteenth-century decades in terms of enclosure activity were the 1760s and the 1770s which saw 42 and 36 Enclosure Acts respectively.¹⁰ Although Arthur Young could still describe the East Riding as containing 'far more open field than enclosure' in 1771, in fact, by this time 'a large scale of attack upon the old system was by now well under way'.¹¹ This attack was further encouraged by the high prices during the French Wars and the additional impetus provided by the General Enclosure Act of 1801. By 1810, open-field agriculture had disappeared from most of the Riding, and although a 'trickle' of acts continued until 1900 'the

⁸ Crowther, 'Incidence', p. 66.

⁹ J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1880*, B.T. Batsford, London, 1966, p. 4; Harris, 'Open Fields' p. 10; M.G. Adams 'Agricultural Change in The East Riding of Yorkshire, 1850-1880: An Economic and Social History', Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Hull, 1977, p. 13.

¹⁰ Crowther, 'Incidence', p. 66.

¹¹ Wilkinson, 'Agricultural Revolution', p. 7.

greater part of the of the Riding had been enclosed by 1815'.¹² The only area that retained a substantial proportion of open arable acreage after this date was the Wolds, but by 1850 this too had all but disappeared.¹³

Enclosure enabled the removal of fetters, which under the open field system, had restricted the pace and extent of agricultural change. The status of enclosure as a necessary force for agricultural improvement has been questioned in recent historiography but in the East Riding it undoubtedly facilitated and encouraged the adoption of new crop rotations which provided the basis for an expansion of mixed arable farming.¹⁴ As Grigg has stated, the introduction of the turnip was fundamental for laying the foundations for the type of agriculture which evolved into the integrated arable and livestock husbandry associated with 'high farming, in its mid-Victorian 'Golden Age':

The central feature of the new methods was the integration of livestock and arable farming. It is true that both crops and stock had been raised on open field farms, but the two systems were only incidentally locked. The turnip was the key to integration. The bare fallow could then be utilized, providing feed for livestock whilst still resting the land from successive grain crops. Sheep could be folded on the crop, their feet consolidating the lighter soils, as well as manuring the land for the succeeding wheat crop.¹⁵

The adoption and diffusion of new rotations involving seeds and turnips in the East Riding from the mid-eighteenth century was 'associated closely' with the parliamentary enclosure movement.¹⁶ The region had been sluggish in its

¹² Ibid.

¹³ A. Harris, 'Rural Landscape', p. 97.

¹⁴ R.C. Allen, 'Agriculture during the Agricultural Revolution', in R. Floud and D. McCloskey, eds, *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700*, 2 Vols, Second Edition, I, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994; Idem, 'Tracking the agricultural revolution in England', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, LII, 1999; M. Overton, 'Re-establishing the agricultural revolution', *Agricultural History Review*, 44, 1996.

¹⁵ D. Grigg. *The Agricultural Revolution in South Lincolnshire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966, p. 48.

¹⁶ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 16.

adoption of the 'new husbandry': both turnips and clover being absent prior to the eighteenth century, and their use was limited thereafter until they were adopted as field crops in areas of enclosure from the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁷ The areas of the greatest diffusion of new rotations from this time were also the areas in which parliamentary enclosure was most extensive.¹⁸

The extent of change varied in each of the three regions. It was most pronounced on the Wolds where the process of pre-parliamentary enclosure had been most limited. Here 70 per cent of enclosure proceeded through Act. Most of this occurred in two phases of activity. On the lower-eastern and western slopes, enclosure tended to occur in the 1760s and 1770s. On the high Wolds enclosure took place principally between 1790 and 1819.¹⁹ This promoted a gradual but increasingly dramatic transformation in land use on the Wolds as the former predominance of grass gave way to mixed arable farming. Led by the example of a number of prominent landowners, large tracts of the old sheep pasture were pared and burnt, enclosed and then cultivated. Enclosure and an expansion of arable farming was well underway by the end of the eighteenth century, but, whereas at the beginning of the French Wars, permanent pasture and rabbit warrens were still common, by 1850 most of the rabbit warrens, open fields and permanent grass had either disappeared or were about to.²⁰

The mixed arable farming that developed on the Wolds from the late-eighteenth century was based upon the Norfolk four-course rotation or variations of it. From the 1770s, seeds and turnips had rapidly become the basis of Wolds' husbandry. During the French Wars, and the remainder of the first half of the nineteenth century, this system became more pervasive. As grass land was

¹⁷ Harris 'Open Fields', p. 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10; Harris, 'Rural Landscape', p. 61; Adams 'Agricultural Change', p. 18.

¹⁹ Crowther, 'Incidence', p. 66.

converted to tillage, wheat became increasingly important: production of wheat doubled and that of barley quadrupled between 1820 and 1848.²¹ Livestock husbandry, principally in the form of sheep, remained important to Wolds' agriculture but there were important changes in its character. Between 1770 and 1830, new breeds of sheep were introduced as native shortwools, and Holderness longwools, were replaced by flocks of Improved Leicesters. These provided an increase of up to 100 per cent in the weight of wool produced by each sheep whilst also offering a larger carcass when slaughtered.²² Shortages of winter feed had once been a factor limiting the size of Wolds' flocks but the introduction of turnip cultivation now provided enough winter feed to allow farmers to expand the size of their flocks and many now carried flocks of several hundred animals.²³ As these new flocks were integrated into a regime of mixed arable and livestock husbandry the result was an 'improved and highly capitalised, high-input arable farming system'.²⁴ One lingering problem for this system which had threatened to stall its progress in the early-nineteenth century was that of producing enough manure to sustain the turnip crop. In overcoming this 'bottleneck' the Wolds began to experience the onset of the second phase of its agricultural revolution. Following the example of the leading landowners on the Wolds, the Sykes family of Sledmere, many Wolds' farmers began to apply artificial fertiliser in the form of bone manure.²⁵ The efficiency of its application was increased by the use of technology in the form of fixed and portable bone mills and drilling machines. These enabled the fine-grinding of bones and their application at the turnip drilling stage.²⁶ Another means of increasing manure production, through the keeping of store-fed cattle, had become increasingly

²⁰ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 18; Harris, 'Landscape', p. 97.

²¹ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 20.

²² G.G.S. Bowie, 'Northern Wolds and Wessex Downlands: Contrasts in Sheep Husbandry and Farming Practice, 1770-1850', *Agricultural History Review*, 38, 1990, p. 118, pp. 124-125.

²³ Harris, 'Rural Landscape', p. 106.

²⁴ Bowie, 'Northern Wolds', p. 118.

²⁵ Harris, 'Rural Landscape', p. 105.

important by 1850.²⁷ Purpose built 'high barns', some of them with accommodation for resident labourers, were constructed for this purpose on the high Wolds from the beginning of the nineteenth century.²⁸ By the middle of the nineteenth century, therefore, the Wolds had experienced a first agricultural revolution and was well into a second as 'high farming' became increasingly predominant. An example of the type of improvements taking place on the Wolds is provided by the example of Eastburn, a mixed arable and pasture farm of 1,300 acres situated on the south eastern edge of the Yorkshire Wolds and occupied from 1849 by a Mr Jordan, a tenant of Lord Hotham. In 1849 Eastburn was already a partially enclosed holding with 800 acres under mixed arable cultivation. The remaining 450 acres, however, was rabbit warren. Jordan divided the farm into two farmsteads and enclosed the warren into fields of 60 acres. In the process, 6 miles of warren was levelled, 20 miles of quick fences were planted and 40 miles of post and rail were erected. All but 75 acres of this newly enclosed land was ploughed up and brought under arable cultivation:

The gravely land of this warren was so sterile, that tradition says, that it would not even grow twitch; but Mr Jordan, after giving it a good dressing of bone, essayed to grow a crop of turnips on it, much to the astonishment of his neighbours and servants. His success was not brilliant in the first year, but, what few roots he did obtain were fed off by sheep, with a liberal allowance of cake. The next year he again attempted to grow turnips, and this time obtained a good crop, which was disposed of as before; after which the land was cultivated for many years on the four-course system, by a continued liberal use of artificial manures, it has been rendered tolerably productive.²⁹

²⁶ Bowie, 'Northern Wolds', p. 123.

²⁷ Harris, 'Rural Landscape', p. 105.

²⁸ G. Legard, 'Farming of the East Riding of Yorkshire', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, IX, 1848, p. 104; C. Hayfield, 'Manure Factories? The Post-enclosure High Barns of the Yorkshire Wolds', *Landscape History*, 13, 1991.

²⁹ W. H. M. Jenkins, 'Show Farm: Eastburn Farm, near Driffeld Yorkshire', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, IV, 1869, p. 403.

The better loamy soils of the warren were also improved through repeated liming and its 75 acres of grass was, after being laid down, dressed with bones and manure. The remaining grassland of the farm was also 'much improved' by the 'liberal use' of 'linseed cake roots &c', and 60 acres of carr land was 'thoroughly drained' and brought under cultivation.³⁰ Both the new and the more established land continued to be improved and maintained through the employment of flexible rotations, artificial fertilisers and frequent manuring. By 1869, the two farmsteads comprised of 1300 acres, of which 1050 was arable, and maintained 36 cart horses, 100 cattle, 800 sheep and 50 pigs. The annual expenditure on linseed cake and other artificial food, fertiliser and dressing was £2,430. In addition to this 'a large quantity of lime' was used at a cost of approximately 10s per ton. Its labour force of farm servants, day, casual and harvest labour cost close to £1, 600 per annum.³¹

The key factor stimulating such improving efforts 'on the part of market orientated landlords to improve their estates through a policy of heavy investment' was the price of food, particularly high corn prices. The two periods of most intensive enclosure coincided with high corn prices.³² The increased demand and prices obtained for sheep carcasses and heavy fleeces to supply the expanding urban populations and woollen mills of the West Riding was also significant.³³ By 1850, an area that in the mid-eighteenth century had been criticised for its tracts of uncultivated sheepwalk and rabbit warrens, had developed 'An extensive type of agriculture dominated by the large capitalist farmer'.³⁴ These farms were the largest in the county, ranging from 300 to over 1,300 acres, their agricultural practices now served as a model of agricultural

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, p. 413.

³² Adams, 'Agricultural Change', pp. 16-17.

³³ Bowie, 'Northern Wolds', p. 118.

³⁴ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 20.

progress and their tenants were commended by agricultural writers such as James Caird for their liberal and progressive attitudes, their willingness to embrace the use of modern technology, and their wealth.³⁵

II

Agricultural change was less dramatic in the lowland areas of Holderness and the Hull Valley and the Vale of York. In part this stemmed from the fact that agriculture here had been in a more advanced state in 1750 than was the case on the Wolds. Change was, therefore, likely to be less dramatic. Equally important, however, was the fact that these areas, with their heavier and often poorly-drained soils, were less amenable to the types of improvement practised on the Wolds. Most of the Vale was low lying and flat and suffered from poor drainage. In the far south, close to the River Humber, there was marshland and to the north of this large tracts of carr land. The largest of this, Wallingfen, extended up to Market Weighton. The rest of the Vale was drained by the River Derwent and the flat-floored valley of this river experienced frequent flooding. Although there had been some improvements by the early-eighteenth century, and although the Vale of York was at this time regarded as the leading agricultural district in the East Riding, much of the area remained in 'a relatively undrained state'.³⁶ There was also a significant amount of old enclosed land in the Vale of York: only about a quarter of its land was enclosed by Act.³⁷ Interest in improving agriculture here had begun 'in earnest' from the mid-eighteenth century when there was a concerted effort to improve drainage and communications and thereby facilitate the enclosure of commons and wastelands

³⁵ In 1851 Caird thought them to be amongst the wealthiest farmers in the county, J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-51*, London, 1852, p. 310.

³⁶ J. A. Sheppard, *The Draining of the Marshlands of South Holderness and the Vale of York*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: No. 20, 1966, p. 19.

³⁷ Crowther, 'Incidence', p. 66.

and the introduction of improved methods of cultivation.³⁸ Under the Market Weighton Navigation and Drainage Act of 1772, for example, the Market Weighton Canal was cut in the 1770s and 1780s. It combined navigation and drainage functions with both existing rivers and new channels draining into the canal.³⁹ The improved drainage of the northern carr lands south of Market Weighton that resulted, enabled extensive enclosures in this area. The Bishopsoil Inclosure and Drainage Act saw the construction of two more drains which ran into the Humber. Existing drains were also improved around Howden, an area known as Howdenshire. Here also from the early-nineteenth century, there were significant gains through extensive warping which produced substantial new tracts of rich fertile soil. Despite these improvements in the northern carrs and Howdenshire, much of the Vale continued to suffer from poor drainage and waterlogging throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁰

After the Napoleonic Wars, drainage tiles became popular in the Vale of York and by the 1830s it was claimed that they had enabled 'extensive improvements'.⁴¹ At Scoreby near York, for example, large sums were spent on underdraining with the result that land that once required regular fallowing was brought into a high state of cultivation.⁴² The consequence of this uneven pattern of development in the Vale was a varied farming structure. Where adequate drainage had combined with enclosure, improvements, in the form of new crop rotations, had enabled a mixed farming regime to become established. From the mid-eighteenth century the Norfolk four-course rotation became more common and the application of marl and bones was practised by improving farmers. By 1801 many turnips were grown in the Vale and the four-course

³⁸ Sheppard, 'Draining Marshlands', p. 20.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 24

⁴¹ C. Howard, *A General View of the Agriculture of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, Library of Useful Knowledge, London, 1836, p. 24.

alternate husbandry became general on lighter soils after the Napoleonic Wars. Where poor drainage persisted however, and where heavy clay lands were predominant, conditions were not conducive to the new husbandry and bare fallowing was still common in the 1840s.⁴³ The Tithe Surveys of the 1840s reflect this mixed picture, indicating that although the Vale was predominantly arable, oats and increasingly wheat being the leading crops within four or five course rotations, there were also substantial pockets of permanent pasture in areas of heavy and poorly-drained land.⁴⁴ Livestock continued to be important here, therefore, and considerable numbers of sheep and cattle were kept, the latter being particularly important in areas of lush meadow pasture close to the Derwent and Humber rivers. Flax was a significant crop around Melbourne and Kelfield in the northern Vale. It was also grown in substantial quantities in the vicinity of Howden, whilst potatoes were also becoming an increasingly important crop on the rich loams and warplands close to the Ouse.⁴⁵

Holderness and the Hull Valley was also an area of early enclosure with approximately 60 per cent of its land being enclosed before the parliamentary enclosure period. The remainder of these areas was enclosed in the second half of the eighteenth century with the greater part of the region being enclosed by 1801.⁴⁶ As was the case in the Vale of York, both Holderness and the Hull Valley suffered from substantial tracts of heavy and often poorly-drained land. William Marshall described Holderness as 'fen country' in the late-eighteenth century and the continued inadequacy of drainage here meant that the new husbandry was adopted in a slower and more fitful manner than on the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 22.

⁴⁴ A. Harris and R. Kain, 'Agricultural Land Use in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', in S. Neave and S. Ellis, eds, 'Historical Atlas', p. 70.

⁴⁵ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 22.

⁴⁶ Crowther, 'Incidence', p. 66.

Wolds.⁴⁷ Few turnips were grown here in 1801, although they were being introduced where lighter soils predominated and where improvements in drainage allowed, emphasising that here, as in much of the Vale of York, drainage was the key to agricultural progress. In southern Holderness, a major improvement in drainage was achieved under the Keyingham Drainage Act of 1802 which resulted in measures that prevented serious flooding and ensured that the valleys of south Holderness had obtained 'reasonably adequate drainage by the early nineteenth century'.⁴⁸ The carr lands of the northern part of the Hull Valley were described as 'coarse boggy land' in the early-eighteenth century and were still subject to extensive winter flooding after 1750.⁴⁹ The better-drained silt land in the south of the valley was also still in danger of flooding at this time and a general inadequacy field drainage here meant that never more than a third of the land was under the plough. From the late-eighteenth century however, the protracted drainage of these waterlogged lands and parts of adjoining Holderness began in earnest.⁵⁰ These improvements enabled a better co-ordinated system of drainage for both the northern and southern parts of the Hull Valley and reduced flooding there to 'a brief winter season'.⁵¹ A significant change was also brought about by the reclamation of substantial areas of new land in both the southern part of the Hull Valley and Holderness. Along the shores of the Humber, the deposition of sand and silt enabled reclamation of new land that transformed land use and the appearance of the landscape. The most dramatic example of this was at Sunk Island in southern Holderness. This area virtually ceased to be an island after 2,730 acres were added to the existing embanked area of 1,560 acres between 1798 and 1800.⁵²

⁴⁷ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 14; Allison, 'East Riding', p. 158.

⁴⁸ Sheppard, 'Draining Marshlands', p. 11.

⁴⁹ J.A. Sheppard, *The Draining of the Hull Valley*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: No. 8, 1958.

⁵⁰ Allison, 'East Riding', p. 168.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Thus, although the pattern of development was uneven, the period 1750-1850 had seen fundamental change in East Riding agriculture. By 1850, most of the region was experiencing the culmination of a first agricultural revolution that had witnessed its transformation into an area in which large-scale mixed arable farming was increasingly predominant. The greatest transformation had been experienced on the Yorkshire Wolds which now possessed the largest cultivated acreage in the East Riding. Here the first agricultural revolution which had begun in the second half of the eighteenth century with rapid enclosure and the application of new rotations had merged into a second agricultural revolution from the early-nineteenth century as 'growing consumer demands for meat and wool encouraged substantial capital expenditure, and led to an early expansion into High Farming'.⁵³ The experience of the lowland areas of the Vale of York, Holderness and the Hull Valley from the late-eighteenth century was less dramatic. By the mid-nineteenth century increasingly unfavourable comparisons were being drawn between the advanced nature of Wolds' farming and that of the lowland regions.⁵⁴ However, although agriculture in these regions lagged behind the Wolds, the trend towards arable farming was 'still powerful' here, and in general its agriculture 'compared well with standards nationally'.⁵⁵ The lowland areas possessed farms that were able to match those of the Wolds in terms of agricultural progress, offering examples of the kinds of improvements possible when enclosure, improved rotations, and drainage were combined. Southern Holderness was the most advanced farming district in the lowland areas. Here, there were examples of the capital-intensive high farming characteristic of the second phase of the agricultural revolution. At Patrington in southern Holderness, for example, Enholmes, a 1000 acre farm created from land purchased in the 1840s, witnessed extensive drainage and the construction

⁵³ Bowie, 'Northern Wolds', p. 126.

⁵⁴ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', pp. 28-29.

⁵⁵ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 27.

of new farm buildings occupied by a 40 horses and 'large numbers' of bullocks, cows, pigs and poultry. It was also a heavily mechanised operation:

A steam-engine of eight-horse power occupies the centre of the barn, within whose capacious roof are fitted, (by Crosskill of Beverley), in different compartments, every imaginable machine for converting the corn and vegetable produce of the farm into food for the sustenance of man and beast.⁵⁶

In those lowland areas characterised by enclosure and drainage a transformation in the appearance of the landscape comparable with that on the Wolds had also been realised. At Sunk Island, for example, the extensive reclamation of land and its drainage and cultivation had resulted in a unique landscape reminiscent of fenland Lincolnshire.⁵⁷

A key factor retarding the development of 'high farming' systems in the lowlands had been the slump in prices experienced after the Napoleonic Wars. The Wolds had seen greater continuity and progress during this period because its light soils had greater immunity to the adverse circumstances offered by the downturn in prices. In the lowland vales, depressed prices were a greater impediment to the development of high farming as these lands were more costly to farm and improve. There was, therefore, some regression away from high farming here in the 1820s and 30s. From the late 1840s, and especially after 1850, however, as prices recovered, a process of increased convergence occurred between the regions and the pervasiveness of high farming expanded across the East Riding. Mechanisation, for example, became more widespread. Horse-powered threshing machines, first introduced in the late-eighteenth century, but already regarded as 'general' and 'indispensable' on larger farms by 1812, continued to increase in number in the first half of the nineteenth

⁵⁶ Caird, 'English Agriculture', p. 305.

⁵⁷ Allison, 'East Riding', p. 174.

century.⁵⁸ By the 1850s, steam-powered threshing machines were replacing horse-powered threshers and mechanical reapers were being introduced, (they were cutting half of the Riding's corn harvest by the 1870s).⁵⁹ The construction of new farm buildings and the use of artificial manures also increased considerably after 1850 especially where large farms predominated.⁶⁰ Tenancy agreements were modified and came to include tenant compensation for investments in, for example, oil cake, artificial manures, liming, marling and land drainage.⁶¹ Once again, the Wolds led the way in adopting these progressive methods and practices. In the late 1840s, for example, the scythe was replacing the sickle as the main harvesting tool in the lowlands but had completely done so on the Wolds.⁶² After 1850, mechanical reapers increasingly prevailed over the scythe on the Wolds and by the end of the 1860s it was reported that reaping machines had 'rendered both the scythe and the sickle nearly useless' there.⁶³ Improved tenancy agreements were pioneered on the Wolds from the late 1850s, a decade ahead of most lowland districts, and it was on the Wolds that there was the greatest use of liquid manure, drills, wheel rollers, scarifiers, clod crushers and harrows, artificial manures, marling and liming.⁶⁴ Improvements in the housing and feeding of cattle also increased the numbers of cattle kept on Wolds farms.⁶⁵

The progressive nature of agrarian capitalism in the East Riding continued, therefore, to be best exemplified by the Yorkshire Wolds. Never the less,

⁵⁸ H. E. Strickland, *A General View of the Agriculture of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, York, 1812. p. 85; Wilkinson, 'Agricultural Revolution', p. 13.

⁵⁹ W. Wright, 'On the Improvements of the Farming of Yorkshire since the date of the last Report in the Journal', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, XXII, 1861, p. 102; *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 1 September, 1870.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*; Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 48.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

⁶² G. Legard, 'On the Farming of the East Riding of Yorkshire', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, IX, 1848, p.117; Wright, 'Improvements', p.102.

⁶³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 19 August, 1869.

⁶⁴ Wright, 'Improvements', p. 102.

although the two other main agricultural regions of the Riding continued to lag behind the Wolds as centres of high farming, farming there also became 'considerably higher' between 1850 and 1880.⁶⁶ Many lowland farms were consolidated and their fields enlarged during this period. As a consequence, the average size of farm in these areas increased. In the Vale of York, for example, the average size of farm increased by 14.5% between 1851-1871.⁶⁷ Increases in farm and field size facilitated mechanisation on the lowlands and the reaper was in 'general use' in Howdenshire and Holderness by 1870.⁶⁸ The development of small reapers specifically designed for use on small and medium-sized farms after 1860 also helped to encourage their wider diffusion.⁶⁹ Steam-ploughs were also being used in Holderness by 1861 and, encouraged by government loans, drainage schemes were 'pressed forward vigorously' in the lowland areas after 1850, facilitating a 'general improvement in land drainage' there in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ Thus, although still trailing the Wolds, lowland agriculture made 'considerable progress' in the mid-nineteenth century and as a consequence: 'the efficiency gap between the Wolds and the Vales narrowed between 1850 and 1880'.⁷¹

Although something of a late-comer, therefore, the East Riding's agricultural revolution displayed similar characteristics to the capitalist modernisation of agriculture elsewhere. Enclosure and the introduction of new rotations promoted increased farm size, new methods of cultivation and advances in mechanisation. Indeed partly because of this lateness, in terms of the size and layout of its farms, its utilisation of modern technology, much of the East Riding could claim

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 103.

⁶⁶ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 42.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.128.

⁶⁹ Ibid; *Driffield Times*, 30 August, 1870.

⁷⁰ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 41.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 45.

to be amongst the most modern and progressive examples of the mixed high farming associated with the mid-Victorian 'Golden Age' of English agriculture. The effects of this economic transformation upon the growth and distribution of population, the settlement pattern, and the social structure of East Riding society will now be explored.

III

At the first census in 1801, the East Riding was one of England's most rural counties with a population density of under 100 per square mile.⁷² After 1801 the population roughly doubled from 110, 614 in 1801 to 238, 034 in 1861, a rate of increase roughly in line with the national average of 102 per cent. Much of this expansion was accounted for by the growth of Hull, its number of inhabitants rising from 29,965 in 1801 to 99,196 in 1861. But other urban centres such as Norton, Driffield, and Beverley also experienced a rapid expansion of population during this period.⁷³ Although more than half of this growth was urban, however, there was also a substantial expansion of the rural population from 56,311 in 1801 to 98, 981 in 1851; with two-thirds of rural parishes recording increases of over 50 per cent in this period and one third, mainly on the Wolds, recording increases of over 100 per cent.⁷⁴ The main cause of this population growth in rural parishes was agricultural change in the form of the expansion of large-scale capitalist farming. In the East Riding, as was the case in other areas in which enclosure was associated with the cultivation of previously uncultivated 'wastelands', there was an expansion of population.⁷⁵ Rural population growth was greatest in areas of recent enclosure,

⁷² M. Trevor Wild, 'Population Change: 1801-1991', in Neave and Ellis, eds, 'Historical Atlas', p. 46.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁵ A. Armstrong, 'Labour I: Rural Population Growth, Systems of Employment, and Incomes', in G.E. Mingay, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. VI, 1750-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 658-660.

which, in expanding the cultivated acreage, prompted a rising demand for the tradesmen, craftsmen and especially the agricultural labourers that were integral to the needs of modern capitalist agriculture.⁷⁶ The general trend across the rural East Riding was for this increased demand for labour and services to curb rural out-migration and also to encourage in-migration at a time of a rising rural birth rate and promote the resulting increase in the total population.⁷⁷

The variations in this general pattern between the main agricultural regions of the Riding reinforces the importance of the transition to large-scale capitalist agriculture as a factor shaping population change.⁷⁸ The area of greatest population growth was the Wolds, where, as we have seen, there was extensive enclosure of previously uncultivated land and an early entry into high farming. The changes associated with this - the ploughing up of sheepwalk and rabbit warrens, the introduction and maintenance of the Norfolk four-course husbandry, the ploughing, harrowing, drilling, repeated carting of manure and numerous applications of fertiliser and the expansion in the numbers of livestock - created an increased demand for a large permanent agricultural labour force. As a consequence, a majority of Wolds' parishes experienced population increase, with many doubling and some trebling their population in the first half of the nineteenth century through a combination of an increased birth-rate and significant in-migration.⁷⁹ In Holderness, where parliamentary enclosure and the development of high farming was less dramatic than the Wolds, the rate of population growth was correspondingly lower. The area that had seen the least recent enclosure and was least associated with the development of high farming, the Vale of York, saw a lower rate of population increase than both the Wolds and Holderness. Here, for example, there was some out-migration from rural

⁷⁶ Trevor Wild, 'Population Growth', p. 46.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid; Harris, 'Rural Landscape' p. 98.

parishes to nearby urban centres and into the two other agricultural regions of the Riding in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁰

Agricultural change and the expansion of the rural population that accompanied it, also promoted an alteration in the settlement pattern of the East Riding. A nucleated settlement pattern dominated by villages and hamlets was supplemented, and in some areas transformed, into a pattern of dispersed and isolated farmsteads built on newly enclosed lands. Again this pattern of change was most dramatic in the area of greatest agricultural transformation: the Yorkshire Wolds.⁸¹ In the mid-eighteenth century, when most of the Wolds was still under the open field system, the greater part of the population, and the majority of farms, were concentrated in nucleated villages and hamlets. Enclosure then promoted an increase in the number of large farms. Some of these were built within existing settlements, but from the 1770s, a 'rash of new outlying farmsteads' were built on newly-enclosed lands outside of and away from the old settlements. The number of isolated farmsteads on the Wolds increased from 195 in 1772 to 835 in 1843.⁸² By 1850, this process of 'post-enclosure dispersion' had transformed the settlement pattern of the Wolds and had led to a 'proliferation of one of the most common features of the East Riding landscape, the isolated farmhouse in the midst of its fields'.⁸³ The manner in which the expansion of large-scale capitalist agriculture promoted the creation of so many new and substantial farmsteads outside of the old nucleated settlements, had significant implications for both the geographical distribution of the expanding population of the Wolds and its social composition. Both were reshaped as agricultural change prompted a symbiotic process of population

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ M. B. Gleave, 'Dispersed and Nucleated Settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds, 1770-1850', *Institute of British Geographers, Transactions and Papers*, 30, 1962.

⁸² Ibid, p. 106, pp. 116-117.

growth, settlement expansion and geographical dispersal. This process of combined economic and social change can be illustrated through the example of Middleton on the Wolds in the period 1801-1851. During this time, Middleton expanded from a settlement of 46 houses in 1801 to one of 133 in 1851. Of the 86 new houses built in these years, 71 were in the nucleus of the settlement, including one new farmstead. No farmsteads existed outside of the nucleus prior to enclosure, but enclosure, which took place in 1805, resulted in the construction of 7 new large farmsteads and 8 cottages outside of the settlement. By 1831, although 23 farms remained in the settlement, they were, with the exception of the recently built farmstead, predominantly small and now accounted for less than one third of the farm acreage of the township. By 1851, this agricultural dominance of the large farms outside of the settlement had been reinforced with the total number of farms in the settlement declining through consolidation to 11. Middleton therefore demonstrates the characteristic pattern of settlement reshaping on the Wolds during the agricultural revolution: one of simultaneous growth of population within nucleated settlements being accompanied by an expansion of population in new large isolated farms and cottages away from the village centre. A similar process is evident in many other Wolds' parishes during the first half of the nineteenth century, including, for example, Wold Newton, East Heselton, Weaverthorpe and Thwing. All experienced a combined process of population growth and settlement dispersal at this time.⁸⁴ Middleton also illustrates another trend that was pervasive at this time, in that, agricultural change, population growth and its geographical dispersal was associated with a reshaping of the social structure. The decline in the total number of farms, and a corresponding increase in the predominance of large farms employing a substantial workforce, meant that the number of farmers in the settlement declined whilst the number of agricultural labourers

⁸³ Allison, 'East Riding', p. 160.

increased. There was also an increase in the number of tradesmen and professionals. Much of this increase was the product of in-migration into the parish.⁸⁵ For example, whilst most of the farmers in Middleton in 1841 were born in the parish, over fifty per cent of agricultural labourers and non-agriculturally employed population was external in origin, the product of in-migration into the village from other Wolds' townships, nearby market towns and farther afield.⁸⁶ An equal number of the heads of households originated in Middleton and other Wolds' townships; of the remainder, 14 originated from other parts of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire whilst one, a master shoemaker, was born on a ship in the Mediterranean.⁸⁷ Thus, like many other Wolds' parishes, Middleton was experiencing population growth, in-migration and class formation as it became stratified into a society of a few large landowners who owned the land, a limited number of substantial tenant farmers who managed the land, and an expanding number of agricultural labourers who worked the land. Complicating this increasingly tri-partite social structure - but only slightly - was a middle stratum of craftsmen and professionals. The majority of those groups which had expanded most rapidly - tradesmen, craftsmen and agricultural labourers - lived in the old established settlements, which, to a large extent accounts for the growth in the numbers of houses in the village. For example, the greater part of the agricultural labour force in Middleton was comprised of 63 married labourers who lived in the village and the recently-built cottages placed alongside the newly-created farmsteads. In addition to these, however, were 43 unmarried labourers who lived-in with their employers on the farm. 7 of these were resident on village farms, but the majority, 36, lived on the dispersed and isolated farmsteads created after enclosure.⁸⁸ This was a

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Gleave, 'Dispersed and Nucleated', pp. 110-113.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 113.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 110-112

pattern that was replicated in many Wolds' parishes. Large post-enclosure farms that drew part of their permanent labour-force from the nearby village, but also combined this with the labour of farm servants resident on the farm. For example, Neswick Farm, a six-hundred acre holding near Drifffield, employed 3 day-labourers on a regular basis throughout the year. This was supplemented by considerable, but irregular, bouts of employment for up to 10 women and 18 additional labourers recruited for five weeks during the harvest. The bulk of the labour on this farm was, however, provided by seven farm servants, hired by the year and living on the farm.⁸⁹ In some parts of the Wolds the proportion of resident farm servants in the labour force was even greater. A number of townships were comprised entirely of farmers' families and farm servants resident on the farm. The large numbers of farm servants suggesting that they formed the majority if not the entirety of the farm's labour force. At Cottam in 1841, for example, the only inhabited houses were two farmsteads containing 41 people. Similarly at Cowlam 38 people were housed in two farmsteads, the explanation for such large numbers being 'the practice of boarding on the farm many of those whose services were required daily'.⁹⁰ The origins of these unmarried male and female labourers living on such farms, was similar to the married householders in Wolds' villages, in that, the majority were born either in the parish or other nearby Wolds' settlements. A substantial minority, however, came from towns on the margins of the Wolds, elsewhere in Yorkshire, and from outside the county.⁹¹

These examples illustrate one of the most striking features of the Wolds, the manner in which its large arable farms utilised the labour of large numbers of resident farm servants. Agricultural modernisation did not initiate this practice.

⁸⁹ G. Legard, 'Mode of Cultivation Pursued upon Neswick Farm, near Drifffield', *Transactions of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society*, I, 1837, p. 31.

⁹⁰ Harris, 'East Riding', p. 99.

Henry Best, who farmed 460 acres at Elmswell near Driffield in the seventeenth-century, usually hired eight servants each year whom he boarded on the farm.⁹² A number of pre-enclosure farmhouses on the Wolds built in the seventeenth and eighteenth century also included rooms for the accommodation of farm servants.⁹³ At this time the Wolds was conforming to the national pattern. Farm service was common throughout seventeenth and eighteenth-century England. Like their counterparts elsewhere, Wolds' farmers found the labour of living in male and female farm servants a convenient and practical means of satisfying their labour requirements. Thereafter, the Wolds, and to a large extent the rest of the East Riding, deviated from what is often regarded as the 'normal' pattern of agricultural modernisation. In much of southern and eastern England, enclosure and the development of 'high farming' with its emphasis upon cereal production and integrated livestock husbandry coincided with a steep decline in the incidence of farm service. By the mid-nineteenth century farm service was almost extinct in the arable South and East.⁹⁴ In contrast the East Riding continued to employ large numbers of farm servants into the twentieth century.⁹⁵ Although this reliance was greatest on the Wolds, farm service was also significant in Holderness and the Vale of York. In 1851, for example, for the East Riding as a whole, farm servants comprised of 33 per cent of the total male agricultural labour force.⁹⁶ On the Wolds, the proportion of farm servants was higher than this, with the majority of townships recording

⁹¹ Gleave, 'Dispersed and Nucleated', p. 113.

⁹² D. Woodward, ed., *The Farming and Memorandum Books of Henry Best of Elmswell, 1642*, British Academy Records in Social and Economic History: New Series, VIII, 1984, p. xxix, p. xxxvii.

⁹³ C. Hayfield, 'Farm Servants' Accommodation on the Yorkshire Wolds', *Folk Life*, 33, 1994, pp. 14-15.

⁹⁴ A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 132.

⁹⁵ S. Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses. The Horselads of East Yorkshire*, Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991.

⁹⁶ J. A. Sheppard, 'East Yorkshire's Agricultural Labour Force in the mid-Nineteenth Century', *Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 9, 1961, p. 48.

over 33 per cent of farm servants and some exceeding 50 per cent.⁹⁷ In Holderness and the Vale of York either married day-labourers or family labour were generally more prevalent than farm servants, but in both areas there were significant enclaves in which farm service as a proportion of the agricultural labour force exceeded the Riding average of 33 per cent.⁹⁸

One explanation for this differential pattern, which might also throw light on the reasons for the general prevalence of farm servants in the East Riding, is farm size.⁹⁹ The Wolds was an area increasingly characterised by large farms, some in excess of 1000 acres employing up to 40 persons. In contrast, small farms often under 50 acres predominated in the Vale of York. These farms required the labour of only four or five persons, and as many of these could be found from within the farming family, there was less need for hired labour. In Holderness the average size of farm was greater than the Vale, between 300-800 acres and these required the labour of ten, and on the larger farms up to 30 persons, which meant that the proportion of the farm workforce made up of hired non-family labour was greater.¹⁰⁰ Although this variation in farm size and non-family labour requirements offers an explanation for three regions different levels of employment of non-family labour, it does not, however, explain the differing proportions of farm servants and labourers in the non-family labour force in each region. An important factor determining this was the extent of high farming in each area. It is sometimes suggested that the expansion of large-scale arable agriculture undermined much of the rationale for resident labour engaged on long hires because it increased the seasonality of the agricultural year.¹⁰¹ In

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 51.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 48.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 48-49; Adams, *Agricultural Change*, p. 333.

¹⁰¹ Kussmaul, 'Servants', p. 22, pp. 107-8, pp. 121-122; K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 86.

the East Riding, however, the expansion of the acreage under root crops, the intensification of livestock husbandry, the nature of the soils, and the size of farms meant that the development of high farming required a substantial, permanent workforce. On the Wolds, for example, the expansion of large-scale capitalist agriculture involved an expansion in the use of horses in carting, ploughing, drilling, manuring, threshing, and so on. In the East Riding the preparation, working and care of these fell largely to male farm servants, boarded on the farm. At Eastburn's two farmsteads, for example:

The manual labour connected with the horses is very methodically arranged. The 36 horses are equally divided between the Warren and Eastburn homesteads, and the hind who lives at each place boards 6 lads who look after their 18 horses, the hind giving out the corn. These lads, during spring and summer, get up at half-past 4, and in winter at 5, do the horses, and find employment in the stable until 20 minutes past 5; they then go to breakfast, which occupies half-an-hour, leaving 10 minutes to get the horses to the field by 6. At noon they come in with the horses and get them their dinners, being in the fields again at 1. Work continues from 6, when the horses are brought into the stable and done up, the lads leaving for supper at a quarter to 7; and at 8 they return to the stable to finish for the night.¹⁰²

This correlation between the expansion of arable agriculture and a reliance upon the labour of farm servants can also be illustrated through an examination of changes to Wolds' farmhouses from the late-eighteenth century. Before enclosure, even large farms situated away from existing settlements had only limited accommodation for farm servants. As Hayfield states 'Despite the considerable size of their holdings (often about 1,000 acres), such farms were designed and built to cater for a relatively small workforce as the bulk of their land would originally have been permanent sheep pasture with only a small acreage under the plough'.¹⁰³ With enclosure, the arable acreage of these existing large farms expanded they required a larger workforce and there was a

¹⁰² Jenkins, 'Eastburn', p. 411.

corresponding increase in their provision of accommodation for farm servants. Hayfield's study of farm servants' accommodation offers examples of this, including that of the seventeenth century farmhouse of Towthorpe. When this holding was fully enclosed at the end of the eighteenth century, its arable acreage increased and radical alterations were made to the farmhouse, including raising its roof to accommodate two large dormitories for male and female farm servants.¹⁰⁴ The new farmhouses built on newly-enclosed land away from existing settlements also included extensive accommodation for both male and female servants. At Wharram Percy farmhouse, for example, built in the 1840s as the farmhouse for a holding of 900 acres, the entire left hand portion of the building was given over to the accommodation of male and female farm servants.¹⁰⁵ In 1851 this farm employed eighteen men, of which, fourteen lived-in as farm servants.¹⁰⁶

These examples from the Yorkshire Wolds indicate a correlation between enclosure, the extension of the arable acreage, the development of high farming and an expansion of farm service. But of course this need not have been the case. As has been noted, in much of the South and East of England, the expansion of high farming led instead to a decline of farm service, as farmers increasingly preferred to hire non-resident labour. This suggests that although the expansion of high farming is a factor in explaining the continuation of farm service in the East Riding it is not a sufficient explanation on its own. Another reason for the continuity of farm service in the East Riding is the manner in which the development of high farming combined with, and then reinforced, the problematic labour supply situation that confronted many of the region's farmers.

¹⁰³ C. Hayfield, 'Accommodation', pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 14.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

In the south of England the abandonment of farm service was made possible by 'a glut of labour' due a combination of the agricultural depression after the French Wars and absence of alternative industrial employment.¹⁰⁷ This created an opportunity for farmers to realise a long-standing desire to rid their houses of farm servants. Contemporary comment on the increased wealth and social pretensions of East Riding tenant farmers suggests that the social and cultural forces that encouraged the decline of service in the South and East: a desire for privacy, and a growing distaste for the idea of accommodating servants in one's home, existed here, and would have promoted the decline of farm service if other constraints had not dictated otherwise.¹⁰⁸ In contrast to the south of England, the expansion of large-scale capitalist arable agriculture in the East Riding occurred within the context of the proximity of alternative industrial employment. This, as Caird pointed out, was the key determinant of agricultural wages, because farmers had to compete with the 'increasing demands and more tempting wages of the manufacturer' which drew existing and prospective agricultural labourers away from nearby rural areas and forced wages up as farmers had to compete with the monetary attractions of industrial

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ Kussmaul, 'Servants', p.29

¹⁰⁸ For example, in 1814, in the course of a discussion of the relative merits of day labourers and farm servants, a member of the Holderness Agricultural Society complained that 'Menials in farm houses generally set bad examples to the children of their masters family', *Extracts from the Minutes of the Holderness Agricultural Society*, Leng and Co, Hull, 1883, p. 75. By the mid-nineteenth century the wealth and increasingly 'gentrified' lifestyle of the larger East Riding tenant farmers was a common theme in the local press. See, for example, 'The Yorkshire Wolds', by the Roving Commissioner of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle, York Herald*, 8 October, 1864, who described them as living 'in the style of country squires rather than tenant farmers'; see also *the Hull Advertiser*, 12 April 1850, and J Caird, 'English Agriculture', pp. 310-311. There is evidence that in the years after 1815, a labour surplus induced some East Riding farmers to abandon the farm servant system. In the Vale of York, for example, there was a temporary shift away from farm service in some areas of recent enclosure as the expansion of the arable acreage, which had seen an expansion in the use of farm servant labour, could not be maintained in the adverse economic circumstances of the post-war depression, Howard, 'A General View', p. 19; BPP, 1836, V, *Second Report from the Select Committee appointed to enquire into the State of Agriculture*, evidence of Mr C Howard, Q. 5434.

employment.¹⁰⁹ According to Caird, the average weekly wage for an agricultural labourer in the south of England was 8s 5d in 1850-51. In the North, in contrast it was 11s 5d. Although the level of wages in the East Riding fell below those paid to agricultural workers in industrialised northern counties such as the West Riding and Lancashire which averaged rates of 14s and 13s 6d per week respectively, it was close enough to Hull, the West Riding and Cleveland, to feel the positive effects that alternative industrial employment could bestow on rural labourers. Its average wage of 12s per week was above both the national average of 9s 6d and the northern average of 11s 6d, making it the highest-waged region in which arable agriculture predominated.¹¹⁰

The proximity of alternative industrial employment had two major effects which tended to reinforce East Riding farmers' propensity to rely upon the labour of resident farm servants. First, despite the general expansion of the population in the Riding there was sufficient out-migration to industrial areas to ensure, that within the context of the increased demand for agricultural labour within the Riding, no labour surplus of the kind found in the southern counties developed here. Second, the relatively high money-wages of day labourers in the East Riding, reinforced the economic rationale of employing farm servants to a greater extent than in the arable South and East. Because day labourers' wages in the Riding were amongst the highest in the country, the cost-benefits of paying wages in kind to farm servants in the form of board and lodging were increased: particularly as the methodical organisation of horse-work meant that much of the constant labour on the farm was being undertaken by young, 'unskilled' and, therefore, relatively inexpensive workers.

¹⁰⁹ Caird, 'English Agriculture', p. 513.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

The problem posed by the presence of alternative industrial employment exacerbated what was the fundamental problem for East Riding farmers, the localised labour supply problems posed by the generally low population density of those areas of the Riding experiencing the greatest agricultural transformation. Prior to enclosure, the Wolds, for example, had been an area of declining population and 'deserted villages' which meant that its attempts to meet its expanding labour requirements started from a low base. Indeed, as Strickland noted in 1812, the characteristic problem for most of the East Riding was that the population failed to match the increased labour requirements created by enclosure and working the large capitalist farms that resulted from it:

In the course of the last half-century a prodigious number of inclosures have taken place, and many thousands of acres, previously in a state of waste, brought under the plough; these, together with the improved system of agriculture have caused an increase demand for labourers, which however, as may be inferred from the peculiarly high price of labour in this Riding, has been inadequately supplied.¹¹¹

This general low population density was further exacerbated by the manner in which the settlement pattern was reshaped by enclosure and the development of high farming. As we have seen, the new large farms built after enclosure tended to be constructed away from of existing settlements. Thus, in parts of the East Riding, the transition to high farming simultaneously expanded the demand for a constant core workforce whilst also ensuring that it was unlikely that a sufficient quantity of labour would be readily available at, or close to, the point of production. In 1843, after decades of population increase on the Wolds, this problem of procuring sufficient local labour persisted, with the 'chief' source of labour on large isolated arable farms being provided by a core farm-servant labour force, many recruited from outside of the parish and some being drawn from outside of the Riding. This core labour force of farm servants was

complemented by day-labourers and a seasonal harvest-labour force when required.¹¹²

Another factor reinforcing this interrelatedness between the expansion of large-scale capitalist agriculture and farm service was the pattern of landownership in the East Riding and the influence it exerted over settlement growth. Large estates predominated in the East Riding. In 1873, 60 per cent of its 700, 000 acres of farm land was in the hands of 93 owners each owning over 1000 acres. Eleven of these owned over 10,000 acres: 28 per cent of the land in the Riding.¹¹³ The result was a large number of 'close' or 'estate' villages dominated by a single landowner. It was these large landowners who were central in promoting enclosure and in the construction of the large isolated farmsteads associated with high farming practices. Consequently, a majority of the isolated post-enclosure farms were on landed estates dominated by 'close' parishes. The more 'wealthy, powerful and ambitious' of these landowners had an expansive view of 'improvement' which 'meant not only hedged fields, rebuilt farmsteads and new crops, but also enlarged manor-houses, landscaped grounds, expanded parks and often the diversion of roads and the removal of unsightly houses and cottages'.¹¹⁴ Examples of such orderly estate villages are Sledmere, Settrington, Escrick, Sewerby and Howsham. This contributed to the local labour-supply problems of farmers because of the restrictions that these landowners placed upon cottage building. Villages dominated by a single landowner experienced less population increase than 'open' townships where land ownership was shared, because landowners limited the number of cottages built in them. The reasons for this were financial - the implications that such

¹¹¹ Strickland, 'A General View', p. 289.

¹¹² BPP, 1843, XII, *Reports of Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, p. 328.

¹¹³ B. English, 'Patterns of Estate Management in East Yorkshire c 1840-c 1880', *Agricultural History Review*, 32, 1984, p. 29.

settlement might have had for the level of the poor rate - and social - the potentially de-stabilising social changes that settlement expansion might also have brought.¹¹⁵ Consequently, 'close' parishes experienced a smaller-than-average population increase. Although it occurred across the East Riding, a combination of large isolated farms and 'close' parishes was most common on the Wolds which possessed about 40 per cent of the Riding's 'close' parishes.¹¹⁶ The problem was less pronounced in Holderness, but here also, there were areas in which isolated farms, 'close' parishes, and a shortage of cottages created similar problems. Some farmers attempted to resolve this problem by using 'gang labour' recruited from open villages or nearby towns. In the 1840s, for example, gangs of women and children from Driffield were recruited and employed on Wolds' farms.¹¹⁷ Another solution was to recruit day labourers from nearby or more distant villages. In 1851, for example, many labourers on the Wolds lived in the village of one township but worked on farms in another. The distance between farms and villages and between villages on parts of the Wolds, meant that many labourers must have faced daily walks of four miles or more.¹¹⁸ One response to this problem was to 'meat' labourers on the farm, that is, give them part of their wages 'in kind' in the form of their food for a day or even feed and board them for part of, or the whole working week.¹¹⁹ These practices became increasingly rare, however, because the isolation of many farms meant that adequate female and child labour was difficult to come by whilst the practice of 'meating' meant that labourers had to travel long distances to work and were fatigued on arrival. Furthermore, both

¹¹⁴ K J Allison, 'East Riding', pp. 183-4.

¹¹⁵ J.E. Crowther, 'Landownership and Parish Type', in Neave and Ellis, eds, 'Historical Atlas', p. 62; Trevor Wild, 'Population Change', p. 4; Allison, 'East Riding', pp. 193-5; B. A. Holderness, "'Open and "Close" Parishes in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Agricultural History Review*, 20, 1972.

¹¹⁶ Holderness, "'Open" and "Close"', p. 127.

¹¹⁷ BPP, 1843, XII, p. 282, p. 379; BPP, 1867-8, XVII, *Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, First Report, p. 95.

¹¹⁸ Sheppard, 'Labour Force', pp. 51-2.

practices attracted opprobrium from moralists for undermining femininity and family life.¹²⁰ For the majority of farmers who were tenants of large isolated farms away from village settlements, therefore, the absence of cottages reinforced further the rationale for indoor farm service as the means of providing the core of their constant labour requirements.

The key variables explaining the continued reliance upon farm servant labour and its pattern of incidence in the East Riding were, therefore: enclosure and the development of high farming with its requirement for a large core-workforce; and the manner in which it reshaped the settlement pattern, which created local labour supply difficulties within the context of the general absence of a glut of agricultural labour. The pressure that this placed upon farmers was further enhanced by the high number of 'close' parishes which limited the availability of cottage accommodation. Thus, when farm size is combined with the prevailing settlement pattern in a region, the relative importance of servants and labourers becomes explicable. Farm service was most prevalent where large isolated farms were located away from village settlements, which being constrained by the effects of landownership, had a deficit of resident labourers. In such circumstances, farmers, in order to guarantee a regular supply of labour, had to rely upon young farm servants, located on the farm and tied by annual contracts, as the core of their permanent work force. Some of these were drawn from the local population, which also had the effect of releasing the pressure of overcrowding in the cottages of these villages. Others came from nearby 'open' parishes or from farther afield. As we have seen, on the Wolds these two variables were combined as the expansion and development of high farming reshaped the settlement pattern creating large isolated farmsteads which were dependent on the labour of resident farm servants. In contrast in the Vale

¹¹⁹ BPP, 1843, XII, p. 328; Legard, 'Farming', p. 125; BPP, 1867-8, XVII, p. 94.

of York and Holderness, where there was less parliamentary enclosure and the development of high farming within a dispersed settlement pattern was less pronounced, the reliance on farm service was less salient. Nevertheless, in both regions there were areas of parliamentary enclosure, land reclamation and drainage improvement, which prompted an increase in the proliferation of large isolated farmsteads away from existing settlements. This created, in the case of both areas, significant enclaves in which farm service as a proportion of the agricultural labour force exceeded the Riding average of 33 per cent in 1851.¹²¹ Sutton on Derwent and Woodhouse are examples from the Vale whilst a classic area of farm service in Holderness was the recently reclaimed lands of Sunk Island. Here, as in Wolds' townships such as Cowlam and Cottam, there were no village settlements and both shared their propensity for employing farm servants.¹²² Thus, the example of the East Riding tends to support the argument advanced by Howkins and Merricks that, in the nineteenth century, there was correlation between an expansion of farm service and the development of the most advanced form of the agrarian capitalism - high farming.¹²³

The continued intensification and expansion of high farming practices and its greater diffusion across the East Riding after 1850 was central in guaranteeing that the proportion of farm servants in the male agricultural labour force, not only remained steady, but actually increased, in the 1850-75 period, as the figures in table 1 illustrate:

¹²⁰ BPP, 1867-8, XVII, p.5.

¹²¹ Sheppard, 'Labour Force', pp. 49-51.

¹²² Ibid, pp. 49-50

¹²³ A. Howkins and L. Merricks, 'The Ploughboy and the Plough Play', *Folk Music Journal*, 6, 2, 1991. pp. 192-3.

Table 1. The Number of Farm Labourers, Farm Servants in the East Riding, 1851-81.¹²⁴

Year	Farm Labourers	Farm Servants	Total
1851	11,470	7,451	18,921
1861	11,730	7,550	19,230
1871	9,494	6,885	16,379
1881	-	-	15,104*

Although the occupational tables of the census have been described as being of 'dubious validity' and are particularly problematic for areas in which the hiring of farm servants was prevalent; taken as general indicators of broad long-term trends, the figures in Table 1 indicate two developments.¹²⁵ One is that the overall number of those employed in agriculture declined roughly in-line with the general reduction of the rural population that began from 1861.¹²⁶ The second is that the proportion of farm servants within that employed group increased. When placed within the wider context of economic changes taking place during the mid-Victorian period these trends become more explicable. In terms of agricultural change, all areas of the Riding saw an expansion of arable acreage and a more intensive integration of livestock into the high farming regime.¹²⁷ As a consequence, the requirement for a constant labour force, already established with enclosure and the initial transition to high farming, continued to operate with its consolidation during the mid-Victorian period, as a contemporary observer of Yorkshire agriculture noted:

¹²⁴ Sources : BPP, 1854, c.6191, *Census of England and Wales 1851*, II, p. 691; BPP, 1863, c.3221, *Census of England and Wales 1861*, II, p. 689; BPP, 1873, c.872, *Census of England and Wales 1871*, 111, p. 465; BPP, 1883, c.3722, *Census of England and Wales 1881*, LXXX, p. 400. *The 1881 census tables did not distinguish between agricultural labourers and farm servants.

¹²⁵ E. Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', *Social History*, 8, 1983, p. 202 and passim; D.R. Mills, 'Trouble with farms at the Census Office: an evaluation of farm statistics from the censuses of 1851-1881 in England and Wales', *Agricultural History Review*, 47, 1999, p. 69 and passim;

¹²⁶ Trevor Wild, 'Population Change', p. 46-7.

¹²⁷ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 417.

Improved cultivation, more general and thorough management of root-crops, the extension of sheep farming and winter feeding of stock, induced by the high price of wool and meat, have all tended to increased employment on the best managed farms, and to equalise it during the different periods of the year.¹²⁸

Furthermore, other circumstances that had encouraged the retention and expansion of farm service in the East Riding from the late-eighteenth century also continued to operate after 1850. East Riding landlords continued to be reluctant cottage builders: complaints of the shortage of cottage accommodation and its effects upon the labour market continued to be voiced in the 1850s and 1860s. It was after 1850 that out-migration from the East Riding became most significant. The East Riding witnessed the onset of a process of long-term rural depopulation after 1860 and much of this was due to extensive migration from rural areas to Hull, the other towns of the East Riding and to the industrial regions of northern England.¹²⁹ There was also emigration overseas to the United States, Canada and Australia.¹³⁰ It has been suggested that 'high farming' with its propensity towards mechanisation was the prime factor in promoting this rural depopulation:

The middle decades of the nineteenth century had seen important advances in the mechanisation of cereal farming, particularly the adoption of drilling, winnowing and threshing machines which were being widely used in the East Riding by the 1860s. Machines such as these reduced agricultural for the county's large pool of unskilled farm labourers. Much of this rural population, therefore, was forced by technological change to migrate and seek work in the nearest town, especially the growing town of Hull. Later in the century many emigrated to the United States and Australia.¹³¹

Initially, however, mechanisation appears to have been more a consequence of migration and emigration than a cause. For example, the mechanical reaper, for

¹²⁸ J.D. Dent, 'Agricultural Notes on the Census of 1861', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, XXV, 1864, p. 347.

¹²⁹ Adams, 'Agricultural Change' p. 345-7; Trevor Wild, 'Population Change', p. 47.

¹³⁰ Trevor Wild, 'Population Change', p. 47.

some the ultimate symbol of high farming, was introduced earliest and most extensively where high farming combined with local labour shortages. The early adoption of mechanical reapers on the Wolds, for example, has been attributed to a tightening labour market due to the fact that labourers were migrating to take work in higher paid industrial and mining occupations outside (and increasingly inside) the East Riding at a time when the availability of travelling harvesters was also declining.¹³² The case of the East Riding appears to endorse Collins' argument that mechanisation was a response to an absence of a labour surplus and a decline in the availability of harvest labour. Here, emigration which increased from the early 1850s and accelerated after 1860, compounded existing labour supply problems and promoted mechanisation on large arable farms.¹³³ It also reinforced the need for farm service because mechanised tasks tended to utilise the labour of permanent core workers involved with the care and maintenance of horses which supplied the motive power for most mid-Victorian farm machinery. Thus emigration which further reduced the available farm labour force in the Riding not only helps to explain why the agricultural labour force declined in the period 1851-71 but also why the proportion of male farm servants in that agricultural labour force increased.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 131. In addition, other factors promoting increased emphasis upon resident farm servant labour included an expansion of alternative employment opportunities locally, in, for example: drainage work, the rural police force, railway construction in the industrial and agricultural processing industries in towns such as Beverley, Driffield and Hull. The Hull docks also absorbed potential agricultural labour. These localised opportunities combined with those further afield in Cleveland and the West Riding and offered alternative occupations at a time when high farming was increasing the demand for permanent workers on the farm.

¹³³ E. J. T. Collins, 'Harvest Technology and Labour Supply in Britain, 1790-1870', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, XXII, 1969; Idem, 'The Rationality of "Surplus" Agricultural Labour: Mechanisation in English Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century', *Agricultural History Review*, 35, 1987.

IV

East Riding farmers also employed a substantial number of female farm servants. In 1851 the census tables recorded a total of 1,055 female farm servants.¹³⁴ These statistics are also problematic as all servants on farms who were engaged on domestic duties as 'cooks, housemaids and nurses etc.' were excluded from the farm servant category and placed in the sub-order for domestic servants.¹³⁵ This, as Higgs has pointed out, led to an under-enumeration of female farm servants because many engaged as farm servants and employed on some 'outdoor' tasks would have been excluded.¹³⁶ The extent that this is regarded as a serious distortion depends on how changes in the nature of female farm service from the late-eighteenth century are interpreted. Ivy Pinchbeck argued that in the eighteenth century, the principal work of female farm servants was 'mainly outdoor agricultural work: weeding following the harrow, leading horses at the plough and feeding the stock'.¹³⁷ When not required for such outdoor labour the female servants would be employed in 'domestic duties in the farmhouse'.¹³⁸ She suggested however, that by the early-nineteenth century the traditional female servant in husbandry who had combined outdoor labour with domestic responsibilities had all but disappeared. Females continued to be hired on annual contracts but were increasingly regarded as domestic servants working in the farmhouse as cooks, laundry maids, nurse maids and serving maids with outdoor labour tasks such as ploughing, 'at one time a common occupation for women', now the responsibility of men.¹³⁹ Kussmaul offers a similar analysis. She suggests that although a sexual division of labour existed within the farm servant workforce

¹³⁴ BPP, 1854, c. 6191, I, p. 692.

¹³⁵ Ibid;

¹³⁶ E. Higgs, 'Women, occupations and work in the nineteenth century censuses', *History Workshop Journal*, 23, 1987, pp. 69-71; idem, 'Occupational censuses', pp. 707-708.

¹³⁷ I Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution*, Virago Press, London, 1981, pp. 16-17.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

prior to the nineteenth century, from this time onward females were increasingly concentrated within the domestic sphere and absent from outdoor labour tasks. She also argues that, as a consequence, by the mid-nineteenth century they were no longer 'productive' servants hired to 'maintain the household economy', but "domestics", hired to establish and maintain the status of the farmer's family and to attend to its personal needs'.¹⁴⁰ This latter interpretation is over-drawn, at least for the East Riding. It is undoubtedly the case that, as Pinchbeck and Kussmaul suggest, female farm servants were, by the early-nineteenth century, increasingly concentrated in the domestic sphere of employment. In the 1840s, for example, it was stated that in the East Riding, young unmarried women were not generally engaged in field work because they were hired as farm servants and that 'maid servants object to outdoor work'.¹⁴¹ This does not mean, however, that all those females engaged on farms and increasingly referred to as 'domestics' were not 'productive' servants. Some of their work was undoubtedly concerned with servicing the lifestyle of the increasingly wealthy and status conscious farmers of the Riding. However, they were also employed to service the needs of the male farm servants who were hired on the large arable farms that were occupied by such wealthy tenants. Although male farm servants constituted the larger proportion of the farm servant labour force, their numbers and concentration determined also that female servants were also required in numbers greater than was necessitated by the purely domestic needs of the farmer's household. The renovated or newly-constructed farm-houses were supplied with separate kitchens and wash-houses in which female servants would spend much of their working day. As well as cleaning, cooking and serving in the farmhouse, young female servants were also responsible for feeding and milking cows and in preparing and cooking the large quantities of

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 36, p. 109.

¹⁴⁰ Kussmaul, 'Servants in Husbandry', p. 35, p. 4.

¹⁴¹ BPP, 1843, XII, p. 294, p.330.

food consumed by the male farm servants. They would also be involved in cleaning the male servants' quarters, laundering their bedlinen and, on some farms, their work clothes.¹⁴² The working life of these women therefore combined a mixture of tasks and responsibilities which varied in terms of their direct contribution to the economy of the farm, as the following description of a female farm servant's working life around the middle of the nineteenth century, illustrates:

She enters a farm-house. For a year or two she has not do the hardest kind of work; her main duty at first may be to nurse the children; she has been engaged with that object. She is up at betimes, generally about 5 a.m. in summer, long before the children are out of bed; she has to fetch up the cows to be milked when they are out in the pasture, and has to make herself useful in the house and out of it from morning till evening . . . I have heard of a girl at that time of life or a little older who had to help in the milking of nearly twenty cows daily. . . . meanwhile the head-girl would be getting the lads' breakfast ready. Then came the dairy work, "siling" the milk, churning and what-not. In those days too, it was customary for the servant girls to wash for the lads and men; for this they received no extra pay, as it was all part of their agreement; and this, added to the regular washing for the household, was no light matter.¹⁴³

To categorise such tasks as non-productive is clearly erroneous. They were fundamental to the operation of large arable farms. In addition, it is clear that female 'domestics' were at times engaged in direct agricultural labour, helping during the harvest, for example, and perhaps on other 'odd-jobs' such as pulling turnips.¹⁴⁴ The example of Esther Scorbrough, a female servant, whose leg was lacerated whilst she was assisting at a threshing machine in December 1849 underlines the fact that female servants were not confined to purely domestic tasks.¹⁴⁵ The large arable farms that were becoming increasingly predominant in the East Riding by the mid-nineteenth century were,

¹⁴² Hayfield, 'Accommodation', pp. 22-4.

¹⁴³ Rev. M.C.F. Morris, *The British Workman Past and Present*, Oxford University Press, London, 1928, pp. 57-8.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

therefore, dependent upon the productive labour of both male and female servants; and although the latter were increasingly employed within a domestic environment, this was, as yet, a far from complete exclusion from outdoor tasks.

The census returns suggest a rapid decline in the number of female servants after 1850, however. According to this source the 1851-1871 period saw a decline in the number of female farm servants from 1,055 in 1851, to 861 in 1861, and 215 in 1871. These statistics, which suggest a decline of 80 per cent, grossly underestimate the number of female farm servants employed in the East Riding. The principal reason for this statistical decline is the manner in which the census enumerators' instructions in 1871 were inclined to lead to a further under-enumeration beyond that which existed in 1851. In 1861 the instructions were the same as in 1851, and the decline in the number of female farm servants, though still disguising the extent of their productive labour, might be taken as an indication of the increased domestication of female farm service. In 1871, however, the instructions given to census enumerators were to include all female farm servants responsible for any household tasks in the sub-order for domestic servants.¹⁴⁶ As a consequence, females who in practice combined domestic tasks in the farmhouse with farmyard duties and possibly some occasional fieldwork would have been classified as a purely domestic servant. This compounded further the existing tendency of the census returns' failure to reflect fully the mixture of tasks that female farm servants performed. Another possible source of under-enumeration are those women who worked as part of a 'family' unit in 'hind houses'. The 'hind' was a married farm foreman who housed and fed farm servants in a separate hind house away from the main farmhouse or on a separate farmstead. The hind was paid an allowance for each

¹⁴⁵ *Hull Advertiser*, 15 December, 1849.

farm servant boarded and the cooking cleaning and other domestic responsibilities fell to the hind's wife and daughters, or if these were insufficient, hired female servants. This practice appears to have originated in the early-nineteenth century. Houses with resident foremen or hinds who were paid an allowance for each servant accommodated existed on Sunk Island in 1802.¹⁴⁷ In areas of recent enclosure and large farms, such as the Wolds, as farms became larger and were subdivided, the practice became increasingly common and its pervasiveness appears to have become much more marked after 1850. The following is an account of the accommodation arrangements associated with this system in the late 1860s:

At each homestead is a hind's cottage constructed with reference to the system of employing and boarding a certain number of lads who are engaged by the year. ... they live with the hind, who is paid by the occupier of the farm 8s 6d per week each for their board ...

The hind's cottages are designed specially with a view to prevent the hind and his family being inconvenienced by so many young men living in the house...the portion devoted to the hind and his family being almost entirely isolated from the living and sleeping rooms appropriated to the lads.¹⁴⁸

By the 1880s, this form of labour organisation was regarded as 'universal' on the Wolds and was widely used elsewhere.¹⁴⁹ The following recollection of a hind's daughter from the early-twentieth century, offers an illustration of the work undertaken by the wives, daughters and female servants working in such houses:

¹⁴⁶ Higgs, 'Occupational censuses', p. 708.

¹⁴⁷ 'Extracts Holderness Agricultural Society', p. 78.

¹⁴⁸ Jenkins, 'Eastburn', pp. 413-414.

¹⁴⁹ BPP, 1881, XV-XVII, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Depressed Condition of the Agricultural Interests*, p. 143; M.C.F. Morris, *Yorkshire Folk-Talk, with Characteristics of Those who Speak it in the North and East Ridings*, 2nd edn, A. Brown, London, 1911, p. 210, describes the hind system as largely prevailing in the East Riding by the late-Victorian period, especially on the Wolds.

As our family was so large and there were always men living in who had to be provided with all their meals - and who had very big appetites - it was a never ending struggle for my mother to provide enough food for the meals that everybody ate in the kitchen. Of course, the girls in the family all had to help her as soon as they were old enough and we became experienced cooks at a very young age.

There was a regular routine of housework which was rarely changed. Monday, of course was washday, followed by ironing on Tuesday. Wednesday was a baking day, and the bedrooms were 'done' on Thursdays. Friday was another day for a big baking session before the weekend, although no day went by without hours spent on baking.¹⁵⁰

The male farm servants lived in a 'Men's Chamber' at the back of the house with its own ladder access. This ladder was 'scrubbed white' every week and the mens' room was scrubbed every fortnight.¹⁵¹ It seems likely, given Higgs' arguments regarding the accuracy of census details, that many of the women engaged in hind houses would either be recorded as domestic servants or assigned no occupation at all.

As has been conceded, however, female farm servants were increasingly identified with indoor domestic tasks, and after 1850 were less likely to be involved in fieldwork, except perhaps when engaged on smaller farms. One factor in this was increased mechanisation which tended to make routine unskilled labour performed by women in the fields redundant. As we have seen, mechanised tasks fell to the male farm servants who were already firmly associated with horse work. By the late-nineteenth century, it was suggested that women were rarely engaged in field work on the Wolds except at harvest time.¹⁵² Comments of this kind need to be treated with caution, since the casual nature of womens' employment often hid its true extent, but there seems little

¹⁵⁰ A Markham, *Back of Beyond: Reminiscences of Little Humber Farm 1903-25*, Lockington Publishing Co, North Ferriby, 1979, p 28.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 28

¹⁵² BPP, 1892-3, XIII, I, *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour: The Agricultural Labourer*, p. 745.

doubt, however, that the extent of womens' field labour did decline in the East Riding from the 1870s, and mechanisation has been cited as a major reason for this.¹⁵³ Another reason for this decline, however, were prevailing notions of what was considered appropriate work for women. In 1843, although common in many parts of the Riding, women's field labour was regarded as relatively unproblematic. In part this was because it was believed that the young unmarried women who might suffer from its consequences entered farm service, and therefore did no field labour.¹⁵⁴ During the mid-nineteenth century moral opinion towards women's field labour hardened and it was during this period, in the 1850s and 1860s, that the use of female labour in the fields of the East Riding reached its nineteenth-century peak before declining from the mid-1870s.¹⁵⁵ This coincided with increased criticism from moralists and clergymen, who attacked it as an inappropriate and unnatural occupation for women. It was suggested, for example, that field work accustomed girls 'to the use of foul language' and promoted 'a roughness of manners and a dislike of restraint', which meant that subsequently, the women involved became 'entirely unfit' for either domestic service or marriage.¹⁵⁶ Within this context, farm service became an acceptable alternative which offered a route to domestic service, marriage, and respectability for working-class women:

The indoor farm servant was favourably contrasted to the field worker in point of respectability. She was thought to be engaged in proper 'women's work' which would serve to improve her as a prospective wife and mother, and to prepare her for service in a 'big' house if she wanted to move on to higher things . . . By contrast the field labouring girl was held to be spoiled alike for domestic service and for marriage, 'coarsened' by her work - and by the mixed company that she kept - to the point that womanliness was destroyed.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', pp. 376-7.

¹⁵⁴ BPP, XII, 1843, p. 293.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 376.

¹⁵⁶ BPP, 1867-8, XVII, p. 95.

¹⁵⁷ J. Kitteringham, 'Country work girls in nineteenth-century England', in R. Samuel, ed. *Village Life and Labour*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975, p. 97.

Such views were not just the preserve of 'bourgeois moralists' but were increasingly accepted by the working class, including working-class women, themselves. The definition of female farm service as an entirely domestic occupation which had once been an exaggeration increasingly conformed to reality. For example, by the 1860s, female servants in the East Riding were increasingly reluctant to undertake not only field labour but also outdoor farmyard duties. At Howden hirings in 1869, for example, 'Good servants for farmers' places were difficult to engage, especially if they were required to milk.¹⁵⁸ At Drifffield in the same year there was a similar shortage of 'girls who would consent to undertake milking the cows, which the females are now beginning to think too slavish and dangerous a duty to be performed by them'.¹⁵⁹ At Howden in 1876, 'Considerable difficulty was experienced in getting girls for farmhouses where they had to milk, many of them objecting greatly to do this'.¹⁶⁰ The following year at Howden 'milking was objected to by the majority of those seeking farmhouse situations'.¹⁶¹ By the late-nineteenth century, general yard-work was increasingly given over to young male farm servants rather than women.

It may be that ideological and cultural factors were important here, but if the prevailing morality regarding 'fit work for women' was significant in this domestication of female farm service, so too were economic considerations. As Kitteringham's comment suggests, indoor service on a farm could operate as a stepping-stone or bridging occupation: a means of gaining relevant experience for domestic service outside of agriculture. Proven experience in domestic rather than general tasks was also increasingly important as the demand for specialised

¹⁵⁸ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 18 November 1869.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Hull Times*, 26 November, 1876.

¹⁶¹ *Hull Times*, 27 November, 1877.

domestic servants, laundry maids and cooks in the houses of wealthy tenant farmers in the East Riding increased. It was on the largest farms, and amongst the wealthier tenantry, that the 'genteel' lifestyle requiring a more specifically domestic servant working under the managerial supervision of the farmer's wife would be found.¹⁶² In the 1840s, in those areas close to towns, farmers complained that they found it difficult to obtain female farm servants because 'Situations in town are greatly preferred'.¹⁶³ After 1850, there was an expansion such opportunities as rural women with domestic experience were increasingly sought as house servants in the expanding market towns and resorts of the East Riding. In all cases, notions of respectability and domesticity were reinforced by monetary and career considerations because servants hired as domestics commanded higher wages, and, having acquired the necessary experience, paved for themselves a path out of agricultural employment and into work in high-status households.¹⁶⁴ By the 1870s, farmers and mistresses were having to compete with those seeking house servants at the larger urban hiring fairs.

Thus despite statistical evidence to the contrary, female farm servants remained important in the East Riding after 1850. The tendency for female farm servants to be confined to a domestic sphere of responsibility, a tendency that was well established prior to the mid-nineteenth century, became more pronounced during this period. Outside of helping at harvest-time the majority of female farm servants probably undertook little field labour, and increasingly were less engaged in yard work. In part, this was a response to the expansion of the horse-work and mechanisation associated with high farming which consolidated the position of male farm servants as the core group of permanent field

¹⁶² Pinchbeck, 'Women Workers', p. 36.

¹⁶³ BPP, 1843, XII, p. 313.

¹⁶⁴ Higgs, 'Domestic Servants', p. 208.

labourers. Evidence suggests, however, that women were not only excluded from outdoor work, but actively sought to disassociate themselves from it. Both before, and especially after 1850, they sought, for ideological and monetary reasons, to identify themselves with the indoor domestic sphere. By the 1870s these divisions had become firmly established because field labouring was ideologically unattractive, less available, and less well paid. However reshaped, though, the labour of young females remained fundamental to the agricultural economy and they continued throughout the period of this study to be hired at hiring fairs under annual contracts that were broadly the same as those for men.

V

From the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, the East Riding developed a dynamic and prosperous variant of high farming which enjoyed its 'Golden Age' during the years 1854-76. The development of large-scale arable farms is generally regarded as promoting class formation in that it is associated with a rural social structure which increasingly conforms to a 'tripartite' model which divides rural society into three social classes on the basis of their relationship to the means of production. The relatively unique aspect of high farming in the East Riding - its extensive reliance upon the labour of male and female farm servants - may represent a challenge to this model however. Farm service is sometimes regarded as a traditional, pre-capitalist form of labour organisation, and its continuation, despite its integration into a highly advanced capitalist mode of production, may therefore represent a continuity of pre-capitalist social relations. The sexual division of labour within farm service, and the manner in which this developed into increasingly separate gendered spheres of activity needs also to be considered. The tripartite model, in exaggerating the salience of class, may fail to recognise the significance of sex and gender divisions. As it will be argued later that the social experience of life and work

within farm service is important in shaping the behaviour and practices at hiring fairs; these questions, and the implications that they pose in terms of interpreting the nature of social relations in the East Riding, deserve fuller attention and will be considered in the following chapter.

Chapter Two

East Riding Farm Servants c. 1840-80¹

A debate has developed in recent years regarding the interpretation of the social structure and social relations of rural society in the nineteenth century. Within the dominant paradigm, enclosure, technological change and the transition to large-scale capitalist agriculture from the mid-eighteenth century have been taken as the normal pattern of economic development. This agricultural modernisation is in turn regarded as promoting a process of social modernisation which resulted in a tripartite social structure of landlords, tenant farmers, and labourers. In general it has been accepted that this process of capitalist modernisation involved the formal proletarianization of the labouring population in the sense that they now lacked ownership and control over the means of production. The main point of disagreement has centred upon whether this formal level of class formation then translated into class-orientated socio-political consciousness. For some, the absence of a sustained and formally organised labour movement is interpreted as evidence that formal proletarianization failed to generate a class orientated socio-political consciousness at least until the rural trade unionism of the 1870s.² In contrast, a revisionist interpretation of nineteenth-century rural society has sought to emphasise that the formal proletarianization of the rural labourer did result in class consciousness. Within this paradigm, the periodic riots, sporadic trade unionism, incendiarism and animal maiming that occurred in the decades after the Napoleonic wars are cited as evidence of an emerging

¹ Much of this chapter has been published as 'Proletarian labourers? East Riding farm servants c. 1850-75', *Agricultural History Review*, 47, 1999.

² A. Armstrong, *Farmworkers in England and Wales: A Social and Economic History, 1770-1980*, B.T. Batsford, London, 1988, is generally regarded as a representative example of this position.

proletarian consciousness developing in opposition to that of the capitalist landlords and tenant farmers.³

More recently, a third, 'post revisionist' interpretation has emerged which emphasises the geographical and theoretical limitations of the two existing paradigms. This view, which has been most clearly outlined by Alun Howkins, focuses upon the regional imbalance of most agricultural and rural history.⁴ Howkins suggests that an over-concentration upon the large arable farms of southern and eastern England has resulted in a distorted 'tripartite' model of the rural social structure which exaggerates the importance of capitalist agriculture and proletarianization in shaping social relations because it excludes those parts of nineteenth-century Britain in which neither predominated. In these excluded areas, it is suggested, a far more complex pattern of social relations existed which involved social groups such as peasants and farm servants, whose consciousness cannot be explained by reference to the orthodox model which assumes that the landless proletarian is the norm.

Howkins' attempt 'to provoke thought and argument' offers a rural perspective on the more general re-interpretation of British social history that has gained ground in recent years. This has critically re-evaluated the orthodox linear interpretation of industrial development which still forms the material context for much rural social history: an interpretation which assumes that modern large-scale production inevitably superseded older forms. The utility of concepts such as proletarianization and class formation as the 'master tools' of social history

³ See for example, R Wells, 'The Development of the English rural proletariat and social protest, 1700-1850', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 6, 1979; and the same author's, 'Tolpuddle in the Context of English Agrarian Labour History, 1780-1850', in J Rule, ed, *British Trade Unionism 1750-1850: The Formative Years*, Longman, London, 1988.

⁴ A. Howkins, 'Peasants Servants and Labourers: the marginal workforce in British agriculture, c. 1870-1914', *Agricultural History Review*, 42, 1994.

has also been questioned in recent years.⁵ Howkins' exploratory re-interpretation of the nineteenth-century social structure continues this recent reappraisal as he not only emphasises the survival of forms of production involving peasants and farm servants, but also the possibility that these were integral to a more diverse and overlapping mix of social relations than is allowed for by class-orientated paradigms. The remainder of this chapter seeks to respond in a positive but critical fashion to some of the provocations offered by Howkins and focuses on a particular aspect of the debate he has attempted to stimulate: the implications of his ideas for the analysis and interpretation of East Riding farm service in the nineteenth century.

Most historians have regarded farm servants as extraneous to the rural proletariat even when they depended upon wage labour for their existence. Ann Kussmaul, for example, has suggested that although farm servants were hired wage labourers engaged on annual contracts, their transitional status, their location within a familial regime, and the legal and customary expectations of the master-servant relationship set them apart from other wage labourers.⁶ This binary opposition between farm servants and proletarian labourers is also apparent in most interpretations of the process of proletarianization and class formation in southern England from the late-eighteenth century. In general, these studies associate the emergence of a proletariat with a corresponding decline of farm service. The classic example is Hobsbawm and Rude's still influential study *Captain Swing*. This locates rural protest within the context of economic and social changes which included the transition to large-scale capitalist agriculture

⁵ P. Joyce, 'Work', in F.M. L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, 3 Vols, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, II, pp. 151-2.

⁶ A Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 8-9.

and a corresponding decline of farm service.⁷ Both are regarded as precipitating a deterioration in social relations that was integral to the 'relentless proletarianization of the farm labourer' which provided the stimulus for rural protest movements.⁸ A similar approach is apparent in the work of other historians who have also connected the emergence of agrarian capitalism and the decline of farm service with the formation of a rural proletariat.⁹ In general, two central themes inform these studies. Firstly, that farm service is a traditional, pre-modern labour system which declines with the emergence of modern capitalist agriculture: in Kussmaul's words it is 'one the large reptiles of economic history, extraordinarily successful in its time, and driven rapidly to extinction when times changed'.¹⁰ Secondly, that the decline of farm service is integral aspect of the destruction of the customary social relationships that had previously fettered class formation in rural society. Taken together, these themes suggest that farm service is incompatible both with the forces and relations of production regarded as typical of modern agrarian capitalism and that proletarianization and class formation can only occur outside of farm service. This further implies that any remaining farm servants that continued to survive into the nineteenth century should be regarded as being located within a network of pre-capitalist forces and relations of production.¹¹

The example of the East Riding of Yorkshire confounds this model on the first count, because, as we have seen, the transition to large-scale capitalist agricul-

⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm and G. Rude, *Captain Swing*, Penguin University Books, Harmondsworth, 1973.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹ B. Reay, 'The Last Rising of the Agricultural Labourers; The Battle of Bossenden Wood, 1838', *History Workshop Journal*, 26, 1988; Wells, 'Tolpuddle'; K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor : Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, associate the emergence of large-scale cereal farming with a decline of living-in farm service, which alongside other factors promotes proletarianization, protest, and class consciousness amongst the rural poor.

¹⁰ Kussmaul, 'Servants' p. 134.

¹¹ Joyce, 'Work', p. 152.

ture here did not involve the abandonment of farm service. In fact, those tenant farmers who presided over the development of the most advanced forces of production in that region remained most committed to the retention of living-in farm service and even increased their reliance upon it throughout the nineteenth century. Research on farm service in others parts of nineteenth-century England has revealed a similar coexistence between farm service and the development of large-scale capitalist agriculture. Brian Short, for example, has argued, contrary to Hobsbawm and Rude, that farm service remained important in some areas of Sussex into the second half of the nineteenth century and noted that this survival co-existed with large-scale capitalist farming.¹² The fact that farm service continued to survive in areas of large-scale capitalist agriculture suggests that there is no automatic correlation between the development of modern forces of production and the decline of farm service and that farm service as a labour system was more pervasive in the nineteenth century than was once thought. What is more at issue, however, is whether the survival of the farm service system in areas that witnessed the development of large-scale capitalist agriculture, continued to operate as a fetter upon the development of capitalist social relations, despite its contiguity with modern forces of production. The work of a number of historians in other regions where there was a similar combination of large-scale capitalist agriculture and farm service suggests that it might have done. Alastair Orr has for example argued that in the Forth Valley and South-East Lowlands of Scotland the survival of farm service within an otherwise progressive form of capitalist agriculture retarded the development of capitalist relation of production. There, although the forces of production became capitalist, the retention of farm service preserved elements of pre-capitalist social relations and the rela-

¹² B Short, 'The Decline of Living-in Servants and the Transition to Capitalist Farming', *Sussex Archeological Collections*, 122, 1984, p. 162.

tions of production remained, to quote Orr, 'stubbornly traditional'.¹³ Similarly, Brian Short argued that although many of the farms retaining farm service in Sussex were large and capitalist, their retention of living-in meant that the social relations on these farms remained pre-capitalist and feudal.¹⁴ Both Orr and Short, therefore, regard the fact that farm servants continued to live-in meant that their experience was in some respects 'unproletarian'. A recent endorsement of this interpretation of the social consequences of the survival of farm service in northern agriculture has come from Patrick Joyce, who has argued that one of the prime reasons that capitalist proletarian relations had not developed there, as they had in the most of the south of England, was that northern farmers had retained farm service which meant that the farmhouse remained the focus for a shared culture for capital and labour.¹⁵

These questions of the nineteenth-century farm servant's pervasiveness and social position are central to Alun Howkins' post-revisionism. He emphasises the continued vitality of farm service and urges a revision of the view 'argued by Ann Kussmaul and others that farm service was in decline in England from the 1830s and had become insignificant by the 1870s'.¹⁶ Whilst accepting 'Kussmaul's dichotomy between service and day labour', Howkins' adopts a broader definition of farm service based on hiring by the year or half-year which encompasses many varieties.¹⁷ He helpfully offers a model that identifies three kinds of farm service still extant in nineteenth-century England. He begins with what he terms '“classic” farm service in which one or two sons or daughters of social equals lived with a different family and “learnt a trade”, hoping them-

¹³ A. Orr, 'Farm Servants and Farm Labour in the Forth Valley and South-East Lowlands', in T.M. Devine ed., *Farm Servants and Labour in Lowland Scotland*, J. Donald, Edinburgh, 1984, p. 29.

¹⁴ Short, 'Decline', p. 147.

¹⁵ Joyce, 'Work', p. 152.

¹⁶ Howkins, 'Marginal Workforce', p. 57.

¹⁷ Ibid.

selves eventually to take a farm'.¹⁸ This, he suggests is 'the form that most concerns Kussmaul and is certainly in decline throughout the nineteenth century'.¹⁹ More significant in the nineteenth century was 'the practice of hiring young men and, to a lesser extent, women into the farmhouse or another house or both on the farm but whose status was that of hired labour with little or no hope of ever becoming farmers themselves': the East Riding of Yorkshire is cited as the prime example of this mode of farm service in England, followed by Lincolnshire and parts of Nottinghamshire.²⁰ In some areas of Scotland and England this departure from the classic form of farm service co-existed with Howkins' third variety of service - family hiring - which involved 'the head of the household ... being hired for a year with his or her family to live and work on a particular farm'.²¹ Under this revised model, Howkins suggests that farm service is far more common in the nineteenth century than has been thought: 'In England, the counties of Cumberland, Westmoreland, north Lancashire, Northumberland, Durham, and Yorkshire were dominated by farm service even in 1905. It was also present in some form in all but thirteen English counties'.²²

This attempt to revise the orthodox model of the nineteenth-century labour force is not merely an exercise in quantification. Howkins' discussion of the survival of farm service is but one element in his wider project of offering a new interpretation of nineteenth-century rural Britain. Basically, the pervasiveness of nineteenth-century farm service is used as a stick with which to beat the standard model of proletarianization and class formation which still informs much

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 58.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, p. 59.

²² Ibid, p. 58. This is perhaps not incompatible with Kussmaul's general conclusion that farm service declined as a national institution as England became divided into a low service agricultural south and a high service industrial north and west. See Kussmaul, 'Servants', p. 130 and Chapter 7 *passim*. It is perhaps unfortunate that this chapter, which concedes the persistence of farm service in the north of England, is entitled 'Extinction'.

rural history. For example, the continued existence of the three varieties of farm servant are used 'to question the notion that the main form of farm labour in nineteenth-century Britain was "agricultural proletarian"'.²³ Taking farm servants, peasants and other 'marginal' workers whose wage relationship fell short of the 'pure cash nexus' into account, Howkins goes on to suggest that:

the 'classic proletarian' farm labourer is probably in a minority, albeit a slight one, of all those who worked the land of Britain in the nineteenth century. Moreover he is probably regionally restricted to the eastern, and some southern counties and some midland counties. It is here that 'proletarian' social relationships might be expected to develop in the form of trade unions and political organizations and of course, they do although still only among part of the labour force. ...

In contrast, a substantial area of England and especially Scotland, Wales and Ireland was worked by farm servants. Most contemporaries and many more recent writers noted that hiring by the year frequently led to close and apparently harmonious relationships between employer and employed.²⁴

The fact that Howkins continues to regard the transition to capitalist agriculture as significant in generating proletarian social relationships in the south and east of England whilst excluding even those farm servants employed as waged labourers on large capitalist farms in the north, is important. It suggests that he regards all forms of farm service, even those variants that co-existed with capitalist forces of production, as fundamentally unproletarian.²⁵ This appears to mark a break with at least some of his earlier writing on this subject in which he suggested that some farm servants might be regarded as proletarians.²⁶ The

²³ Ibid p. 60. Howkins' suggests that hiring was the main difference but other factors, such as payment in kind (including board and lodging) also modified the position of farm servants and blunted the pure cash-nexus of the wage relationship.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 61.

²⁵ Ibid, Howkins readily acknowledges that farm service as a labour system is capable of generating antagonistic social relations, but his analysis suggests that such conflicts should be regarded as taking non-proletarian forms.

²⁶ A Howkins and L Merricks, 'The Ploughboy and the Plough Play', *Folk Music Journal*, 6, 1991; A Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History 1850-1925*, Harper Collins, London, 1991; have encouraged this author's view that farm servants engaged on large capitalist farms may be regarded as proletarian labourers.

source of this departure may be statistical in the sense that this most recent revisionism is burdened with the task of broadening the definition of the farm servant in a manner that facilitates claiming the highest possible membership for the non-proletarian group. This enables him to deploy all farm servants alongside the re-discovered peasantry in support of a thesis that claims that 'By a narrow majority, those who worked the land of Britain, the object of our search, were not proletarianized and landless day labourers but peasants or servants'.²⁷ However his inclusion of all farm servants in the non-proletarian group also suggests that he regards their social situation and consciousness as qualitatively different from other wage labourers. It is the contention of this chapter that this importation of all farm servants into the world of the non-proletarian may be taking revisionism too far. One area in which this reasoning that places all farm servants outside of the rural proletariat might be challenged is that where agricultural modernisation promoted the emergence of a type of farm service which marked a significant departure from the 'classic' form of farm service studied by Kussmaul: i.e. the practice of hiring labourers who had little expectation of anything other than paid wage labour. The East Riding of Yorkshire is the prime example of this variant of nineteenth-century farm service, and this discussion will now consider whether the East Riding farm servants of the mid-nineteenth century should be regarded as non-proletarians as Howkins suggests.

Initially I want to focus upon proletarianization as a process which involves the expropriation of labour as a commodity. In this respect, following Marx, the East Riding farm servants are required to meet a number of conditions. That, as the sellers of labour power they are free to dispose of this labour power as their own commodity. That they have no other commodity other than their labour to sell. That they meet the owner of capital in the market on the basis of equality

²⁷ Howkins, 'Marginal Workforce', p. 60.

before the law, and that they sell their labour power only for a definite period.²⁸ The structure of agriculture and the nature of farm service in the East Riding appear to satisfy this formal level of class formation. As we have seen in the previous chapter, by the mid-nineteenth century East Riding agriculture was a predominantly capitalist industry in which tenant farmers employed waged labour and sold what they produced on the market. In parts of the Riding the greater proportion of this labour took the form of living-in farm servants engaged on annual contracts created through a process of verbal bargaining at an annual round of hiring fairs.²⁹ Thus whilst Howkins emphasises the significance of farm service in modifying the wage relationship in the sense of blunting the dependence of the worker on the market, the evolution of the hiring fair in the East Riding limited this considerably. The transformation of the hiring fair into a labour mart within which farm servants sold their labour as a commodity meant that farm servants shared a common dependence upon waged labour. In this formal sense the East Riding farm servants conform to Charles Tilly's definition of proletarians as 'people who work for wages, using means of production over whose disposition they have little or no control'.³⁰ A number of historians have seen this as a sufficient qualification for farm servants to be regarded as proletarian labourers overriding any reservations that might be held as a result of their location within the household of an employer. In a response to Short's article, for example, Mick Reed has suggested that 'hired workers whether or not they lived in the farmhouse were proletarian; ... It is their divorce from the land

²⁸ F Engels, ed., K. Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, Volume One*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974 Edition, pp. 164-165.

²⁹ J Sheppard, 'The East Yorkshire Agricultural Labour Force in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Agricultural History Review*, 9, 1961; custom determined that servants were free to attend several hirings. For details of East Riding Hiring fairs see: S Caunce, 'East Riding Hiring Fairs', *Oral History*, 3, 1975; Idem, Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses: The Horselads of East Yorkshire*, Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991., chapters 5 and 6; G Moses, 'Rustic and Rude: Hiring Fairs and Their Critics in East Yorkshire c. 1850-75', *Rural History*, 7, 2, 1996; S Parrott, 'The Decline of Hiring Fairs in the East Riding of Yorkshire: Driffield c. 1874-1939', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 16, 2, 1996.

or other means of production that makes them proletarians not their removal from the farmhouse'.³¹ Two recent contributions to the *Agricultural History Review* by Richard Anthony and Stephen Caunce appear also generally to follow this formal definition of farm servants as proletarians because of their divorce from ownership of the means of production and their consequent dependency on wage labour.³²

Howkins' decision to exclude the East Riding farm servant from the ranks of the rural proletariat would seem to suggest that he regards a formal definition of proletarianization based upon non-ownership of the means of production as too shallow, and that he regards the everyday experience of farm service as transcending this formal dependence upon market relations and precipitating a level of consciousness which is non-proletarian. It is, therefore, worth examining farmer and farm servant relations on the farm away from the hiring fair. It is here that Howkins' view that farm service constituted a non-proletarian experience is perhaps most apposite. For example, although farm servants created their contracts in a free and unfettered fashion, and increasingly regarded them in cash terms, it could still be that the nature of the master-servant relationship once these were established distinguished the farm servant's experience from that of the classic proletarian. Not so much because the law of master and servant was repressive and iniquitous in its unequal treatment of servants and masters - farm servants shared this burden with other fully fledged proletarians notably miners and workers in the iron trades - but more that actually living-in, or on, the farm, encouraged social relations that were more interdependent and

³⁰ C. Tilly, 'Demographic Origins of the European Proletariat', in D. Levine, ed., *Proletarianization and Family Life*, Academic Press, New York, 1984, p. 1.

³¹ M. Reed, 'Indoor Farm Service in 19th Century Sussex: Some Criticisms of a Critique', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 123, 1985, p. 226.

³² R. Anthony, 'Farm Servant vs Agricultural Labourer, 1870-1914: a commentary on Howkins', *Agricultural History Review*, 43, 1995; S. Caunce, 'Farm Servants and the Development of Capitalism in English Agriculture', *Agricultural History Review*, 45, 1997.

consensual than those on the large arable farms of southern and eastern England. Howkins, for example, cites contemporary testimony of the 'clannish' feelings between employer and employed on northern farms employing farm servants as evidence of the fact that living in on the farm could limit the emergence of a proletarian consciousness in the form of, for example, trade unionism.³³ A similar point is made by J.P.D. Dunbabin in his work on agricultural trade unionism in the 1870s in which he notes the relative failure of organised agricultural trade unionism in the north of England and relates this to the continued pervasiveness of farm service there:

a high proportion of the farm workers were unmarried, and boarded in the farmhouses. And this certainly militated against the development of formal trades unions. For a strike must have been difficult to organise when one was actually living in a farmer's house; and close social relationships were universally believed to make for an identification of the farmer's and labourers' interests.³⁴

The case of the East Riding of Yorkshire, an area in which the ratio of indoor to out-door labourers was 1 to 1.4 apparently endorses this analysis. Here, three other factors which Dunbabin suggests do correlate with trade union activity elsewhere - arable farming, large farms and Primitive Methodism - were present as well as farm service. Yet he describes trade unionism as 'very weak' in the East Riding.³⁵ As trade unionism is emphasised by Howkins as an indication of the level of socio-political consciousness amongst rural labourers it is tempting to regard the farm servants' absence from the East Riding trade unionism of the

³³ Howkins, 'The Marginal Workforce', p. 61.

³⁴ J.P.D. Dunbabin, 'The Incidence and Organization of Agricultural Trades Unionism in the 1870s', *Agricultural History Review*, 16, 1968, p. 122.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124, this may be something of an exaggeration as there is evidence of considerable trade union activity in the East Riding during the early 1870s. However this seems to have generally excluded farm servants. For details see M. G. Adams, 'Agricultural Change in the East Riding of Yorkshire 1850-1880: An Economic and Social History', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Hull, 1977, pp. 350-51; and *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 25 January, 1872; 22 and 29 February 1872; 7, 14 and 21 March 1872; 4, 11, 18, April 1872.

1870s as confirmation of the proposition that farm service inhibits the development of a proletarian consciousness.

It is true that many Victorian commentators did believe that the retention of farm service would ensure better relations between farmers and labourers. Often this stemmed from their observations of what they believed were the consequences of its decline in those areas where farm service had been abandoned. Cobbett was the most famous proponent of the view that its decline had precipitated a growing separation of feelings and interests between employers and labourers, but there were others also who were prepared to criticise southern farmers for no longer living amongst their servants.³⁶ One example of this discourse which drew comparison between the situation in the south and that in the East Riding was offered by George Nicholls in 1846 with his *On the Condition of the Agricultural Labourer: with Suggestions for its Improvement*. Nicholls argued that farmers' discontinuation of the practice of keeping young farm servants in the farm house had been 'productive of much mischief and demoralisation'.³⁷ The reason for this, he argued, was what had been lost in terms of the paternal care and guidance offered by the farmer to his young charges:

Towards young men so employed, the farmer stood in the relation of a parent. They formed part of his family. To him they were accountable. To him they were accustomed to look for advice. And they were kept out of the way of temptation, and prevented from falling into improvident habits, to which all young men are more or less prone, if left without control. Our farmers now employ yearly servants of this description. They generally engage their labourers by the day, by the week, or by the job; taking no further care about them, and leaving them, whether single or married, to provide for themselves as they best can. The consequence is, that young men are now for the most part left without supervision of any kind.³⁸

³⁶ W. Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, Penguin Edition, Harmondsworth, 1967, pp. 226-229; for a discussion of similar contemporary opinions see K.D.M. Snell, 'Annals' pp. 68-8.

³⁷ G Nicholls, 'On the Condition of the Agricultural Labourer: with Suggestions for its Improvement', *Transactions of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society*, 9, 1846, pp. 68-99.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 74

Nichols' solution to this problem was to advocate the restoration of farm service which he argued would both increase the regularity of employment and 'restore a very important link in the social chain, which circumstances have of late years tended to weaken'.³⁹ The editor of the *Transactions of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society* was quick to point out that such criticism and recommendations were unnecessary in Yorkshire because 'fortunately it is still the general custom to board young farm servants in the employers house'.⁴⁰ At least one recollection of farming in the East Riding around this time, the 1840s, indicates that there was some truth in this, on small farms at least. In his recollections of his boyhood on the East Yorkshire Wolds in the 1820s and 30s, J.R. Mortimer, the son and grandson of local farmers recalled that:

At the period I am speaking of, the farmers of Fimber were a very plain and homely class, worked and took food with their servants, acting in fact as foremen. They mostly wore the same kind of clothing as their labourers, which consisted mainly of fustian jackets and long smock-frock, either white or brown, of a coarse material named duck. ... They were sociable neighbours, and at such times as sheep shearing and corn thrashing with the horse machine (no steam thrasher being then in existence) they personally assisted one another, along with their servants.⁴¹

He also stated that servants and farmers' families ate together and slept under the same roof, with the farm servants sharing a bed chamber with the farmers' children.⁴² Such arrangements were to be lamented as part of a lost golden age by mid and late-Victorian critics of East Riding farm service, but it is doubtful if they were predominant even during the early-nineteenth century. Like their compatriots elsewhere, the tenants of the large capitalist farms that were becoming representative of East Riding agriculture at this time, found the prospect

³⁹ Ibid, p. 75

⁴⁰ Ibid, fn.

⁴¹ J.D. Hicks, ed., *A Victorian Boyhood on the Wolds: The Recollections of J.R. Mortimer*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: 34, 1978, p. 6.

of sharing their houses with their farm servants unappealing. This desire for privacy was not entirely new, there is evidence, in the form of probate inventories, for example, that in the eighteenth and even as far back as the seventeenth century, farmers had adopted systems of accommodation that meant that although servants were technically boarded in the farm house, there was segregation between them and their employers' families, particularly in terms of the location of the sleeping arrangements.⁴³ During the Napoleonic Wars, when high food prices made payment in kind less attractive to farmers, there were complaints that indoor servants were both more expensive than labourers and an invidious influence in the farmhouse.⁴⁴ These concerns fuelled interest in building cottages and employing day labourers as an alternative.⁴⁵ As we have seen, neither proved to be a viable alternative in the East Riding. By the mid-nineteenth century, this desire for privacy and social segregation on the part of farmers and the expanding numbers of farm servants employed, had encouraged a transformation of the East Riding farm service system. The result was a labour regime that minimised the extent that payment in kind in the form of living-in could encourage close familial relations of the kind suggested by Howkins' and Dunbabin's analysis. Instead, the East Riding system was subject to a number of innovations that facilitated the development of capitalist social relations within farm service.

As the size of farms and the average number of farm servants employed on them increased, there were extensive changes in their accommodation and living arrangements. The prevailing trend in both new and enlarged farms was for the farm servant accommodation to be located in a separate and distinct part of the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ C. Hayfield, 'Farm Servants' Accommodation on the Yorkshire Wolds', *Vernacular Architecture*, 33, 1994, p. 10.

⁴⁴ *Extracts from the Minutes of the Holderness Agricultural Society*, Leng and Co, Hull, 1883, p. 73, Meeting at Hedon, 28 March, 1814.

farmhouse away from that occupied by farmers and their families. This often involved almost total segregation with all farm servants housed in separate dormitory units located in adjoining outbuildings with only limited and discrete access to the main body of the farm-house. In some cases, both innovations were combined, with the female servants occupying a wing of the farmhouse with its own access to the wash-house and kitchen, whilst the men occupied a separate dormitory outbuilding or 'men's end' attached to the farmhouse but with its own external doorway and yard. This type of 'men's end' which often provided for as many as twenty servants was described as being 'like a barrack with a long chamber full of beds, one of which the foreman commonly occupies to keep order and rouse the men in the morning' in evidence given to the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture.⁴⁶ Under this system, although there was a pronounced degree of segregation, the farm servants still resided under the same roof and often ate with their employer - albeit on a separate table. With the expansion of the hind-house system after 1850 the extent of the segregation between capital and labour increased still further. By the late-nineteenth century, the practice of accommodating farm servants in 'barracks under the eye of the hind who is practically their master' was described as being 'near universal' on the Wolds.⁴⁷ A description of the nature of such arrangements on a 'quite representative Wold farm' in the 1880s was provided in Coleman's Report for the Agricultural Interests Commission in 1881:

Formerly the hired servants boarded at the tenants house, and were more immediately under his control and supervision; but on larger occupations this practice has given way to that which

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ BPP, 1867-8, XVII, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, I, p. 368; V. Neave, 'Living-In in The East Riding', *Vernacular Architecture*, 2, 1971, p. 18.

⁴⁷ BPP, 1881, XV-XVII, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Depressed Condition of the Agricultural Interests*, I, Assistant Commissioner Coleman's Report, p. 143.

I am describing ... The house in question is quite a model erection, and is said to have cost £700. It comprises a cooking kitchen with every facility for the work and for the accommodation of the foreman's wife and family, with apartments over. This kitchen communicates with the men's boarding room, a very large and airy apartment. The space above is divided into a barrack and two sick rooms, lofty and well ventilated. The men's quarters are quite distinct from the hind's house, as they enter into an ante-room with washing appliance, water being laid on. Twelve or thirteen hands are thus housed. They are hired by the year, and the foreman is allowed 8s 6d a week for their food.⁴⁸

Each of these changes had precedents prior to the mid-Victorian period but whereas they had once been exceptional, by the 1880s they combined to form a near-universal pattern of social segregation between capital and labour on the larger tenant farms of the East Riding.

There were similar and contemporaneous changes in the nature of the manner in which the farm servant workforce was organised. As was established in the previous chapter, the use of technology in East Riding agriculture advanced considerably during the mid-Victorian period. As most of this mechanisation relied upon the motive power of horses this served to consolidate the centrality of the labour of farm servants within this advanced form of agrarian capitalism. Consequently, although the East Riding developed a relatively unusual symbiosis between farm service and arable agriculture, it otherwise conformed to a pattern of agricultural development that E L Jones identified as emerging elsewhere in England from 1850.⁴⁹ Jones has suggested that the agricultural labour market began to tighten, particularly in areas in which high-farming existed on recently reclaimed land away from established settlement patterns and in close proximity to alternative industrial employment. He has argued that farmers responded to this tightening labour market through a combination of mechanisa-

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ E L Jones, 'The Agricultural Labour Market in England, 1793-1872', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, XVII, 1964.

tion and workforce reorganisation that enabled a regular core of farm staff to handle a large proportion of the all-year-round work. As was argued in the previous chapter, much of the East Riding, particularly the Wolds and Holderness areas conform to this pattern with the important distinction that the core of permanent workers were male and female farm servants. One of the chief consequences of this practice of combining large numbers of farm servants with the demands of large-scale agriculture was that the employment relationship became less intimate and the labour process more divided. Employers' retained control over hiring and the general organisation of production but increasingly had little direct contact with the greater proportion their workers. Farmers delegated the day-to-day control of labour to supervisory workers: the foreman or hind. Often farm servants rarely saw their employer and instead took their instructions from the foreman or hind who was regarded as, and referred to, as 'boss' or 'maister'. This managerial and supervisory elite, who had themselves graduated from being ordinary farm servants, presided over a labour regime under which the care, feeding and working of the horses was organised as a 'mass horseman' system which utilised the divided labour of young proletarians organised, supervised and disciplined by the more experienced foreman (or hind) and wagoner. This regime was characterised by its own internal hierarchy or 'pecking order' which ascribed the role and status of each worker.⁵⁰

The combination of relative autonomy, order and discipline that existed on such farms is illustrated by Alice Markham's memories of life as part of a hind-foreman's family on Little Humber farm, at Paull, in southern Holderness in the early years of the twentieth century:

⁵⁰ For detailed discussion of the workings of this system see Counce, 'Farm Horses', especially chapters 4, 7 and 8.

It was a big undertaking for my father to come to Little Humber as foreman, as he was only twenty-two years old and the farm was between three and four hundred acres in size. ... My father was very strict with the men and as a result he was not liked. The farmer however, had told him that he did not want him to work himself but to see that the men worked, and gave him a free hand with every thing on the farm. My father made it quite clear that everybody had to do as he said. I have known him get men out of bed at night when he discovered that they had neglected the horses in some small way. I always felt very sorry for them. The farm men addressed him as 'Foreman' or 'Master' which they pronounced as 'Maister'.⁵¹

The men were accommodated in a 'Men's Chamber' at the back of the house which had iron bars across its windows and 'although a chamber pot was provided, it was not to be used unless absolutely necessary'.⁵²

Specialisation and hierarchy was also increasingly characteristic of female farm service. Some women became a more specifically domestic servant demanded by the genteel privacy now characteristic of larger farmhouses. Others were employed to service the extensive board and lodging requirements of the male farm servants combining domestic and farmyard duties with cooking and cleaning. Many combined both. These trends also involved the development of more formal and impersonal relationships between employers and female servants. Farmers' wives were now less likely to work alongside female staff, instead they exercised a more managerial role delegating manual labour tasks to young female servants and much of their direct supervision to older more experienced servants who presided over an increasingly delineated work hierarchy.⁵³ The expansion of the hind-house system from the 1850s totally removed the farmer's wife from such managerial tasks and delegated them to the hind's wife,

⁵¹ A Markham, *The Back of Beyond: Reminiscences of Little Humber Farm 1903-1925*, Lockington Publishing Co., 1979, p. 25.

⁵² *Ibid* p. 28.

⁵³ I Pinchbeck, *Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution*, Virago, London, 1969, Chapters 2 and 4; L. Davidoff, 'The Role of Gender in the "First Industrial Nation": Farming and the Countryside in England, 1780-1850' in *idem*, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on*

who, exercised her own authority over a labour system based predominantly upon the family labour of female proletarians.

In general then, the pivotal relationship between farm service and the development of high-farming in the East Riding had ensured that the working relationship between master and servant lost most, if not all, of its 'clannish' familial associations. Thus the continued reliance on farm service demanded by the economic needs of high farming in East Yorkshire did not necessarily ensure the continuation of pre-capitalist social relations; rather, farm service was adapted in ways which suggest that the relationship between servant and master lost its close paternal intimacy and became in the words of the leading historian of East Riding farm service 'almost entirely economic'.⁵⁴

Since the evidence considered so far suggests that yearly hiring and living-in did not necessarily create the ideal conditions for close and consensual social relations, it is worth considering whether any other aspect of the system is able to bear the burden of explaining the apparent absence of socio-political consciousness amongst the East Riding's farm servants. One aspect of the East Riding system worth further consideration is the manner in which its mode of labour organisation delegated day-to-day management functions to supervisory workers who presided over an authoritarian but relatively autonomous labour hierarchy. This labour system which allowed workers to exert a degree of control of the labour process may be interpreted as limiting the extent of proletarianization because although market relations were established, direct control over the labour process was not. It therefore fell short of establishing the real subordination of labour considered important in the emergence of a proletarian socio-

Gender and Class, Polity Press, London, 1995; Idem, 'Class and Gender in Victorian England: The Case of Hannah Cullwick and A.J. Munby', *Feminist Studies*, 5, 1979.

⁵⁴ Counce, 'Farm Horses', p. 86.

political consciousness.⁵⁵ In this sense, therefore, although the farm service system was a highly ordered and divided form of labour organisation - Counce has recently likened the system to a form of 'proto-Taylorism' - it also allowed for for a compromise between labour and capital centred upon the work group's self discipline and self organisation and their positive identification with the objects of their labour.⁵⁶ In his impressive study of twentieth-century farm servants, Counce offers extensive testimony to the degree of intrinsic job satisfaction afforded to farm servants who worked with horses.⁵⁷ As he demonstrates, the male farm servants employed within this system derived a sense of pride in their capacity for hard work, their skill at the plough and in the condition of the horses placed under their supervision. A graphic illustration of this is also provided by the recollections of Herbert L. Day who worked as a farm servant in the East Riding between 1916 and 1930. Day points out that:

An understanding relationship developed between a man and his horses which cannot be experienced with a machine Unlike machines, horses are flesh and blood, and are subject to nerves, physical disorders and pain. I found it impossible not to be concerned with the welfare of the horses which formed my working unit. I did not consider the work I did in the stable to be real work as such.⁵⁸

In his book 'Horses on the Farm' he refers also to the 'imaginary ownership' of animals and tools that occurred amongst farm servants:

Hired horsemen lived in a world of make-believe. They imagined that they owned the horses they drove, the tools they used and the plough or wagon they were allocated. The word "my" often crept into their conversation on and off the farm.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ G Stedman Jones, 'Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution', *New Left Review*, 90, 1975, p. 49; Joyce 'Work', p. 151; Howkins, 'Labour History', p. 118.

⁵⁶ Counce, 'Farm Servants and Capitalism', p. 55.

⁵⁷ 'Farm Horses', Chapter 10 and passim.

⁵⁸ H.L. Day, *When Horses were Supreme: The Age of the Working Horse*, Hutton Press, Beverley, 1985, pp. 27-8.

⁵⁹ H. L. Day, *Horses on the Farm*, Hutton Press, Beverley, 1981, p 18

This positive identification with the objects of their labour forms part of the basis for Counce's explanation of the absence of a socio-political consciousness amongst East Riding farm servants whom he describes as 'non-unionised and relatively acquiescent in things as they were'.⁶⁰ He argues that the East Riding system worked as a form of 'social control' based around a combination of the authority of the supervisory workers and the servants' own desire to do their jobs well. When both functioned effectively they fostered a sense of internal order and harmony within the labour hierarchy. He does not, however, suggest that this is a sufficient explanation for the high degree of consent and equilibrium. Instead he emphasises the importance of locating the workings of the labour system within the context of the benefits afforded by the positive market situation of the East Riding farm servant.⁶¹ Dunbabin suggested that hiring fairs nullified the need for formal trade unions because they fulfilled comparable functions but generated less conflict. Counce pursues a similar argument because, although he compares the hiring fair 'to an informal and temporary union' which involved 'genuine and sometimes fierce bargaining with the farmers', he suggests that the extent and depth of this conflict was contained by the ritualised nature of annual hirings and the equalised bargaining power that existed between farmers and servants.⁶² Thus, although Counce regards farm servants as formal proletarians with a potential conflict of interest with their employer, the workers' identification with their labour and the benefits they obtained through the system of contracts and bargaining at hiring fairs resulted in general worker satisfaction with farm service. It is not that farm servants were antipathetic to trade unions in principle (after all, many of those East Riding labourers that participated in the trade unionism of 1870s were ex-farm servants)

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

⁶¹ Counce, 'Farm Horses', chapter 7 *passim*.

⁶² Dunbabin, 'Agricultural Trades Unionism', pp. 120-122; Counce, 'Farm Horses', p. 67; Idem, 'Farm Servants and Capitalism', p. 59.

but the workings of the system meant that conflicts were channelled into other forms which limited the extent of ill-feeling.⁶³

It is important to emphasise at this point that Howkins does not seek to argue that farm servants are incapable of engaging in social conflict with their employers. He readily acknowledges that farm servants, including those in the East Riding, were capable of engaging in conflicts as sustained and possibly even more astringent than those involving labourers in the English south. What appears to distinguish these conflicts from those of the proletariat is the absence of institutional expression in the form of collective organisations. Consequently although Counce's interpretation differs from Howkins', it may lend some comfort for his decision to exclude the East Riding farm servants from the ranks of the rural proletariat as it offers an explanation for the absence of trade union militancy amongst East Riding farm servants, the level of socio-political consciousness that Howkins regards as integral to the fully-fledged proletarian.⁶⁴ An alternative interpretation might follow Reed in regarding all farm servants as proletarians whose conflicts with capital should be regarded as a form of socio-political consciousness analogous to that exercised by other workers through formal organisations such as trade unions.⁶⁵ This approach, which integrates farm servants into the tripartite model and grants them a proletarian socio-political consciousness, obviously questions Howkins' decision to set them apart. It is, therefore, worth considering whether Reed's position is appropriate for the East Riding during the mid-Victorian period.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 69

⁶⁴ Howkins' argument that farm servants' conflicts with capital should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of proletarian consciousness possibly gains support from Counce's conclusion that 'The outlook of farm lads undoubtedly moved a few steps towards that of the industrial working-class as their status as permanent wage earners became clear and unarguable in the nineteenth century, but before 1914 it was only a few steps', 'Farm Horses', p. 200.

⁶⁵ Reed, 'Criticisms', p. 233.

There is evidence that at this time the working and hiring practices of the East Riding farm service system were generating conflicts between labour and capital. One area in which the system experienced contradictions was that of the control of horses. Within the male work force there was intense rivalry centring on the relative condition of the horses under each farm servant's supervision. In their desire to out-do their peers, farm servants used linseed cake and drugs to fatten and improve the appearance of horses.⁶⁶ This could lead to tensions between farmers and servants. There were, for example, cases in the mid-Victorian period in which farmers summonsed farm servants for appropriating oil cake and for administering drugs without consent. In 1851, for example, a case was brought before the East Riding Petty Sessions concerning four horses poisoned by a farm servant, three of which had died. Whilst accepted as unintentional, this was regarded as symptomatic 'of a very reprehensible practice amongst farmers' servants of drugging their master's horses for the purpose of making their skins look sleek and smooth, and in good condition'.⁶⁷ The number of cases of this kind reported in the local newspapers would suggest that this practice became increasingly prevalent during the mid-Victorian years and peaked in the 1870s. In 1876, for example, Thomas Jackson, wagoner, appeared before York Assizes for 'unlawfully and maliciously poisoning three horses', the prisoner having given 'mercury and bitter aloes to the horses to make them eat and improve their coat'.⁶⁸ In April of that year the issue was discussed by the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture where 'Several members spoke of the danger to which farmers were exposed by the system pursued by lads in giving poisonous drugs to horses', they also called for government legislation to curb the practice.⁶⁹ Control over the quantity and content of what was fed to horses was also an issue of concern at this time. George Henderson,

⁶⁶ See Counce, 'Farm Horses', Chapter 9, for a discussion of horse-feeding practices.

⁶⁷ *Hull Advertiser*, 26 December, 1851.

⁶⁸ *Driffield Times*, 15 July, 1876.

John Harrison and William Stubbs, for example, were summonsed by J.P. Duggleby, farmer, for 'purloining wheat for the purpose of giving it to their employer's horses' the farmer stating that:

He brought the case in order to show them that they could not take upon themselves to do such a thing contrary to his orders, and because it was a very injurious thing to give to horses, a neighbour of his having last year lost two valuable animals from the same cause, and he had no doubt thousand of horses were killed or permanently injured by the practice among servants, whose intention was to make the horses' coats shine.⁷⁰

Two similar cases were: Seth Moor, farm servant, who was prosecuted for 'unlawfully and contrary to the orders of his master' taking barley and bonemeal to give to horses, the Magistrate imposing a £1 fine and costs as 'a warning to the defendant and others'; and Thomas Whitfield, summonsed for 'appropriating and giving to horses, without orders, eight oil cakes'.⁷¹ The latter individual had previously been cautioned by his employer, who stated that 'the practice had been indulged in to such an extent that the horses would scarcely take food unless mixed with cake'.⁷² Occasionally horses were the victims of revenge attacks by disgruntled farm servants such as the case of the servant committed to prison for 'pulling out a horses tongue by the roots'.⁷³ In general though, these were essentially disputes over the boundaries of authority and control over the forces of production prompted by the farm servants' positive identification with, and imaginary ownership of them. The purpose of bringing such cases before the magistrates was mainly symbolic, to assert the employer's social authority, as Whitfield's employer emphasised, he was not seeking a heavy penalty

⁶⁹ *Driffield Times*, 18 April, 1876.

⁷⁰ *Driffield Times*, 18 November, 1877.

⁷¹ *Driffield Times*, 8 December, 1877

⁷² *Driffield Times*, 8 May, 1875; *Driffield Times*, 7 November, 1874.

⁷³ *Driffield Times*, 7 November, 1874.

against him 'but merely to show the defendant that he could not do this sort of thing with impunity'.⁷⁴

There is further evidence that farm service was generating tensions and conflicts during the mid-Victorian period. This relates to two areas in particular: bargaining at hiring fairs, and the enforcement of annual contracts. At this point the notion of 'structural conflict' may be of some use. This concept was developed by Alun Howkins as a means of analysing non-institutional forms of conflict between farmers and labourers which occurred at certain times of the agricultural year, particularly those that created labour shortages and placed farm workers in a stronger bargaining position.⁷⁵ One of the attractions of farm service for farmers was that it tended to insulate them against such conflicts because servants contracts and wages were fixed at the hirings which occurred during a lull in the agricultural year. As a consequence of this, servants were placed at a disadvantage when negotiating their wages and were prevented thereafter from capitalising upon later short-term seasonal fluctuations in wages at peak times of the agricultural year. During the mid-Victorian period, however, a sustained change in the labour market position of the farm servant meant that structural conflicts of the kind identified by Howkins, became increasingly common. E L Jones has suggested that in areas where a tightening labour market situation emerged after 1850, it enabled and encouraged a greater sense of assertiveness and independence amongst the labouring population. He argued that there is a correlation between the workers' strength in the labour market and the emergence of independent working class organisation in the form of for example, religious organisations and friendly societies - a process that culminated in the trade unionism of the 1870s.⁷⁶ I would suggest that there is evidence of a similar pattern of

⁷⁴ *Driffield Times*, 8 May, 1874.

⁷⁵ A. Howkins, 'Structural Conflict and the Farmworker', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 4, 1977.

⁷⁶ E L Jones, 'The Agricultural Labour Market', pp. 332-7.

development in the East Riding which included the farm servants. Farm servants did not generally participate in the trade union activity that occurred in the East Riding but they exhibited a similar, if less institutional, change in their consciousness. The newspaper reports of East Riding hiring fairs during the mid-Victorian period supply evidence of the farm servants' assertive use of the hiring fair, an assertiveness that often enabled both female and male servants to overcome the disadvantage of autumn hiring and pursue structural conflicts which resulted in them securing wage increases. This problem became most acute during the early 1870s, but twenty years before this farmers were complaining of the changing balance of power in the local labour market and the effect that this was having upon the farm servants' consciousness.⁷⁷

Servants pursued other tactics designed to maximise the potential offered by the fact that hirings were a frequent occurrence over an extended period. One was for servants to reach agreements with several farmers but to fulfil only the most lucrative contract: a practice known as 'scrimshanking'. At Bridlington hirings in 1851, for example, it was reported that: 'There were cases of servants repudiating contracts at these hirings when subsequently having gained more money from another farmer'.⁷⁸ Often the 'repudiation' occurred after the hirings, servants returning their 'fests' and informing the farmer that they had obtained employment elsewhere. On other occasions servants deserted their places soon after hiring and sought employment at post-Martinmas 'runaway' hirings such as those reported at Bridlington in 1852 where 'The deserters were chuckling over their exploits having, as they expressed it "served their maisters and missuses so nicely"'.⁷⁹ The latter were reported to be looking with 'anxiety' for new ser-

⁷⁷ W. Barugh, *Master and Man*, A Reply to the Pamphlet of the Rev. John Eddowes, entitled "The Agricultural Labourer As He Really Is", Driffeld, 1854. This will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3.

⁷⁸ *Hull Advertiser*, 4 November, 1851.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 10 December, 1852.

vants to replace the runaways and the *Hull Advertiser* observed that 'this custom of farm servants deserting their places was a serious and growing evil to farmers causing them much unpleasantness and inconvenience'.⁸⁰ Caunce has suggested that such actions were regarded as customary and were accepted by both parties in the early-twentieth century, but during the mid-Victorian years, when servants were relatively scarce, some farmers resented such transgressions and used the law to signal this fact and enforce the contract.⁸¹ The same week as the runaway hirings were held, for example, a number of young farm servants appeared before Bridlington Petty Sessions charged with absconding and 'on promising to return to their several services, to do their duty to their respective masters, and paying the expenses were allowed to do so'.⁸² Cases of this kind continued to occur into the 1860s, as three cases brought before East Riding magistrates in 1866 illustrate. These being: John Campney committed to prison for seven days and ordered to resume his service having agreed to hire but then returned his fest in postage stamps to his employer; and Robert Clarke, who having agreed one contract then hired with another farmer and returned his 'fastening penny' of 3/6. Clarke was ordered to prison for fourteen days and instructed to fulfil his contract thereafter.⁸³ There was also the case of James Welsh a 'runaway servant' apprehended by the police in Hull, committed to prison for twenty-one days and ordered to return and finish his service on his release.⁸⁴ The problem continued into the 1870s, a fairly representative case being that of Edward Marshall, charged by J. Thornhill Elgey of Wetwang, farmer, with not fulfilling a contract. He had received a 5s fest at Driffield hirings on the 10th November and began work on the following Saturday morning, but: 'on Saturday at noon he unharnessed his horse, and left without giving

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Caunce, 'Farm Horses' p. 62.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 24 November, 1866.

⁸⁴ *Beverley Gaurdian*, 23 June, 1866.

notice, or giving any reason for so doing'.⁸⁵ The police Superintendent reported that this was the third fest taken by Marshall that year. He was ordered to pay 8s expenses and 10s compensation but having spent all his wages he was sent to the House of Correction for 14 days.⁸⁶ Such practices appear to have peaked in the 1870s when farmers complained 'at the frequency and coolness with which the hiring contracts were broken almost as a matter of course', and that this increasingly common occurrence meant that they had become 'tools in the hands of the servants' because they 'had to attend five or six different hirings before they could get servants'.⁸⁷ Servants also refused to be hired if employers tried to impose unacceptable conditions such as regular attendance at church.⁸⁸

There were also, at this time, similar prosecutions of farm servants for refusing to obey orders. John Walker, for example, 'summoned by his master for disobeying orders' was ordered to pay 7s.6d compensation and 11s costs and to 'return to his place and do his duty in future'.⁸⁹ Henry West, foreman with Jonathan Dunn of Hutton Cranswick, was fined for refusing to undertake 'a Carter's work' and for assaulting his employer.⁹⁰ A prominent source of tension precipitating cases of this kind, was the question of whether farmers could expect farm servants to work in the evening. Mr Joseph Lett of Scampston, for example, summonsed one of his servants, Thomas Ireland, for 'refusing to obey his lawful orders on the 22nd June and at other times'. Ireland had refused to feed stock or work after six o'clock arguing that it was generally agreed that servants should not work after that hour. The Bench found against Ireland, in-

⁸⁵ *Driffield Times*, 9 December, 1874

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ J Dunn, Chairman of York Chamber of Agriculture, *York Herald*, 14 July 1876; *York Herald*, 7 May, 1875, Meeting of York Chamber of Agriculture, 'Discussion on the Hiring of Servants'. The meeting was attended by farmers from all parts of the Riding.

⁸⁸ BPP, XVII, 1867-8, I, p. 100.

⁸⁹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 8 July, 1872.

⁹⁰ *Hull Times*, 5 June, 1875.

forming him that 'The time of a yearly servant was his master's time'.⁹¹ By the mid 1870s this question of 'What are the Hours of Labour on Farms' was reported as 'now being agitated' through 'Disputes (that) are now often coming before the magistrates in which farm servants refuse to work after six in the evening and their masters summons them for disobedience of orders'.⁹² Another case which 'occasioned some stir in East Yorkshire' was that of two servants who had, 'refused to work the new double furrow ploughs, and actually left their horses standing in the field', the magistrates ordered them to pay costs of 9s and £2 compensation.⁹³ The amount of free time farm servants should have at their disposal, particularly at peak times of farming activity, also became an issue of contention. John Jackson, wagoner, for example, was summonsed for neglect of duty and abandoning a horse. His employer having refused to allow him to go to Beverley races: Jackson 'refused to fulfil his work and beat a horse', another servant who had been given permission to attend the races, lost his job and most of his wages when he stayed over in Beverley for two days.⁹⁴ A practice that irritated and inconvenienced many farmers was the custom of servants attending several hirings towards the end of their contract. There were, for example, criticisms that as the hiring season approached farm servants became unruly and inattentive to their work, attended an unreasonable number of hiring fairs and thereby inconvenienced farmers who had a press of work.⁹⁵

There is evidence also, that during the mid-nineteenth century, the East Riding farm servant system was increasingly unable to fulfil the function of preventing farm servants from capitalising on the higher wages available in spring and summer. During the 1850s, for example, there were complaints by farmers re-

⁹¹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 11 July, 1872.

⁹² *Hull Times*, 17 July, 1875.

⁹³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 9 May, 1872.

⁹⁴ *Hull Times*, 7 July, 1877.

⁹⁵ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854.

garding the number of farm servants breaking their contracts at peak times of demand for labour. The Beeford farmer, William Barugh, defended himself and his 'brother farmers' against the accusation made by local clergy that farmer neglect was the root cause of the perceived demoralisation of the farm servant population. He rejected this in favour of an explanation that dwelt upon the farm servants' changed position in the labour market. It was this, he suggested, that explained 'the numerous cases of litigation betwixt masters and servants which have come before the magistrates in recent years'.⁹⁶ He argued that farm servants were hiring in autumn and then leaving to take employment elsewhere at higher wages in the Spring for the rest of the year, insubordination being the means of securing release from their contracts in the form of dismissal.⁹⁷ It is difficult not to conclude that Barugh was guilty of exaggeration here because such a strategy was laden with risks for the servant: mainly because magistrates usually found against them in such cases. Nevertheless, if a farm servant did manage to abscond at peak times (possibly without being brought before the magistrates) and if he had already received some wages (as was often the custom) such behaviour enabled the servants to benefit from what farm service had traditionally denied them: the opportunity to take advantages of higher wages at peak times of demand for labour. Because of the time, the inconvenience, and the risk to their reputation, farmers like some other employers were often reluctant to use the law. The threat of the courts was used as a warning. How often the threat was carried through if it failed to act as a deterrent is uncertain but it seems likely that only a minority of disputes ever came to the courts, particularly at busy times of the year.⁹⁸ What is clear, is that there were two main periods of the year when servants were brought before the courts for absconding and not fulfilling their contract: early December when, as we have seen, many failed ei-

⁹⁶ Barugh, 'Master and Man', p. 19

⁹⁷ Ibid.

ther to enter service as agreed or quickly ran away, and then in Spring and early Summer. Many of these later cases might be seen as lending plausibility to Barugh's argument that servants were seeking dismissal so as to take advantage of the seasonal upturn and hire elsewhere in agriculture or industry. Examples include: three farm servants: M. Land, M. Crow and G. Wright, hired at Martinmas, but all absconding in the following Summer from the service of Mr W.D. Tomlinson. When ordered to be bound over at £5, and to return to work and do their duty, all replied 'with a great deal of bravado' that they would go to prison.⁹⁹ Another example was Jos. Sharpe, wagoner, charged by his employer with having disobeyed his orders: 'The foreman ordered him to take the horses and go to the field, when he refused, and asked for his money, and this conduct had been repeated from day to day'.¹⁰⁰ Other cases include: Joseph Rutter charged with absconding from the service of Thomas Hodgson because 'the work was too hard for him'; George Fisher and George Nicholson charged with absconding from the service of W. Catton of Routh, and George Watson, who absconded because his employer refused to let him go to chapel.¹⁰¹

Equally probable, however, was the fact that the threat to leave service was used to pressure farmers into concessions such as paying extra money for haysel and harvest work. A County Court Judge accused farm servants of exploiting the fact that farmers were reluctant to use the law as a means pressuring their masters into either releasing them or paying them an increase. He claimed, for example, that:

His name, and those of other judges were used in these servant and masters' cases as a terror to the masters, forcing them to pay

⁹⁸ D.C. Woods, 'The Operation of the Master and Servants Act in the Black Country, 1858-1875', *Midland History*, 16, 1987, p.101.

⁹⁹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 8 July, 1872.

¹⁰⁰ *Driffield Times*, 16 March, 1872.

¹⁰¹ *Driffield Times*, 13 March, 1875; *Hull Times*, 5 June, 1875

to save the inconvenience of going to the County Court. Many a demand was made by a servant, both in domestic and farm life which the master knew he was not bound to pay, but he paid rather than go into the County Court.¹⁰²

This judge who later stated that 'As a rule he had thought it practical to decide in favour of the master ninety-nine times out of a hundred' was clearly anxious that farmers should no longer be so reticent.¹⁰³ He announced that:

He wanted farmers and tradesmen, and gentry in the neighbourhood during the next two years to make up their minds that whatever inconvenience it may be to themselves, wives and daughters they will set their faces against such demands absolutely and come before him; trusting him to do what is right. If only they would do that, he thought they could remodel the district, and alter the vices of those servants who were using the County Court to spoil themselves and alter the position between master and servant.¹⁰⁴

By the 1870s this issue of enforcing contracts, retaining farm servants, and maintaining discipline over them had become a major source of debate in Chambers of Agriculture and at public meetings called specifically to discuss these issues. A paper given by a farmer at the Beverley branch of the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture claimed that:

the non fulfilment of the contract by the servants - especially females - has increased to a fearful extent, and increases every year Scores of cases are proved to have taken place in this locality; very few indeed are the employers who have who have not had cases more or less, and great has been the loss in agricultural labour as a consequence.¹⁰⁵

This problem of enforcing contracts had become more acute after the Master and Servant Act of 1867 stipulated that all contracts of a year or more had to be in writing. As most farm servants' contracts were verbal and ended on November 23rd, any contract agreed before this date was potentially invalid and farm ser-

¹⁰² *Beverley Gaurdian*, 23 November, 1878.

¹⁰³ *York Herald*, 24 November, 1879.

¹⁰⁴ *Beverley Gaurdian*, 23 November, 1878.

vants exploited this loophole when summonsed to appear before the magistrates for breaking or not entering their contracts. In an attempt to combat this problem, East Riding Chambers of Agriculture pressed for the alteration of the dates of hiring fairs so that none occurred before the 23rd. They also organised boycotts of earlier hirings, campaigned for an alteration of the law of master and servant, and tried to prevent servants attending so many hiring fairs.¹⁰⁶

Despite the fact that farm servants did not participate in the formal trade union activity that developed in the East Riding during the 1870s, the tightening labour market created the conditions for farm servants to engage in analogous behaviour which involved a greater assertiveness and independence. This behaviour was possibly informed and inspired by the trade union activity amongst agricultural day labourers and urban workers in the East Riding. For example, the disputes over the care and treatment of horses, the use of technology, and working hours peaked in the 1870s and coincided with the 'revolt of the field' in the East Riding. Interestingly, these disputes were often interpreted as being related to and even part of the trade union agitation for wages and shorter hours that was taking place at this time. For example, there was the case of married 'beastman' Richard Midgley charged with unlawfully leaving the service of Mr William Dennis 'a large wold farmer' of Luttons Ambo. Midgley, hired on a long-term contract but paid '8s a week and meat' stated in court that 'there was there was a strike for 10s a week with meat, and 18s without; and he, having a wife and family, thought he had a right to better his position as well as others, and he gave a week's notice leave, alleging that he was paid by the week, and that he was not a servant till May Day'.¹⁰⁷ Midgley's marital status and weekly

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ For a fuller discussion of this campaign see Moses, 'Rustic and Rude', and Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁷ *Driffield Times* 13 April, 1872. The magistrates did not agree and compensation and costs were found against him.

wages meant that he was not a typical farm servant. However, other similar cases that day which were 'more clearly those of "servants in husbandry"' were also thought by the local press to be 'perhaps influenced by the prevailing agitation'.¹⁰⁸ The demands made by farm servants at Malton and Pickering hirings in 1872 - the first year of the agricultural trades unionism - were also ascribed to the effect of the 'recent agitation'.¹⁰⁹ An element of discontent was also perceived to be behind some of the other conflicts of the 1870s. The magistrate presiding over what was dubbed 'the strike against double ploughs', for example, argued that this 'was part and parcel of the general discontent going on, which must be put down, or farming would come to a dead stop'.¹¹⁰

Caunce acknowledges (and offers evidence) that farm service could generate conflicts that challenged the authority and discipline inherent within the system and suggests that it was on the larger capital intensive farms, with the largest concentration of farm servants, that the problems of control were most pronounced.¹¹¹ He also suggests, however, that incidents of this type were exceptional deviations that serve to underline the harmony that normally prevailed.¹¹² This is a valid interpretation which is a reminder that some degree of friction may be beneficial for the maintenance of equilibrium. There is also the danger, however, that an overly functionalist approach, with its emphasis upon the positive contribution of all social action to the maintenance of social order, can overstress the extent of integration and consent. The existence of conflict is also a reminder that farm service was not necessarily a total institution that completely contained the tensions inherent in the capitalist labour process. Furthermore, the possible correlation between farm size and conflict suggests that the

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Driffield Times*, 16 November, 1872.

¹¹⁰ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 18 April, 1872.

¹¹¹ Caunce, 'Farm Horses', p. 77; p. 201.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

larger arable farms should perhaps be interpreted as a variant of the large bureaucratic type of enterprise that has been regarded as facilitating the formation of a class-orientated socio-political consciousness amongst rural labourers.¹¹³ This is not least because in their work-orientation and everyday life the farm servants employed on the larger isolated farms, shared many characteristics with the 'occupational community' regarded by some as conducive to the formation of a radical social imagery amongst agricultural workers.¹¹⁴

Mick Reed has suggested that we should not assume that the absence of formal trade unionism is evidence of an absence of socio-political consciousness amongst English farm servants.¹¹⁵ I would tentatively follow this lead and suggest that the mid-Victorian period is a time when East Riding farm servants combined the custom of the annual round of hirings with the idea that labour is a commodity to be sold in the market as dearly as possible. The conflicts over contracts and other aspects of the labour process suggest that this was part of a broader process involving the formation of an informal socio-political consciousness within the farm servant population. It seems plausible to suggest that there was an interaction between three factors: the farm servants' experience of the modernised system of farm service, the changing condition of the labour market and the carnivalesque environment of the hiring fair. This resulted in the hiring fair becoming an increasingly effective vehicle for the expression of a form of collective opposition by farm servants against employers. This action took forms not always recognised as evidence of a socio-political consciousness, but the tactics and actions of East Riding farm servants are comparable

¹¹³ D. Lockwood, 'Sources of Variation in Working Class Images of Society', *Sociological Review*, 14, 1966.

¹¹⁴ C. Bell and H. Newby, 'The Sources of Variation in Agricultural Workers Images of Society', *Sociological Review*, 21, 1973.

¹¹⁵ Reed, 'Criticisms', pp. 226-235; I. Carter, 'Class and Culture among Farm Servants in the North-East, 1840-1914', in A. Maclaren, ed., *Social Class in Scotland*, John Donald, Edin-

with those of other proletarian workers in the mid-Victorian period in that they are seeking to mitigate and qualify their formal dependence upon the labour market. These actions are perhaps best categorised as evidence of corporate class consciousness.¹¹⁶

Alun Howkins' attempt to forge a new interpretation is valuable in that it highlights the potential weaknesses of the existing rural labour /social history paradigms: namely, their tendency to underplay the uneven nature of the nineteenth-century rural economy and the diversity and heterogeneity of social relations that this enabled. His assertion of the importance of forms of identity and consciousness other than class rightly emphasises that nineteenth-century rural society was a more complex matrix of structures, identities and relations than is often allowed for by a strict adherence to the conventional tripartite model. However, Howkins' continued attachment to the notion of proletarianization and class formation in some regions of developed agrarian capitalism suggests that he retains a commitment to some form of economic and social determination. The logic of this position suggests that if southern, eastern and some mid-land labourers are to be considered as proletarians then so should farm servants engaged on large arable farms in the north of England. It is true that farm servants constituted a group that was distinct and separate from other labourers in terms of their work tasks, contracts and residence on the farm. However, all of these labourers shared a common dependence upon wage labour throughout their working lives, and the divisions between male and female farm servants and between all farm servants and day labourers was less graphic than the gulf which had emerged between the substantial capitalist masters and all labourers.

burgh, 1976; and Anthony, 'Commentary'; suggest that Scottish farm servants were also capable of developing a proletarian socio-political consciousness.

¹¹⁶ As in a class 'which pursues its own ends within a social totality whose global determination lies outside it', P Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', in P Anderson et al, *Towards Socialism*, Fontana Press, London, 1965, p. 34.

In terms of socio-political consciousness the farm servants may have diverged from the formal requirement of forming trade unions but their more informal activities should be interpreted as a different but equally valid response to the process of proletarianization. It appears reasonable, therefore, to regard the distinction between labourers and servants as one that reflects different stages in the farm labourer's life and to regard all farm labourers as variants of a rural proletariat. In support of this point it is worth emphasising that East Riding farm servants also participated alongside other labourers in the development and organisation of two institutions that E. L. Jones suggested were indicative of the development of independent working-class feeling in mid-Victorian rural society: Primitive Methodism and friendly societies. David Neave has argued that East Riding friendly societies were largely independent working-class organisations that were able to withstand upper and middle-class attempts to control them. He also states that 'hired farm servants were among the most active in joining the affiliated orders'.¹¹⁷ He emphasises also that the East Riding was second only to Cornwall as a bastion of rural Methodism and notes the strength of the 'more radical' Primitive Methodism.¹¹⁸ Neave suggests that the experience of farm service, Primitive Methodism and friendly societies helped to foster a sense of independence, assertiveness and mutual solidarity amongst the farm servant population:

The distinctive elements of East Riding rural society in the nineteenth century were the overwhelming support for Methodism and the continuation and development of the tradition that the young men would spend the first ten years of their life as hired farm servants. Neither of these two elements contributed to producing a dependent, submissive, cap touching proletariat. In Methodism particularly Primitive Methodism, the labourers and rural artisans demonstrated their independence from the control of clergy and landowner and in the hirings and mutualism of living-in were learnt the benefits of collective action. This inde-

¹¹⁷ Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830--1914*, Hull University Press, Hull, 1991, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

pendence and collective action were combined in the village branches of the affiliated order friendly societies to produce what was the only strong rural working class organisation in the Victorian countryside.¹¹⁹

I would broadly endorse this analysis and follow Neave in describing the nineteenth-century East Riding farm servants as 'a mobile and independent rural working class'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 11.

Chapter Three

The Development of Hiring Fairs as Centres of Collective Bargaining

This chapter will focus on a major aspect of the East Riding hiring fair in the mid-nineteenth century, its role as a labour market for farm servant labour. This was the traditional economic function of the fair the 'real business part of the fair, the object for which it is established, namely the hiring of servants'.¹ Hiring at a hiring fair involved servants and masters gathering in the market places and streets of towns and villages and engaging in a process of mutual observation, interrogation and bargaining that resulted in a verbal hiring agreement. The agreement was sealed by the offering and taking of a symbolic token payment known variously as a 'God's penny', 'hiring penny' 'fastening penny' 'earnest' or 'fest'. 'Fest' was the term commonly used the East Riding of Yorkshire. The duration of the contract, unless stipulated otherwise, was for one year from the regional hiring date, which, in the case of the East Riding was Old Martinmas Day (23 November). Although annual contracts continued to be regarded as the norm, and were regarded as a form of yearly hire, by the early-nineteenth century the conventional period of service lasted for 51 weeks rather than the full year. Contracts would run up to and terminate at Martinmas but the new term of service began one week later. This practice had been introduced in the early-nineteenth century as a means of avoiding the possibility that servants would obtain a new settlement through a year's residence in a parish. This practice also allowed for a week's annual holiday for the farm servants. Many of the major hirings were located within this week. This custom tended to reinforce the already pronounced interdependence between the hiring fair, farm service and annual contracts. This interdependence meant also that so long as farm service and annual contracts remained a significant aspect of East Riding agriculture, the hiring

¹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 26 November, 1870.

fairs were also likely to remain important because they offered the most convenient location for the creation of secure and enforceable contracts.

The origin of hiring fairs themselves is usually located in the state's attempts to regulate the supply, price and conditions of employment of labour within the context of the labour shortages and wage inflation that resulted from the epidemic mortality of the Black Death.² Under the Statute of Labourers of 1351 (23 Edward 111), for example, all rural servants were commanded to appear in markets towns to be hired in public and bound to serve for one year at the wages stipulated by local Justices.³ A second statute, (25 Edward 111) extended these provisions to employees in industry and fixed the wage-rates for both industrial and agricultural servants.⁴ Wilhelm Hasbach suggested that these fourteenth-century enactments and other later measures of a similar nature created a system of officially-regulated labour markets within which lay the origins of the public hiring fair of the nineteenth century.⁵ This interpretation may, however, exaggerate the significance of these statutes in the origins of public hiring fairs. It seems likely that hiring fairs were not the creation of the expanding administrative state: they were the creation of an existing and expanding labour market which the state then sought to control and regulate. Labour markets regulated by common law in local courts and occurring on an annual basis existed prior to the legislation of the fourteenth century.⁶ These legislative measures, and their periodic revisions, did, however, locate these markets and their customary practices within a statutory legal framework. This enhanced their regularity and possibly their legitimacy as economic and social

² M. Roberts "Waiting Upon Chance": English Hiring fairs and their meanings from the 14th to the 20th Century', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1, 1988, pp. 125-133.

³ BPP, 1875, *Second and Final Report of The Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Master and Servant Act, 1867, The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 34 and 35 Victoria, c. 32*, I, pp. 2-3; J. Catt, *Northern Hiring Fairs*, Countryside Publications, Chorley, 1986, pp. 3-4; W. Hasbach, *A History of the Agricultural Labourer*, 1894, 1966 Edition, F. Cass and Co., London, 1966, p. 23.

⁴ BPP, 1875, p. 2.

⁵ Hasbach, 'Agricultural Labourer', p. 23.

institutions.⁷ This statutory framework grafted upon the public hiring fairs also bequeathed the prefix 'statute' which became synonymous with public hirings long after the statutes associated with them had been repealed.

All statutes concerned with controlling and restricting the cost and mobility of labour were repealed and consolidated by the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers of 1563 (5 Elizabeth, C.4). This legislation had similar aims to that which preceded it: to make labour compulsory and local and to regulate the wages and conditions of employment.⁸ With regard to servants in husbandry, every person between the age of 12 and 60, who possessed no property, was not employed in a specific trade, and was neither a gentleman nor a scholar at university was bound by contract to serve for at least one year.⁹ The enforcement and regulation of this Act was placed in the hands of High Constables or Justices of the Peace who presided over public sessions held during a slack period in the agricultural year. These sessions, which became known as Statute or Petty sessions, ensured that all contracts were legal and that all servants had masters.¹⁰ Neither the master nor the servant was permitted to break the contract before the end of its stipulated term of service, unless this was agreed by one or more Justices. Masters' breaches of contract were regarded as a civil offence, they were liable for a fine if such a breach was proved. In contrast, servants who failed to fulfil their contracts without reasonable cause, or refused to serve at the appointed wages, were treated as criminals; they were liable to be committed to prison without bail until they agreed to fulfil the contract.¹¹ This legislation was applied with greater rigour and geographical scope than that which has preceded it and it has been suggested that it promoted the creation of a new

⁶ Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 127.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ BPP, 1875, p. 2; A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 60-61.

⁹ BPP, 1875, p. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid, p 3; Catt, 'Hiring Fairs', p. 5.

¹¹ BPP, 1875, p. 4.

generation of hiring fairs designed to implement the legislation of 1563.¹² Henry Best's account of East Riding hirings in the seventeenth century records such a system of official administrative sessions in operation and it has been suggested that the Elizabethan statute was the instigator of hiring fairs for farm servants in the East Riding.¹³

By the seventeenth century, therefore, East Riding hiring fairs and the agreements between masters and servants created at them were subjected to considerable regulation and enforcement by the law. The dates of hirings and rates of wages was determined by Justices of the Peace empowered by Parliament to regulate wages and enforce contracts. Ann Kussmaul argues, however, that sessions of the type described by Best, were not yet hiring fairs in their nineteenth-century form, because they were not labour markets concerned with wage bargaining.¹⁴ In contrast, she suggests, these Statute Sessions were 'principally administrative' being concerned with setting wage rates and ensuring that agreements already made prior to the session, conformed to, and were therefore enforceable, under the existing statutes. These existing agreements were recorded, and only a minority of servants who had not already hired were placed into service by justices: a system Kussmaul describes as clearing the market 'not through bargaining but compulsion'.¹⁵ She argues that these administrative sessions were transformed into hiring fairs concerned with wage bargaining during the eighteenth century. She suggests that the decline of wage fixing during this period meant that the wages of farm servants became determined, not by external regulation in the form of wage assessment, but by the laws of supply and demand.¹⁶ Farmers and farm servants continued to gather at what were still often referred to as 'Statutes' but the old

¹² Ibid.

¹³ K. McCutcheon, *Yorkshire's Fairs and Markets to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Thoresby Society, 39, York, 1940, p. 157.

¹⁴ Kussmaul, 'Servants' p. 61.

¹⁵ Ibid.

practice of wage-fixing had now given way before 'the flowering of free and open markets in agricultural labour, centred around the hiring fair the successor to the statute session'.¹⁷ Thus, the formal repeal of the wage fixing provisions of the Statute of Artificers in 1813, merely reflected a situation that had already existed 'on the ground' for some time: the tendency for wages to be determined through an increasingly market-driven process of negotiation between capital and labour. This interpretation, which offers a unilinear transition from administrative sessions to labour markets during the eighteenth century might be overstated. It perhaps exaggerates the extent and efficiency of official regulation prior to the eighteenth century. This was imperfect and always had to coexist with 'unofficial' market-orientated hiring fairs at which bargaining and negotiation were more salient: particularly when labour was scarce.¹⁸ Despite these caveats regarding the origins of the East Riding's hiring fairs and the extent to which they represented a form of institutional regulation prior to the late-eighteenth century, it still seems plausible to place the East Riding within the general pattern of development outlined by Kussmaul. This is a pattern of statutory regulation of wage levels and labour allocation giving way to a broadly free-market system in which the laws of supply and demand increasingly prevailed. Although the extent to which the mid-to late-eighteenth century constituted a watershed might be questioned, by the early-nineteenth century there had been a reshaping of the hiring fair as an institution. Although they often retained the title 'Statute Hirings', by the early-nineteenth century, the external regulation of the East Riding's fairs internal economic functions: wage determination and labour allocation - had become a distant memory. The East Riding fairs now served primarily as convenient sites for

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. This transition from Statute Sessions to hiring fairs may also have been encouraged in the East Riding by the impact of the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1752 with officially regulated fairs conforming to the change, but other 'unofficial' hirings continuing to observe the former date with the 11 November becoming New Martinmas (the time of the Statute Session) and the 23rd becoming Old Martimas (the time of the hiring fair), Catt, 'Hiring Fairs', p. 11.

bargaining and negotiation between capital and labour which resulted in the creation of verbal contracts, enforced and regulated thereafter, by custom, common, and statute law.¹⁹

This latter point is a reminder of the fact, however, that although the wage fixing aspects of the farm servant's contract was increasingly determined through negotiation within the context of the market, in other respects, the contracts created at the hiring fairs continued to be subject to extra-economic compulsions and sanctions. Although the remaining sections of the most important regulatory statute of the early-modern period - the Statute of Artificers - were rescinded in 1814, a year after the wage fixing sections were repealed, other enactments that provided the framework for the legal enforcement of the master servant relationship still referred back to the Act of 1563. This ensured that its main principles in terms of regulating and enforcing the contract remained alive.²⁰ For example, the amending acts that increasingly provided the framework for the regulation of the law of master and servant from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century continued that earlier tradition of partiality towards employers. A statute of 1747 (20 George II c.19), for example, gave summary jurisdiction to Justices of the Peace in the matter of disputes between masters and servants in husbandry hired for one year or longer. This was extended in 1758 (31 George II c. 53) to those hired for less than a year.²¹ Under this legislation one or more Justices were empowered to hear any complaint from servants and determine any dispute regarding their wages and conditions of service arising from such complaints. Cruelty entitled a servant to summon an employer before a magistrate and obtain a formal discharge if proven. The magistrate was also empowered to order payment of wages up to £10 to the

¹⁸ Roberts, 'Waiting', pp. 126-131.

¹⁹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854.

²⁰ W.R. Cornish and G. de N. Clark, *Law and Society in England: 1750-1950*, Sweet and Maxwell, London, 1989, p. 293.

²¹ BPP, 1875, p. 2.

servant in cases of breach of contract by an employer. In the case of complaint by a master or mistress, however, the authority and power of Justices of the Peace was greater. They had the power to entertain a complaint from employers regarding 'any misdemeanour, miscarriage or ill behaviour by the servant in his or her service or employment or service' and hear, examine and determine the same.²² If the Justice decided against the servant, he had the power to abate some part of their wages, discharge them from service or commit them to the House of Correction for whipping and hard labour.²³

By the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of prosecutions were made under the Statute of 4 Geo. IV. C.34, (1823).²⁴ This Act had continued the tradition of unequal treatment for capital and labour. It entitled a servant who could prove cruelty or ill treatment to obtain a discharge from service and claim all wages that were owing. In the absence of cruelty being proven the maximum penalty that could be levied against an employer was a £10 fine.²⁵ Once again, the provisions against servants were wider and more severe. The Act dealt with breaches of contract on the part of the servant not entering service or quitting before the agreed term had fully expired. These breaches, as well as any misdemeanour or misconduct during the period of service, were subject to the jurisdiction of a Justice who had the power to imprison the offender in the House of Correction for up to three months, abate part or all of their wages, or dismiss the servant from service. In addition, a master summonsed by his servant could appear in his own defence, servants were not given this right.²⁶ Thus, although the development of the law of master and servant by the mid-nineteenth century reflected, in part, the transition to a system of

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ D. Simon, 'Master and Servant', in J. Saville ed., *Democracy and the Labour Movement*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1954, p. 165.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ BPP 1875, p. 2; D.C. Woods, 'The Operation of the Master and Servants Act in the Black Country', 1858-1875, *Midland History*, VII, 1982, p. 93.

contracts created within a market context - the role of Justices' was increasingly that of arbitrating complaints and disputes arising from such contracts - the legal framework for this continued to fall unequally on servants and masters.

A shift towards greater parity occurred with the passing of the Master and Servant Act, 1867 (30 and 31 Victoria c.41). Under this Act both employers and servants were liable for fines if they broke their contracts. Magistrates had the power to award damages to the servant instead of fining the employer, and the worker could now give evidence on their own behalf. However, breach of contract by the servant was still regarded as a criminal act with magistrates having the power to abate wages or impose a fine of up to £20. Both were recoverable through distress and sale or by imprisonment of up to three months. Although direct imprisonment was now confined to 'aggravated' cases 'causing injury to persons and property' magistrates were given considerable discretion regarding what constituted 'aggravated' behaviour which could include behaviour regarded by the magistrate as 'misconduct, misdemeanour or ill-treatment'.²⁷ Thus, under statute law up to 1875, the law regulating the relationship of master and servant placed a coercive weapon in the hands of employers to which they could have recourse in order to control their servants and compel the fulfilment of contracts. Servants were liable for punishment as criminals, employers were only liable for civil damages. The relationship of master and servant was also shrouded by certain normative assumptions which informed interpretations of what was customary in various localities and how the law was interpreted by magistrates. The relationship between the master and the servant was regarded as a form of patriarchal domination placing the servant under the master's authority, and regarding them as with his own wife and children as their property.²⁸ The servant was required to work whenever

²⁷ Simon, 'Master and Servant', pp. 185-6; Woods, 'Operation', p. 95.

²⁸ Cornish and Clark, 'Law and Society', pp. 286-7.

instructed by their master: disobedience, insubordination and dereliction of duty could entail physical punishment or summary dismissal.²⁹

Such a combination of legal restraint and normative subjection has been termed 'pre-industrial, almost biblical subordination'.³⁰ In fact, extra-economic coercion of this kind is far from unique under industrial capitalism and according to Corrigan, may have been expanding both in its early stages and thereafter.³¹ The inequities of the legal regulation of contracts which treated servant breaches as criminal and employers' breaches as civil were corrected to some extent by the passing of the Employers and Workmen Act of 1875. This replaced the criminal penalties of the Master and Servants Acts by civil remedies and gave the new civil jurisdiction over employment contracts to the County Courts, if the sum claimed exceeded £10, and to the Magistrates' Courts if it did not. The old power to order a servant back to work on pain of imprisonment was now removed and courts could now only award damages or wages due or enforce and rescind the contract.³² Although this Act meant that the breaking of a contract was now a civil offence whether committed by a worker or an employer it was still intended to function primarily as a means through which employers could impel servants to return to work and fulfil their contracts.³³ Magistrates still had at their disposal, in certain circumstances, the power to impose prison sentences.³⁴

This extra-economic coercion offered by the law is important in explaining why farm service remained so widespread in the East Riding throughout the nineteenth

²⁹ Legal protection for servants from physical punishment was absent until the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861 (24 and 25 Victoria c. 42).

³⁰ L. Davidoff, 'Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Social History*, 7, 1974, p. 406.

³¹ P. Corrigan, 'Fuedal Relics or Capitalist Monuments? Notes on the Sociology of Unfree Labour', *Sociology*, XI, 1977.

³² Cornish and Clark, 'Law and Society', p. 320.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Woods, 'Operation', p. 95.

century. Given the all-year-round labour requirements of East Riding farmers and the labour shortages that could, at times, afflict the local labour market, farm service, with its legal constraints, offered an effective means of ensuring the availability of labour. The fact that hiring fairs were already established as the traditional location for the creation of the contracts that bound this labour, served also to reinforce the continued vitality of the hiring fair.

Although the law of master and servant might be regarded as labour repressive, this type of contract, and farm service itself, was not entirely without its benefits for the farm servant. Employers were also bound by the contract and this obliged them to provide food and lodging for the servant, irrespective of whether work was available. Masters were also expected to care for the servants' physical and moral welfare. Servants were thus 'insured' for the year against sickness and unemployment, and were also insulated against rises in the cost of living. The value of these non-monetary aspects of the wage varied over time but they could be considerable. Alan Armstrong, for example, has suggested that farm servants boarded-in probably fared best of all farm workers in terms of diet and he has remarked of the wages in kind earned by farm servants that 'it is remarkable how high they stood in relation to the outdoor labourer's usual wage, out of which rent had to be paid, and food and fuel provided to his dependants'.³⁵

In addition to this, it is worth emphasising that there was a distinction between the law and the potential power that it offered employers and the manner in which it was actually deployed. Its use and operation was conditioned by the workings of the master servant relationship on the farm and the condition of the market for farm servant labour. Legal coercion had to be utilised carefully within a system of

³⁵ W. A. Armstrong, 'Food Shelter Self Help', section I, Chapter 8, G. E. Mingay ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol VI*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

dialectical social relations informed by the fact that contracts were created and had to be maintained within the context of a labour market in which labour could be a relatively scarce commodity. This militated against excessive *de facto* use of the *de jure* powers placed at the master's disposal. In this respect, there was a relationship between the increased salience of wage bargaining and contract creation at the hirings and the actual operation of the contract thereafter. Employers had to compete with each other at the hirings to secure the labour power of the servant, offering both cash and non-cash inducements. A farmer with a poor reputation for board and lodging or who was overly possessive, repressive or litigious in his, or her, treatment of servants would have found it difficult to hire and retain able servants.³⁶

II

It seems likely that the retention and rejuvenation of farm service in the East Riding had an effect upon the region's hiring fairs, perhaps stimulating one of the periodic bouts of expansion associated with the institution.³⁷ However, establishing the exact number of hiring fairs in the East Riding during the mid-Victorian period is far from straight-forward. The most readily available source, local newspaper reports, are less than comprehensive in their reporting and recording of the various hirings. Each November, most local newspapers offered a brief review of some of the hirings in their locality, but even the larger hiring fairs were not always recorded in a consistent and detailed fashion and the smaller village hirings received only intermittent coverage. The number of hiring days recorded at each venue also varies. Another source, the information gathered by the East Riding police, is also problematic. For example, a statistical return made by the East Riding Constabulary in 1860 recorded 22 hiring fairs with a total attendance of 10,472 farm servants.³⁸

³⁶ S. Counce, *Amongst Farm Horses: The Houselads of East Yorkshire*, Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991. p. 60; Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 145.

³⁷ Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 132.

³⁸ J. Skinner, *Facts and Opinions Concerning Statute Hirings*, London, 1861, pp. 21-22, 'Appendix 1, Statute Hirings: Statistical Return'.

This return ignores, however, the fact that many venues had several hiring days. Driffield, for example, is recorded as having only one hiring on November 12. Newspaper reports reveal, however, that Driffield had a total of three hirings over a period lasting from early November to early December.³⁹ The 1860 return also omits the major hiring fairs at towns such as Beverley, Bridlington and York which attracted the largest number of farm servants. Later surveys by the East Riding police are more comprehensive and record a higher level of attendance at hirings in the East Riding than that of 1860:

Table 2. Total attendance at East Riding Hiring Fairs as Estimated by the East Riding Constabulary.⁴⁰

Year	Males	Females	Total
1864	12980	6300	19280
1865	10880	5413	16293
1866	10090	3577	13667
1867	11222	4888	16110
1868	12725	5003	17728
1869			16295
1870			13955
1871			14950

This increase may be accounted for by the inclusion of the larger urban hirings such as Beverley's major hiring on November 6 and some increased recognition of multiple hirings. A number of large and important hiring fairs adjacent to the East Riding which attracted farmers and servants from the area are not included however. The hiring fairs at York and Malton, for example, were as important hiring centres for East Riding farmers and farm servants but are excluded from this survey. Another frustrating aspect of this source is the fact that the police ceased to record attendances in 1872. This creates an impression of a decline in attendance after 1872 which is possibly misleading. The (admittedly impressionistic) reports of hirings by newspaper correspondents imply that this decline in the early 1870s was

³⁹ *Driffield Times*, 20 November, 1875.

⁴⁰ Chief Constable's Reports to East Riding Quarter Sessions, as reported in the *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*: 5 January, 1865; 4 January, 1866; 3 January, 1867; 2 January, 1868; 7 January, 1869; 6 January, 1870; 5 January, 1871; 4 January, 1872; The totals for

a temporary downturn prior to a period of unprecedented strength and vitality for East Riding hiring fairs in the mid to late 1870s. Perhaps the only safe conclusion regarding the number of farm servants attending East Riding hiring fairs during the mid-Victorian period, given the problematic nature of the statistical evidence, is to accept it alongside descriptive accounts of the hirings as a rough and impressionistic index that suggests hiring fairs remained important as labour markets and consistently attracted large numbers of employers and servants throughout this period. There is certainly no firm evidence of a significant decline.

III

Any conclusion regarding the number of hiring fairs serving the East Riding labour market must also, given the imperfect nature of the sources, remain tentative. An examination of newspaper reports of hiring fairs in local newspapers between 1848 and 1880 indicates that there was a total of 32 hiring fairs in the East Riding at 25 venues occurring between 2nd November and 2nd December. In addition, there were a number of other hirings just outside the East Riding which, especially after the expansion of the rural railway network from the late 1840s, came within relatively easy reach of East Riding employers and servants. If Malton and Selby are included, for example, the totals rise to 36 and 27 respectively. The inclusion of these still omits those hirings that took place outside of the major hiring season which were either only occasionally recorded or not reported at all. These include 'runaway hirings' which catered for farm servants who had absconded from service in the early weeks of their contracts and sought to re-engage with new employers still seeking labour. Such hirings were more likely to occur when demand for servants was high and are known to have taken place in the East Riding at

males and females were combined from 1869. 1871 was the final year that attendance at hirings was recorded.

Bridlington and Hedon in December after the main season of hirings had finished.⁴¹ It is also clear that hiring often continued between and after the more acknowledged and reported hiring days at the larger centres especially. At York, for example, the main hirings occurred at the Martinmas Fair on November 23rd but there is evidence that hiring continued after then. A petition submitted to York City Council in 1861 by a number of shopkeepers on Parliament Street, for example, complained of female farm servants standing in the street and obscuring their shop fronts 'on Martinmas Day (November 23) and several following Saturdays'.⁴² The following year, female farm servants were still hiring at York on 27th December.⁴³ Reports from later in the century, when newspapers were published on a daily basis, record at least a week of hirings at York and there is similar evidence of this extended pattern elsewhere.⁴⁴ On the whole then, the imperfect and often impressionistic evidence available suggests that hiring fairs continued to function as important labour markets throughout the mid-nineteenth century and beyond: an impression confirmed by Counce's and Parrot's research on East Riding hiring fairs in the twentieth century.⁴⁵

IV

As we shall see, East Riding hiring fairs were never entirely free of external attempts to regulate and control their internal functions and character. But the decline of formal regulation of wages from the late-eighteenth century meant that the hiring fair was increasingly shaped by its main participants: farm servants and farmers. By the mid-nineteenth century, the pattern of the hiring day was well

⁴¹ *Hull Advertiser*, 10 December 1852; M. T. Craven, *A New and Complete History of the Borough of Hedon*, Ridings Publishing Co., Drifffield, 1972 p. 199; Catt 'Northern Hiring Fairs', p. 63.

⁴² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 16 November, 1861.

⁴³ A.J. Munby, MS. Diary, Vol. 16, 27 December, 1862, cited in J. Kitteringham, 'Country work girls in nineteenth-century England' in R. Samuel ed., *Village Life and Labour*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1875, p. 97.

⁴⁴ *York Herald*, 27 November, 1900, for extended hirings at York and Malton.

established. The hiring day began with the arrival and occupation of the town or village by large numbers of farm servants. These would arrive from the early hours of the morning, either on foot or in a variety of vehicles and from the late 1840s, on trains. At Driffield hirings in 1871, for example, servants were observed 'pressing into town' from the early hours of the morning in 'carrier carts, omnibuses and all kinds of vehicle from cabs down to hand carts'.⁴⁶ Later in the day, when this already substantial gathering, was supplemented by those conveyed on trains, the farm servants who filled the streets of the town were described as resembling 'a dense surging tide'.⁴⁷ On their arrival the servants' first objective was to obtain food and drink at a public house and then, 'after refreshing themselves', they would 'take their stand in the market place'.⁴⁸ By the 'middle of the forenoon' they would be concentrated in the market place and adjacent streets, which by now would be 'completely filled with a dense mass of servants'.⁴⁹ At this point the employers would begin their active participation in the days proceedings:

After taking a look round, a master or a mistress accosts a servant - inquires if she wants hiring - what wages she is asking - where she lived last - what work she has been used to, and if she can milk cows. After a good deal of parlaying about wages, perhaps a bargain is struck and then a "fest" or "hiring penny" is given to the servant to fasten the contract.⁵⁰

Few late-nineteenth century excursions into local folklore failed to include an account of the hiring fair and its open air bargaining practices. Often, these were interpreted and portrayed as examples of traditional and quaint rustic customs: as

⁴⁵ S. Counce, 'Farm Horses'; Parrott, 'The Decline of Hiring Fairs in the East Riding of Yorkshire: Driffield, c. 1874-1939', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 16, 1996.

⁴⁶ *Driffield Times*, 18 November, 1871

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November 1854. During the mid-nineteenth century hiring was conducted by farmers and their wives, by the early twentieth century, foremen might also be involved in hiring farm servants at hiring fairs. H. Reffold, *Pie for Breakfast: Reminiscences of a Farmhand*, Hutton Press, Beverley, 1984, p. 68.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1864.

atavisms from a bygone age.⁵¹ Generally, however, the prevailing view of open-air bargaining in the mid-Victorian period was that it should be deplored as a 'slave market practice' which degraded those involved. A typical example of this type of critical comment appeared in the *Hull Advertiser* in 1854:

The Martinmas hiring day has always painfully impressed us with the modified realisation of an Oriental Slave-market. The spectacle of so many human beings huddled together to be examined like cattle, with a view to the purchase of their toil and fidelity for a year, has always had for us, had the association of an Eastern Bazaar for the swarthy sons of Ethiopia, and the fair maidens of Georgia and Circassia.⁵²

This slave-market metaphor was ubiquitous amongst nineteenth-century critics of hiring fairs, who, as we have seen could be fanatical in their dislike of the institution. T.E. Kebbel tried to strike a more balanced view when he agreed that public hirings tended to debase and demoralise those offering themselves to be hired, but he also felt that the criticisms of hiring practices were often exaggerated. But when he conceded that employers observed farm servants 'as the slave merchant would have scanned a Negro, and naturally regard them as in no other light than that of animals' his evaluation of the hiring practices of employers and its effect upon the farm servants was not fundamentally different from most outside observers of the hiring day.⁵³

Servants' physical attributes were undoubtedly an important factor considered by employers who would 'compare the thews and sinews of a great many candidates for service before engaging one'.⁵⁴ Servants were aware that they were on public display and would, as a consequence, strive to enhance their physical appearance at

⁵¹ For a discussion of these observers and their myopic propensities see Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 125.

⁵² *Hull Advertiser*, 11 November, 1854.

⁵³ T.E. Kebbel, *The Agricultural Labourer: A Short Summary of His Position*, W.H. Allen and Co., London, 1887, p. 173.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

the hirings. Male servants in the East Riding, for example, dressed in a manner that emphasised their physical prowess: 'Lads were proud of their physique and the local fashion of fastening a jacket with a piece of chain instead of buttoning it was intended enhance the size of a lad's chest and hence by implication, his strength and carrying ability'.⁵⁵ Female servants also dressed for the occasion and sought to make a favourable impression upon farmers and mistresses.⁵⁶ However, as Caunce, Roberts and others have argued, the Victorian observers who focused exclusively upon this aspect of the hiring day, derived a superficial and one dimensional view of the proceedings which failed to appreciate the full complexity of the hiring fairs internal practices.⁵⁷ Farmers did not only consider the physiological attributes of servants when hiring; strength was an important consideration, but experience, skill, character and general demeanour also figured.⁵⁸ Few farmers wished to hire a demoralised or disruptive servant who might abscond or might destabilise the internal order of the farm servant hierarchy.⁵⁹ In addition, as Michael Roberts has argued, a farmer's reliance upon visual clues and perceptions was not an indication of indifference towards the servant's inner character. It was part of a 'semantic system' in which the clothes and emblems worn by servants and their general demeanour were regarded as visual clues as to their origins, availability, skills, and personality.⁶⁰ For this reason alone, both physical and personal characteristics would be considered when farmers' exchanged information and opinions about servants:

You used to line yourselves up with other lads at side o't'road and t'farmers were across on t' other side o' t'road and they used to look you over, talk to one another, you know, and, "Do you know him?" "He looks like a likely lad, you know," and they'd say, "You want to get so and so if you're wanting a lad".... And of course,

⁵⁵ Caunce, 'Farm Horses', pp. 71-2.

⁵⁶ Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 140.

⁵⁷ S.Caunce, 'Farm Horses', Chapter 6; Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 122.

⁵⁸ Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 139.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 136.

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 138-142.

they'd talk amongst themselves and discuss you among themselves, and they'd say "Oh, he'll just do for me. Which is him? "There look". And they'd come across then ... and they'd say, "Noo my lad, dost'a want hiring?".⁶¹

Furthermore, as the newspaper descriptions of mid-Victorian hirings often reveal, the verbal exchanges that followed initial visual observations could be detailed and probing, as one former farm servant recalled: 'there was no end of questioning from both sides'.⁶²

This reference to questioning from both sides raises a second and equally important caveat to the representation of hiring fairs offered by their Victorian critics. The slave market metaphor implied that the role of the farm servant in the hiring process was that of a passive victim. The critical discourse deployed against hiring fairs almost invariably described the farm servants as subjects of a system that denied them what one critic described referred to as 'that proper and limited sense of independence which is sometimes the boast of the English labourer'.⁶³ In fact, farm servants could be powerful and assertive participants in shaping the hiring fair and many farmers came to feel that there were times when the servants' power at the hiring was neither proper nor limited. The perception of farm servants as passive victims of a slave market system is, as Stephen Caunce has argued, only appropriate for some hiring fairs in the south and midlands: there many had become one-sided affairs.⁶⁴ This was not the inevitable consequence of the hiring fair as an institution, however, it was the product of the rural unemployment and underemployment which had undermined the market situation of the southern farm servant. It was this context that enabled the southern farmers 'to pick the men they wanted, state their terms and leave'.⁶⁵ Many of the critics of the mid-Victorian

⁶¹ Caunce, 'Farm Horses', p. 59

⁶² Kitchen, 'Ox', p. 60.

⁶³ Eddies, 'Martinmas Musings', p. 6.

⁶⁴ Caunce, 'Farm Horses', p. 71.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

hiring fair in the East Riding adopted the language and the assumptions of attacks made upon hiring fairs in the south of England without considering the radically different market situation of the northern farm servant. In the north, a relatively tight labour market ensured that farm servants enjoyed a greater degree of parity and power in their negotiations with employers, as Howkins and Merricks have argued:

for one day the servant could say no , for the hiring fair of the north and east was no slave market, despite what southern observers thought. As long as there was a labour shortage in the north, as there was for most of the nineteenth century, it was always the master who asked if the servants wanted hiring and the servant could and did refuse.⁶⁶

The servants' shaping of events began with their arrival in the early hours of the hiring day. The influx of hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of farm servants transformed the appearance and the atmosphere of the streets towns and villages as they became 'completely wedged in with those that were standing to be hired'.⁶⁷ The boisterous and even arrogant confidence that this occupation engendered amongst the farm servants was a source of anxiety for some of those that witnessed this 'annual invasion'. A letter from a 'A Householder' that appeared in the *Driffield Times* in November 1875, for example, complained that 'the streets are once more abandoned to a lawless mob of rougns from the country' who indulged in 'boisterous horse-play arising out of drinking varied perhaps with a little rioting and fighting'.⁶⁸ Drink was undoubtedly a factor in this boisterousness, but the very act of gathering together in the streets also served to imbue the servant gathering with a sense of power. This feeling of power was fuelled also by the unusual relationship between farm servants and employers on this day. As William Howitt noted servants at the hirings confronted masters from a position of unique equality, because they were 'for the time their own masters, having left, or being about to

⁶⁶ Howkins and Merricks, 'The Ploughboy and the Plough Play', *Folk Music Journal*, 2, 1991, p. 197.

⁶⁷ *Hull Advertiser*, 14 November, 1851.

leave their own places'.⁶⁹ This exceptional moment - 'the only time when master and man met as equal and separate units' - offered the servants more than a moment of carnivalesque exuberance and freedom. It was also a fundamental juncture in their working lives.⁷⁰ The hiring fair presented them with the problem and the opportunity of shaping their own future through the agreements that they reached over their wages and conditions of employment for the forthcoming year.

This fact as well as the festive nature of the occasion informed the servants' demeanour when they confronted employers. In the opening exchanges, a mock indifference to being hired was affected so as to establish a position of strength:

We would stand about in groups, either in the market or the adjoining streets, until a farmer came along. After eyeing us up like so many oxen, he would say "nah, my lads; any on yer seeking a place?" Being wound up with good ale, we answered truculently or offhandedly at least, that we didn't "care a damn whether we got a place or not", and, what sort of chap are yer wanting?⁷¹

A. J. Munby's account of the female hirings he witnessed at York 'Statties' offers a similar impression of the testy opening banter between employers and farm servants: 'Here and there a farmer or a farmer's wife was bargaining with them. "Esta getten hired, lass?" said a woman to one girl. "Naa". "Well ye mun get hired here, or not at all - what wages de ye want?"'.⁷² In the bargaining that followed such opening encounters, servants asserted their independence and presented themselves, not just as labourers for hire, but also as prospective consumers of the farmer's food, board and wages. In this reversal of roles, servants ceased to be the sole objects for sale, the farmer's reputation became subject to as much scrutiny as

⁶⁸ *Driffield Times*, 13 November, 1875.

⁶⁹ W. Howitt, *The Rural Life of Old England*, Longman. London, Third Edition, 1844, p. 496.

⁷⁰ F. Kitchen, *Brother to the Ox: The Autobiography of a Farm Labourer*, J.M. Dent and Co., London, 1946, p. 100.

⁷¹ F. Kitchen, 'Ox', pp. 98-99.

⁷² A. J. Munby, cited in J Kitteringham 'Work Girls', p. 97.

the servants, Farmer's reputations were discussed by servants and circulated around the hiring. Servants were swift to reject inadequate wages - cash and in-kind - the quality of the board and lodging was a crucial consideration, servants would refuse to hire into a 'bad meat house'.⁷³ Long ago, Ian Carter highlighted the importance of 'status criteria' in the hiring process and emphasised that this was brought to bear upon farmers as well as servants. As he pointed out, this conditioned the farmers' attitudes towards and treatment of their farm servants throughout the year because they feared the consequences of a bad reputation.⁷⁴ This was also the case in the East Riding as the following recollection of a nineteenth-century farm servant illustrates:

I can recall not a few East Riding farmers who had not very good reputations either for the manner in which they fed or treated their servants, who went to all the sittings, ... both before and after Martinmas and even then rarely succeeded in engaging their full staff of workmen and therefore had to be content with strangers or wasters.⁷⁵

Similarly, H.L. Day who worked as a farm servant in the first half of the twentieth century recalled that: 'A farmer who provided poor board and lodging and kept his horses short of fodder was unable to hire the best horsemen'.⁷⁶

Placing the process of bargaining and hiring between farmers and servants as individuals within a market context suggests, therefore, that it was far more dialectical than was credited by the majority of Victorian observers. Hiring fairs offered an institutionalised framework within which the nature and terms of the master servant relationship could be explored, negotiated and possibly reshaped by

⁷³ Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 37; Catt, 'Northern Hiring Fairs', p. 32; H. L. Day, *Horses on the Farm: Recollections of Horse-farming in Yorkshire*, Hutton Press, Beverley, 1981, p.11.

⁷⁴ I Carter, 'Agricultural Workers in The Class Structure: A Critical Note', *Sociological Review*, 22, 1974, p. 276.

⁷⁵ T, Clarvis, in J. Fairfax Blakeborough, *Yorkshire: East Riding*, p. 48, cited in Counce. 'Farm Horses', p. 60.

⁷⁶ Day, 'Horses', p. 11.

servants as well as farmers.⁷⁷ Furthermore, although individual acts of bargaining were the raw material that made up the fabric of the hirings, there was, as has already been indicated, a broader collective dimension to this. This collective dimension derived at first from the fact that hiring fairs gathered the usually scattered and isolated farm servant population together in one location:

With the hiring fairs the farm houses emptied once a year and until the farmer hired his new quota of lads, he could get very little done with his horses - in other words, his position resembled someone who had been struck against. ...

The bargaining was, in its own way collective. Though the farm lads were scattered over a wide area during the year, for the hirings they were gathered together in one place and faced all their employers together.⁷⁸

This helps to explain why, to the consternation of many public moralists, servants so often resisted attempts to abolish outdoor hiring. As Kussmaul has noted: 'Servants preferred hiring in the open market. It was there removed from obscurity of the household, that they could be powerful collectively'.⁷⁹

The gathering of servants was not sufficient for collective bargaining to take place, however. It provided an opportunity for collective action, but the potential benefits of this could be realised only through consciousness and action on the part of the farm servants present. Servants had, over time, developed a range of collective practices that enhanced their capacity to use the hiring fair as the site for informal collective bargaining. For example, servants collaborated in generating and circulating information about the state of the market and the likely level of wages that might be obtained that year:

They meet here old acquaintances and compare notes of the past year, of the character of different places they have had; of what

⁷⁷ Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 124.

⁷⁸ Counce, 'Farm Horses', p. 69.

⁷⁹ Kussmaul, 'Servants' p. 62.

extraordinary has befallen them; and are full of new schemes and speculations as to where they shall go; what advances of wages they shall obtain; in what capacity they shall hire themselves.⁸⁰

The fair also offered means of collectively influencing the bargaining process. The fact that bargaining took place in public before other farm servants meant that individual negotiations were informed by their wider collective audience. This encouraged assertiveness and those tempted to accept the offer of a low wage might find their bargaining subject to intrusion by surrounding farm servants who, through this intervention, appropriated the interactions of individuals to the broader collective interest.⁸¹ The means through which servants exchanged and circulated information about farmers and wages also illustrates the collective dimension of the hiring fair. The repartee and badinage of the market not only functioned as a form of amusement and release for the farm servants, it also offered them a means of interpreting the meaning and significance of the hiring fair. Within this discourse guidance was offered regarding the behaviour expected of farm servants present at the hirings. Hostile opinions about particular farmers and farmers in general were voiced. Apocryphal stories which lionised servants who had stood firm in the market place were used to warn the unwary and to underline the fact that farmers and servants had conflicting interests. Songs sung at the hiring were another means of entertaining, warning and informing and also functioned to build a sense of common purpose and solidarity amongst servants. As the following example 'Cowl Stringy Pie' illustrates:

Over in Yorkshire a farmer did dwell,
And they called 'im Yaddy 'Ughes,
and you all know 'im well;
He keeps four servants, it i'nt any lie,
And 'e feeds 'em all up on 'is cowl stringy pie.
And 'e feeds 'em all up on 'is cowl stringy pie.

⁸⁰ Howitt, 'Rural Life', p. 496; Roberts, 'Waiting', p. 145; Catt 'Northern Hiring Fairs', pp. 32-5; Day 'Horses on the Farm', p. 11.

⁸¹ Roberts, p. 146; J. Horsfall Turner, *Yorkshire Anthology: Ballads and Songs-Ancient and Modern*, T. Harrison and Son, Bradford, 1901, 'The Yorkshire Hirings', p. 124.

And 'e's got nine 'osses and they're that thin,
You can count every bone as it ligs in the skin;
There's four bent int' leg and there's four swung in t' back,
And he drives one along with his 'Ah gee woaback'.

He gets 'is lads up at a quarter past five
To gan off t' stables to see if they're still alive;
He feeds 'em on oats and e' feeds em on bran,
And it rattles in their guts like a rusty owd can.

If any o' you lads wants to learn 'ow to plough,
Gan to owd Yaddy's, 'e'll soon learn you 'ow,
He'll keep you working without any pay
And expect you to plough four yakker a day.

And if any o' you lasses wants to learn to scour pans,
Well gan to Mrs. Yaddy's you'll get mucky 'ands
She'll keep you workin' the livelong day;
'Can I set you on lass next Martinmas Day?'

One day Yaddy to his shepherd did say.
'we 'ad owd sheep died jus three weeks today'
'Fetch 'er up, bullocky fetch 'er up on the sly,
And we'll give those laddies some rare mutton pie'

They fetched the sheep up, boiled 'erin pot
And they served 'eron t'table, she was reekin' 'ot;
And t'maggots crawled over 'er four inches thick,
But owd Yaddy 'ad a lad Knockin' 'em off wi' a stick.⁸²

Songs were also used to circulate information regarding what wages might be expected in a particular year and to encourage solidarity on wages amongst those present:

The master that a servant wants will now stand in wonder:
You all must ask ten pounds a year and none of you go under.
It's you must do all the work and what they do require
So now stand up for wages, lads, before that you do hire.⁸³

These collective practices indicate that whilst each negotiation at the hiring fair was dependent upon the bargaining skills - visual and verbal - deployed by each individual these were also conditioned by a broader collective awareness that farmers and servants had conflicting interests. An awareness that was rooted in

⁸² 'Cowl Stringy Pie' in Catt, 'Northern Hiring Fairs', pp. 32-33.

the experience of work and society outside the hiring fair. In this respect, as argued in the previous chapter, the hiring fair could be the location for a form of 'structural conflict' between capital and labour, as it provided an occasion at which the potential conflict which derived from the two parties' differing relations to the means of production could be explored. This exploration occurred at each individual hiring but it is most usefully examined through an analysis of the pattern of bargaining as it developed during the season of hiring fairs that occurred each year from early November to early December.

V

The mid-Victorian hiring season had a well established pattern of moves and counter-moves which developed from the attempts of farmers and servants to shape the protracted period of bargaining to their own advantage. The period prior to the hirings was one of anticipation and speculation on both sides regarding to the condition of the labour market and the expected rates of wages that year. The early hirings would then offer an opportunity for both sides to test the market and attempt to establish a position of strength. At the first hirings in each district it was usual for servants to seek an increase on the previous year. These demands were met by affected incredulity and outrage from employers who would declare their determination to resist. These early forays into wage bargaining were reported in the newspapers and the amount of hiring and the level of wages obtained at these early hirings influenced the pattern of bargaining thereafter. Major hirings that occurred close to the beginning of the season were particularly important in this respect. Beverley's first hirings occurred on November 6, a fortnight before servants were released from their contracts and this was regarded as an important barometer of the likely level of wages that would later prevail. Both farmers and

⁸³ 'Country Statutes', in Catt, 'Northern Hiring Fairs', p 33.

servants were, therefore, determined to establish a position of strength at this early hiring fair and carry this through to subsequent hiring fairs.

The pattern of events during a season at the very beginning of the mid-Victorian period, that of 1849-50 offers some insight into how this process of bargaining developed. At Beverley's first hiring that year, servants demanded increased wages but encountered firm resistance from employers who informed the press that they considered 'the wages asked too high'.⁸⁴ There was little hiring at the wages demanded and it was forecast that wages would have to fall that year if agreements were to be made.⁸⁵ Two days later, at Howden hirings, only those servants willing to accept reduced wages were able to secure places and this became the predominant pattern at other early hirings, which, the *Hull Advertiser* regarded as an indication of 'a downward tendency' in wages that year which were now expected to be 'lower than for many years'.⁸⁶ The servants lack of success at Beverley and other early hiring in the East Riding was regarded as the principal reason for the 'many thousands' of farm servants present the following week at Driffield Hirings which was said to represent 'a greater influx than was ever remembered'; supply clearly exceeded demand, however, and it was reported that 'a comparatively less number of servants found masters than was usual' as 'farmers considered themselves in a position to expect a decrease in wages and to dispense, for a time with their usual number of hands'.⁸⁷ At Bridlington the following day, this increasingly ominous pattern continued with 'a general disposition among masters and mistresses to economise, in doing with as few servants as possible', which meant consequently, that although 'hiring was tolerably brisk', those hired 'had to submit to a diminution of wages'.⁸⁸ At Patrington three days later, the adverse bargaining

⁸⁴ *Hull Advertiser*, 9 November, 1849

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Hull Advertiser*, 16 November, 1849.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

position of labour received further confirmation when 'a great many servants remained unhired ... many farmers have not only determined to decrease wages, but also dispose with their usual number of hands'.⁸⁹ By Martinmas week, when servants were released from their contracts, a falling demand for servants and wage reductions generally prevailed. At the final hirings at Beverley and Driffield it was widely predicted that many servants would remain unemployed throughout the winter of 1849-50, despite the acceptance of the lower wages offered by employers.⁹⁰

This example of one year's hiring, illustrates the importance of two factors emphasised by Howkins in his delineation of the concept of 'structural conflict'.⁹¹ These were, respectively: the short-term seasonal situation and longer-term movements in the labour market. Both of these originated outside of, but greatly informed, the hiring fairs internal wage-bargaining processes. Generally, the short term seasonal situation favoured the employers against the farm servants because the timing of the annual round of hiring fairs coincided with a slack period in the agricultural year. Consequently, farmers were not generally under short-term pressure to hire, because, as a farmer noted approvingly in the *York Herald*, the location of the hiring meant that, 'Masters usually have much less business of importance, and servants are of much less value to masters than they could be, by any means, at any other time of the year'.⁹² As the example of 1849 hiring season illustrated, this structural advantage for farmers was accentuated further when fine weather had enabled farmers to progress their work significantly. That year one of the major factors said to be responsible for the reduced wages was 'the great progress which had been made in the season' which had meant that farmers felt less

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ *Hull Advertiser*, 7 December, 1849.

⁹¹ A. Howkins, 'Structural Conflict and the Farmworker', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 4, 1977.

⁹² *Hull Advertiser*, 9 November, 1849.

pressure to hire immediately and could therefore hold out for a reduction in the wages at later hirings.⁹³ There were occasions, however, when this short-term seasonal situation favoured the servants. Poor weather might arrest the progress of farm work and enhance the labourer's position in the labour market. Another factor, which could combine with this situation, was the protracted hiring season itself and the reputed unsteadiness of servants towards the end of their service, who, it was suggested, attended so many hirings and became so unsettled that they were of little use to their employers towards the end of their term of service.⁹⁴ The primary motivation for the servants' assertion of this customary right, which generally allowed their attendance at two pre-Martinmas hirings, was their desire to test the labour market. But this behaviour, if combined with a favourable short-term seasonal situation, could conceivably have also strengthened their bargaining position and assist the later Martinmas hirings to realise their full potential as a favourable site for collective bargaining. This alone was probably never sufficient during the mid-nineteenth century, however. Then, the most important single factor affecting the balance of power between labour and capital was not the short-term seasonal situation but longer-term movements in the market for farm servant labour. Here the fundamental factor was agricultural prosperity and its effect upon the labour market. There was a clear correlation between the condition of agriculture, demand for farm servant labour and the pattern of bargaining at hiring fairs. The availability of alternative employment and the local population's readiness to take it, was also important. As we have seen in chapter two, the East Riding farmers' rationale for retaining farm service depended on a number of factors including the labour requirements of high farming, a dispersed and isolated settlement pattern, and the absence of a labour surplus due to alternative industrial employment. When

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ H. E. Strickland, *A General View of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, York, 1812, p. 261. Similar complaints were made during the mid-Victorian period, see, for example, the Editorial in the *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 3 December, 1868, 'The Hiring of Farm Servants in Yorkshire'.

these forces combined with a period of sustained agricultural prosperity, as was the case in the East Riding for most, if not all, of the mid-nineteenth century, they created a labour market situation which servants might utilise to their advantage. Again the example of the 1849-50 season can be used to illustrate this. That year represented the lowest point in a short agricultural depression which lasted from 1848 to 1853. During those years a combination of wet seasons and low prices placed East Riding agriculture in depression; profits fell and tenant indebtedness rose (despite rent reductions of 10-15 per cent).⁹⁵ The consequence for both married labourers and farm servants was rising unemployment and reduced wages as the usually beneficial effects of alternative industrial employment were nullified by the depth of the slump in agriculture. The farm servants at the hirings of 1849 were thus disadvantaged both by short-term seasonal factors and a longer-term shift in the labour market caused by the agricultural depression. This both reduced overall demand for agricultural labour and eroded much of the rationale for hiring resident farm servant labour for the whole year. This was because this decision in favour of farm service was informed, in part, both by anticipated seasonal labour requirements later in the year and the likely level of structural conflicts that might ensue in the form of, for example, strikes by harvest labour. If farmers no longer anticipated labour scarcity in the peak spring and summer seasons, the pressure to hire a substantial cohort of servants in the autumn diminished. The example of the 1849 hiring season provides, therefore, a graphic illustration of how both short-term seasonal factors and longer-term shifts in the labour market shaped the pattern of wage bargaining at hiring fairs. As a newspaper report of the 1849 season stated, it was 'The present depressed state of the agricultural interest and the great progress already made in field labour, owing to the favourable season' that had enabled

⁹⁵ M. G. Adams, 'Agricultural Change in the East Riding of Yorkshire, 1850-1880: An Economic and Social History', Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, University of Hull, 1977, p. 32.

farmers to 'to be in a position to expect a decrease in wages and to dispense, for a time, with their usual number of hands'.⁹⁶

As we move further into the mid-Victorian period, however, the longer-term labour market situation becomes more favourable for the East Riding farm servant. From the early 1850s, East Riding agriculture recovered from depression and entered a period of general prosperity which lasted well into the 1870s.⁹⁷ This encouraged the resurgence of the high farming which, as we have already seen, was heavily reliant upon the labour of farm servants. Evidence that this prompted a shift in the labour market which benefited the bargaining position of farm servants can be found from the early 1850s. During the hiring campaign of the autumn and winter of 1852, for example, there was a perceptible improvement in the bargaining position of farm servants. Hiring was described as 'brisk' or 'tolerably good' at Driffield first and second hirings, Beverley second hirings and at the hirings held at Bridlington and Patrington, in some cases there were increases in wages at these fairs.⁹⁸ An indication that the market was becoming more buoyant and the farm servants more confident, was provided in the larger than usual attendance of servants at the 'runaway' hirings held at Bridlington in December of that year.⁹⁹ There was also a noticeable increase in the number of servants brought before magistrates charged with absconding from service.¹⁰⁰ The following year, as the recovery of agriculture became more secure, a more buoyant labour market was apparent. The *Yorkshire Gazette's* review of York hirings in 1853, for example, recorded that the 'bustle and animation was greater than many years past', and noted that 'first rate servants in husbandry ... were readily engaged, as they are the class of men whom the farmer requires in these days of progress and improvement

⁹⁶ *Hull Advertiser*, 23 November, 1849.

⁹⁷ M. G. Adams, 'Agricultural Change', p. 32.

⁹⁸ *Hull Advertiser*, 19 November, 1852; 26 November, 1852; 3 December, 1852.

⁹⁹ *Hull Advertiser*, 10 December, 1852.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* See also Chapter 2 of this thesis for a fuller discussion of these developments.

as regards the cultivation of the soil'.¹⁰¹ It was not only the return of agricultural prosperity that was aiding the position of farm servants in the labour market though. From the early 1850s, emigration overseas and migration to urban industrial employment increased. There was also an increase in the range of alternative non-farming occupations available in the East Riding, including, for example, employment on the expanding railway network, dock work, drainage work, and in agricultural service industries. The labour shortages that this created became a concern to local farmers and others, particularly on the Wolds, even featuring as an issue in the election campaign of 1852.¹⁰² In 1854 this tightening labour market situation became still more favourable for servants due to the impact of the Crimean war, which not only drew agricultural labourers into the army but also provided a further impetus to agricultural prosperity and to the high farming methods that tended to increase the farmer's need for resident farm servant labour. By this time, farmers were beginning to complain of the increasingly tight labour market for farm servant labour. A pamphlet by one local farmer issued in 1854, for example, complained that :

The unparalleled exodus which has taken place from our towns and villages, has placed the servant in a very different position to that which he occupied a few years ago. Labour is now scarce and dear in the market.¹⁰³

At that year's hirings farm servants demanded higher wages. Farmers at York, for example, found themselves confronted by what they felt were 'exorbitant' demands from both male and female servants which they resisted in an attempt 'to bring wages down to somewhat nearer to last year'.¹⁰⁴ Whether this tactic succeeded at York, is not clear, but elsewhere servants obtained increases. At Driffield, for

¹⁰¹ *Yorkshire Gazette* , 26 November, 1853.

¹⁰² M G Adams, 'Agricultural Change', pp. 344-47; *Hull Advertiser*, 16 April, 1852; 14 May, 1852; 16 July, 1852.

¹⁰³ W Barugh, *Master and Man, A Reply to the Pamphlet of the Rev. John Eddowes, entitled "The Agricultural Labourer As He Really Is"*, Driffield, 1854, p. 19.

example, 'hiring was pretty brisk' and 'Servants stood out for an advance of wage, and obtained it'.¹⁰⁵ The fact that this success occurred at Driffield's first hirings is a telling indication of the changing situation. In 1849 attempts by servants to raise wages at the early hirings had been rebuffed by farmers, but at Driffield first hirings in 1854, the plot had changed and farmers had to accede to the increases demanded by servants. At the same hirings the following year, employers even attended earlier in the day than was usual in order to be sure of obtaining servants because 'a scarcity of servants was anticipated, and there is great complaint that most of the best servants have either emigrated or gone to be soldiers'.¹⁰⁶ Wage increases were once again conceded by farmers.¹⁰⁷ In 1856, the pattern of wages drifting upwards continued. At Bridlington and Howden, 'high wages' were obtained by 'all description of servants', and both female and male farm servants stood out for and obtained higher wages at Driffield and Beverley.¹⁰⁸ This scarcity of farm servant labour and higher wages were the general rule at hiring fairs across the region up to 1857. After a brief downturn in demand towards the end of the 1850s, the market for farm servant labour revived from the early 1860s.¹⁰⁹ By the middle of that decade, farmers were once again complaining of the 'high' and 'exorbitant' demands of servants and of the fact that wages were 'running up every year'.¹¹⁰ Female servants were increasingly scarce and they obtained the greatest increases in wages in this and the following decade, by which time complaints of shortages of females were legion. Writing during the mid-1860s, one experienced and informed commentator claimed that 'there is every year an increasing pressure on the labour market - labour is scarcer and therefore dearer' he attributed this to a combination of

¹⁰⁴ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 25 November, 1854.

¹⁰⁵ *Hull Advertiser*, 18 November, 1854.

¹⁰⁶ *Hull Advertiser*, 17 November, 1855.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Hull Advertiser*, 15 November, 1856; *Beverley Guardian*, 10 November, 1856; 27 November, 1856.

¹⁰⁹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 18 November, 1858; *Hull Advertiser*, 19 November 1859.

¹¹⁰ *Hull Advertiser*, 15 November, 1856.

the lack of cottage accommodation which meant that the 'young and able bodied were driven off into mining districts' and the expansion of 'high farming and enterprise' which meant that 'more labourers are wanted'.¹¹¹ This situation, he argued, had altered the balance of power between farmers and servants so that 'instead of being slaves to the masters, these men are actually becoming masters, and their positions are becoming reverse, and the power is coming into their hands'.¹¹² Such claims need to be located within the context of prevailing normative expectations of the passivity and servility expected of servants as a class. It also needs to be emphasised that wage gains made by servants in monetary terms during the 1850-70 period were relatively modest.¹¹³ Nevertheless, there is more than a grain of truth in the observation that farm servants were becoming more assertive and able in their use of the hiring fair, and that they increasingly basing their wage demands on market criteria rather than custom. Farm servants, like many other proletarian workers in the decades around the middle of the century were becoming engaged in what Eric Hobsbawm has termed 'the partial learning of the "rules of the game"', that is: 'to regard labour as a commodity to be sold in the historically peculiar conditions of a free capitalist economy'.¹¹⁴

If the gains and the learning process were limited up to 1870, there was a considerable advance in both spheres thereafter. During the 1870s, servants of both sexes were repeatedly successful in overcoming the seasonal disadvantage of autumn hiring and secured higher wages at even the earliest and most crowded hiring fairs. At Beverley first hirings in 1871 for example, farm servants demanded wage increases 'and the farmers had no alternative but to comply, the large numbers

¹¹¹ F.D. Legard, 'The Education of Farm Servants', in F. D. Legard ed, *More About Farm Lads*, 1865, pp. 2-3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', pp. 359-60.

¹¹⁴ E. J Hobsbawm, 'Custom Wages and Work-load in Nineteenth-century Industry', in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1964, p. 345.

of servants present seeming to make no check in their favour'.¹¹⁵ As we have seen farm servants did not generally participate in the agricultural trade unionism that spread through the East Riding from 1872, but its effects upon their consciousness were felt at the hirings in the autumn of 1872. At these hirings, servants demanded substantial wage increases, despite the fact that the exceptionally wet weather and flooding that year meant that many farmers could not progress their work, a fact that placed servants in a weak short-term bargaining position. These demands, which the press related to the 'recent agitation for higher wages' were 'stoutly resisted' by farmers at Malton's first hirings, a pattern that continued at the second hirings at Malton:

Commercially the farmers are carrying the day. The country is so wet that but little work can be done, and as higher wages are asked a great number of men and boys remain unhired. Throughout the hirings the masters have resisted successfully the attempts to run up wages, though agitators singing "Strike boys, strike" have tried their best to sow seeds of discontent.¹¹⁶

According to the *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, this was the general pattern of the bargaining at the East Riding's hirings in 1872: 'The wretchedly wet condition of the country, and the demand for higher wages by farm servants, have caused farmers to be very independent, and although the regular hirings are over, there are still a great number of agricultural and also domestic servants unhired'.¹¹⁷ Yet to the surprise of the newspapers, and one suspects, many farmers, this determination to hold out against higher wages did not, as was usually the case, result in lower wages. Although some farm servants remain unhired, the majority of those that obtained employment did so at the higher wages demanded. At Driffield, for example, 'As was expected, great wages were asked by both sexes of servants,

¹¹⁵ *Beverley Recorder*, 11 November, 1871.

¹¹⁶ *Driffield Times*, 16 November 1872; 30 November, 1872.

¹¹⁷ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 5 December, 1872.

which they succeeded in most cases in obtaining'.¹¹⁸ At Bridlington: 'The wages demanded were very high: but not withstanding this, many succeeded in obtaining wages'.¹¹⁹ At Hunmanby, bad weather meant 'a meagre attendance of both masters and servants, yet a good number met with engagements, especially boys at a higher rate of wages'.¹²⁰ Beverley hirings saw an 'immense attendance of lads and lasses' but not withstanding this, hiring was 'pretty brisk' with both sexes obtaining wages 'a little higher than previously'.¹²¹ This pattern continued in 1873 and 1874. At Malton first hirings in 1873, wage demands were higher than the previous year and farmers were reluctant to hire at these rates; by the second hirings however, employers were hiring more freely and at wages that 'ruled very high'. Some employers complained that they had had to pay an advance of 33 per cent on the previous year for both farm and domestic servants.¹²² Once again these successes occurred despite a short term seasonal situation that was expected to be unfavourable for labour and lead to wage reductions. At Beverley first hirings in 1874, for example, the *Beverley Recorder* reported 'an immense assembly of farm servants and domestics' and but despite this and the fact that farmers were forward with their work advances in wages were conceded.¹²³ Three weeks later, at Hunmanby, towards the end of the hiring season, farmers were more numerous than servants and hiring took place 'at almost fabulous wages'.¹²⁴ Wages of both sexes 'ruled higher than hitherto' at Beverley's first hirings in 1875 and wage increases were also obtained at Driffield, Hull and Howden.¹²⁵ As usual, Malton's first hirings saw farmers in theatrical mood, broadcasting their disgust at the 'excessive rates demanded' and their determination to refrain from hiring as they

¹¹⁸ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 14 November, 1872.

¹¹⁹ *Driffield Times*, 16 November, 1872.

¹²⁰ *Driffield Times*, 30 November, 1872.

¹²¹ *Driffield Times*, 9 November, 1872.

¹²² *Driffield Times*, 23 November, 1873; 29 November, 1873.

¹²³ *Beverley Recorder*, 7 November, 1874.

¹²⁴ *Driffield Times*, 28 November, 1874.

¹²⁵ *Driffield Times*, 13 November, 1875; *Hull Times*, 13 November 1875; 27 November 1875.

were 'well forward with their seed sowing' and they expected labour to be 'plentiful' in the winter 'due to the existing stagnation and gloomy prospects of the iron trade in the north'.¹²⁶ Those farmers 'most pressed by farm-work' and all employers seeking female servants who, as usual, were in short supply, had to concede the higher wages demanded, however.¹²⁷

The following year, 1876, saw a continuation of this pattern of farm servants demanding higher wages in the face of determined resistance by employers. At Driffield's first hirings: 'Very high wages were asked which for a time checked engagements, but the demand being general and unabating, the rise was generally obtained'.¹²⁸ At Bridlington's first hirings, the high wages demanded meant that many masters and mistresses left without hiring, but many servants still found engagements 'at advanced wages'.¹²⁹ At the second hirings at Bridlington, wages for all classes 'ruled high'.¹³⁰ 'High wages were asked and obtained' at Market Weighton, and at Hunmanby employers were reportedly reluctant to hire at the high wages asked, but the servants remained unmoved: 'seeming heedless as to whether they were hired or not'.¹³¹ There were also complaints regarding the high wages obtained at Malton that year, especially those of 'good female domestics'.¹³² Up to the late 1870s, therefore, female and male farm servants were increasingly able to utilise the East Riding hiring fair as a vehicle for an informal but effective process of collective bargaining. In general, farm servants showed an increased determination to ask for and stand out for higher wages, despite often determined and protracted resistance from employers. At this time, the traditional correlation between a large attendance of servants at a hiring and low wages was broken, as the

¹²⁶ *Hull Times*, 20 November, 1875.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Driffield Times*, 18 November, 1875

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Hull Times*, 2 December, 1876.

¹³¹ *Driffield Times*, 2 December, 1876.

¹³² *Hull Times*, 26 November, 1876.

external long-term market situation shifted in favour of the male and female servants. A tight labour market enabled a situation in which servants attended in unprecedented numbers and still secured their demands for higher wages. The wage gains in the 1870s were greater than they had been in the previous two decades.¹³³ In real terms, of course the gains, made at this time were even greater, because farm servants, being paid part in-kind in the form of board and lodging were insulated from the inflation that had played a prominent part in the promoting agricultural trade unionism amongst day labourers in the East Riding.

There were, however, limitations to the success obtained by farm servants. Although farmers were unable to drive down wages, there is evidence that by the mid 1870s they were beginning to respond to the greater costs of both day and farm servant labour by hiring a more limited complement of labourers; and/or substituting younger and less expensive farm servants for the more older experienced workers who had tended to lead the push for higher wages.¹³⁴ It was perhaps at this time that mechanisation was beginning to have a negative effect upon employment of some groups of farm servants, with farmers responding to high wages by combining a smaller work force with accelerated mechanisation.

The relatively favourable market situation for the farm servant lasted until the late 1870s when there was once again a major shift in the labour market, a shift that worked against the farm servants' interests. This shift began to mark itself in 1877. That year, at Malton hirings, although females continued to be scarce and obtained 'high wages', for the first time in many years employers were able to force a reduction in male farm servants' wages. This was ascribed to the fact that male labourers were 'plentiful' due to the partial stoppage 'of many of the North

¹³³ Adams, 'Agricultural Change', pp. 360-362

¹³⁴ *Bridlington Free Press*, 20 March, 1875.

Yorkshire and Durham ironworks and mines'.¹³⁵ At York hirings, wages also had 'a downward tendency', here, the principal cause was said to be 'the depressed condition of agriculture and the overstocked market for servants'.¹³⁶ Indeed, that year appears to mark the onset of the combined effects of the late nineteenth-century depression in agriculture and industry which had the effect of loosening the agricultural labour market and, which thereafter enabled a concerted and eventually successful attempt by farmers to drive down wages. At Driffield and Bridlington hirings the following year, for example, females managed to hire at the previous year's rates but male servants had to accept reductions in wages of up to £5.¹³⁷ There was little hiring at the high wages asked that year at Beverley, and at Howden wages showed a general reduction all round, with male servants being forced to accept reductions of £ 4-5.¹³⁸ A similar situation prevailed at Malton where farmers were 'determinedly standing out for a reduction in the price of labour all round and the wisest and most intelligent of the men are accepting the inevitable', and although many refused the employers terms, only females were able to hire at the previous year's rates and avoid reductions of between £ 2-4.¹³⁹ Similarly at York, servants were having to 'yield to the inevitable': reductions of, on average, £3.¹⁴⁰ The following year saw further reductions in male farm servants wages with older more experienced workers having to accept the greatest reductions and 'even the domestics' had to be 'less exorbitant in their demands'.¹⁴¹ By 1880, a situation comparable to that of 1849 had returned, in which the internal dynamic of the fairs was once again conditioned by an external market situation that placed the farmer in the stronger position. By the end of this decade, the overriding characteristic of the hiring reports is one of farmers reasserting their ability to shape the hiring fair to

¹³⁵ *Driffield Times*, 18 November, 1877.

¹³⁶ *York Herald*, 26 November, 1877.

¹³⁷ *Driffield Times*, 16 November, 1878.

¹³⁸ *Hull Times*, 23 November, 1878

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *York Herald*, 25 November, 1878.

¹⁴¹ *Hull Times*, 29 November, 1879

their own advantage. However, this shift towards the farmer never reached that level of dominance that had precipitated the decline of farm service in the southern half of England. Farm servants continued to be fundamental to East Riding agriculture and this ensured that a reasonable degree of parity between capital and labour continued to be a feature of the East Riding hiring fair well into the twentieth century.¹⁴²

The adaptation and expansion of the farm service system in the region was probably the most important single factor sustaining East Yorkshire's hiring fairs throughout the mid-Victorian period. Although the hiring fair had a degree of autonomy from everyday life, in the sense that it provided an exceptional participatory experience for those involved, it was never totally divorced from its external context. The day to day experience of life and labour on East Riding farms and the condition of the market for agricultural labour were fundamental factors informing the hiring fair's internal character. In the relatively favourable market context of the mid-Victorian years, the hiring fair realised much of its potential as an arena for structural conflict. Farm servants built upon an already existing tradition and became more assertive in their use of the hiring fair. The obligations and restraints associated with the relationship of master and servant were tested and partially redefined through a process of confrontation and negotiation within a market context which itself was informed by, and interacted with, the carnivalesque atmosphere of the fairs. As the example of hirings in the south of England illustrated, this process of bargaining and negotiation within a hiring fair context need not entail greater freedom and autonomy. An unfavourable market position might result in a market-driven form of subordination which compounded the extra-economic controls offered by the law. At times like the 1870s, however, the labour market offered a context within which servants could through their own actions, achieve a partial reshaping of their worth

¹⁴² Caunce, 'Farm Horses', Chapter 6.

and status. At this time, the hirings enabled farm servants to realise the potential power offered by their gathering together and translate this into successful collective bargaining; not only in terms of wages and conditions but also in obtaining greater autonomy in their everyday lives. In order to appreciate fully the importance of the hiring fair in offering an opportunity for the reshaping of the farm servants status and identity in rural society, however, we need to examine its non-labour market functions in more detail.

Chapter Four

The Development of Hiring Fairs as Centres of Popular Recreation

Hiring fairs had always been more than an annual economic ritual. As well as offering the farm servant an opportunity to explore the condition of the labour market, they were also the occasion for a rural festival which offered them a welcome release from labour towards the end of their working year.¹ In this respect, hiring fairs can be regarded as part of 'traditional culture' in that they were part of an established recreational calendar intertwined with the seasonal rhythms of life and work in agricultural communities.² For example, one of Driffield's three hirings became known as 'Gathering Day' because it provided a day's holiday and rendezvous for a large proportion of the local labouring population. As such it became one of the high points of the local calendar:

The hiring day is unquestionably the most remarkable event witnessed in the town during the year. ... Driffield on these occasions forms the point of attraction, at which are collected all the rustic youth of both sexes, within a circle extending from 10 to 12 miles around. Numbers of yeomen and farmers with wives and daughters also attend and swell this purely agricultural gathering.³

The inclusion here, of 'yeomen and farmers ... wives and daughters' suggests that hiring fairs shared with other calendar rituals, the function of providing

¹R W Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973, p. 23. Much of the remainder of this chapter is indebted to the analysis of the social functions of popular recreations offered by Malcolmson in this pioneering text.

² M. Judd, "The oddest combination of town and country": popular culture and the London fairs, 1800-60', in J.K. Walton and J Walvin eds, *Leisure in Britain: 1780-1939*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1983, p.15 and passim, Malcolmson, 'Recreations', p. 24; H. Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture', in F.M.L. Thomson, ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950*, 3 Vols, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, II, p. 303.

³ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854; S Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses: The Horselads of East Yorkshire*, Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991, p. 62.

means of articulating a sense of communal solidarity.⁴ Although they were not celebrations that were unique to members of a particular parish, by bringing the rural community together they provided the occasion for the expression of 'a corporate society'; like other calendar festivals 'they afforded an opportunity for all ranks of people to assemble and spend their time in innocent mirth and hilarity'.⁵ The manner in which the hiring day had become structured by the mid-nineteenth century limited its ability to articulate such communal solidarity, however. Perhaps, as the broadside ballad 'The Hirings' suggested, both masters and servants had once enjoyed the festive dimension of the day and danced together.⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century, however, employers no longer engaged in the festive aspects of the day and participated in hiring only. This was usually completed by the early afternoon and at this point employers would vacate the hiring fair leaving its festive aspects to be enjoyed by the labouring population.⁷ The hirings seem, therefore, to represent a trend often regarded as characteristic of traditional recreations: that of elite and middle-class withdrawal promoting the creation of an event that was increasingly popular and plebeian in character. Typically though, even within the working class there was a difference in the extent and intensity of participation. The most active and earnest participants in rural festivities of this kind were, by this time, young men and women in their teens and early twenties.⁸ Since the majority of farm servants were single young people, this was especially true of hiring fairs, which, notwithstanding their appeal to other members of the agricultural labour force, had the greatest significance for the young farm servants. Farm servants

⁴ B. Bushaway, *By Rite. Custom, Ceremony and Community in England, 1700-1880*; Junction Books, London, 1982, pp. 148-160.

⁵ British Library: *J. Haslewood's interleaved copy of J Brand, Observations on Popular Antiquities*, advertisement at the beginning of Vol. I, cited in Bushaway, 'By Rite', p. 158.

⁶ 'The Hirings', in J. Horsfall Turner, ed., *Yorkshire Anthology : Ballads and Songs Ancient and Modern*, T, Harrison and Son, Bradford, 1901, p. 178.

⁷ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854..

⁸ Malcolmson, 'Popular Recreations', p. 53.

not seeking employment still attended the fairs: 'even if they are going to remain at the same place for another year they consider they have a right to come down to the statutes'.⁹ The attractions of a day or more at the hiring fair for farm servants are not difficult to imagine. For both female and male servants the hiring fair offered a moment of escape from the constraints, controls and limited opportunities for leisure characteristic of life upon the often remote and isolated farms of the East Riding. The control exercised by farmers may have fallen short of the paternalistic ideals of moral philanthropists, but life on the farm for the average farm servant was far from an unbridled exploration of the doctrine of hedonism. The hiring fair was, therefore, a rare opportunity for the farm servants to indulge a pent-up desire for freedom on territory that was not controlled by their employers; it was, as one critic recognised: 'a day of unfettered liberty and unrestrained enjoyment, almost the only day on which they are their own masters and mistresses, and can do as precisely as they please'.¹⁰

This exuberant escapism was most pronounced at those fairs that took place after Martinmas (November 23) when the servants had been released from their annual contracts. Martinmas week brought a period of extended freedom which could mark the termination of a poisonous and difficult relationship with an oppressive employer or foreman. Songs sung at hirings sometimes articulated the sense of release felt at the termination of a contract which at times had resembled a period of penal servitude:

Good Morning Mister Martinmas
You've come to set me free

⁹ BPP, XVI, I, 1867-8, I, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*; I, p. 99.

¹⁰ J. Eddowes, *Martinmas Musings; or, Thoughts about the hiring day*, Drifffield, 1854, p. 3.

For I don't care for master
And he don't care for me.¹¹

The tendency for public gatherings to pose a challenge to and undermine the normal mechanisms of 'social control' has been noted by a number of historians and hiring fairs were no exception.¹² They were gatherings characterised by an absence of restraint in the form of consumption, disorder, drunkenness and sexual promiscuity. It was this aspect of the hiring, especially, that drew criticism from moral philanthropists who recognised that elements of the carnivalesque were central to the fair's vitality: 'Hiring-day! It would seem to be the signal for the suspension of every law of virtue and morality: every restraint seems loosened, and every feeling of shame forgotten'.¹³ Hiring fairs were regarded as especially problematic because they were shaped by the desires and proclivities of their chief patrons: the young male and female farm servants. Both were perceived as being at the same time vulnerable to and constitutive of, an atmosphere of unbridled and irresistible licentiousness:

The sexual reputation of fairs was partly a consequence of the social circumstances of those persons who were most directly involved - servants, apprentices, and other young bachelors and spinsters. ... Their subordination involved many everyday constraints, and the stronger the constraints, the more relief from authority was valued ... Hiring fairs were especially appropriate occasions for sexual adventures because they were very much servants' events, holidays which were shaped by the servants own tastes and personal needs.¹⁴

¹¹ Hiring Rhyme recited by Sam Robson of Bempton, East Riding, cited in C. Kightly, *Country Voices. Life and Lore in Farm and Village*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1984, p. 24.

¹² Malcolmson, 'Popular Recreations', p. 79; R. Storch, 'The Problem of working-class Leisure: Some Roots of middle-class Moral Reform in the Industrial North: 1825-50', in A.P. Donajgrodski, ed., *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Croom Helm, London, 1977, p. 140; E. and S. Yeo, eds, *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1982, passim.

¹³ Eddowes, 'Martinmas Musings', p. 4.

¹⁴ Malcolmson, 'Popular Recreations', pp. 78-79.

All hiring fairs possessed some elements of the carnivalesque, but those that occurred after Martinmas Day (November 23) had a special significance. The coming of Martinmas marked the beginning of the farm servants' annual holiday and these hiring fairs were, therefore, imbued with the greatest determination to indulge. This holiday, and the hirings that took place within it, combined to form what was termed 'Martinmas Week' or 'the annual festival of Martinmas'.¹⁵ For the majority of the farm servants, the holiday week and attendance at one or more hirings combined to form the high points of the festival of Martinmas: 'So far as the labourer or servant girl are concerned, the Martinmas holidays and the statutes are a sort of yearly festival ending too frequently in the worst excesses'.¹⁶ Although this excess stemmed, in part, from the fact that Martinmas Week was a time of celebration, it was also informed by a degree of anxiety about the future. The hiring season was a time of uncertainty for the farm servants 'the epoch of their existence of vast consequence, for better or worse as it may happen to be'.¹⁷ For those that had not secured a new contract, Martinmas brought doubt and anxiety about the future. For those that had already secured a position, there was uncertainty about their new situation. Indulgence and excess was, therefore, a means of dealing with double-edged nature of Martinmas, and this too played its part in shaping the festive atmosphere of the hirings.

More prosaically, the custom for farm servants to receive the greater part of their annual wages at the termination of their contract ensured that they had the means of enjoyment at their disposal: 'After toiling the year round they visit our fairs with the produce of their labour, which are as freely spent as hardly

¹⁵ M. C. F. Morris, *Yorkshire Reminiscences*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1922, p. 176.

¹⁶ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 3 December, 1868.

¹⁷ *Hull Advertiser*, 16 November, 1849.

earned'.¹⁸ The 'fest' was traditionally spent at the hiring and although it was still on occasion referred to as a 'hiring penny', by the 1840s only a 'near' farmer offered as little as a shilling, the usual being half a crown for a man or a maidservant.¹⁹ The farm servants' wages and 'fests' offered an important source of revenue for local shopkeepers and publicans. Indeed, such was the importance of the income offered by the farm servants' expenditure at the hirings to shopkeepers and publicans, it was they that had been most significant in ensuring that the tradition of the hiring day was retained after the decline of its formal regulation in the early-nineteenth century. At Driffield in the 1850s, for example: 'the holding of statutes of late years has been a matter in which the shopkeepers and publicans have been chiefly interested, and who have been the prime-movers in procuring their being held'.²⁰ Servants tended to purchase their essential needs for the coming twelve-month and as Martinmas approached 'clothiers and footwear dealers made sure they had good stocks of good strong suits and boots ready for the demand that would certainly be intensified'.²¹ Servants would also settle credit debts on purchases made earlier in the year or at the previous Martinmas. It was not only 'essentials' in the form of work-wear that was purchased however. Farm servants' had a reputation for enjoying clothes other than those required for their every day work and for parading these at the hirings. This often drew criticism from upper and middle-class observers. H.E. Strickland writing in 1812, for example, complained of the 'passion for finery' that prevailed amongst male and female farm servants and the manner in which they 'squandered' their 'exorbitant wages' amongst 'tailors

¹⁸ *The Yorkshireman*, 30 November, 1850. Farmers would usually advance part of the servants wages during the year but the greater part of the wage was paid at the conclusion of the year's contract. M. T. Craven, *A New and Complete History of the Borough of Hedon*, Ridings Publishing Co., Driffield, 1974, p. 190.

¹⁹ Craven, 'Hedon', p. 190.

²⁰ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854.

²¹ F Austin Hyde, 'Old Time Martinmas Hirings', *York Times*, 1962 cited in Catt, 'Northern Hiring Fairs', p. 40.

and shopkeepers'.²² Testimony of the importance of farm servants as consumers can be found in the newspaper advertisements of the time which, with their bold 'Martinmas Martinmas!' headlines are clearly aimed at the farm servants' bulging wallets. These not only advertised the essential goods that had traditionally been purchased by farm servants at this time - work clothes and footwear - but also increasingly other less-essential consumer goods such as tailored suits, concertinas, melodeons, violins and silver lever watches.²³ The latter was a purchase that was particularly prized, it was reputedly the ambition of every male farm servant to own an English lever watch, they would sometimes pay half the cost one Martinmas and half the next.²⁴ Rising wages and the falling price of clothes after 1850 increased the affordability of such clothing for farm servants and the 'improved', 'well dressed' and 'warmly clad' appearance of all farm servants but especially the 'gaily dressed' females increasingly drew comment in newspapers.²⁵ At Bridlington in 1854, it was noted that in terms of their 'outward appearance in dress &c.' farm servants at the hirings appeared to be 'in comfortable and thriving circumstances especially compared with their costumes and general demeanour a few years since'.²⁶ At Beverley hirings in 1871, the streets were filled with 'rustics with neatly combed hair and gaudy tie ... accompanied by the softer but by no means weaker sex ... arrayed in all the glory of coloured ribbons and fiery plaids'.²⁷ In part this 'dressing up' for the occasion was related to the task of getting hired, which involved an element of sartorial display. As a recollection of Driffield hirings in the 1880s emphasises:

²² H. E. Strickland, *A General View of the Agriculture of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, York, 1812, pp. 284-5.

²³ *Driffield Times*, 13 November, 1873; 11 November, 1876.

²⁴ Hyde, 'Old Time Martinmas', in Catt, p. 41.

²⁵ J. Burnett, *A History of the Cost of Living*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969, pp. 214-215; *Beverley Recorder*, 7 November, 1860; *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 4 December, 1860; *York Herald*, 24 November, 1876.

²⁶ *Hull Advertiser*, 18 November, 1854.

In those days you were usually classified by your clothes. A shepherd wore a bit of wool in his button-hole, and looked wonderfully self possessed. A groom wore "britches and laggins" and moved with a quick, sprightly gait. A foreman, or wagoner, had three bright buttons on the slopes of his trousers, shaped like the ace of clubs, wore his raddy hat cocked on one side, and usually oozed with self importance.²⁸

In the case of female servants, who could be so finely dressed that only their speech indicated they were servants, this propensity to dress up for the hiring was also a means of indicating that their experience and aspirations lay within the domestic rather than the outdoor sphere of labour.²⁹

This personal display was not, however, entirely for the benefit of employers, they often decried the extravagance of farm servants' attire; much of it was for the benefit of farm servants themselves. Hiring fairs were arenas of courtship and fine clothes were a means of impressing and attracting a partner. 'Dressing up' was also an act, which, through the wearing of distinctive clothes such as 'gaudy silk neckties and pearlies' denoted membership of the farm servant group. This behaviour also publicly affirmed and celebrated their ability to afford, and freedom to choose, what were often regarded by many observers as excessively opulent clothes.³⁰ The importance of wearing fine clothes and their contribution to the festive aspects of the day, was recognised by the reporter who observed the 'well dressed' farm servants at an East Riding hiring fair in 1876 and noted that 'Most of them had evidently dressed themselves for the

²⁷ *Beverley Recorder*, 11 November, 1871. .

²⁸ T. Sykes, 'An Old Time Martinmas', *Driffield Times*, 24 November, 1934, cited in S. Parrot, 'The decline of hiring fairs in the East Riding of Yorkshire: Driffield c. 1874-1939', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 16, 1996, p. 24.

²⁹ Catt, 'Northern Hiring Fairs', p. 24.

³⁰ Roberts, 'Waiting Upon Chance', p.140.

occasion ... not so much to get hired as to have what is termed in common parlance "a day out".³¹

The farm servants' propensity to take all or a substantial proportion of their wages to the fairs also provided a magnet for pickpockets and prostitutes, local and itinerant, who regarded farm servants as easy prey. Driffield hirings, for example, was said to be 'the resort of pick pockets, prostitutes, thieves, and the most depraved characters, - making their prey on the unsuspecting young people, who become their easy victims'.³² In 1850, *The Yorkshireman* complained that the hirings drew prostitutes and pickpockets to York attracted by contents of farm servants' wallets, and concluded that: 'In many cases these dupes are wantonly plundered' adding that many of these robberies were 'perpetuated in Brothels'.³³ Naturally, those engaged in the provision of other forms of commercialised pleasure also sought to profit from these gatherings. At York in 1853, for example, *The Yorkshire Gazette* complained of 'the increased number of temptations of a low and disgraceful character held out to the ignorant and unwary' offered at York's Martinmas hiring fair; these included 'several balls, sparring exhibitions, (and) one publican on Swinegate (who) issued placards announcing an 'entertainment' of this kind and informed the public that this was the only public house in York conducted after the London style'.³⁴ Publicans also endeavoured to attract the farm servants by providing rooms for drinking and dancing. At Driffield for example:

The Corn Exchange has frequently on these occasions been taken by publicans and opened as a dancing room, at an admission of sixpence each, and in which liquor was served the same as at a public house. Two or three public houses have

³¹ *York Herald*, 20 November, 1876.

³² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854.

³³ *The Yorkshireman*, 30 November, 1850

³⁴ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 26 November, 1853.

large club rooms attached, and these have been used for the same purpose. Enter the public house, and you find them crowded in every available room from the top to the bottom. Almost every man has a girl on his knee; the windows are open and there is nothing heard or seen but drinking, smoking singing, shouting, fiddling, dancing, noise and confusion.³⁵

Later that night, groups of male and female servants were observed parading the streets of Driffield singing defiantly 'we won't go home till morning till daylight does appear'.³⁶

In the streets and market places of the towns, extensive pleasure fairs gathered to cater for the farm servants' pursuit of enjoyment. At a hiring fair in 1876, the entertainment offered before them included:

steam horses, shooting saloons, photographic establishments ... a couple of giant twin brothers, ... a lady who, being deprived by mother nature the luxury of a pair of arms was doing some crotchet work with her feet ... a number of cheap jacks, worm doctors, a party of religious workers who, from the steps of the market cross vainly endeavoured to make themselves heard; the yells of the showmen, the clanging of bells, the jostling and shouting of the crowd and the discordant notes of the song vendors.³⁷

Drinking was a prominent aspect of most popular gatherings in Victorian England but it was especially important at those which, like the hiring fair, combined economic transactions and recreation.³⁸ Drink played a prominent role in both the business and pleasure aspect of the hirings. As we have seen, a public house was likely to be the first destination of the farm servant when they arrived at the hiring fair. Thereafter an intermittent but intimate relationship between the farm servant and the public house was liable to continue. Alcoholic

³⁵ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *York Herald*, 20 November, 1876.

³⁸ B Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: the Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*, second edition, Keele University Press, Keele, 1994, p. 55.

beverages not only provided a relatively safe, convenient and cheap form of refreshment and stimulation, they played a role in the economic transactions of the statute fair. Drink was important in the act of hiring, in the absence of a written contract, the symbolic exchange of drink between the employer and the servant was a means of cementing their relationship and it was, therefore, common for farmers to seal the hiring bargain with the offer of a drink (some of the bargaining took place in public houses particularly if the weather was inclement). That other symbolic exchange deriving from the bargaining process, the 'fest' payment, was also customarily used to finance all or part of a day's recreational drinking. Tradesmen and shopkeepers would also treat farm servants when they purchased goods and settled their credit debts.³⁹ In the Victorian period, as today, intoxicants were known to moderate fear and give confidence and energy. Farm servants used drink to embolden themselves and encourage greater assertiveness when bargaining with employers in the market place. Some farmers complained of the difficulties of bargaining with inebriated servants, who it was claimed were 'in a beastly state of drunkenness before entering the hirings'.⁴⁰ Even without the links between drink and economic transactions, drinking would, in any case, have remained a salient aspect of hiring fairs. Drinking and drunkenness, with its propensity for moderating gloom and enhancing festivity fuelled the releasing of tensions and relaxing of restraints. Critics concluded that 'invariably drunkenness becomes the order of the day' and complained of 'lads of twelve and fourteen ... reeling about the streets in a state of beastly drunkenness'; the police often concurred, describing Drifffield hirings in 1858, for example, as 'a surging sea of drunkenness'.⁴¹

³⁹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 11 February, 1854, Letter, 'A Rural Dean'.

⁴⁰ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 14 January 1854, Letter, 'A Farmer Beverley'.

⁴¹ Chester, 'Hiring Fairs', p. 8; Skinner, 'Facts and Opinions', p. 11.

Drunkenness on this scale was, according to religious opinion, responsible for immorality and disease because it fuelled the relaxation of sexual restraint which resulted in 'an initiation into the deadly sin of fornication' and/or 'the long rued evils occasioned by intercourse with the abandoned women who invariably attend the hirings'.⁴² Although such observations are part of the exaggerated clamour that invariably accompanied moral reformers' accounts of popular festivities of this kind, there is little doubt that drink and drunkenness was fundamental in contributing to the culture of excess that was characteristic of statute hirings. Excessive drinking was also regarded as a prime cause of the many brawls that occurred at the fairs. Accounts of hiring fairs often leave an impression that drinking and drunkenness caused eruptions of gratuitous violence between farm servants. Take the following account from the mid-1850s, for example:

During the afternoon they parade the streets, bawling and shouting, visit the shows, sparring booths, try their hand at petty gambling, and lark with "Mr Merryman". Excited by the liquor they have taken, they become pot valiant, and pugilistically inclined. Pugilistic encounters take place, crowds collect round and there is such swearing and blaspheming. Friends interfere, and one fight begets another.⁴³

Another account, this time from the early 1870s, offers a similar picture:

Directly a sufficient quantity of aqua vita had been imbibed loquaciousness was the result, and the most disgustingly abusive language soon found sequence in blows. Long before midday was reached several rather severe hand-to-hand struggles took place, the combatants in many instances receiving extensive wounds on the head, and 'black eyes' were also visible on the physiognomy of a number of women as well as men.⁴⁴

⁴² Chester, 'Hiring Fairs', pp. 11-12.

⁴³ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854.

⁴⁴ *Driffield Times*, 15 November, 1873.

In November 1880 Malton magistrates dealt with a number of cases involving farm servants charged with violent assault on other farm servants at Sherburn hirings which the *York Herald* felt 'shockingly illustrated the brutality of the agricultural servants of the East Riding'.⁴⁵ These cases included Thomas and John Megson who were known as the 'Flixton Champions' and went about the hirings 'challenging anybody to fight who dared'.⁴⁶ These accounts by external observers find support in the accounts of hirings provided by farm servants themselves :

There'd be a lot drunk at hiring fair. They'd take their fest-money and drink it - and others' fest-money besides if they could get it! And there was one couple always had a fighting-do every year, to see which was best fella. They used to get their collars and ties off, and go up agin' cake mill, and they'd have it out. Talk about blood!: and what with that and muck in road, they was a mess when they'd finished, but they went on while yan (until one) of them went down. And I think one of them got gaffer (was the winner) every time. But t'other'd never give up. They used to meet a'purpose for it.⁴⁷

Although drink undoubtedly had a role in promoting behaviour of this kind, it was as much a catalyst as a cause. Although women were occasionally involved in brawls, many of these acts of aggression, which were regarded as a normal aspect of the hiring fair, were expressions of the burgeoning masculinity that appears to be increasingly characteristic of farm servant culture during the mid-Victorian period. As we have seen, farm service was increasingly divided as an occupation into masculine and feminine spheres of work activity during the nineteenth century. Although women continued to be hired as farm servants their increasingly domestic role meant that the young male farm servants defined themselves in opposition to this feminine sphere. Their identity and culture was,

⁴⁵ *York Herald*, 22 November, 1880.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ C. Kightly, *Country Voices. Life and Lore in Farm and Village*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1984, p. 42.

therefore, increasingly informed by notions of masculinity and manhood derived from the experience, demands and expectations of their work in outdoor world. This was reinforced by the fact that ever larger groups of young males were becoming the characteristic work group on the farm. In the absence of direct employer control these work groups developed a regime of internal control, a regime that as well as being physically demanding could be harsh and violent in its imposition of order and discipline.⁴⁸ This gave rise to an expressive culture that emphasised the value of qualities such as strength, endurance, toughness and even aggression.⁴⁹ These qualities could be tested and affirmed through confrontations between farm servants before their peers in the form of the public brawls which were common at the hiring fairs. Fights of this kind, celebrated and reinforced a form of proletarian masculinity shaped by the experience of work and afforded the victor prestige, status and respect from his peers.

Much of this fighting was also the product of the practice for farm servants to use hiring fairs as the venue for the settling of personal antagonisms that had arisen within the farm servant group during the previous year. Fighting whilst in service could poison relations on a farm and might also bring dismissal for those involved. It was customary, therefore, for farm servants to defer the settling of a dispute that arose on the farm until the Martinmas hiring.⁵⁰ These disputes were also an accepted and keenly relished part of the festivities, 'several hundred' people witnessed a brawl of this kind at Driffield in 1875.⁵¹ The fairs also offered the opportunity for servants to take revenge against a

⁴⁸ For personal accounts of farm service which emphasises its discipline and brutality see: H. Reffold, *Pie for Breakfast: Reminiscences of a Farmhand*, Hutton Press, Beverley, 1984.

⁴⁹ A. Howkins and L. Merricks, 'The Ploughboy and the Plough Play', *Folk Music Journal*, 2, 1991.

⁵⁰ Counce, 'Farm Horses', p. 175.

⁵¹ *Driffield Times*, 20 November, 1875.

foreman or wagoner who had accrued an unpopular reputation through their immiseration of the workers' placed in their charge. In this as in many other practices, a collective dimension became significant, as Counce illustrates:

A lad might hesitate to challenge a wagoner or a foreman during the year, but at Martinmas all authority was cancelled, and if a lad was leaving he need not fear retribution. It was even known for boys to set on a particularly unpleasant man as group, to offset the difference in age and size, a practice known as smallganging.⁵²

On occasions the collective dimension of the hiring fair moved on to another level; one in which the hiring fair became the occasion for the expression of common solidarity by the farm servant group in the form of violent retribution against outsiders and authority. As the *Driffield Times*' account of a riot at Driffield hirings in 1875 illustrates:

Fights on these occasions are so common that they attract but little attention, but about the time mentioned such a boisterous yell arose that we were attracted from our monotonous type setting and made for the Market-place, from where the noise proceeded. Here a scene of a remarkably lively character presented itself; the hundreds of farming men who thronged the streets were giving vent to a genuine red Indian War-whoop - pieces of wood, clubs, and canvass were flying in the air, tradesmen were rapidly putting up their shutters, second and third storey windows and every elevated position was studded with eagerly gazing spectators. This sort of thing continued for about an hour, and such was the throng and the danger of being hit by some missile that we deemed it wisdom not to make an attempt to get very near the actual scene of the action. The police, some dozen in number, were quite powerless, and in all probability, such was the phrensy of the drunken ruffians, had they made any attempt to arrest anyone, lynch law would have been the result.⁵³

This episode, which was considered serious enough to warrant a communication to the Home Secretary, exhibited a sequence of events common

⁵² Counce, 'Farm Horses', p. 176.

⁵³ *Driffield Times*, 13 November, 1875.

to many of the more turbulent disturbances that occurred at East Riding hirings fairs. It began with a disagreement at the door of a show owned by Mary Bland, a show-woman from Salford who travelled with her two children - one a dwarf, the other a giant. A young farm servant, William Smith had begun to 'abuse and call the show' and attempted to gain free entry. The ensuing altercation between Smith and the doorman developed into a fist-fight. This rapidly drew in a number of surrounding farm servants, who, 'taking it for granted that that their agricultural brother had been swindled, at once commenced an attack'.⁵⁴ According to the doorman 'ten or a dozen' farm servants seized him, knocked him down and 'would have killed' him if he had not struggled free 'and took refuge in the London Hotel'.⁵⁵ Both the dwarf and the giant also fled the scene, leaving only Mary Bland to try defend what remained of her show which was 'pulled down, broken up and strewn about the Market place' by the farm servants.⁵⁶ The deposition of a police sergeant against one of those involved in the fracas, Johnson Colley, a farm servant from the Wolds' parish of Weaverthorpe, offers some insight into the nature of the melee that ensued:

I heard a great disturbance in the market-place, and on going there found from 2,000 to 3,000 people congregated, the majority of them quite wild and very riotous. Whilst standing at the side of the booth I saw the defendant leading the crowd on, shouting "come on you b.....". He caught hold of an upright post and broke it in half, and then intermixed with the crowd. The mob then completely pulled down one side of the booth. A few minutes afterwards I saw the defendant again in front of the show: he caught hold of a portion to pull it down and it gave way, and he then threw himself amongst the crowd.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Driffield Times*, 20 November 1875, 13 November 1875.

⁵⁵ *Driffield Times*, 20 November, 1875.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 1875, *Driffied Times*, 4 December, 1875.

⁵⁷ *Driffield Times*, 20 November, 1875.

Although this was probably the most serious disturbance at an East Riding hiring fair during the mid-nineteenth century, it was not an isolated case. A number of similar disturbances occurred at Driffield in 1858 and at Bridlington in 1875, there were also sporadic outbreaks of violence between farm servants and the police at Beverley, Sherburn and Pocklington during this period. These violent incidents also conformed to a similar pattern: a disagreement between a farm servant and a publican or showman precipitating a brawl which drew in fellow farm servants at which point the situation would escalate into a major disorder. As the report from Driffield indicates, the police were reluctant or unable to intervene and quell the riot (arrests were effected later). This discretion was probably the consequence of experience gained at previous disturbances when attempts to arrest farm servants had escalated the violence and had resulted in further damage to both property and to the police. At Driffield hirings in 1858, for example:

Some of the servants and the police came in collision, in consequence of a man having been taken into custody, and his companions attempting to rescue him. For some time a regular fight and struggle went up, and down the market place - a forest of sticks were in motion, and stalls were swept aside before the moving crowd like chaff before the wind.⁵⁸

The rigorous policing of hiring fairs was a recent development at many East Riding hirings, the East Riding Constabulary was not created until 1857, but in the short term at least, this appears not to have reduced the farm servants' propensity for disorder.⁵⁹ Indeed as the events at Driffield in 1858, which were described as 'a riotous commotion ... such was never witnessed in Driffield before' suggested, the heightened presence of the police at hirings may have

⁵⁸ *Eastern Counties Herald*, 18 November, 1858.

⁵⁹ D. Foster, 'The East Riding Constabulary in the Nineteenth Century', *Northern History*, XXI, 1985; Idem, 'Police Reform and Public Opinion in Rural Yorkshire', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 2, 1982.

increased, rather than reduced, such acts of aggression. The farm servants collective presence at the hirings and their occupation of the town environment, fostered a sense of unity and purpose within the group. Taking retribution against outsiders who were perceived as attempting to swindle or abuse a fellow servant had become a customary practice. It was an informal, blunt, but effective form of corrective action through which the farm servants asserted their identity and interests against the perceived transgressors. Police attempts to intervene, appropriate and control this activity may well have been interpreted as an unwelcome intrusion which provoked resistance and resentment from the farm servant group. Consequently, the arrest of one or more farm servants by the police would almost inevitably provoke a response amongst the male farm servants which usually took the form of an attack upon the police involved. This example from Bridlington hirings in 1875, illustrates this pattern of events:

About noon a dispute occurred between a lad and a stall keeper near to the Black Lion Hotel, and coming to, the police interfered and took the lad into custody. This was a signal for an attack on the police, who were few in number and had no chance of being able to get the lad to the police station, which they tried to do in the face of a mob of about five hundred men and boys. During the affray the police received heavy blows and their helmets were seen flying in the air.⁶⁰

This process of contestation between the farm servants and the police over control of the territory of the hiring fair eventually seems to have resulted in compromise. The police appear to have settled upon a policy of intervening only against the worst cases of drunkenness and violent behaviour. Consequently moderate drunkenness and limited violence between farm servants appears to have become accepted by the police as a normal aspect of the hirings which they deemed it was impracticable and inadvisable to intervene against. When private property was threatened they had to act, but otherwise they avoided arresting

farm servants because of the violent response this usually brought. At Driffield in 1873, for example, there was considerable violence and drunkenness but the police response was to 'supress as far as possible the disturbances which took place during the day, without putting the law in force, except in extreme cases.' The *Driffield Times* had 'no doubt that this was the best way in which to act' because 'by being officious frequently more disturbances take place'.⁶¹

II

Most English fairs had traditionally combined the roles of market place, labour exchange, amusement park and even museum.⁶² By the late-nineteenth century, however, the national pattern was for the marketing functions of fairs to decline in importance and increasingly their role as centres of pleasure provision became more and more salient. A major reason for this was transport improvements which facilitated direct marketing into urban areas and promoted the expansion of specialised markets and retailing there. These increasingly undertook and supplanted the traditional functions of fairs.⁶³ As a result, many fairs either became defunct and disappeared, or survived in a reshaped form - as pleasure fairs.

As fairs became defunct as marketing centres they became eligible for abolition. In London, for example, the Metropolitan Police Act (3 George IV. C. 55) precipitated the abolition of a substantial number of fairs particularly in the early-nineteenth century. By the 1850s, inner London was 'bereft of fairs'.⁶⁴ Outside of London, the main onslaught against fairs came after 1850; the major

⁶⁰ *Bridlington Free Press*, 13 November, 1875

⁶¹ *Driffield Times*, 15 November, 1873.

⁶² Judd, 'Oddest Combination', p. 15,

⁶³ R. Perren, 'Markets and Marketing', Chapter 3 of G. Mingay, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. 6 1750-1850*; R.H. Rew, 'English Markets and Fairs, *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, 111, 1892.

⁶⁴ H. Cunningham, 'The Metropolitan Fairs: A Case Study in the Social Control of Leisure', in Donajgrozski 'Social Control', p. 172.

decline in their numbers occurring after the passing of the Fairs Act of 1871 (34 Victoria C. 12). This stemmed from a privately sponsored bill to provide for the abolition of fairs that 'are unnecessary, are the cause of grievous immorality, and are very injurious to the inhabitants of the towns in which such fairs are held'.⁶⁵ This Act was used to suppress more than 150 fairs in England and Wales between 1871 and 1878.⁶⁶ It was, therefore, a significant factor in explaining a general decline in the number of fairs in England and Wales from 1,691 in 1789 to 1,055 in 1888.⁶⁷ In the north of England, however, the decline in the number of fairs was less dramatic, three of the four counties showing an increase in the number of fairs during this period were in the North. Yorkshire as whole experienced a moderate decline from 101 fairs in 1789 to 84 in 1888.⁶⁸ At the national level, it was during the second half of the nineteenth century that hiring fairs 'came under frequent attack and noticeably declined in importance'.⁶⁹ Again, the most dramatic changes occurred in the south of England where a decline in farm service meant that many hiring fairs were transformed into 'pure fun fairs'.⁷⁰ This meant that they could be not be defended in terms of their traditional market functions and many were consequently suppressed.⁷¹ In the East Riding, however, there was no transformation of this type. Although there was a general decline in the number of fairs in the East Riding during the second half of the nineteenth century, this did not include the hiring fairs. Because farm servants continued to hire at hiring fairs, they were less vulnerable to the predatory attentions of those

⁶⁵ Malcolmsom, 'Popular Recreations', p. 149.

⁶⁶ Cunningham 'Metropolitan Fairs', p. 173.

⁶⁷ Rew, 'Markets and Fairs', p. 102.

⁶⁸ Ibid. The counties that recorded an increase were Cornwall, Lancashire, Cheshire and Cumberland

⁶⁹ Malcolmsom, 'Popular Recreations', p. 149.

⁷⁰ A Kussmal, 'Servants in Husbandry', p. 63.

⁷¹ R. Malcolmsom, 'Popular Recreations', pp. 150-151.

seeking the legal abolition of fairs.⁷² East Riding hiring fairs would seem, therefore, to confirm Malcolmson's view that rural fairs, particularly those that blended business and pleasure, were more resilient than many urban fairs and survived against the endeavours of those who sought their abolition.⁷³

III

The continued existence and vitality of East Riding hiring fairs does not necessarily mean, however, that they remained unchanged. In chapters six and seven, two reforming campaigns, which sought to alter the nature of hiring fairs, one religious, one secular, will be considered in detail. For the remainder of this chapter, however, two other possible forces for change will be considered: railway development and the expansion of capitalist leisure entrepreneurship. Both have been identified by Hugh Cunningham as being increasingly significant in reshaping the nature of fairs at a national level during and after the mid-Victorian period.⁷⁴ It is worth considering, therefore, if they had some bearing upon the character of hiring fairs in the East Riding during the same period.

Cunningham has suggested that, in general, fairs of all kind were on the wane in the 1830s, not only because of moral disapproval but also because those fairs that had survived were proving less and less profitable. Showmen, for example, found that their usual attractions were able to appeal to an increasingly sceptical audience only by reducing the price of shows.⁷⁵ What rescued the fairs from oblivion, or at least ensured that they continued in a reshaped form, was

⁷² For the general decline of fairs in the East Riding in the nineteenth century see M. Nobel, 'Markets and Fairs', in S. Neave and S. Ellis eds, *An Historical Atlas of East Yorkshire*, University of Hull Press, Hull, 1996. This does not include hiring fairs.

⁷³ Malcolmson, 'Popular Recreations', p. 150.

⁷⁴ H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c. 1780-C. 1880*, Croom Helm, London, 1980, Chapter 5.

the development, from the mid-nineteenth century, of the two interrelated factors mentioned above: the railway and capitalist leisure entrepreneurship. As Cunningham has pointed out, the expansion of the railway network in the late 1840s and 1850s meant that many fairs, and especially those close to urban centres, became more accessible to and therefore increasingly attracted, short - and - long distance excursionists. This gave them an 'enormous boost' at a time when their marketing functions and very existence was being questioned.⁷⁶ This encouraged a reshaping and revitalisation of many traditional fairs as centres of commercialised pleasure: 'Precisely at the time when they had become established in the middle-class consciousness as "relics of a barbarous age", fairs received a new lease of life from that symbol of progress, the railway'.⁷⁷ This resurgence of the fairs was both encouraged by and resulted from a change in the form of the attractions offered at fairs. Showmen, in order to attract larger crowds and charge higher prices, deployed increasingly costly and sophisticated attractions, in the form of mechanically powered rides. These offered a new and different form of entertainment based upon the excitement derived from the experience of movement and speed. In place of the old static shows and booths, 'a synthetic adventure in unnatural movements and sounds' became increasingly characteristic of the attractions offered at pleasure fairs.⁷⁸ The level of investment and organisation involved in developing, deploying and maintaining rides of this nature prompted a gradual transformation of the traditional fair-ground. From the mid-nineteenth century, alongside the stimulus provided by the railway, leisure entrepreneurs offering increasingly capital intensive and dynamic forms of entertainment prompted a renaissance of English fairs as they were reshaped by new levels of investment and a new

⁷⁵ H. Cunningham, 'Metropolitan Fairs', pp. 169-170; 'Leisure', p. 175.

⁷⁶ Idem, 'Leisure' p. 159.

⁷⁷ Idem, 'Metropolitan Fairs', p. 167.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 170; I. Starsmore, *English Fairs*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1975, p. 10.

scale of organisation into centres of capitalist leisure provision.⁷⁹ Another contemporaneous change was for this leisure provision to be increasingly concentrated at urban centres. The principal explanation for this being that the expansion of capital-intensive leisure entrepreneurship tended to promote the expansion of larger urban fairs and the decay of the smaller rural gatherings as showmen now attended only the larger, more accessible, gatherings which offered higher returns on time and investment.⁸⁰

Cunningham has suggested that this reshaping of the English fair, initiated in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, had important consequences for their internal character and function. Increasingly fairs, like many other forms of leisure provision, offered a less intense and more passive experience as people's participation in fairs and festivals became based around the consumption of movement. This, and changing leisure patterns in society in general, Cunningham has suggested, meant that the social functions of fairs and popular festivals changed. The new leisure entrepreneurship focused upon servicing people as consumers of a product which offered them escapism and as a consequence fairs came to be less directly informed by the world of work and the conflicts it might generate.⁸¹ The relationship between work and recreations remained important but it became less intense and less problematic.⁸² By the end of the nineteenth century fair-going, like other forms of leisure had, it is suggested, become a more discrete and routinised experience which was less open to politicisation. Instead of offering a potential threat to authority, fair

⁷⁹ Cunningham, 'Leisure', p. 174.

⁸⁰ Idem, 'Metropolitan Fairs, pp. 180-1

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

going had become safe, controllable and acceptable: 'a relatively routine ingredient in an accepted world of leisure'.⁸³

Do these mid-nineteenth century themes identified by Hugh Cunningham also pertain to hiring fairs? The first third of this chapter would suggest not. It has been argued that, in most respects, hiring fairs represented a continuation of a form of popular culture that remained embedded in the rural calendar and continued to be informed by the experience of agricultural labour. Hiring fairs retained a volatile, disorderly and, at times, carnivalesque character. This does not totally invalidate Cunningham's interpretation, however. He emphasises that the mid-Victorian period was a time of transition which meant that fairs retained elements of their traditional character. Bearing this qualification in mind, one can perceive a degree of reshaping of the hiring fair during the mid-Victorian period. For example, although observers tended to employ rural terminology in their description of the hirings fairs, the location and immediate context of the majority of these gatherings was increasingly urban: the market towns of the East Riding and the cities of Hull and York. This was not an entirely new phenomenon, the towns and cities of the region had traditionally hosted hiring fairs and it was at these locations that they were most likely to be combined with a well-established pleasure fair: as was the case at York and Beverley, for example. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the cities of York and Hull were expanding as were the majority of East Riding's market towns.⁸⁴ It can be suggested, therefore, that the fairs were increasingly occurring within the physical environment most associated with the nascent modern leisure culture identified by Cunningham: urban and urbanising settlements. Furthermore, these urban hirings were increasing in size and

⁸³ Ibid, pp. 163-4.

importance at the expense of the more rural small-town and village gatherings. This point was made by Cauce in his pioneering article on East Riding hiring fairs. He argued that by the early-twentieth century, the hirings at the larger market towns such as Malton, Driffield and Selby continued to be well patronised but those at smaller centres such as Hornsea, Hunmanby and Patrington were in decline.⁸⁵ This process was well underway by the mid-nineteenth century. By this time, many of the hirings which had existed in the seventeenth century, such as those at the villages of Kirkburn, Sledmere and Kilham were defunct. In contrast, newspaper reports suggest that both the size and frequency of the hirings at expanding urban centres such as York, Driffield, Beverley, Bridlington, Hull, Selby and Malton increased during the mid-Victorian period. The survey by the East Riding Constabulary in the early 1860s confirms this impression. Driffield, an expanding market town, recorded the largest attendance of 2,590 farm servants whereas those at smaller centres such as at the villages of Keyingham, Holme on Spalding Moor, Fridaythorpe, Huggate, and the declining market towns of Patrington and Hornsea mustered a combined attendance of only 406. Such was the decline of these smaller hirings, that it was believed that only 'a little exertion and trouble' was required in order to secure their total abolition.⁸⁶ Other smaller market towns still continued to attract reasonable numbers of farm servants, but were increasingly experiencing competition from the larger town and city hirings. By the late-nineteenth century, little hiring took place at Hedon, farmers now conducted their business in Hull, and Howden's hirings were increasingly overshadowed by those at Selby.⁸⁷ There was, therefore, a perceptible change taking place during the mid-nineteenth century, with the larger urban centres expanding in

⁸⁴ M. Noble, *Change in the Small Towns of the East Riding of Yorkshire c. 1750-1850*, Hedon and District Local History Series: No 5, Hedon Local History Society, Hedon, 1979.

⁸⁵ S. Cauce, 'East Riding Hiring Fairs', *Oral History*, III, 1975, p. 45.

⁸⁶ J. Skinner, 'Facts and Opinions', p. 21; p. 11.

importance at the expense of the smaller locations. These increasingly operated only as small localised hiring centres. There were exceptions to this rule, however, the villages of Cottingham and Aldborough: both revived once defunct hiring fairs in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁸

A factor of considerable significance encouraging this urban concentration of hiring fairs in the East Riding region was that mid-nineteenth century trend identified by Cunningham: railway development. The emergence of a local railway network in the East Yorkshire area from the 1840s increased the number of hirings open to most farm servants and farmers. By the late 1840s, the major settlements of the Riding were linked by the Hull and Selby line (1840), the York and Scarborough line (1845), the Hull and Bridlington line (1846), the York and Market Weighton Line (1847), the Scarborough and Bridlington line (1846) and the Selby and Market Weighton line (1848). By the mid-1860s, the few remaining gaps in this network had been filled by the construction of the Malton and Driffield line (1853), the Hull and Withernsea line (1854), the Hull and Hornsea line (1864) and the Market Weighton and Beverley line (1865) so that all the hiring fairs in the Riding were accessible via this network.⁸⁹ From the late 1840s, the newspaper reports of York, Driffield, Beverley, Hull and Malton fairs, record that large numbers of farm servants now arrived by train, with both short and longer distance travellers making use of the railway system. At York in 1847, for example, it was reported that the Martinmas Fair and hirings had enjoyed 'a more numerous attendance by parties

⁸⁷ M. Craven, 'History of Hedon', p. 222; Counce, 'Farm Horses', p. 54.

⁸⁸ Cottingham's hiring fair was reinstigated in 1867, *Victoria County History of the Counties of England, A History of the County of York: East Riding*, K.J. Allison, ed, Vol. IV, 1979; p. 75. Aldborough's hirings were revived in 1891 and 'met with a fair share of success', *Bulmer's History and Directory of East Yorkshire*, 1892, p. 303.

⁸⁹ K.A. MacMahon, *The Beginnings of the East Yorkshire Railways*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: 3, 1953; C.T. Goode, *The Railways of East Yorkshire*; Oakwood Press, Trowbridge, 1981.

from a distance than in any former year', the report added that 'The number of persons who arrived by railway was immense'.⁹⁰ At Drifffield first hirings in 1848, it was estimated that one thousand farm servants arrived by train.⁹¹ At the second hirings, the station at Drifffield became so crowded with 'ungovernable and boisterous agricultural servants' that the railway company was compelled to introduce a 'strong force' to 'marshall the crowds and prevent the avoidance of fairs'.⁹² This stimulus to the larger hiring fairs continued and expanded with the development of the East Riding railway network during the mid-nineteenth century. By the 1860s, railway companies ran special trains to the larger hiring fairs.⁹³ At Malton, in the 1870s, the railway brought 'an immense influx' of men and women servants from the North and East Ridings to the hirings: it was estimated that 2,000 servants arrived by train at Malton hirings in 1870.⁹⁴ By increasing the number of hirings within easy reach, the railway acted as a stimulant to the larger fairs in particular. It enabled farmers and servants to gravitate towards to the larger fairs which now offered a wider range of servants and employment opportunities. This, and the expanding number of local newspapers which carried information on wage rates and retail outlets encouraged the expansion of the larger urban centres which increasingly acted as the main hiring centre for a region at the partial, if not yet total, expense of the smaller village hirings.

The other factor highlighted by Cunningham - capitalist leisure entrepreneurship - also played a role in encouraging an urban concentration of hiring fairs. The pursuit of pleasure was an established aspect of the hiring fair prior to the mid-

⁹⁰ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 27 November, 1847.

⁹¹ *Hull Advertiser*, 17 November, 1848.

⁹² *Hull Advertiser*, 16 November, 1849.

⁹³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 19 November, 1863.

⁹⁴ *Drifffield Times*, 22 November, 1873; *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 17 November, 1870.

Victorian period. Henry Best's servants attended hirings that were part of a festive season and this continued through to the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. The limited nature of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century newspaper reports and their tendency to concentrate upon the business aspects of fairs, make it difficult to establish the extent of leisure provision at this time. York's Martinmas fair was certainly well established as a pleasure fair in the pre-Victorian period. In 1827, for example, the *York Herald* reported upon a busy Martinmas Fair but commented that 'by far the greater proportion of those who thronged the fair were drawn thither more by pleasure than by business'.⁹⁵ There is evidence, however, that the pleasure aspects of York's hiring fair expanded in scale during the mid-Victorian years and that this pattern was characteristic of the hiring fairs held at the other expanding urban centres in the East Riding.⁹⁶ The increased scale of the attractions offered, became a regular feature of the newspaper reports of the larger hirings at Beverley, York, Driffield, Bridlington and Hull from the late 1840s. The (often critical) gaze of newspaper reporters and moral reformers suggests also that there were significant changes in the nature as well as the number of the attractions offered: with the mid-Victorian years forming a water-shed in terms of the size and technological sophistication of the attractions on offer. In the 1830s and 1840s fairs tended to be dominated by games, stalls, entertainers and displays of curiosities and freaks of nature. By the end of the mid-Victorian period, a gradual expansion of larger scale exhibitions, music-hall entertainments, and other more technologically-sophisticated attractions in the form of hand-and-steam powered rides is evident. From the late 1840s especially, observers of hiring fairs claimed to perceive a shift away from 'giants and giantesses and other freaks of nature' towards what were regarded as more morally uplifting

⁹⁵ *York Herald*, 27 November, 1827.

attractions in the form of, for example, 'panachronic and diachronic representations'.⁹⁷ Driffield second hirings in 1852, drew the following observation from the correspondent of the *Hull Advertiser*:

Amongst the sources of amusement there were more than the usual attractions, and, as an instance of the progressive tendency of the age towards refinement, even the shows are obliged to keep pace with the times. Instead of natural monstrosities, we now have machinery, works of art, and other sources of amusements of a more laudable character than the dwarfs, giants and fat pigs of other days.⁹⁸

Evidence of these changes in content and the contemporary feeling that they were contributing to a degree of civilisation of the hiring fair can also be found elsewhere. The report of the introduction of the first steam powered ride at York in 1866, for example, correlated this with an 'absence of those exhibitions of an objectionable kind which used so much to characterise our fairs'.⁹⁹ Similarly, the presence of 'Manders Mammoth Menagerie of wild beasts birds and reptiles' a 'phantoscope', 'Marionettes' and 'automaton pole-balancers' at York's Martinmas fair in 1870 drew favourable comment, as did the absence of attractions 'calculated only to pander to vicious and depraved minds'.¹⁰⁰ Ten years later, the attractions at York included photography in the form of 'Mr Chadwick's ... patent luxographic process', Mr Randall Williams 'Hobgoblinscope' which was the 'remarkably well patronised', Edmond's menagerie and Baylis's Royal Italian Marionettes.¹⁰¹ By the 1870s the scale of attractions offered at hirings was so extensive that a special correspondent sent

⁹⁶ *Victoria County History of the Counties of England, A History of the County of York: The City of York*, P.M. Tillot, ed., London, 1961, p. 170.

⁹⁷ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 27 November, 1847; Freaks of nature in the form of 'mysterious ladies' and 'celebrated giantesses', continued to be popular at this time, however, *York Herald*, 29 November 1851.

⁹⁸ *Hull Advertiser*, 19 November, 1852.

⁹⁹ *York Herald*, 24 November, 1866.

¹⁰⁰ *York Herald*, 26 November, 1870.

¹⁰¹ *York Herald*, 20 November, 1880; 23 November 1880.

to observe a major East Riding statute fair concluded that: 'Anyone who had no idea of the immediate cause of this would have probably been of the opinion that it was simply and solely what is generally termed a pleasure fair'.¹⁰² Two years later at Beverley, it was reported that 'The pleasure part of the fair was very brisk, the shows and attractions being more extensive than was ever known here'.¹⁰³

Occasionally, the reports suggest that in the case of some hirings, a similar process was taking place to that which occurred in the south of England, whereby hiring fairs lost their labour market functions and had been transformed into pure pleasure fairs. At Beeford Hirings in 1871, for example, it was recorded that 'This year there were more attractions than usual', which included 'Maunder's Waxworks ... several other shows, including giants dwarfs, circus, etc, ... Delhi the fire-eater ... shooting galleries and stalls, in fact all the attractions of a country fair' yet although this was described as 'the best hirings held for some time' there was in fact no hiring and the report suggested that this aspect was now moribund 'These hirings, ... so far as their original function is concerned are fast waning away, ... and were it not that the inhabitants make the day a holiday, and their great festive day of the year, Beeford Sittings would soon sink into oblivion'.¹⁰⁴ The large range of attractions at Beeford in 1871 was due to unusual and temporary circumstances, however. Beeford was a convenient stopping-off point between larger urban fairs. As a consequence, 'Mander's waxworks, together with several other shows - including giants, dwarfs, circus, &c, stopped and spent the day, being on their way to Beverley fair'.¹⁰⁵ The following year, at the same hiring, there

¹⁰² *York Herald*, 20 November, 1876.

¹⁰³ *Hull Times*, 9 November, 1878.

¹⁰⁴ *Driffield Times*, 11 November, 1871.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

were once again many shows but: 'Very few, if any, servants were hired at Beeford this year'¹⁰⁶ The vitality of Beeford's hiring fair appears to have become dependent upon its leisure functions which themselves were in turn reliant upon its contiguity to another larger urban hiring fair. Critics of hiring fairs were quick to seize upon the burgeoning pleasure functions of the hiring fairs and used this as a means of questioning their legitimacy. It was claimed that the fairs had lost, or were rapidly losing, their market functions and that having 'now become ... occasions of meeting for pleasure rather than business' should be abolished.¹⁰⁷

Descriptions of hiring fairs that suggest that they were becoming pleasure fairs rather than labour marts are not confined to the smaller hirings. At Hull in 1870, for example, it was recorded that 'the market place and the principal streets of the town were thronged with agricultural labourers of all classes, but for the most part they were pleasure seekers, rather than searchers for employment'.¹⁰⁸ At these larger centres, however, the pleasure aspects did not generally overshadow the hiring functions. Pleasure provision expanded alongside a vigorous and extensive market for the labour of farm servants. Large crowds of farm servants were once again hiring at Hull in the early 1880s.¹⁰⁹ What needs to be born in mind is that when reports record little hiring at a substantial late hiring, as was the case with the example of Hull, this did not necessarily reflect a fundamental shift in the fair's character. It was almost certainly because the labour market had been cleared at earlier hirings, leaving the later fairs free for the untrammelled pursuit of pleasure. A tight labour market encouraged early

¹⁰⁶ *Driffield Times*, 9 November, 1872.

¹⁰⁷ *York Herald*, 13 October, 1866, Church Congress, Canon Randolph, 'Social Conditions and Recreations of the Poor'.

¹⁰⁸ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 1 December, 1871.

¹⁰⁹ *Beverley Gaurdian*, 2 December, 1881.

hiring and therefore, by default, enhanced the role of the later fairs as centres of pleasure and recreation.

The East Riding hiring fair was, therefore, subject to influences which have been identified as altering the nature of fairs elsewhere. The process of concentration might be regarded as weakening the importance of hiring fairs as rural festivals, because they increasingly occurred within an urban context. This process of concentration and the expansion of commercialised and increasingly formalised forms of entertainment, meant that hirings became larger and possibly more impersonal gatherings.¹¹⁰ However, in general, neither the railway nor the expansion of commercialised leisure provision caused a fundamental transformation in the nature of hiring fairs during the mid-nineteenth century. It was only with the total decline of farm service in the inter-war years that East Riding hiring fairs became purely pleasure fairs and lost their association with farm service.¹¹¹ During the mid-Victorian period the general pattern of change was one of uneven development. The larger fairs maintained and expanded their importance as labour markets whilst also becoming more attractive as centres of leisure and recreation for farm servants and, increasingly, other members of rural and urban society. The smaller hirings were in decline, but not as yet, given the increased demand for farm servants, totally defunct: as we have seen, two village hirings were actually revived after 1850. The smaller hirings were becoming localised in terms of those attending to be hired and in their provision of pleasure with the larger travelling shows tending to by-pass them leaving the provision of entertainment to local initiative, unless, as was the case at Beeford, they provided a convenient stopping-off point between larger urban events. This may have

¹¹⁰ Counce, 'Farm Horses', p. 64.

¹¹¹ Parrot, 'Decline of Hiring Fairs', p. 28.

undermined the hirings' ability to function as a venue for the articulation of communal solidarity in the form of affirming the ties that bound the rural community together.¹¹² This had never been the primary cultural function of the nineteenth-century hiring fair, however; that had been to serve, not so much as a communal festival, but as a site for the expression of a solidarity and identity within a particular social group: the farm servants. Although experiencing changes in the mid-Victorian period, hiring fairs retained this function and remained in many respects a farm servant carnival:

a period of indulgence in food and drink, enhanced sexuality, singing and dancing in the streets, familiarity between strangers, the acting out of aggressiveness, the acceptance of folly and carnival "madness". Its leitmotif was the inversion of the normal rules of culture'.¹¹³

Indeed the changes brought about by the railway and commercialisation of pleasure possibly enhanced the hiring fairs capacity to function as vigorous carnivals as the farm servants' propensity for excess and indulgence was concentrated at the larger urban fairs. Although there were innovations in terms of the nature of attractions which did become more technologically sophisticated and formalised. They were not sufficiently different to undermine the atmosphere of boisterousness and excess characteristic of these events. Despite an increasing tendency on the part of external observers to regard the attractions offered at the hirings as evidence of progress and rationalism they were not in many respects more edifying at the end of this period than they had been at its outset. The greatest attraction of York's Martinmas Fair in 1890 was Wombwell's Menagerie an old established attraction which as well as offering its celebrated 'wild beasts' also promised the visitor 'the biggest of giants, the

¹¹² Bushaway, 'By Rite', p. 148.

¹¹³ D. A. Reid, 'Interpreting the Festival Calendar: Wakes and fairs as Carnivals', in Storch ed., 'Popular Culture and Custom', p. 125.

smallest of dwarf, tattooed ladies, hairy people, fat babies, Circassians, snake charmer, skeletons, tattooed pig, tattooed dog, bearded lady, largest women, smallest female, giant horse, Zulus, Arab, and Indians'.¹¹⁴

Regarding hiring fairs as farm servants' carnivals still poses a question of interpretation in terms of their role in the social order. One approach is to regard the hiring fair in functionalist terms, as an event which in allowing a relaxation of normal restraints and a temporary inversion of power relations served, through its exceptionality, to preserve and reinforce the social order.¹¹⁵ In the words of the fifteenth century defender of the Feast of Fools cited by Natalie Zemon Davis: 'Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air'.¹¹⁶ This 'functionalist steam-valve explanation' has been adopted by a number of historians who have examined hiring fairs. Caunce, for example, offers an interpretation which emphasises that the hiring fair, by facilitating a temporary absence of restraint, served to preserve a general equilibrium in rural social relations: both within farm servants as a group and between farm servants and their employers.¹¹⁷ Howkins and Merricks, and to some extent Roberts, tend also to regard hiring fairs either as exceptional inversions of the everyday that tended to reinforce normal power relations or as an outlet for pent-up tensions that allowed for readjustment.¹¹⁸ Such an approach has its merits. It can help to identify a relationship between hiring fairs and the wider social system. There is little doubt that aspects of the hiring fair did function in this manner, in that they offered a momentary release from the restraints of farm service and provided an environment in which conflicts could

¹¹⁴ *York Herald*, 29 November, 1890.

¹¹⁵ N.Z. Davis, 'The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-century France', *Past and Present*, 50, 1971.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p 48.

¹¹⁷ Caunce, 'Farm Horses', p 69.

¹¹⁸ Howkins and Merricks, 'The Plough Boy', p.199; Roberts, 'Meanings', pp. 152-6.

be explored in a semi-ritualised form. An overly zealous adherence to a functionalist approach also has its limitations, however. The extent of order can be exaggerated and consequently, all social action can be perceived as a positive contribution to the social order. This approach may, therefore, underestimate the extent of conflict present in practices and institutions; or by regarding such conflicts as positive re-adjustments, underplay and even ignore the question of social change. An alternative approach is to adopt a more 'Bakhtinian' approach which regards carnivalesque practices not just as a force for stability and continuity but as also having the potential to promote conflict and become 'a primary source of liberation, destruction and renewal' for those involved.¹¹⁹ Within this framework, the temporary experience of power facilitated by the carnivalesque moment is translated into more permanent and enduring consequences. This approach has generally been most fruitful in the analysis of carnivals in continental Europe where the carnival tradition was more dynamic and enduring than in Britain. It may also have some validity for the mid-Victorian hiring fair in the East Riding, however. Although lacking the vitality that enabled continental carnivals to generate overtly political protests, hiring fairs possessed a capacity for criticising and subverting prevailing power relations. Undoubtedly the hiring fairs' practices had the potential for legitimising things as they were. At times, the consequences of this exceptional inversion of the everyday for the farm servants was limited to the functional effect of 'coping with their lowly status on the other days'.¹²⁰ However, there were times when the expressive potential of the hiring fair might develop beyond this reinforcement of the social order. The flexible and dynamic environment of the hiring, rather than merely offering a means of releasing tensions and displacing conflicts, also had the potential for giving them further

¹¹⁹ Davis, 'Misrule' p. 49.

¹²⁰ Howkins and Merricks, 'The Plough Boy' p. 199.

expression. The environment of the hiring fair had the potential to provide a learning experience that contextualised and gave a broader meaning to the experience of labour within the increasingly proletarianised farm service system. A critical factor, increasingly, was the condition of the labour market for farm servants. When the labour market situation was favourable, the atmosphere of freedom and carnivalesque release characteristic of hiring fairs informed, in positive fashion, the mood and course of the farm servant's collective bargaining practices. Within this context, the increasingly lively character of the East Riding hiring fairs, offered a temporary power and equality which was more than a moment of a release; it was an occasion when they were able to effect changes in their living and working conditions and wages. Conversely, when the labour market was overstocked, farm servants were less able to use the hiring fairs as a means of shaping their futures in a positive manner. At such times, the use of the pleasure functions of the hirings as a means of temporary escape from the consequences of their dependence upon the labour market probably became more pronounced. During most of the mid-Victorian period however, the market position of the farm servants was reasonably buoyant and the majority of the hiring fairs were expanding as centres of popular recreation. The burgeoning of both aspects of the hiring fair at this time offered the farm servants a means of exploring their own potential power through both the festive and bargaining elements of the hiring day. Both elements played a major role in fuelling the opposition that emerged against hiring fairs in the East Riding during the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter Five

The Church of England's Critique of Hiring Fairs in the East

Riding

In 1850, *The Yorkshireman* attacked York's annual Martinmas Hiring Fair. In doing so it offered a typical example of the increasingly negative local newspaper comment directed at hiring fairs in the York and East Riding area during the mid-Victorian period. The fair was condemned as an event which placed temptations of an immoral nature before 'youths from the country' which led these 'dupes' into profligate expenditure, sexual promiscuity, and made them easy prey for prostitutes and thieves, who, it was suggested, attended the fair 'in unprecedented numbers'.¹ This attack went on to conclude that:

Martinmas Fair ... is an evil which increases crime, causes the profligate waste of money, adds greatly to the already large number of inmates within the walls of our House of Correction, and so increases the City expenses by their maintenance and the necessary increase of the police-force to preserve the public from robbery, without conferring a benefit on the public in any way.²

East Yorkshire was not alone in developing this critical evaluation of hiring fairs. Malcolmson has noted that at the national level, hiring fairs 'came under frequent attack' in the second half of the nineteenth century.³ By the late 1850s, there was a well-established national campaign directed against and seeking the immediate reform and eventual abolition of hiring fairs in England.⁴ This campaign was active in many counties including: Gloucestershire,

¹ *The Yorkshireman*, 30 November, 1850.

² *Ibid*

³ R.W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1750-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973, p. 149.

⁴ Rev. N. Stephenson, *On the Rise and Progress of the Movement for the Abolition of Statutes, Mops, or Feeing Markets*. London, 1861, *passim*.

Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Lincolnshire and its supporters claimed to be enjoying considerable success.⁵ The campaign employed many of the tactics that have become associated with the agitations of mid-Victorian pressure groups including: creating a network of local associations, lobbying local and national interests and authorities, writing letters to local and national newspapers, publishing tracts, and organising public meetings.⁶ It also engaged in example-setting in the form of promoting alternative 'rational' hiring practices and recreations designed to erode and supplant the customary practices associated with hiring fairs.⁷

From the early 1850s, the East Riding of Yorkshire became something of a 'front line region' in this agitation and it retained this position throughout the mid-Victorian period. Here also, the campaign was based around the activities of a number of voluntary associations which sought short-term reform and long-term abolition of hiring fairs. Unsurprisingly, the most persistent protagonists in this campaign were drawn from organised religion, with both Non-conformist and the established Churches playing a role. The initial attempts to supplant the Martinmas hirings at York, for example, were initiated by the York-based Society for the Prevention of Youthful Depravity, an ecumenical organisation. Methodism also made a contribution, promoting temperance missions and other activities designed to compete with the attractions offered at the fairs. However, whilst the ecumenical nature of the movement deserves to be noted, it is also clear that the more organised and expansive aspects of this campaign were promoted by the Church of England. Churchmen were the most

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For an analysis of the tactics and methods of Victorian pressure groups see: P. Hollis ed., *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England*, Edward Arnold, London, 1974; B. Harrison, 'Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth Century England', *Past and Present*, 38, 1967.

⁷ Stephenson, 'Rise and Progress, passim; G. Moses, "'Rustic and Rude": Hiring Fairs and Their Critics in the East Riding of Yorkshire c. 1850-75', *Rural History*, 7, 1996, pp. 151-4.

prolific letter writers and tract publishers, they attacked hiring fairs at Church and Social Science Congresses, and it was they who, along with their wives, daughters and other laity, organised and publicised the major reforming initiatives taken against hiring fairs in the East Riding. Almost all of the permanent organisations that emerged from this agitation, such as The Buckrose Ainsty and Bulmer Registration Society, and The Yorkshire Society for the Supplanting of Statute Hirings, were led and organised by Anglicans. Not surprisingly, the most active clergymen were those with hiring fairs in or close to their parishes. But the issue became one of general concern to the Anglican Church in the East Riding during the mid-nineteenth century. The course and impact of this campaign will be fully evaluated in the next chapter, but a brief outline is necessary at this stage in order fully to understand the motivation of Anglican reformers in the East Riding.

The ultimate aim of the campaign, for its most zealous advocates at least, was to secure the end of hiring fairs, annual contracts and eventually, farm service itself. The precise means of achieving this caused considerable debate. Some favoured outright legal suppression of the hiring fair. One protagonist, for example, claimed that 'Nothing but the law, which put down such abominations as Bartholomew and Greenwich fairs in London can hope to put a stop to "statty" fairs'.⁸ However, although abolitionist feeling was never disappeared entirely, most opponents of hiring fairs recognised that their legitimate economic function as a market for farm labour and their burgeoning popularity as rural festivals meant that immediate outright suppression was unlikely to succeed. As a consequence, the main focus of the campaign by the Church of England concentrated upon an approach designed to secure abolition through stealth.

⁸ Letter, "Nemo", *Yorkshire Gazette*, 9 October, 1859.

What emerged was a strategy of eroding and undermining the functions of the hiring fairs by providing a substitute system.

This substitute system had two main aspects. The first centred upon reintroducing a moral nexus as the basis of relations between masters and servants by introducing moral criteria at the point of engagement. Consequently, farmers were urged to hire only those servants who possessed a written testimony of their moral character and conduct over the past year. It was envisaged that these written 'characters' would become the basis of a moral compact between masters and servants in the East Riding. In order to promote this new system, and guarantee its moral rigour, the written characters were to be collated and administrated through a network of registration societies. The task of each registration society was to gather lists of vacancies and servants seeking employment, and, through the establishment of offices in the towns and villages of the Riding, encourage both employers and servants to make enquiries and reach agreements away from the hiring fairs. The ultimate scope of these proposals was, therefore, somewhat deeper than the initial aim of re-asserting moral criteria as the basis of master-servant relations. By shifting the act of hiring away from the hiring fair and encouraging the adoption of a contract that was more flexible in terms of the time of its creation and duration, it was hoped that the current practice of hiring all servants from Martinmas to Martinmas would fall into decay. It was also envisaged that as a consequence of this, the custom of all farm servants being released simultaneously from their contracts on November 23 would also decline as the servants' holiday moved with the point of engagement to any time of the year. The result of both measures, it was anticipated, would mean that over time the number of servants attending hiring fairs would decline, and the festive and carnivalesque excess that was characteristic of all hirings, especially those of Martinmas week, would

be purged. Denuded of their legitimate economic functions and denied their annual influx of rural youth, the hiring fairs would, it was hoped, wither away. For its most zealous and earnest advocates the establishment of a system of written contracts was not only important in its own right but also as a stepping-stone towards a far more fundamental change which involved the abolition of annual contracts, hiring fairs and even farm service itself.

This first stage of reform predominated during the 1850s. A second phase, which was related to, and complemented the first, developed from the early 1860s, when Anglican clergy decided to try and offer a more direct challenge to the internal functions of hiring fairs. In an attempt to draw servants away from the streets, market places and public houses they offered an alternative indoor location for hiring in large rooms. These rooms provided registration facilities, warm fires, and cheap refreshments; local clergy were also on hand to supervise the proceedings and offer religious guidance to those present. In addition, there was an attempt to compete with the entertainments offered by publicans and showmen. This centred upon the provision of alternative 'rational recreations' in the form of, for example, brass-band music and indoor concerts. These indoor hirings, and their associated rational recreations, performed a multiple role. They enabled a more assertive religious presence to be established at the hiring fair itself whilst also providing a new means of promoting the alternative system of hiring contracts. They also offered the Church the opportunity of competing with and challenging the carnivalesque excesses associated with the hiring day. The passing of legislation facilitating easier abolition of fairs, prompted a third phase of agitation in the 1870s. Critics now called for totally separate hiring fairs for men and women and lobbied for parliamentary intervention to secure the legal suppression of all hirings in the East Riding. Such, briefly, is the general course of the Anglican campaign against hiring fairs in the East Riding

of Yorkshire in the mid-Victorian period. The remainder of this chapter will seek to examine the motives behind this campaign of attempted cultural reformation.

Events of this nature had always had their critics. Opposition to hiring fairs had existed in the East Riding prior to the 1850s.⁹ In some respects, therefore, the mid-Victorian campaign merely continued this tradition. There was a noticeable increase in the level of critical comment and reforming activity in the East Riding from early 1850s, however. One reason for this may have been the manner in which the capitalist modernisation of agriculture was impacting upon hiring fairs in the East Riding at this time. As we have seen, the symbiosis between the expansion of high farming and farm service in the East Riding meant that hiring fairs remained important both as labour markets and as popular festivals. In short, a possible explanation for the increased hostility towards the hiring fair during the mid-nineteenth century is its continuation and even its revitalisation at this time. Contemporary attacks upon the fairs were certainly informed by a mixture of outrage and incomprehension that an event of this nature not only survived, but appeared to be enjoying something of a renaissance. For many, the survival of the hiring fair was regarded as an aberration in an age of economic and social advancement: a bulwark against moral progress. Observers questioned, for example, how, 'in an age of social and civil improvement' the attractions offered at the hiring fair were 'allowed to occupy the place of more rational and instructive recreations'.¹⁰ Another, articulated his amazement 'that such a monstrous iniquity should have been tolerated so long, and that no one should have put his shoulder to the wheel to remove it as an accursed nuisance,

⁹ One critic of the hirings, Joseph Dent, Esq., of Ribston Hall, writing in 1850s claimed to have campaigned against hiring fairs 'for over 40 years', *Hull Advertiser*, 8 November, 1850.

¹⁰ *Hull Advertiser*, 9 November, 1849.

the very base of morality and religion'.¹¹ Such feelings were heightened by an awareness that, elsewhere, successful action had been taken against hiring fairs. Many of the printed attacks upon East Riding hirings featured evidence of hostile comment directed at hiring fairs outside of the Riding and drew inspiration from the tactics that had been employed to reform and even suppress them. Most of this was Anglican in origin.¹² Anglican clergy, the leading reformers of hirings in the East Riding were, therefore, following a course of action initiated within a national institution, the lead given by their peers elsewhere inspiring action in their own locality. However, in order fully to appreciate the centrality of the Church of England's role in the campaign against hirings in the East Riding it is necessary to examine the manner in which the farm service system had come to pose contradictions before the institutional and spiritual objectives of the Established Church.

One might expect the Church of England's clergy to be concerned about an event like the hiring fair. Anglican clergymen constituted the 'traditional intellectuals' of rural society. Defining Anglican clergy in this manner offers a way into interpreting their position in the social order and the motivations underlying their actions. As indicated in the introduction of this thesis, the concept of the traditional intellectual is derived from the work of Antonio Gramsci. Much of Gramsci's writing on the function of intellectuals in capitalist societies focused upon the role the 'organic intellectuals'.¹³ These are thinkers

¹¹ Rev. F. O. Morris, *The Present System of Hiring Farm Servants in the East Riding of Yorkshire with Suggestions for its Improvement*, London, 1854, p. 5.

¹² Examples include: Morris, 'Present System', Stephenson, 'Rise and Progress'; Rev. Greville J. Chester, *Statute Fairs: Their Evils and Their Remedy*, York, 1856; Rev. James Skinner, *Facts and Opinions Concerning Statute Hirings, Respectfully Addressed to the Landowners, Clergy, Farmers and Tradesmen of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, London, 1861; Rev. J. Eddowes, *Martinmas Musings: Or Thoughts about the Hiring Day*, Drifffield, 1854.

¹³ For a fuller elaboration on the concepts of 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectual' and related themes see Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith eds, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971, pp. 1-23; R. Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, pp. 93-101.

and organisers in society and in the sphere of production who are assimilated into the dominant economic class becoming 'a real organic vanguard of the upper classes, to which economically they belonged'.¹⁴ These intellectuals act to organise, for example, ideas, culture, education and the legal system and the forces of production and, in doing so, perform a fundamental role in securing social hegemony for the ruling class. An example of such a group are the 'ecclesiastics' who under the feudal mode of production were 'organically bound' to the feudal aristocracy.¹⁵ Traditional intellectuals, in contrast, exist in a semi or wholly independent relationship to the ruling class and put themselves forward as 'autonomous and independent of the dominant social group'.¹⁶ These are often the organic intellectuals of a former mode of production, or a mode of production in the course of being superseded. One of the key tasks of a class associated with the new mode of production seeking to construct social hegemony is to develop its own organic intellectuals who must simultaneously 'assimilate and to conquer "ideologically" the traditional intellectuals'.¹⁷ Gramsci argued that in nineteenth-century England the industrial bourgeoisie exercised economic hegemony over the land-owning class but was less certain in its assertion of hegemony at the politico-intellectual level. The result was, he suggested, that the landed elite were not totally conquered, but retained their prominence over the politico-intellectual sphere. Nevertheless, although they retained a high level of control and coherence as a group they were assimilated as traditional intellectuals by the new ruling group: 'The old land-owning aristocracy is joined to the industrialists by a kind of suture which is precisely that which in other countries unites the traditional intellectuals with the new dominant classes'.¹⁸ Within this frame-work the role of Church of England and

¹⁴ Hoare and Nowell Smith, 'Prison Notebooks', p. 60.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 7

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 18

its clergy in the Victorian period can be interpreted in a variety of ways. One might be to regard them as being absorbed with the landed interest as 'traditional' and 'subaltern' intellectuals as part of a governing apparatus which enabled them to continue their traditional role and retain their customary world-view: so long as these adapted to and reinforced prevailing 'bourgeois' notions of economic life and morality.¹⁹ In this respect criticism of and interventions against events such as hiring fairs by Anglican clergymen were a continuation of their established role as agents of a national institution with a primary responsibility for the maintenance of morality and social order. A different and alternative view might emphasise Gramsci's point that traditional intellectuals think of themselves as "'independent", autonomous, endowed with a character of their own, etc'.²⁰ It may be worth considering, therefore, whether Victorian clergymen did increasingly exhibit greater autonomy and independence from any social group and whether this encouraged a new level of dynamism and earnestness on their part. It can be argued, for example, that: the challenge of economic and social change, the resurgence of Non-conformity, the questioning of the established nature of the Church of England, a gradual decline in aristocratic patronage and a rise in the recruitment of middle-class graduates into the Church, gradually shifted the social orientation of the clergy away from a close and intimate association with the landed interest towards a more autonomous and independent role: one more akin to that performed by modern secular professions.²¹ This professionalism - which saw a transition across the Victorian period from clergymen as country gentlemen 'rounding his parish in the style of country gentleman, in carriage and pair' to 'a more narrowly

¹⁹ R. Gray, 'Bourgeois hegemony in Victorian Britain', in T. Bennett, et al, eds, *Culture Ideology and Social Process: A Reader*, Open University Press, London, 1981, p. 239.

²⁰ Hoare and Nowell Smith. 'Prison Notebooks', p. 8.

²¹ A. J. Russell, *The Clerical Profession*, S. P. C. K., London, 1980; p. 6; A. Haig, *The Victorian Clergy*, Croom Helm, London, 1984, pp. 2-29; M. J. D. Roberts, 'Private patronage and the Church of England 1800-1900', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32, 1981, pp. 204-8.

professional ... figure, whose short black coat was practical for pedalling a bicycle'- and the traits that it advocated - "altruism", "sense of vocation", "service", "close relationship between professional and client", "code of practice", 'absence of cash nexus'" - has been regarded as instrumental in promoting an administrative and pastoral reformation in the Church of England during the nineteenth century. The result of this, it has been argued, was an increase in the efficiency, diligence and social activism of the parish clergy of the Church from the 1830s and especially the 1850s.²² A transformation in outlook which played an important role in prompting church building, an increase in the numbers of clergy and curates, and greater vigilance against pluralism, non-residence, and clerical laxity.²³ This suggests that the campaign against hiring fairs did not merely represent continuity, but was also a by-product of this administrative and pastoral professionalism which manifested itself in a greater sense of social mission at the parish level.²⁴

This shift towards what might be regarded as a more professional and autonomous orientation for the clergy was far from total however. A major reason for this was that the values and traits that were emphasised in this rising tide of professionalism, were not primarily reflective of contemporary ideologies of professional practice, but stemmed instead from a revival of older traditions which had surfaced within the Church of England after the Reformation. Thus, although there was a heightened sense professionalism

²² A.D. Gilbert, 'The Land and the Church', in G.E. Mingay, ed., *The Victorian Countryside*, Volume 1, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981, p. 52; R. O' Day, 'The Clerical Renaissance in England and Wales', in G. Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian England, I, Traditions*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988, p. 186 for the traits; For a discussion of professionalism see also Russell, 'Clerical Profession'; Haig, 'Victorian Clergy', B. Heeney, 'On Being a Mid-Victorian Clergyman', *Journal of Religious History*, VII, 1973; D. Macleane, 'The Church as Profession', *National Review*, 1899.

²³ G. Parsons, 'Reform, Revival and Realignment: The Experience of Victorian Anglicanism', in Parsons, ed., 'Religion I', pp. 17-29

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 27.

developing within the Church of England during the mid-Victorian period this drew upon lapsed internal traditions rather than the contemporary world:

What we are seeing in the Victorian period is *not* the emergence of a new profession, modelled on the contemporary secular professions, but rather a conscious revival of the occupational professionalism of the early modern period and an urge to systematize this professionalism.²⁵

At the heart of this systematisation was the impulse provided by the revival of Evangelicalism and the emergence of the Oxford Movement: both emphasised the importance of maintaining and reviving the pastoral role of the parish clergyman. The Broad Church tradition also came to embrace the pastoral ideal with more urgency in the mid-Victorian period.²⁶ The result was an approach which, at the parish level, combined renewed activism and innovation with organisational traditionalism and ideological conservatism. Despite the economic and social changes that were transforming urban and rural England in the early and mid-nineteenth century the majority of clergymen remained committed to an essentially fixed and hierarchical view of society and their traditional alliance with the landed interest:

The ideal parish, most early Victorians continued to believe, was one in which squire and parson presided jointly over a close-knit and deferential local community. The gradual abandonment of this eighteenth-century paradigm was to be an important aspect of Victorian Church history, but equally important was the fact that Anglicans generally abandoned it with great reluctance, and often long after fundamental social changes had turned into an ecclesiastical liability. ... So deep had been the Church's historic commitment to the influence of the great landed families - so strong was the nostalgia for an idealized past in which social mores had had been prescribed under the paternalism of the 'big house' and the parsonage - that the Church adjusted very slowly to the less prescriptive, more pluralised type of society which was emerging.²⁷

²⁵ O' Day, 'Clerical Renaissance', p. 200.

²⁶ Parsons, 'Reform and Realignment', pp. 24-5.

²⁷ A.D. Gilbert, 'The Land and the Church', p. 47.

Both of the traditions most associated with the parochial revival adhered also to the ideal of an ordered, hierarchical society cemented by relations of paternalism and deference. Both saw intervention and activism in the world of popular culture as a means of restoring and maintaining social relations of this kind. Evangelical sentiment, concerned as it was with sin and salvation and the need for social and self discipline, encouraged a more confrontational stance against events which, as was the case with the hiring fair, gathered people together, encouraged an absence of restraint, and placed temptations of an exceptional and concentrated nature before them.²⁸ The growing influence of the Oxford Movement within the Church of England at this time was also significant, particularly its emphasis upon the importance of the pastoral role of the parish priest. Both Evangelicals and Tractarians, despite their differences, emphasised, therefore, the importance of confronting sinful behaviour and promoting the values of paternalism and deference as the basis of social relations. Although seemingly anachronistic in a society in which capitalist market relations were promoting an increasingly stratified and geographically-mobile population, these ideals retained a powerful attraction to Anglicans throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed such ideals were generally regarded as anything but anachronistic by their advocates. For many rural clergymen, they were advocated as a necessary response to the seemingly corrosive effects that the development of agrarian capitalism was having upon rural social relations. When coupled with an emphasis upon the importance of revitalising the parochial system these beliefs provided the basis for a new exemplar of a professional and activist ministry for both Evangelicals and High Churchmen: as Roberts has noted, by the 1840s:

The growth of evangelicalism led both clergy and laymen to superintend their parishes with a conscientiousness not seen since Puritan days - and the challenge being laid down by the evangelicals, High Church clergymen redoubled their zeal for parish work. ... The idea that the clergy should be the main instruments of social reform and control had become an inextricable part of the Church of England.²⁹

Other historians, including Alan Gilbert, Brian Heeney, James Obelkevich and Alun Howkins have also emphasised the importance for rural clergy of these ideals and their organisational corollary the parochial system into and throughout the mid-Victorian period, with the late 1840s and early 1850s marking the beginning of a more energetic and professional phase in the relationship between the Church of England and rural communities.³⁰ Roberts has suggested the role assigned by these ideals for rural clergymen in their parishes was 'particularly suited for rural areas where the parish was small enough for the clergyman to know all his flock and where dissent was weak enough not to disturb the needed homogeneity'.³¹ As we shall see in this chapter, these are not the circumstances that generally prevailed in the rural East Riding. This does not exclude the possibility that the ideals were inspirational, however. As the work of Obelkevich on Lincolnshire indicates, the attempt to re-assert parochial paternalism could also be a response to adverse local circumstances: the ideal of an active parish priest being employed as a means countering the expansion of rural Methodism, for example.³²

²⁸ On Evangelicalism and its attitude towards popular recreations see: Malcolmson, 'Popular Recreations', pp. 100-107.

²⁹ D. Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 1979, p. 62.

³⁰ Gilbert, 'The Land and the Church'; Heeney, 'On being a Clergyman'; J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1976; A. Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England 1850-1925: a Social History*, Harper Collins, London, 1991.

³¹ Roberts, 'Paternalism', p. 156.

³² Obelkevich, 'Rural Society', pp. 103-182

East Yorkshire seems to reflect its own combination of the ideological and institutional developments outlined above. Here also, the mid-Victorian period was a time of renewed activism on the part of the Church of England. The 40 year archepiscopate of Edward Vernon Harcourt which lasted from 1808 to 1848 was noted more for its length than its vigour. His successor Thomas Musgrave whose archepiscopate ended in 1860 has been described as a man who 'dreaded all change' and he was succeeded by Longley who was transferred to Canterbury in 1862.³³ It is his successor, William Thomson, Archbishop from 1863 until 1890, who has been credited with bringing about a significant change of fortune for the Church of England in Yorkshire: 'During his time as Archbishop there was a development of Church work in the Diocese of such as had never been seen before. ... He was the architect of the modern Diocese of York'.³⁴ On his accession he faced a situation in which the Anglican provision for worship and its spiritual vitality was lacking. According to Thomson's primary Visitation in 1865 only 84 parishes out of 638 had weekday services and 118 held less than the legal requirement of two full services a week. In 276 parishes there were less than 12 celebrations of Holy Communion in a year and only 176 incumbents claimed to keep a list of communicants. Some parishes had no communicants at all.³⁵ In part this was due to the problems posed by a prevalence of large scattered rural parishes often embracing a number of hamlets, but pluralism, absenteeism and neglect were also impediments to the spiritual vitality of the Church.³⁶ Thomson sought to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Church of England by acting against pluralism and absenteeism and expanding religious provision through

³³ H. Kirk-Smith, *William Thomson, Archbishop of York: His Life and Times*, S.P.C.K., London, 1958, p. 154.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

³⁵ Archbishop W. Thomson, *Work and Prospects. A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of York Delivered at his Primary Visitation in October 1865 by William Lord Archbishop of York*, London, 1865, p. 24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-23.

church building, church restoration and promoting the frequency of worship. In all areas he experienced success. During his archepiscopate 103 new churches were consecrated; 5 new rural deaneries, 1 new archdeaconry and 176 new ecclesiastical districts were created; congregations increased, Holy Communion became more frequent and better attended and weekday services also increased in number.³⁷ The mid-Victorian period was also a time of reorganisation and expansion in Church provision of both primary and adult education and a period of activism in form of clergy promoting village feasts, harvest festivals, country sports and friendly societies.³⁸ It needs to be acknowledged, however, that an improvement in the quality and energy of the parish clergy of the diocese preceded Thomson. Yorkshire had been a centre of the Evangelical revival in the Church of England and from the 1830s especially its influence had prompted the beginnings of a change in the character and energy of Anglicanism at the parish level. Early examples of this more zealous and reformed generation of Anglican clergy are William Richardson, his younger brother James and their nephew Thomas, of whom were influential in promoting Evangelicalism in York.³⁹ Although the York remained a predominantly Low Church diocese there was also a contribution from the High Church tradition. Archdeacon R.I. Wilberforce and Rev. F. O. Morris were men 'imbued with the spirit of the Oxford Movement' and both played a prominent role in promoting school building: it was clergymen and curates of this persuasion who were most eager

³⁷ Kirk-Smith, 'Life and Times', p. 147.

³⁸ J. Lawson, *Primary Education in Yorkshire*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: No. 10, 1959, pp. 16-25; D. Neave, 'Elementary Education: 1850-1902, in Neave and Ellis, 'Atlas', p. 114; J.F.C. Harrison, *Learning and Living 1790 - 1960: A Study in The History of the English Adult Education Movement*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961, pp. 187-193; D. Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830-1914*, Hull University Press, 1991; E. Royle, *The Victorian Church in York*, University of York, Borthwick Paper: No. 64, 1983, p. 24; *York Herald*, 13 October, 1866, 'Annual Meeting of the Church Congress at York', Rev. W. Randolph, 'Social Conditions and Recreations of the Poor'.

³⁹ E. Royle, 'Victorian Church', pp. 5-6.

to promote rational recreations in their parishes.⁴⁰ In general, the middle of the nineteenth century witnessed a 'new generation' of clergy, resident in their parish and more active than their predecessors becoming more influential within the Anglican Church in the diocese of York. It was clergymen of this ilk who themselves urged Thomson at the beginning of his episcopate to arrest further the process of Anglican decline.⁴¹ As was the case in many north-midland and northern counties of England, however, this project of organisational and ideological renewal by the Church of England occurred in adverse circumstances in the form of an unfavourable settlement pattern and decades of rural Methodist growth. It will be argued here, that this problematic conjuncture of Anglican revivalism and adverse circumstances helps to explain the growing antagonism of Anglicanism towards hiring fairs in the York and East Riding area.

Church opposition to hiring fairs can be analysed in terms of two analytical critiques: internal and external. Both relate to the ideological and organisational concerns outlined above. By the 'internal critique' is meant those criticisms that related to the actual content of the fairs. Here the Evangelicals' concern with the dangers of 'the world' were most salient. From this perspective, the hiring fairs offered a concentrated example of the temptations that so often precipitated a life of sin and eternal damnation. In this respect, the Church focused upon the carnivalesque turbulence of the hiring fair, its reputation for crime, violence, disorder, drunkenness, and sexual promiscuity. The general anxieties that the internal character of hiring fairs generated within many of its Anglican critics are illustrated by a memorial issued by the York Diocesan Board of Education in 1856:

⁴⁰ Neave, 'Rural Education', p. 114; Royle, 'Victorian Church', p. 21.

Young people of both sexes, at an age when the affections and passions are least under control, are assembled annually at Statute Fairs. ... This is their first introduction into the world, as it may be called, after they have left the school; it is an assembly from which moral control is simply excluded: and the manifold temptations, to which even those who have been carefully and modestly brought up are thus at once exposed, must be evident to the most cursory observer. In such scenes, the bolder and more dissolute overbear the more scrupulous and timid; the practised in vice seduce the inexperienced; and the very force of numbers aids the work of corruption.⁴²

This memorial combines two of the most important concerns of clergymen regarding the internal practices of the hiring fair. Firstly there is the concentrated nature of the temptations placed before the young farm servants in an environment that appeared to be dedicated to moral laxity. In addition, there is also the concern regarding the fairs' strategic location in the life-cycle of the young farm servants. Compelled to attend by the need to find employment, innocents were then seduced by the overpowering atmosphere of indulgence and excess and led into a life of sin. As another Anglican critic of the hirings put it 'Many we know have gone to the statutes only for the purpose of being hired, their passions have been excited at the dancing saloon and their senses dulled by intoxicating drinks, and thus they have gone home divested of all self-respect, too often to begin a life of sin and wickedness'.⁴³ Such was the intensity of the temptations offered, it was imagined that even those farm servants who had been socialised into a culture of Christian morality by the Church were deemed to be lost in one day of carnivalesque disorder:

It was in vain that in their schools they circulated lessons of sobriety, modesty, and general good conduct if, as soon as soon as their scholars went forth to their active duties of life, they allowed them to be exposed, at an age when the powers

⁴¹ Kirk-Smith, 'Life and Times', p. 27, p. 29.

⁴² Memorial of the York Diocesan Board of Education, 'Hiring of Farm Servants', appendix to Chester, 'Statute Fairs'; this memorial was also published in the local press, see for example, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18th October, 1856.

⁴³ Skinner, *A Letter to the Masters and Mistresses of Farm Houses in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, p. 23, Appendix II, of 'Facts and Opinions'.

of self command are weak, to such strong temptations as these fairs present to them.⁴⁴

Parish clergy also mounted a vehement attack upon the hiring practices of farmers. The fact that hiring took place in the open drew analogies with slavery and the obvious comparisons between women offering their services in the street and prostitution were not lost either. However, it was the criteria used to select both male and female servants that caused the greatest concern. Farmers were attacked for neglecting moral character when choosing and negotiating with servants. The Rev. Greville Chester, a prominent figure in the campaign against hiring fairs in the East Riding, summed up the views of many of his clerical colleagues when he attacked employers' propensity to 'hire their servants, of both sexes, solely on the recommendations of brute strength', adding 'that to ask a character is so exceptional an event, as to be almost unknown'.⁴⁵ He also focused upon the social and moral consequences that resulted from this neglect, suggesting that by not discriminating on moral grounds farmers legitimated immorality because 'the most idle and profligate have as much chance of getting a good place as the most industrious and steady'.⁴⁶ Like many other Anglican critics of hiring fairs, however, Chester also regarded the hiring fair as a structural problem because of its location in the life-cycle of the young farm servants. In a telling piece of moral sociology, Chester linked the internal dynamics of the hiring fair to a more general parochial problem: the mobile, independent and allegedly immoral and unstable lifestyle of the farm servant. He argued that the hiring fair corrupted farm servants and that the farm servant system then ensured that those who had been corrupted then propagated yet more immorality throughout the farmhouses and villages of the East Riding:

⁴⁴ *York Herald*, 1 October, 1864, 'The Social Science Congress at York', Rev. E.R. Randolph, 'On Statute Hirings'.

⁴⁵ Chester, 'Statute Fairs', p. 7.

the system under consideration is injurious, because, by its means, bad and profligate persons are disseminated over the country far and wide, to work as much evil as a bad example can work in a year's time in one parish then move on to pursue the same work of corruption in another.⁴⁷

He also focused on the worsening relations between labour and capital prompted by the custom of annual hiring: 'By the originally heedless manner of hiring, and by the knowledge that their connection will cease in a year, that feeling of mutual kindness which, in a Christian country, should subsist between masters and servants, is lessened or destroyed'.⁴⁸ In part, therefore, Chester's critique of the hiring fair was 'external' in that he regarded it as an event that should be viewed in systemic terms: within the context of its interconnectedness to the two other pillars of the farm service system- annual contracts and living-in. From this broader, external view, the problem of the hiring fair was related, in systemic and causal fashion, to a deeper malaise permeating rural social relations.

This external critique of the hiring fair regarded the problematic behaviour witnessed at hiring fairs not so much as an exceptional transgression of everyday norms but more as a reflection of the farm servants' normal behaviour: behaviour that reflected a moral crisis precipitated by changes in the nature of farm service. It was suggested, for example, that even if the hirings were abolished, the remaining aspects of the farm servant system would ensure that moral corruption would continue to be a feature of rural society:

If the hirings were abolished tomorrow the real evil would not be one whit affected. The statutes only bring to the surface evils which have been accumulating for years within. They

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 15

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 13

concentrate for some twelve hours within the confined area of the town in which they are held, evils which spread themselves over the whole district during the remainder of the year. ... It appears to me that it is the normal state of the agricultural population, not the accidental extravagance of the statutes that is so much to be deplored. So long as effort is restricted to the latter there can be little hope of permanent good.⁴⁹

Two aspects of the farm servants' way of life away from the hiring fair generated the greatest anxiety for clergymen. Firstly, perceived changes in the customary practices associated with farm servants living-in arrangements; and secondly, the farm servants propensity to change employers each year. Living-in, or 'the Farmhouse System' as it was sometimes called, created anxiety for a number of reasons. There was a feeling that farmers no longer exercised the moral and social control over farm servants that they once had. The church expected farmers to act *in loco parentis*, to exert discipline and control over farm servants and to care for their moral and spiritual welfare. Perhaps most importantly, they expected farmers to encourage and even insist upon regular attendance at the parish church. This ideal of the farmer acting as the moral and spiritual guardian of the farm servants in his charge, is encapsulated in one of the numerous letters that appeared in the East Riding press lamenting the absence of this regime of familial paternalism in local farm-houses:

Great responsibility attaches itself to the heads of families in reference to domestics and dependants. The souls of these persons are in a great measure committed to their charge, and it is incumbent on them to feel a lively interest in their welfare. The heads of families should not content themselves with giving their servants every facility to attend public worship, but to use that authority with which they are invested to command and enforce a diligent attention to all religious duties. This may be difficult but it may be done. Diligently using means and looking on high for Divine grace, we may indulge the hope that servants will manifest a disposition to

⁴⁹ Letter 'Nemo' *Yorkshire Gazette*, November 21, 1863.

serve God and to glorify him in that station of life which it has pleased his providence to place them.⁵⁰

The Church of England's view was that a farm service system once characterised by a close familial paternalism and ties of mutual respect, had in recent years degenerated. In the past, it was believed, a paternal regime had maintained the chain of connection between rich and poor which was so central to the Anglican ideal of a stable parish community. Now, it was suggested, farmers neglected this moral dimension of farm service and were concerned only with their servants' performance as a factor of production. Farmers now regarded their servants 'as mere machines who must get through a certain amount of work', and 'as if they were unconscious of any higher motive, and unlikely to be influenced by any more sympathising treatment'.⁵¹ Farmer and servant relations had, as a result, become depersonalised and were now based upon nothing more than the cash-nexus reinforced by the legal controls provided by the law of master and servant.

A forceful articulation of this discourse which delineated a decline in the degree of moral regulation exerted by farmers over farm servants and regarded it as a major cause of immorality and declining social cohesion was advanced by R.I. Wilberforce, Archdeacon of the East-Riding, in the 1840s.⁵² Wilberforce proffered an idealised model of society as a family: hierarchical, paternal and bound by mutual affection and a common faith. He argued that within this 'common household' those of the higher ranks should exercise 'a parents duty' and 'a parents love' towards those placed under their care and control. This

⁵⁰ Letter, 'Farmers and Masters of Families', John Stephen Hall, Rector of Dalby, *Yorkshire Gazette*, October 25, 1856.

⁵¹ Rev. F.D. Legard, 'The Education of farm Servants', in Idem ed., *More About Farm Lads*, London, 1865, p. 1; For a similar analysis from the pen of a farmer see J. Wells, *The Relative Duties of Employers and Employed in Agriculture*, Hull, J. Pulleyn, 1858.

ideal was contrasted with what Wilberforce regarded as the reality of parish life in the East Riding. He focused in particular on the degenerate condition of the farm servant population. He voiced his disquiet that farmers neglected the moral character of their servants and were seemingly unconcerned at the possibility of improper sexual conduct between male and female servants boarded on the same farm. He noted that farm servants in rural parishes were spoken of as 'bad to do with' and that farmers themselves complained that they 'grow every year more headstrong, wayward and selfish'. He complained that they permitted their farm servants to 'roam abroad' and 'neglect public worship' and that, as a consequence, villages on a Sunday were full of 'unemployed loiterers'.⁵³ He suggested, however, that farmers should look to their own lack of control as the main cause of this moral and social malaise:

But what can be expected when youth associate together without any moral restraint; when no law of love is set before them; when they are merely restrained like brute creatures from injuring their masters, but neither cause nor anxiety is felt lest they should injure themselves. If you sow the wind must you not reap the whirlwind?⁵⁴

Significantly, Wilberforce contrasted the improvements that farmers had achieved in the economic sphere with their indifference towards the moral condition of their farm servants:

My complaint is that your crops are better educated than formerly but not your fellow Christians. Your Soil is kept clean, that nothing vile may grow in it, but how many of your fellow creatures have to be plucked out as weeds fit only for the burning.⁵⁵

⁵² Rev. R.I Wilberforce, *A Letter to the Gentry, Yeomen and Farmers of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding*, Bridlington, 1842.

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 2-6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 6

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3.

He then called upon farmers to restore the paternal authority, kindness, concern for moral character and regular attendance at church which he believed had once been characteristic of farm service as a social institution; so that 'the harshness of constraint may thus be lost sight of in the friendliness of family regard'.⁵⁶ This critique of the unruly, independent and immoral character of farm servants and farmers' failure to exercise care and authority over them continued into and throughout the mid-Victorian period. The basic argument was that the absence of an effective regime of paternal control and care meant that a system that had once provided order now created discord between farmers and servants:

I stand by and see with dismay the breach widening between these men and their employers - masters complaining that they cannot get their work done, that servants are not what they used to be - and the lads showing by their insubordination and wilfulness that the hand of authority sits lightly upon them. ... is there not a revolution going on, in which masters and servants are, as it were, changing places? Hard names are called on both sides, the farmers are abused as tyrants and slaveholders, the servants for being past control.⁵⁷

Similar observations were made by other Anglican observers of the farm servant system. The Rev. F. Simpson of Boynton and Carnaby in northern Holderness, a parish with a large farm servant population housed on isolated farmsteads complained of: 'the loss and inconvenience caused to farmers by the constant misconduct of their servants, and the total want on their part of any means of control over them, except the objectionable one, ... viz., application to a magistrate', his view was that if the system was allowed to continue unchanged 'the present race of farm servants will shortly become, what they are well nigh already, more degraded than the animals they fodder'.⁵⁸ His daughter, Mary Simpson, was a tireless worker for the educational and moral improvement of farm servants. As part of her missionary work she visited farm servants in the

⁵⁶ Ibid, 10-13.

⁵⁷ Legard, 'Education of Farm Servants', p. 3.

evenings in an attempt to attract them to her adult night schools. She was shocked at the lack of moral control exercised over farm servants and recorded the following on her first visit to a farm house:

I went to the farmhouse parlour, and stayed for a few minutes talking with its inmates; then down a passage to the farmhouse kitchen, to talk to *its* inmates, consisting of seven young men and youths, and three young women, who had all just finished supper; the girls were "washing up", the lads were sitting on benches about the kitchen or near the fire; there was no housekeeper, no older person with them; that is just what I saw, and just what takes place every evening of their lives.⁵⁹

In her diaries she registered her shock and disgust at the farmers' neglect of farm servants and their seeming inability to exert control over them 'they are sadly ignorant and lawless. ... Every farmhouse that I go into, I hear the same story. The master and mistress have no control whatever over their servants except in their actual work'.⁶⁰ She contrasted the apparent lack of care and control exercised by farmers with the ideal of moral stewardship she believed to be characteristic in 'a gentleman's house':

I think, the blame rests most with the farmers and their wives, in having that number of young servants and not living amongst them; quite forgetting that in every gentleman's house with anything like that number of young servants, there are upper servants, male and female, whose first duty it is to keep order in the household, whereas in a farmhouse, the fore-man, who is the only person supposed to have any authority in the kitchen, is very frequently under twenty, and seldom more than twenty-three.⁶¹

This concern regarding the consequences of the absence of paternal control in the farmhouse was particularly acute in relation to the sexual potentialities of young farm servants left unsupervised in the evenings. Farmers and their wives

⁵⁸ Letter, Rev. F. Simpson, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 28 January, 1854.

⁵⁹ M. Simpson, *Ploughing and Sowing; or, Annals of an evening School in a Yorkshire Village, and the Work that Grew out of it*, Ed., Rev. D. Legard, London, 1861.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 1.

were accused, for example, of dismissing 'open and habitual fornication' amongst servants as 'mere sweethearting' and for being tolerant towards 'unwedded maternity'.⁶² E.B. Portman, who acted as the East Riding commissioner for the 1867-8 parliamentary report which examined the employment of children, young persons and women in agriculture endorsed these views when he complained that 'the masters as a whole seem unaware that they are in duty bound to take some interest in the moral condition of their servants. The separation of the sleeping rooms is very often most incomplete'.⁶³ Observations of a similar nature are repeated in published tracts and pamphlets, and in the periodic Visitation Returns, conducted by the Archbishop of York. A fairly typical response from the latter was that of incumbent of Etton, who remarked that the 'greatest impediment to the spiritual improvement' of his and other East Riding rural parishes was 'the present mode of hiring farm servants and the low state of morality among them. Leading to such a want of chastity among the young women'.⁶⁴ Archbishop Thomson was, therefore, articulating the views of many rural clergymen when he attacked the living arrangements and sexual relations tolerated by farmers:

Left to themselves in the farm-house together in an evening young lads and young women, without religious training, or any clear notions of moral duty, can only corrupt one another. One could tell before experience that such a system would bring ruin upon young girls, and harden lads into insubordination and sensuality; and the results of experience would confirm our forecast.⁶⁵

This problem was exacerbated in the eyes of rural clergymen with the expansion of the hind-house system after 1850. This meant that on many farmsteads

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 2.

⁶² Letter, 'Nemo', *Yorkshire Gazette*, December 26, 1863.

⁶³ BPP 1867-8, XVII, *Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, First Report, p. 100.

⁶⁴ Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1865 Visitation Returns (V/Ret. 1865) Etton.

⁶⁵ Thomson, 'Work and Prospects', pp. 14-15.

farmers were non-resident and had no contact with, never mind influence over, their servants. This meant that the control and supervision of the servants had passed from their social superiors to what one clergymen referred to as 'ignorant hinds'.⁶⁶

A related criticism of the system was that yearly contracts and annual hiring encouraged a mobile and itinerant lifestyle amongst the young farm servants. This was also seen a prime cause of the perceived deterioration of social relations:

perhaps the principal cause of servants being so heedless, and masters so indifferent, is the too prevalent practice by which a servant changes his master almost as regularly as Martinmas comes round. Although he may have no complaint against his employer, and he himself well suited to the place, he regards it almost in the light of duty that he should attend the hirings, and seek an engagement elsewhere. Thus it comes to pass that there is no bond of cordial union between the master and the servant in his house. Seldom do either feel really feel that there interests are identical.⁶⁷

This mobility, it was suggested, not only prevented the development of a positive understanding between masters and servants it also placed a serious impediment before those clergymen seeking to revitalise the parochial system. This impediment took two main forms. Firstly, by drawing the majority of the rural working class into a mobile way of life, farm service forced the young to leave their parishes and withdrew them from the influence of clergy at an early age. When asked in the Visitation Returns to comment on the factors that most impeded their ministry and prevented them from retaining young people at Sunday School, many clergy cited the farm service system as the major problem commenting, for example, that: 'very little success, has attended any effort of this kind. The young people go out chiefly as Farm Servants, and at an early

⁶⁶ BIHR, V/Ret. 1865, Easington.

age.’ and ‘Boys and Girls go early into service.’ or ‘the parish is a poor one all go to service at 12 or 13 years of age.’ also represent typical responses from clergymen who were frustrated at their parishes being repeatedly denuded by the annual exodus of the young into farm service.⁶⁸ This growing antipathy to the institution of farm service was amplified by the difficulties experienced when clergymen attempted to reach the farm servants that the system brought into their parishes. Martinmas could bring a double frustration for parish clergy as the young formerly resident in the village settlement were replaced by an influx of farm servants hired onto isolated farmsteads away from the village centre and its parish church. Mary Simpson’s description of her father’s parish illustrates the consequences of this annual rotation of population:

This is a very scattered parish, entirely agricultural. ... Every farm (there are 12 in this parish) comprises in its household from 6 or 7 to 20 plough lads, according to the size of the farms; there ages varying from 14 to 24, but the greater part in their teens. These are all changed every year at Martinmas(i.e. the last week of November).⁶⁹

She noted that the scattered nature of the population meant that of ‘more than a hundred’ farm servants in the parish ‘only a few are near at hand’ and that in order to reach them she had to walk considerable distances visiting them at the farm houses and even walking next to them whilst they worked in the fields.⁷⁰ By the end of each year, she had usually won the confidence of many of them and she succeeded in attracting some to her evening school, but the custom for servants to move to a new farm each year meant that the work had to begin again every November. In Martinmas 1856, for example, she recorded that ‘My late scholars are all dispersed’ only three of them had remained within the parish

⁶⁷ Eddowes, ‘Martinmas Musings’, pp. 7-8

⁶⁸ BIHR V/Ret. 1865, Crayke; Bridlington; Foston on the Wolds.

⁶⁹ Simpson, ‘Ploughing and Sowing’, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

that year, the rest had hired on farms elsewhere.⁷¹ Such time, commitment and energy was beyond most clergymen whose attempts to reach farm servants were generally less successful than those of the remarkable Mary Simpson.⁷² The following recollection of a Wolds' clergyman offers an illustration of the problems posed for the rural clergyman by the mobile and independent lifestyle of the farm servants:

Of all classes of the community the clergy found none more difficult to deal with at that time than the farm lads. It was well nigh impossible to get in touch with them. They led isolated lives; they were at work from morning until night, and retired to rest early; but the greatest hindrance of all to gaining any influence was that they were only hired for a twelvemonth, and if by any favourable chance the clergy could in a few isolated cases bring them under their teaching, at the end of the year the lads had almost invariably gone to other and perhaps distant parishes, and they were no more seen.⁷³

On the other hand, a more visible and approachable farm servant population was not always a boon to parochial life. One prominent opponent of hirings and a noted critic of the immoral behaviour farm servants, was Rev. John Eddowes of Garton on the Wolds near Drifffield. Eddowes' tract *The Agricultural Labourer as he Really Is* discussed 'farm servants as a class' and attacked 'their present deep degradation', their 'ignorance', their 'sensuality' and their 'drunkenness'.⁷⁴ He also recorded his uneasy encounters with the belligerent independence of the farm servants that the system had brought into in his parish:

If it be summer, you will observe them here and there in knots of some six or seven, laughing and not infrequently insulting the passer-by speak to them of better things, and they will

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁷² For extended discussion of Mary Simpson and her work see Harrison, 'Learning and Living' pp. 188-9; C.B. Freeman, *Mary Simpson of Boynton Vicarage: Teacher of Ploughboys and Critic of Methodism*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: No. 28, 1972.

⁷³ Rev. M.C.F. Morris. *The British Workman Past and Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1928, p. 121.

⁷⁴ Rev. J Eddowes, *The Agricultural Labourer as He Really Is: Or, Village Morals in 1854*, Drifffield, 1854, pp. 3-15.

not heed you; and you will not have gone from them many yards, before a horse laugh will probably inform you that you and your gratuitous care for them are now the subject of their boisterous ridicule.⁷⁵

Mary Simpson also encountered the 'rough' culture of the young male servants and cited examples of it, including that of farm servants who congregated in gangs of twenty or thirty on Sunday evenings and caused a general disturbance 'shouting and swearing in their rough play and otherwise behaving uproariously'.⁷⁶ She also complained that church congregations were disturbed 'by the oaths and shouting of farm lads in the Churchyard' and cited the example of a group of farm servants who broke into a church and 'under pretence of celebrating a wedding, rung the bells so violently that the largest was broken', She referred to the farm servants who caused this damage as 'delinquents'.⁷⁷

The parochial ideal of religious homogeneity and social hierarchy under Anglican tutelage demanded regular attendance at church by all sections of the community. The discourse that increasingly demonised the institution of farm service is also evident in Churchmen's' attempts to analyse and explain the low levels of attendance at Church characteristic of rural East Riding parishes. In his tract *The Agricultural Labourer as he Really Is*, Rev. John Eddowes soliquized his ideal vision of worship in a rural community:

Sunday after Sunday the bells chime cheerily from the old church tower calling rich and poor alike to the house where all are equal, where there is one object of worship, one God and Saviour, and one form of prayer for every worshipper - the same for the servant and his master, the peasant and the squire: for all meet there as miserable sinners, and all seek the

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

⁷⁶ M. Simpson, 'The Life and Training of a Farm Boy', in Legard, ed., 'Farm Lads', p. 89

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 90

same grace. Surely this is the temple of God, it is the house of Prayer for all.⁷⁸

The reality, as Eddowes was swift to acknowledge, was very different, with few farmers and even fewer labourers and farm servants attending church on a regular basis.⁷⁹ The same complaint can be found in the Visitation Returns to the Archbishop of York. Rural clergy continually lamented low attendance at public worship, with 'The worldliness of the farmers' and especially 'indifference among the labouring classes' being reasons often cited.⁸⁰ Once again, many clergy focused upon the nature of the farm servant system when seeking to explain the absence of the working-class attendance at worship. Eddowes observed that even in the larger village settlements it was rare to see more than ten or twelve labourers at Church on a Sunday, and he emphasised that attendance by farm servants was particularly low stating that 'It is one of the most difficult tasks possible to induce the agricultural servant outwardly and with decency to respect the Sabbath and to repair to the temple of his God'.⁸¹ The specific reasons offered for this varied but the alleged degenerate condition of farm servants and the indifference of farmers were salient. The Rev. M.C.F. Morris felt that the farm servants' 'religious life was practically non-existent. ... Taking the class as a whole they were little better than heathens' who, he argued spent their Sundays

wandering about from farm to farm, looking at each other's horses, beasts, and anything of interest to them about the place. ... or if they were within easy reach of the villages, they would frequent them, and stand in groups at the corners of the streets, or hang about the church gates and watch the people as they went to and from public worship. They rarely entered the churches themselves.⁸²

⁷⁸ Eddowes, 'Agricultural Labourer', p. 10.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ BIHR, V/Ret. 1865, Uppér Helmsley, York.

⁸¹ Eddowes, 'Agricultural Labourer', p. 10

He also felt that farmers were partly responsible for this because they 'took little or no interest in their servants' moral or spiritual welfare. Occasionally a God-fearing master would insist on his men attending church ... but such instances were comparatively rare'.⁸³ Mary Simpson believed that in general this farmer neglect had meant that farmhouses become 'haunts of heathenish' and she claimed also that many farmers actively impeded their servants from attending church by 'arranging the hours for feeding cattle, &c., just at church time'.⁸⁴

One of the chief reasons advanced for the farm servants' absence from church, however, was the challenge of rural Nonconformity in the form of Wesleyan and, especially, Primitive Methodism. Wesleyan Methodism had established itself in the East Riding from the mid-eighteenth century and by 1819, over 100 Methodist chapels had been built.⁸⁵ From 1819 the challenge of Wesleyanism was augmented by the arrival of Primitive Methodism which made rapid progress in the rural East Riding and proved particularly successful in attracting the rural working class.⁸⁶ By the late-nineteenth century Methodism had not only challenged the monopoly of the Established Church but had become 'the dominant force in the religious life of the East Riding'.⁸⁷ The Census of Religious Attendance in 1851 illustrated the relative weakness of Anglicanism in the East Riding. Taking the Driffield registration district as an example, the religious census of 1851 indicated that the Established Church attracted 31% of total recorded attendance compared with a combined Methodist total of

⁸² Morris, *The British Workman*, pp. 121-2.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 122.

⁸⁴ Simpson, 'Ploughing and Sowing', p. 3, p. 97.

⁸⁵ D. and S. Neave, 'Protestant Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses', in S. Neave and S. Ellis, eds, *An Historical Atlas of East Yorkshire*, University of Hull Press, Hull, 1996, p. 108;

⁸⁶ J.S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984, pp. 104 -112.

⁸⁷ D. and S. Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses*, East Yorkshire Local History Society, C.Ward and Co., Bridlington, 1990, p. 5.

60.5%.⁸⁸ The pattern was similar in other predominantly rural registration districts such as Bridlington, Pocklington, Skirlaugh and Howden.⁸⁹ The Church of England fared better in the more urban areas such as Beverley and those parts of the York registration district which fell in the East Riding, but Methodism still outperformed the Church in the Riding as a whole recording a combined percentage share of attendance of 47.3 compared with the Church of England's 37.0 per cent.⁹⁰ Making the East Riding the fourth most dissenting county in the country in 1851 and second only to Cornwall as a stronghold of Methodism.⁹¹ The Visitation Returns of rural clergymen also offer testament of strength of the Methodist Churches in the East Riding. It was in the more isolated rural parishes in Holderness and on the Wolds, areas in which farm service was particularly prevalent, that the relative position of the Church was at its weakest. At Weaverthorpe, a 'close' parish dominated by Anglican landowners in the form of the Sykes family, the incumbent reported that 'The majority of the poor people are either Wesleyan or Primitive Methodists'.⁹² Similarly at Burton Agnes, another close parish, the Rev. Joseph Horden complained that 'the population is almost entirely Wesleyan'.⁹³ At Keyingham, the deficiency of communicants was attributed to 'The immense hold which dissenters have been permitted in past days to obtain in the Parish and where they strive, as being one of their strongholds, by every means to keep up, sending their best men'.⁹⁴ Here, even the previous incumbent had attended the evening services at the Wesleyan chapel! At North Frodingham, the vicar lamented: 'The ignorance of the people (chiefly agricultural labourers and farm

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 4; R.W. Ambler, 'Attendance at Religious Worship, 1851' in S. Neave and S. Ellis, 'Atlas', pp. 112-13.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid; B.I. Coleman, *The Church of England in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Social Geography*, The Historical Association, London, 1981, p. 40.

⁹¹ Ibid, D. Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian countryside: friendly societies in the rural East Riding, 1830-1912*, Hull University Press, Hull, 1991, pp. 10-11.

⁹² BIHR, V/Ret. 1877, Weaverthorpe.

⁹³ BIHR, V/Ret. 1865, Burton Agnes.

servants) which inclines them to that place of worship which offers them excitement'; he also noted the significance of 'there not being a church in the midst of the people as are the Dissenting chapels'.⁹⁵ This latter comment is a reminder that whereas the Church found itself disadvantaged by the changes in the settlement pattern prompted by agricultural modernisation, Methodism was able to thrive in the dispersed and isolated settlement pattern that posed such difficulties for the Church of England. Although Anglican church building accelerated during the mid-nineteenth century - the Sykes family expended a million and a half pounds on church building and restoration on the Wolds - it was not able fully to respond to the changing settlement pattern of the Riding and its provision remained poor in areas such as Holderness.⁹⁶ Although Methodists were sometimes prevented from building chapels in some closed parishes, its chapel-building achievements were impressive, with over 400 being constructed between the early-nineteenth century and the outbreak of the First World War.⁹⁷ The peak periods of chapel building were the 1820s and 30s and the 1860s and 70s and by the late-nineteenth century there were few East Riding settlements without a Methodist chapel.⁹⁸ Equally important was the flexibility and the adaptability of the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists circuit system which enabled them to reach out to the increasingly scattered rural population in a manner that was beyond the organisational conservatism of the Church. In the early days of evangelisation and later still in those communities with no chapel, services were performed in farm houses, cottages and even farm sheds as one of the early pioneers of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds, Henry Woodcock, recalled:

⁹⁴ BIHR, V/Ret. 1877, Keyingham.

⁹⁵ BIHR, V/Ret. 1868, North Frodingham.

⁹⁶ Kirk-Smith, 'Life and Times', p. 67; D. Neave, 'Anglican Church Building', in Neave and Ellis, 'Atlas', p. 110-111.

⁹⁷ Neave and Neave, 'Nonconformist Chapels', p.108

storm battered cowsheds, barns, stables, haylofts and coachhouses, were not despised ... cottages with mud walls and thatched roofs, were the most common meeting places; while lonely farmhouses, where, in kitchen or parlour, little knots of farmers and farm labourers listened, with kindly attention, to the words of life ... *these were their cathedrals*.⁹⁹

This recollection implies that, at least in the early decades of its growth, Primitive Methodism was a shared experience for farmers and farm labourers. However, the pattern of rural dissent seems to have developed increasingly along class lines during the nineteenth century with the labouring and farm servant population favouring Primitive Methodism whilst the farmers were more likely to be Wesleyan. The incumbent of Catwick, for example, observed that 'The labouring classes are as a rule Primitive Methodists. The class above these such as the village shopkeeper, blacksmith or smaller tenant of land Wesleyans and the upper class of farmers Churchmen'.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere, the Primitive Methodists were described as 'most popular with the working class'.¹⁰¹ It seems likely that Methodism and especially Primitive Methodism was able to articulate with the assertive and non-deferential culture of the farm servants who lived on the large arable farms scattered across the Wolds and Holderness areas. Werner's analysis of Primitive Methodist obituaries leads her to conclude that in the East Riding the Primitives were particularly successful in attracting young male and female servants, farm servants and labourers.¹⁰² This view, which emphasises the appeal of Primitive Methodism to the young working-class farm servants is given further support when one examines Anglican views of Methodism. Mary Simpson, whose work centred upon the villages of Boynton, Carnaby and Fraisthorpe in northern Holderness, found that both Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodism were active and popular in the area, the former having

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Rev. H. Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry: being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds*, London, 1889, p. 179.

¹⁰⁰ BIHR, V/Ret. 1865, Catwick.

¹⁰¹ BIHR, V/Ret. 1877, Fridaythorpe.

established a chapel the latter holding frequent cottage and outdoor camp meetings. She found that many of the young farm servants were attracted to Primitive Methodism in particular.¹⁰³ She was committed to the parochial ideal and regarded the Church as the only legitimate form of organised religion, advocating as she did 'One rule for all, one Sunday School, one place of worship, one mode of instruction'.¹⁰⁴ She found, however, that she lived in a district in which 'dissenting notions are universal' and where Methodism was 'the only religion that has any real hold on the people about here, young or old'.¹⁰⁵ Consequently her attitude towards Methodism hardened and she became increasingly bitter towards those she termed 'schismatics'.¹⁰⁶ She attacked them for forsaking their 'Apostolic church', for 'dividing Christ's people' and alienating the rural population from 'the church of their forefathers'.¹⁰⁷ Although regarding Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism as a constant hindrance to the Church, her reflections on its nature and impact indicate that she also recognised many of the reasons for its success. The Methodists reached out to isolated rural communities with their cottage services and camp meetings, and unlike many Anglican churches, they held services in the weekdays and evenings, times particularly appropriate for farm labourers and farm servants.¹⁰⁸ Simpson also recognised the failure of Anglicanism to bridge the cultural and social divide between the average clergymen and the rural working class:

If I tell them they should go to church, I am answered that they understand nothing if they do; and this is true. ... As to sermons where is the clergyman who ever preaches one of which every line is not Hebrew to them? Is it an impossibility

¹⁰² Werner, 'Primitive Methodist Connexion', pp. 155-156.

¹⁰³ Simpson, 'Ploughing and Sowing', p. 62, p. 97, p. 106, p. 158.

¹⁰⁴ Idem, 'Life and Training', p. 96.

¹⁰⁵ Idem, 'Ploughing and Sowing', p. 97.

¹⁰⁶ Freeman, 'Mary Simpson', p.39

¹⁰⁷ Simpson, Ploughing and Sowing, p. 157.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 162.

for a classically minded clergyman to adapt his language to the untaught?¹⁰⁹

In contrast Primitive Methodists with their absence of formality and their use of working-class preachers were able to articulate with the culture of the labouring poor, as Henry Woodcock, recalled:

the language of some of these preachers was sometimes strangely provincial, and their grammar very imperfect: ... but they knew how to preach the three R's- Ruin, Redemption, Regeneration. Their sentences, rough hewn and roughly expressed, were like the pebbles from the brook, thrown by a master slinger, and went whistling into the hearts of men who could not be well reached by any more polished weapons.¹¹⁰

He added also that labourers 'feel at home' in Methodist chapels 'as they do not at the Parish Church'.¹¹¹ The same point was recognised by the Rev. M.C.F. Morris when he observed that 'Their methods were simple and unconventional, and in their exhortations they used great plainness of language, so much so indeed that the local preachers commonly addressed their hearers in the broadest vernacular, so that every word sounded familiar and homely'.¹¹²

The view from the Church window was often less sympathetic in its explanation of the appeal of Primitive Methodism for the rural working-class, however:

they neither understand the beautiful prayers of the Church, nor the sermons addressed to them by well educated men, and therefore they go off to other places of worship, where the language of Prayer and Sermon alike though often irreverent and often exaggerated - is common and intelligible to their uncultivated minds.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

¹¹⁰ Woodcock, 'Piety', p. 229

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 262.

¹¹² M.C.F. Morris, *Yorkshire Reminiscences*, Oxford University Press, London, 1922, p. 34.

¹¹³ BIHR, V/Ret. 1868, North Frodingham.

As this comment unwittingly testifies Methodism and especially Primitive Methodism in offering what middle-class clergymen regarded as 'irreverent' and 'exaggerated' provided a religious experience that was more intense, exciting, and, with its offer of free and full salvation, liberating. Furthermore, in a world in which it remained a scarce commodity, it sought to offer a religious experience and forms of participation that were entertaining and enjoyable. A correspondent of the *Church Times* described a 'typical' Primitive Methodist service in the East Riding:

The people who seem so phlegmatic and unexcitable can howl, and bawl, and sigh and stamp at a meeting with an ardour with which at first sight they would not be credited. Church is altogether tame after the religious exercises to which they are accustomed. The staid chapel goers in our towns would think Bedlam had been let loose if they came upon a congregation of East Riding Primitive Methodists 'bringing to' some desperately hard subject. Bonnets fly about, the Almighty is ordered to 'do it' or to 'pour it out', in most imperative terms.¹¹⁴

Both aided the Primitives in their efforts to attract the young farm servants. Services of this kind and the camp meetings, love feasts, and processions that were characteristic of Primitive Methodism appealed because they offered a relief from the experience of life as servant. The moment of conversion and the experiential knowledge of forgiveness and reconciliation brought for them 'a deeply felt sense of release from bondage into freedom' in the form of becoming one of the 'liberated'.¹¹⁵ Mary Simpson was appalled by the Methodists doctrinal attachment to conversion rather than baptism as a means of entering Church, but she recognised the appeal that this had to many young farm servants 'they feel a great desire to be "brought in", or "converted", so they go to a camp meeting, are wound up to a strong state of excitement, "brought in", made "joined members", and then they think they can begin to be good - it was

¹¹⁴ *Church Times*, 22 July, 1887, cited in Kirk-Smith, 'Life and Times', p. 25.

no use trying before.'¹¹⁶ She was frustrated that many baptised Anglicans were lost to Methodism in this way, and found that even those she had succeeded in persuading to apply for confirmation in the Church attended camp meetings and joined the Primitive Methodists instead.¹¹⁷

Although the majority of landowners remained Anglican, the other key link in the chain of connection between the church and the poor, the tenant farmers, tended increasingly either to be indifferent or Wesleyan with only the 'upper class of farmers' remaining Anglican.¹¹⁸ One perceived consequence of this was that farm service, once regarded as a means of reinforcing Anglican hegemony through farmers' directing their servants to church, was now perceived as a source of rural alienation from the Church of England as 'those whose masters are Dissenters, are almost always required to go to chapel; whereas many Church people are indifferent on this point'.¹¹⁹ Although such encouragement on behalf of Methodism may have taken place, such complaints were probably more the product of a burgeoning siege mentality developing within ranks of the Anglican clergy. The reality, in what was now a free market for religious allegiance, was that Methodism, and particularly Primitive Methodism, was more favourably positioned than the Established Church because it was organisationally and culturally more congruent with the way of life of the farm servants. It specifically sought to appeal to the young, to women and to the poor on their own terms and offered them liberation, participation and a more egalitarian ethos than the Church of England. Primitive Methodism was, therefore, better placed than the Church of England to reach out and appeal to a

¹¹⁵ Werner, 'Primitive Methodist Connexion', pp. 146-7.

¹¹⁶ Simpson, 'Ploughing and Sowing', p. 108.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹¹⁸ BIHR, V/RET. 1865, Catwick.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Bridlington.

group who increasingly railed against their subordination and, as one clergymen put it, liked to 'show they are their own master on Sunday'.¹²⁰

This Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist success bred resentment and hostility within Anglican circles. Mary Simpson bracketed 'irreligion worldliness and dissent' together as the combined evils which stood in the way of the Church and which had produced a situation in which 'the church is sometimes nearly empty on Sunday, because one half of the parish have gone to chapel or meeting, and the other half never think of going to any place of worship at all'.¹²¹ Others clearly shared her frustration. Local clergy, complained to landowners regarding the noise and uproar caused by outdoor preaching and cottage services, opposed the construction of Chapels in their parishes, and pressed landowners for the eviction of Methodist tenants.¹²² Anglican farmers were even drafted by Archdeacon Wilberforce to ferry farm servants to their local churches in carts in an attempt to prevent them attending chapel.¹²³ The burgeoning hostility which Methodism's success engendered within Anglican clergy was rarely reciprocated by dissenters, but increasingly took the form of a professional rivalry. For those that believed that the Anglican Church must once again constitute the focal point of the rural community, Methodism's strength questioned the legitimacy of the Church of England and frustrated the attempts of the more active clergy to restore its position in rural society. Farm service was an institution which apparently suited the evangelism, conversionism and organisational dynamism of Methodism whilst also contradicting the parochial ideal of the Church. It was not only that Methodism reached those that had never had any contact with organised religion, there was a feeling that the young who had been baptised into the Church of England were plucked from their

¹²⁰ Ibid, Hutton Cranswick.

¹²¹ Simpson, 'Ploughing and Sowing'. p. 69.

¹²² Woodcock 'Piety', p. 81.

rural parishes by the farm service system and then became vulnerable to the spiritual allure and organisational dynamism of Methodism. This seeming correlation between Methodist growth and farm service reinforced clerical opposition to both.

The Church campaign against hiring fairs in the East Riding of Yorkshire was, therefore, motivated by a number of interrelated concerns. Many clergymen objected to hiring fairs because of the threat they posed to souls of those they gathered together. But the Church of England's opposition to these events was also motivated by a deeply felt unease regarding the Church's role and status in rural society. The rhetoric directed against hiring fairs and farm service was part of a 'moral panic' fuelled by this anxiety. This discourse placed farm service at the centre of a perceived crisis of rural social relations. Farm service, annual contracts and hiring fairs were attacked and vilified as barriers to social morality and portrayed as injurious to the entire community. Much of this reflected genuine belief and real concern; but the fact of the matter was that they were regarded as most injurious to the Church of England in general, and a group of rural clergymen in particular. In conclusion then, the Church campaign against the hiring fairs was a prominent aspect of a general attempt on the part of the Church of England to re-assert its institutional influence within rural society, an endeavour which has been designated by Howkins as the 'new paternalism'.¹²⁴ The abolition of hiring fairs, annual hiring and even farm service as an institution, became part of the Church of England's attempt to achieve institutional and ideological revival. Education remained the main area of endeavour, but the reform of hirings and farm service was also important and coexisted alongside other measures, which were designed to revive a church-

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ A. Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History, 1850-1925*, Harper Collins, 1991, pp. 66-87.

centred social paternalism. Such measures included: the reconstitution of harvest festivals and village feasts, promoting reading rooms, clothing clubs, parish magazines, evening schools and imploring landowners to build cottages in village settlements. The ideal situation for this 'new paternalism' advocated by clergymen was one in which day labourers housed in within nucleated settlements prevailed; here the Church could more easily exert control and influence. Once, farm servants had lived within such settlements and because farmers had enforced discipline and regular attendance at worship, the system had complemented the parochial ideal. Now, however, economic and social changes had combined with a changing settlement pattern to reconstitute farm servants as outsiders whose existence and way of life now undermined clerical attempts to reconstruct paternalism. Now, clergymen were confronted with a section of rural society that lived a constantly shifting existence, had few roots in the parish, and were largely without the influence of the Church. Indeed, to add insult to injury, those that were under the influence of organised religion were attracted to the church's main organisational rival: Methodism. Now, therefore, clergy sought a different situation which relocated the labouring poor within a cottages within or closer to village centres. This helps to explain why cottage building - the essential prerequisite of such a change - was advocated alongside the reforms to hiring fairs and farm service, so that

the young labourer, instead of living with a knot of loose companions in the farmer's house may look forward to a separate dwelling, to marriage, to a long connection to the same employer; and may be softened by a wife's sympathy, and the humanising touch of children's fingers.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Thomson, 'Work and Prospects', p. 15.

Chapter Six

Reforming Hiring Fairs: The Church of England 1850-70

In the prior, brief discussion of the course of the mid-Victorian campaign against hiring fairs in the East Riding in the previous chapter it was suggested that it developed in three main stages. The first phase which emerged in the 1850s involved attempts to supplant existing verbal agreements made at the hirings with written 'characters' administered through registration societies. From the 1860s a second and overlapping initiative emerged which involved establishing a network of hiring rooms and register offices at hiring fairs themselves. The third phase developed from around 1870 and involved an attempt to promote separate hirings for men and women at different times of the year and also to secure the total abolition of hiring fairs. Although it is something of an oversimplification to regard these stages as entirely separate from each other, this nonetheless remains a useful framework for analysis and will form the basis of this and the following chapter, which seeks to examine and evaluate the impact of the campaigns waged against hiring fairs in the years c. 1850-1880. This chapter focuses upon the first two, more successful, stages of the campaign. The later largely unsuccessful phase of reform which surfaced briefly in the 1870s will be discussed in the following chapter alongside contemporaneous attempts by farmers to effect their own reforms.

The first stage began in the early 1850s when a number of Anglican clergymen attempted to co-ordinate clergy, landowners and farmers into a combined effort to reform and eventually abolish hiring fairs.¹ Although the various proposals advanced at this time differed in detail and emphasis, a consensus emerged

¹ For a discussion of the motivations that underpinned the campaign see Chapter Five. For examples of these initial proposals see: *Yorkshire Gazette*, 28 January, 1854, Rev. J.

which centred upon securing the eventual abolition of public hirings through the introduction of a system of written characters as the main criteria for hiring male and female farm servants. Farmers were called upon to issue every servant leaving their employment with a written character 'briefly but fairly and honestly specifying what his conduct had been in his employer's service, to which might be added ... the sort of situation his capacities qualified him for undertaking' and to '*Never hire a servant without asking for written characters of this nature*'.² It was envisaged that the introduction of written characters of this kind would both remind and encourage farmers to consider the past conduct and moral character of a servant to be as important as skill, experience, physical strength and cost when hiring their servants. As has been argued above, clergymen felt that indifference towards the moral conduct and character of servants by farmers had been fundamental in precipitating a breakdown in rural social relations. The introduction of written characters was regarded as a means of impressing upon both farmers and servants alike, the importance of restoring what one clergymen referred to as 'That feeling of mutual respect and kindness which, in a Christian country, should subsist between masters and servants', a feeling of mutual respect and kindness which recent neglect had 'lessened or destroyed'.³

In order to secure the co-operation of farmers and servants the campaigners emphasised the benefits of abandoning the hiring fair and the form of contract with which it was associated. For example, it was suggested that employers, in return for co-operating in this system of moral engineering, would 'obtain a

Eddowes, Letter, 'The Abolition of Hiring Fairs'; Ibid, , Rev. F Simpson, Letter, 'Hiring of Farm Servants'.

² Ibid.

³ Rev. G.J. Chester, *Statute Fairs: Their Evil and Their Remedy*, York, 1856, p. 13.

better conducted class of servants, and more efficient control over them'.⁴ As one of the leading activists in the campaign pointed out, this was because of the:

Additional authority and power a master would have over his servant, by having it always in his power in the event of wilful negligence, disobedience, or misconduct to threaten that he should, at the years end, decline giving satisfactory account of his behaviour; for were this system universally adopted as it ought to be, servants would soon discover the loss of having only an indifferent character to show a person wishing to engage them.⁵

Clergy claimed that this new system would also benefit the farm servants because under the new regime those who were 'well principled, well educated, well brought up, sober, honest and intelligent' would find that these qualities received greater recognition and reward.⁶ In addition, because the new agreements could be made at any time and place, all farm servants would no longer be compelled, by the need to find work, to attend hiring fairs and suffer moral degradation and physical discomfort that this entailed.⁷

This assertion of the need for a restoration of paternalism as the basis of the relationship of master and servant was not unprecedented: this and the adoption of written characters had been urged in the previous decade. What was new, was that both should be advanced, implemented and co-ordinated via a network of registration societies which would promote the establishment of a system of register offices located in the towns and villages of the East Riding. These offices, which were to be organised and managed under the combined supervision of local clergy and gentlemen, were to collate and keep a duplicate record of all written characters. These were to act as a source of information and record for farmers seeking servants; they were also to provide servants with

⁴ Letter, F. Simpson, 'Hiring of Farm Servants', *Yorkshire Gazette*, 28 January, 1854.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Chester, 'Statute Fairs', pp. 10-11

⁷ *Ibid.*

details of the employment opportunities available. Once established, therefore, register offices would provide an alternative means and locus for the hiring of farm servants, which would, it was envisaged, render the annual hiring fairs unnecessary and redundant. The scheme was, therefore, an ambitious undertaking which sought to supplant hiring fairs and the form of contract with which they were associated and thereby precipitate a fundamental reshaping of farm service.

A network of farmers' clubs existed in the East Riding at this time and Anglican clergy regarded these as the most practical means through which these reforms could be publicised and promoted. Clerical opponents of the hiring fairs attended club meetings and urged farmers to co-operate in the formation of a network of register offices and to use written characters. Indeed, perhaps the most succinct and authoritative statement of the aims and methods of the reform movement in its early years was delivered by Rev. F.O. Morris one of the leading advocates of reform, in a paper presented at Drifffield Farmers' Club in March of 1854:

Gentlemen, the remedy is in your own hands. This very year you can if you will at once, and for ever, so far as your district is concerned - and by this means possibly and probably, you may effect the same happy result in other parts of the country, - put a stop to this crying abomination - this most monstrous abuse.

It seems to me, nay I positively assert that it is, perfectly easy, to effect it at once. The plan that I recommend to you is this:- To establish a Register - Office for farm servants in every market town, and that you should then take no servant into your service except from them, and none from them without a character, obtained there, furnished by their former master, or mistress, or from the clergymen and schoolmaster if they have not been out to service before.⁸

⁸ Rev. F O Morris, *The Present System of Hiring Farm Servants in the East Riding of Yorkshire with Suggestions for its Improvement*, London. 1854, pp. 6-7. This paper was

The campaigners received considerable publicity in the local press which reported their meetings and printed their numerous letters attacking the present system and outlining their proposals for change. By March 1854, the issue of hiring fairs and the necessity for their reform was reported as 'engrossing considerable attention' in the East Riding area.⁹ This attention, also focused upon the allegedly degenerate condition of the East Riding farm servant. The momentum was maintained during the summer and autumn of 1854 with the letter pages and editorial sections of the local press deploring the immorality of the hirings, the moral malaise affecting farm servants and commending the efforts being made to elevate their condition through ending public hirings.¹⁰ One notable intervention into this discursive process which sought to demonise both hiring fairs and farm service was that of the Chairman of the East Riding Magistrates, Charles William Strickland, who, in April 1854 attacked 'the reckless carelessness of employers as to the character of their servants' citing this carelessness as the prime reason why 'sessions after sessions, they had cases of stealing by farm servants from their masters'.¹¹ He again raised the question at the Midsummer Quarter Sessions in July 1854 when he complained that:

The careless way in which farm - servants are so frequently hired gives some clue to the many cases of farm-servants stealing from their masters and fellow labourers. I think this is simply what might have been expected, and merely arises as the result of hiring anybody who offers himself and who is apparently strong enough to work, without knowledge or care as to character. I certainly think it is in the interest and duty of every employer and of every honest labourer to do his best to

delivered at Driffeld Farmer's Club 16 March 1854, and reported in the local press. See for example, *Hull Advertiser*, 24 March, 1854.

⁹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 11 March, 1854.

¹⁰ In addition to those letters cited above, see also : Letter, 'The Public Hiring of Farm Servants', 'A Farmer', Beverley, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 14 January, 1854; Ibid, Editorial: 'The Hiring of Agricultural Servants'; Letter 'Agricultural Servants 'A Rural Dean', *Yorkshire Gazette*, 11 February, 1854; 'The Evils of Public Hirings' *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854; Editorial, *Hull Advertiser*, 7 April, 1854.

¹¹ *Hull Advertiser*, 7 April, 1854.

improve this and to have some means of enquiring into character - some way at least of showing some regard for the character of those employed.¹²

Another success for those advocating reform, in terms of publicity and prestige accrued, was that they succeeded in having the hiring fair question adopted as the discussion topic for the Council Dinner of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society in 1854.¹³ Clearly the Church was exploiting its traditional association with the land-owning elite in order to promote awareness of its campaign and encourage farmers to co-operate with it.

In terms of actual results the campaign appears also to have met with some success. Following Morris's address to Drifffield Farmers' Club, a committee of 'fourteen Gentlemen' was appointed to consider the question of the abolition of the present system of hiring.¹⁴ At the June meeting of the club, it was resolved that clergy within the area should be requested to 'use their influence with the farmers to give written certificates of character to their servants'.¹⁵ By July, Drifffield Farmers' Club had established a register office in Drifffield for 'the purpose of ascertaining the character of all farm-servants employed in that neighbourhood', and the farmers of Drifffield were reported to 'have made up their minds to close the doors against Farm Servants not of approved habits of morality and industry'.¹⁶ Farmers' clubs at Howden and Pocklington had also indicated their support by agreeing that they would no longer hire servants

¹² *Hull Advertiser*, 1 July, 1854.

¹³ Yorkshire Agricultural Society, Council Minute Book, 29 June, 1854, cited in V. Hall, *A History of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society 1837-1987*, p.34. In addition to those letters cited above, see also : Letter, 'The Public Hiring of Farm Servants', A Farmer, Beverley, Yorkshire Gazette January 14 1854; *ibid*, Editorial: 'The Hiring of Agricultural Servants'; Letter 'Agricultural Servants' A Rural Dean, Yorkshire Gazette February 11 1854; 'The Evils of Public Hirings' Yorkshire Gazette November 18 1854. Editorial, Hull Advertiser April 7 1854.

¹⁴ *Hull Advertiser*, 24 March, 1854.

¹⁵ *Hull Advertiser*, 24 June, 1854.

¹⁶ *Hull Advertiser*, 1 July, 1854.

without written characters.¹⁷ A number of East Riding landowners also lent their support to the campaign in the form of offering their patronage of and participation in registration societies. They also encouraged their tenants to follow their example.¹⁸ The Sykes family, the largest landowners in the region, were particularly supportive of the cause. They worked alongside clergy in establishing register offices and sponsored functions designed to encourage attention to moral character amongst the female farm and domestic servants on their estate. Dresses were presented to female rural domestic servants who had remained with the same employer for more than one year. Surveys were also conducted enquiring into the character and conduct of servants during the past year. Those found to be of satisfactory character were invited to 'Martinmas Feasts' which offered entertainment in the form of: tea drinking, piano playing, singing children, and what were described as 'amusing games'.¹⁹ At the close of each feast every servant's character was read aloud, it was reported that during this finale 'every eye sparkled with emotion'.²⁰ By 1859, register offices had been established in a number of parishes on the Sykes estate including the Wolds' villages of Nafferton, Wansford, Wetwang, Sledmere, Garton, Weaverthorpe, Fimber and Fridaythorpe.²¹ These and other actions against what it described as 'The evils attendant upon public hirings' were regarded by the *Yorkshire Gazette* as evidence that 'in the East Riding especially, a very strong effort is being made to put them down, and to introduce a system more consonant with public decency and social order'.²²

¹⁷ *Hull Advertiser*, 10 March, 1854, 31 October, 1854.

¹⁸ See, for example, Letter, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 19 November, 1859 drawn up and signed by the tenants of Sir Henry Boynton, Bart. of Burton Agnes.

¹⁹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 3 December, 1854.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 19 November, 1859, 3 December, 1859, 10 December, 1859.

²² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 10 December, 1859.

In spite of these efforts, however, the level of success achieved by the campaign during the 1850s was limited. In order to offer a credible alternative to the established system of contracts and hiring fairs, written characters would have had to be have been adopted on a near universal basis. This much was recognised by those advocating reform when they had envisaged 'a scheme which would be carried-out uniformly in every village'.²³ This proved to be an unrealisable objective. One problem was the longevity of hiring fairs as cultural and economic institutions. As the Rural Dean who referred to hiring fairs as 'legitimised seasons of dissipation' recognised, their long-established position in the rural calendar had imbued them with a degree of traditional authority.²⁴ Many farmers and servants believed that they were obliged to attend hirings by law, and they believed also, therefore, that any other form of contract would be invalid and this reinforced their 'habitual orientation' towards the fairs.²⁵ Furthermore, the hiring fair's location within the life-cycle of young farm servants, meant that the reforms proposed posed a threat to their annual holiday festivities and this was likely to engender resistance on their part, and so it proved. The correspondent of the *Yorkshire Gazette* who discussed the issue of reform with the farm servants standing at York's hirings in 1854 found that 'They imagine that the movement, recently commenced for the purpose of doing away with this slavemarket system is hostile to their interests, and they hug and cleave to it with the greatest tenacity'.²⁶

This 'hugging and cleaving' was more than an attachment to their traditional holiday festivities, though this was important. It also reflected the fact that

²³ Letter, 'The Abolition of Hiring Fairs', J. Eddowes, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 28 January 1854.

²⁴ Letter, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 11 February, 1854, 'A Rural Dean'. For a discussion of the concept of traditional authority see M. Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills eds, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 78. This lecture was first published in Germany in 1919.

²⁵ Letter, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 'A Rural Dean', 2 December, 1854.

²⁶ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 25 November, 1854.

hiring fairs continued to offer the farm servants significant economic and social benefits in the form of the wages and security of employment offered by the annual contracts created at them. The campaign appeared to threaten both with its challenge to the market functions of the hirings and its advocacy of different form of contract.

In this respect the timing of the reform campaign was particularly unfortunate as it coincided with a revival of the agricultural economy, an expansion of high farming and a rise in the demand for farm servants. This meant that the Anglican-led campaign emerged at a time when farm servants were proving to be particularly able in their utilisation of hiring fairs as a vehicle for the advancement of their interests. Viewed within this context, the reforms being proposed not only threatened the farm servants' traditional festivities, but also their economic and social interests: without offering any tangible benefits in return. Servant opposition to change had been anticipated and there was some attempt to reassure farm servants that there was no intention of harming their entitlement to a holiday, or their interests in general.²⁷ In general, however, most of the letters and pamphlets on the issue talked about farm servants rather than to them. Campaigners such as Rev. John Eddowes of Garton on the Wolds, offered themselves and their fellow agitators before farm servants as 'your real friends ... only desirous of your improvement' but when such claims were accompanied by descriptions of servants as 'rudely independent', 'disobedient and impertinent', 'poor and ignorant' and 'heedless and ignorant' one can only conclude that such utterances were unlikely to draw the farm servants to the barricades of reform.²⁸ Generally, the farm servants were regarded as objects of reform who were ignorant of their own degradation and

²⁷ Chester, 'Statute Fairs', p. 16

²⁸ Rev. J. Eddowes, *Martinmas Musings: Or Thoughts about the Hiring Day*, Driffield, 1854, pp. 5-14.

therefore unable to comprehend their true interests. The observer of Driffield hirings in 1854, for example, believed that 'the servants themselves ... would feel great repugnance to the hirings being abolished' but discounted these feelings on the grounds that 'Like all persons who are the subjects of an evil system, they would be found to oppose every measure for its improvement'.²⁹ Given the condition of the agricultural labour market at this time such indifference towards their feelings was misplaced. Farm servants were well placed, not only to cling to the established system but actively to resist any attempts to replace it with written characters. This fact was recognised by even those farmers sympathetic to the objectives of the reform campaign, as one of these pointed out:

not one servant in a hundred will trouble himself either to ask for, or even accept such a written document: knowing that such a large a number of farm servants are required all at once he is not the least alarmed about obtaining a situation.³⁰

Not surprisingly, therefore, perhaps the most significant barrier before the proposed system of written characters was the opposition of farm servants who simply refused to accept and use them. As this report of Bridlington hirings in 1854 noted with perhaps a touch of irony:

One extensive farmer in this neighbourhood, who is parting from several of his servants this Martinmas, offered to give them written characters, and for this purpose he provided himself with printed forms, to be filled up according to circumstances, yet, strange to say, every servant refused to accept such documents, saying that they could get hired quite as well without such characters as with them.³¹

Reformers may have underestimated the importance of winning over the farm servants to their cause but they were keenly aware that securing the co-operation

²⁹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 18 November, 1854.

³⁰ Letter, 'A Farmer: Beverley', *Yorkshire Gazette*, 25 October, 1856.

of farmers was fundamental. It was felt that if farmers and mistresses would determine to use only register offices and written characters, servants would have no choice but to follow their example.³² They were, therefore, regarded as the essential link in a chain of operations commanded by clergy and landowners. In some respects the Church campaign was well positioned to secure the support of farmers because its campaign was launched at time when there was some dissatisfaction on their part with hiring fairs and annual contracts. During the early 1850s the effects of a tightening labour market had enabled farm servants to manipulate the hirings and the annual contract in ways that provoked irritation amongst farmers particularly with regard to the frequency that servants broke their contracts.³³ Clergymen recognised this and offered their own alternative system as a remedy, emphasising, as was noted above, that it would offer the employer more control over their servants. They also underlined the benefits to farmers of not having to offer and, therefore, lose 'fests' and of no longer having to release their servants simultaneously.³⁴ The example of Drifffield and the willingness of other farmers' clubs to co-operate with the movement illustrates that some farmers were prepared to support the proposals advanced by clergy.³⁵ There were also letters in the local press from farmers complaining of the present condition of farm servants and their unruly behaviour which also indicated support for change.³⁶

Even at this early stage in the campaign, however, the clerical critique of farm service that was integral to the clamour for changes in hiring practice was a source of irritation for many farmers. The views of the Beeford farmer William

³¹ *Hull Advertiser*, 18 November, 1854.

³² Morris, 'Present System', p. 8.

³³ See for example, W. Barugh, 'Master and Man', *A Reply to the Pamphlet of the Rev. John Eddowes, entitled "The Agricultural Labourer As He Really Is"*, Drifffield, 1854.

³⁴ Morris, 'Present System', pp. 6-8.

³⁵ For a farmer's critique of farm service advocating a return paternalism see J. Wells, *The Relative Duties of Employers and Employed in Agriculture*, Hull, J. Pulleyn, 1858.

Barugh, who published a pamphlet on the issue, offers an illustration of this.³⁷ Barugh was generally supportive of a change in hiring practices, but he clearly resented some of the criticisms levelled at farmers by local clergy. He argued that these were the product of an idealised and ill-informed view of rural life and that as a consequence they were exaggerated and misplaced.³⁸ He also suggested that many farmers were less well-disposed towards the campaign than himself. He ascribed this in part to their traditionalism, emphasising that: 'Farmers are not men "given to change", old and time-honoured customs have a veneration in their eyes, which they are with difficulty brought to infringe upon.'³⁹ But he also indicated that farmers and clergymen had divergent interests. For example, although Barugh supported the idea of written characters he advocated another reform, that of shifting the hirings from Martinmas to early Spring or Summer. This he suggested would strike at the root cause of the insubordination prevalent amongst farm servants because it would prevent them from hiring in autumn, taking the winter's board and lodging and then absconding to hire elsewhere at higher wages in the spring.⁴⁰ Here from the pen of an open supporter of change is early evidence of an alternative agenda to that offered by the Church campaign. This focused not so much on the immorality of the hirings or the lack of paternalism in farm service but instead looked to the shifting balance of power between labour and capital in the market place and the effect this was having upon the farmers' ability to enforce their contracts. Barugh, in arguing that it was not moral laxity alone that lay behind the farm servants' assertiveness but also a change in the condition of the labour market was foreshadowing a divergence of opinion that was to become more significant in the course of time.

³⁶ See, for example, Letter, 'A Holderness Farmer', *Hull Advertiser*, 3 November, 1855.

³⁷ Barugh, 'Master and Man'.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 5.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 20.

At this stage, however, it was the condition of the labour market and its capacity to empower the farm servants rather than farmers' reluctance to embrace the reforms proposed by clergymen that undermined the early efforts to abolish hiring fairs. Even those farmers willing to support the new system found that they were not able to do so because of the resistance of farm servants. Thus, although reformers could point to their success in at least beginning to establish an alternative mode of hiring, their impact on the hiring fairs themselves was negligible during the 1850s. At Drifffield, for example, the newspaper report of the hirings in 1859 concluded that: 'notwithstanding the efforts being made to put down these meetings, the company was more numerous than for several years'.⁴¹ That this was the case at a hiring fair that was at the centre of reforming activity at this time indicates that the campaign was as yet having little success in securing the decline, never mind the complete abolition, of hiring fairs in the East Riding. The lack of success achieved up to the late 1850s is also unwittingly conceded in a pamphlet produced by one of the most active Anglican opponents of hiring fairs, Rev. J. Skinner, Curate of Drifffield. In 1861, he published a tract entitled *Facts and Opinions Concerning Statute Hirings*, this contained many examples of condemnations and criticisms of the immorality of hiring fairs drawn from the East Riding and elsewhere.⁴² When it turned to offering examples of successful attempts to supplant hirings via the introduction of register offices, however, Skinners' tract cited Lincolnshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, but offered no mention of the East Riding other than his comment that 'If success has attended the establishment of Register Offices elsewhere, I do not see why they should not be equally

⁴¹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 17 November, 1859.

⁴² Rev. J. Skinner, *Facts and Opinions Concerning Statute Hirings, Respectfully Addressed to the Landowners, Clergy, Farmers and Tradesmen of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, London, 1861.

successful in the East Riding'.⁴³ He then called for the adoption of measures not dissimilar to those advanced by East Riding clergy in the early 1850s when he suggested 'That Register Offices be established in every Town or Village where Statutes are held, and others if thought advisable'.⁴⁴ Evidently these reforms had had so little impact that a local clergyman was either unaware of them or deemed them unworthy of mention.

Skinner's intervention, and the publicity it gained in the local press, helped to move the East Riding campaign into a second, more energetic phase which attempted to offer a more direct challenge to the internal hiring practices of the hiring fair. The original aim of securing the abolition of hiring fairs through the promotion of written characters and registration societies remained but the campaign increasingly concentrated its energy upon segregating the hiring of male and female servants. The principal means of achieving this was through the provision of indoor accommodation for the hiring and registration of female farm servants at the hiring fairs themselves. Very soon this approach, which was originally designed to supplement the original objectives of the campaign, became the most salient facet of the attack upon hiring fairs in the East Riding.

The effect of the fairs upon the female servants had always been a major concern of moral reformers but the decision to raise the salience of this aspect of the hirings was also informed by the example of progress in other counties where register offices for females had been tried with some success; nearby Lincolnshire was a prime example which Skinner had emphasised in his pamphlet.⁴⁵ This decision to concentrate the effort upon female servants, was also probably born out of the experience of the earlier phase of the campaign in

⁴³ Ibid, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 13.

the East Riding. Although the evidence is limited, there is some indication, that even during the first, and predominantly unsuccessful phase of reform, one area where some progress had been made was that of attracting female farm servants to the registration societies established in Wolds' villages. The reports of the societies established on the Sykes estate, for example, indicate that they had managed to gain a foothold amongst what were termed 'rural domestic servants', a group of female workers who were still hired in large numbers at outdoor hirings in the 1850s. Another relatively successful initiative had been instigated at York Martinmas fair and hirings, where, from 1857 onwards 'a Christian Lady provided accommodation and refreshments for young persons especially females attending the fair, which had been the means of keeping several hundreds of them from the public houses'.⁴⁶ The second phase of the campaign built upon these marginal successes which had indicated that registration facilities aimed at females and located at the hiring fairs themselves might prove to be a viable stepping-stone towards a more fundamental challenge to the hiring fair.⁴⁷ Skinner's pamphlet reflected this shift in the campaign's strategy when it stated that:

What we wish is to abolish the Public Hiring of farm servants, and more particularly of female servants, and to remove those evils which the facts adduced in these pages plainly prove to be of the most degrading and mischievous character.⁴⁸

From 1860 Rev. Skinner launched a series of initiatives designed to achieve this end at Driffield hirings. These are worthy of reasonably detailed consideration because they became the model for reforms practised elsewhere in the Riding. He issued an address: *To the Masters and Mistresses of Farm Houses in the East Riding of Yorkshire* which warned of the dangers that the hirings posed to

⁴⁶ 'Annual General Meeting of the York Society for the Prevention of Youthful Depravity', *York Herald*, 18 February, 1860.

⁴⁷ Skinner, 'Facts and Opinions', p. 3, p. 16.

the moral character young women and called upon masters and mistresses to abandon the custom of hiring female servants at the hirings. He suggested that that if they followed his advice and 'united together in a firm determination not to admit into their service females hired at Statutes ... the Statutes would be limited to the hiring of labourers for whom I presume they were originally intended'.⁴⁹ The address then announced that at the forthcoming hirings at Drifffield, the Corn Exchange would be available as a register office for female servants. His address then proceeded list a number of conditions and rules which masters and mistresses should observe and which Skinner suggested 'if promptly acted upon, will, I think, speedily put an end to this monstrous evil'.⁵⁰

Employers were urged to hire only those female servants with a written character and to issue their own servants with characters which must be 'strictly correct'.⁵¹ They were also instructed to encourage their servants to pursue private enquiries away from the hirings in village register offices and, if possible, prevent and dissuade their female servants from attending hiring fairs at all. Until the hiring of females at hiring fairs had been totally supplanted those servants attending statute hirings were to be encouraged to make extensive use of the indoor register offices established for the purpose of hiring female servants.⁵² Copies of this address were distributed to farm houses in the locality by local clergy who were specifically requested to discuss the issues of reform with the Mistress of each farm house so as 'to solicit their interest in the

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Rev. J Skinner, *To The Masters and Mistresses of Farm Houses in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, Appendix II of 'Facts and Opinions', p. 23. This address was circulated to farm houses by hand, it also appeared in local newspapers, see, for example, *York Herald*, 10 November, 1860.

⁵⁰ Skinner, 'Masters and Mistresses', p. 23.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, pp. 23-4

effort'.⁵³ Skinner's address was also printed in local newspapers, which, in drawing attention to his efforts offered their own words of encouragement and called for the public to support him.⁵⁴ No one could accuse Skinner of failing to publicise his effort.

This energetic approach towards publicity was continued on the day of the hiring fair. Large placards were posted on lamp-posts at the corner of every road leading into Drifffield and outside the Corn Exchange itself. These announced that: 'The best servants and the best places to be had at the Corn-Exchange' and 'Female servants to be had at the Corn-Exchange'.⁵⁵ Male helpers were stationed in the Market Place and, assisted by the local police, directed girls to the rooms that had been made available for hiring. The rooms 'were spread over with clean straw, and benches were placed all round. At one end of the room Tea and Coffee were served at a low rate'.⁵⁶ Back in the Market Place, a book stall presided over by 'an active young man' sold bibles, prayer-books, testaments and other religious works.⁵⁷ In a letter to the *Yorkshire Gazette* in which he reported on the progress of his experiment, Skinner claimed that it had been 'crowned *with complete success*':

The hall was opened at ten, one room was speedily filled so that I was compelled to throw open another still larger. The mistresses came and the servants followed. The *usual* place for standing was *cleared*, and the town altogether wore a more comfortable and quiet appearance.⁵⁸

⁵³ Skinner, 'Facts and Opinions', Appendix III, p. 25.

⁵⁴ See for example the Editorial in the *York Herald*, 3 November, 1860.

⁵⁵ Skinner, 'Appendix III', p. 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 17 November, 1860.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

He also claimed that the police had informed him that 'there had never been such a quiet hiring'.⁵⁹ As a result of this success, a permanent register office was opened in Exchange Street, Driffield and Skinner declared that the experiment would be repeated the following year.⁶⁰ Accordingly the Corn Exchange was opened for female servants at the next year's hiring and once again met with success. The rooms set aside for hiring and registration being described as 'crowded' in the newspaper report of Driffield hirings in 1861.⁶¹

Skinner was no longer curate at Driffield in 1862 but his successor, Rev. J Nares, continued the work. The Corn Exchange was again opened for the hiring of female servants. Rev. Nares and several other clergy were present in the rooms and, as well superintending the proceedings, distributed addresses containing 'some admirable advice to both servants and their employers, on the duties to themselves and all connected with them'.⁶² Tea and coffee were also provided, and the doors of the Corn Exchange were guarded by policemen who kept out 'all improper characters'.⁶³ It was estimated that 3000 people used the rooms provided.⁶⁴ By the end of the 1860s this practice of providing indoor accommodation and refreshments for the female servants was firmly established at Driffield. In 1869 for example 'an immense number of servants and employers were present' at Driffield hirings but whilst the 'The streets were crowded with men servants and masters', the 'female servants, and those who wished to do business with them' were accommodated in the Corn Exchange and the Assembly Rooms, which were reported as being in a 'crowded state'.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 16 November, 1861.

⁶² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 15 November 1862.

⁶³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 13 November, 1862.

⁶⁴ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 13 November, 1862.

⁶⁵ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 18 November, 1869.

Similar changes were introduced at Malton, although here the female servants seem to have been less co-operative than those at Driffield. Here the process of reform began in 1862 when the clergy of Malton and the surrounding district, through the auspices of The Society for Promoting the Respectability of the Female Servant, opened Malton Corn Exchange 'free of charge' for the hiring of female farm servants 'in order to separate them from the lads, and the immorality of the open market place and beer shops'.⁶⁶ This measure appears to have met with success and by the following year, 1863, it was claimed that 'every respectable girl was found in the Exchange' and although 'some of the roughest of the sex still resorted to the open market, and seemed only too happy among the boisterous lads' the newspaper reported with some satisfaction that 'masters and mistresses preferred those who did not "stand the market"'.⁶⁷ At Malton the campaign introduced an interesting innovation in that it attempted to extend the segregation of men and women outside of the hiring fair itself. In 1863, for example, 'at the request of clergy' the North Eastern Railway Company provided carriages marked 'for females only' on trains to and from Malton hirings. This proved a short-lived experiment, however, as it was a total failure, the carriages provided being 'almost deserted'.⁶⁸ By 1866, indoor hirings with registration facilities were well established at Malton and hot meals at 'cheap rates' had been added as an attraction in an attempt to attract those remaining females who persisted in hiring in the market place.⁶⁹ This, it was claimed, had resulted in further progress with 'none but the roughest girls ... found standing the market'.⁷⁰ Although indoor hiring for female servants became the normal practice at Malton, the resistance of a tenacious minority of female servants continued and proved irksome for those seeking reform. In

⁶⁶ *York Herald*, 19 November, 1864.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 19 November, 1863.

⁶⁹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 8 November, 1866.

⁷⁰ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 15 November, 1866.

1869, for example, although the Corn Exchange was described as 'well patronised' it was also observed that 'In the open market, however, there were hundreds of boys and men, and among them great numbers of the rougher girls, who regard the statutes as a time of revelry and cling to the custom of "standing the market" with the men'.⁷¹ The number of women who insisted upon "standing the market" with the lads' had declined to 'not over a dozen girls' in 1871.⁷² The following year, however, despite 'uncomfortable' weather, girls were still to be seen in the market place and this pattern continued into 1873 when 'The most quiet class of female servants went to the corn exchange, but there was a large proportion of boisterous girls who decided upon "standing the market among the men"'.⁷³ The tenuous nature the changes so far realised by the reform movement at Malton was illustrated in 1877 when 'through some misunderstanding the Corn Exchange was not opened till late', and all women returned to the old system of 'standing the market' amongst the men.⁷⁴

As was mentioned above, the initial impulse for providing indoor accommodation at York pre-dated Skinner's effort at Drifffield. This stemmed from the activities of an ecumenical philanthropic agency, the York Society for the Prevention of Youthful Depravity. This organisation, formed in 1808 had lain dormant for several years but it was reconstituted in 1859 as a sister society of the York Penitentiary Society.⁷⁵ This latter organisation had for some time concentrated its efforts upon rescuing, rehabilitating and reforming prostitutes. The re-formation of the older society as a sister society was regarded as a means of the organisation augmenting its curative work with the more preventative

⁷¹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 18 November, 1869.

⁷² *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 17 November, 1870.

⁷³ *Drifffield Times*, 30 November, 1872; 22 November, 1873.

⁷⁴ *Drifffield Times*, 17 November, 1877.

⁷⁵ *York Herald*, 27 October, 1859; *York Herald*, 11 February, 1860.

strategy of opposing the root causes of vice.⁷⁶ Aware 'that many young persons fall into temptation and sin during the Martinmas hirings' and that in recent years there had been some success in attracting female servants to indoor accommodation, the society resolved 'to extend this means of usefulness and make it more generally known'.⁷⁷ To this end, the society hired the Merchant's Hall in Fossgate, for the two main hiring days of York's Martinmas fair in 1859. Tea, coffee and other refreshments were offered 'at an exceedingly cheap rate' in an attempt 'to draw farmers servants and others, to that place, and thus enable them to avoid those haunts of vice which so thickly abound the city'.⁷⁸ This facility was publicly advertised in local newspapers and through handbills distributed in neighbouring villages.⁷⁹ It was claimed that approximately 400 people visited the hall over the two days.⁸⁰ A missionary from the York City Mission had also 'availed himself of the opportunity of speaking a word in season to many young men and women who were thus enabled to avoid the temptations of the public house'.⁸¹ This was a relatively modest level success for such a large hiring fair but the experiment was repeated in 1860. On this occasion the venture was advertised as the 'Farm Servants Cheap Tea and Coffee Room' and received the 'special patronage of the Lord mayor of York'.⁸² There was an increase in attendance with 450 males and females attending over the two days, each receiving as their reward, a religious tract.⁸³ A innovation that year was the introduction of a deposit bank 'by which servants who had that day received their wages might deposit in secure hands the amount and thus prevent the pickpockets from causing any financial

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *York Herald*, 18 February, 1860, Annual General Meeting of the York Society for the Prevention of Youthful Depravity..

⁷⁸ *York Herald*, 27 October, 1860

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, Annual Sermons and Meeting: York City Mission.

⁸² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 9 February 1861, Annual meeting York Penitentiary Society and York Society for the Prevention of Youthful Depravity.

embarrassment'.⁸⁴ The following year, 1861, witnessed further developments. As usual the Merchant Hall was opened for tea coffee and other refreshments but now it catered only for female servants, a register office was also opened at the hall. Registration facilities for male servants were also made available at a Post Office in nearby Walmgate and in Coney St in the city centre.⁸⁵ Once again, however, only limited success was achieved. Complaints made by local shopkeepers to the city council regarding the crowds of female servants gathered before their shops indicate that female servants were still being hired in large numbers in the open streets at York that year.⁸⁶

By 1863 the register office facilities offered at York had been incorporated into the Church of England's campaign against hiring fairs, becoming part of a network of register offices provided by the Bulmer, Ainsty and Buckrose Registration Society. The hall was now superintended by Canon Randolph, a prominent Church of England opponent of hiring fairs and critic of farm service.⁸⁷ Despite this, however, the new system failed to advance upon the modest success achieved previous years, with only 200 persons using the hall on the Monday, the first day of York's hirings in 1863. The main problem for the reform effort at York was a reluctance on the part of farm servants to use the facilities provided; it being recorded that although 'a large number' of farmers were disposed to use the 'new and improved system of hiring' the number of servants who were willing to do so was 'not so satisfactory'.⁸⁸ The majority of servants and, therefore, masters at the hirings that year were not found at the register office and refreshment rooms but outside in the open streets. The *York Herald* noted, for example, that 'the usual places in Parliament and High

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 24 November, 1860.

⁸⁵ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 30 November, 1861.

⁸⁶ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 16 November, 1861.

⁸⁷ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 28 November, 1863.

Ousegate were not despite the efforts of certain Philanthropists to change the mode of hiring, less numerous than usual'.⁸⁹ The following year saw a change of tactics. The Merchants Hall in Fossgate, remained open for refreshments but additional accommodation for farmers and servants was also made available in a large room at the White Swan Hotel on the corner of High Ousegate and Coppergate. The White Swan was a large public house and hotel in the centre of York adjacent to the traditional outdoor location for the hiring of male and female servants. In offering their facilities at the White Swan, a popular resort for farm servants, campaigners were clearly hoping that this would encourage increased patronage. Although there was no immediate improvement, supporters of the campaign's effort felt that its latest move had proved to be a qualified success. The press, for example, claimed that if it had not been for the unusually fine weather that year, more servants would have been inclined to have used the 'comfortable room' provided.⁹⁰ This and the fact that most of those employers who did frequent the room succeeded in hiring 'respectable servants' was reported to have revived 'fresh hopes that outdoor hiring is a fast fading institution'.⁹¹ Fresh hopes or not, the reform movement decided to become more aggressive in its approach. Force as well as the powers of persuasion was now deployed against the farm servants. In 1866, for example, the city council issued regulations regarding the conduct of hiring at York. These stipulated that males and females should no longer stand together at the hirings but should occupy distinct and separate areas as designated by the city authorities. The women were ordered to occupy a space in front of the White Swan Hotel and the nearby street of Coppergate. The men were allocated to a

⁸⁸ *York Herald*, 28 November, 1863.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *York Herald*, 26 November, 1864.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

separate part of Pavement near St Crux church.⁹² Both men and women resisted this and a sexual division of hiring was only achieved through the actions of the police who physically removed the women to their new place and thereby enforced segregation upon the reluctant farm servants. The police were unable, however, to prevent the men from later abandoning their new, officially allocated hiring location and reoccupying their usual positions at All Saints Church, Pavement, a site much closer to the female servants.⁹³ Despite the resistance of male and female servants, this success in at least establishing a degree of segregation marked a turning point in the fortunes of the reform campaign at York. From that year onward, segregated hirings and indoor hirings for women secured increased acceptance. It was a gradual and attritional process which continued to experience setbacks, however. In 1868, for example it was announced on behalf of the Lord Mayor of York that in order to 'keep the servants out of the streets' separate indoor hirings would be provided for male and female servants, with the women accommodated in the large room at the White Swan Hotel and the men in the recently-built Corn Exchange in King St.⁹⁴ Although the rooms for women enjoyed reasonable patronage, those provided for the men were little used 'and so far as the streets were concerned, little difference could be noticed, the corner of High Ousegate and Parliament being as crowded as ever'.⁹⁵ The following year, masters and servants were directed to use the rooms provided and it was stated that no obstruction of the traditional location for outdoor hiring would be tolerated.⁹⁶ As a consequence of this announcement 'far more female servants patronised the hiring room than had previously been the case', there was no mention of men using the room allocated for them, however, and the attempt to establish indoor hiring for men

⁹² *York Herald*, 29 November, 1866.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *York Herald*, 28 November, 1868.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *York Herald*, 27 November, 1869

at York appears to have been abandoned with this failure. Instead, reformers concentrated upon segregating men and women through inducing as many women as possible to use indoor register offices. This means of segregating the hirings at York had become well established by the end of the 1870s as the *York Herald's* report of the 1870 hirings illustrates:

The usual notice was issued by the Lord Mayor requesting female servants to use the large room in the White Swan Yard in which to be hired. This they did to a large extent and only male servants offered their services at the place usually occupied for that purpose.⁹⁷

The *Yorkshire Gazette* felt that a substantial and permanent change had at last been realised at York, and commented with evident pleasure that:

The fair passed off in an orderly and quiet manner, and the evils associated with the statute hiring of servants in the street seem to be giving way to a better state of things, at least as far as the City of York is concerned.⁹⁸

Thus, after many experiments and setbacks, the Church of England reformers, led by the industrious Canon Randolph, had finally established indoor hirings for women on a permanent basis at York. In doing so, they had ensured that the hiring of male and female servants was largely segregated: a substantial alteration in the character of this major hiring fair.

The 1860s also heralded a bout of reforming zeal at Bridlington, Beverley and Hedon. At Bridlington in 1861 the Corn Exchange was opened for female servants but they refused to use it.⁹⁹ The following year, however, despite fine weather the 'female portion' of a large assembly were 'prevailed on to enter the

⁹⁷ *York Herald*, 26 November, 1870.

⁹⁸ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 26 November, 1870.

⁹⁹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 20 November, 1862.

Corn-exchange' and did so.¹⁰⁰ Mary Simpson was involved in the reform movement at Bridlington and her account of the preparations made prior to the first success there, suggest that Rev. James Skinner's efforts at Driffield had provided the model for the effort at Bridlington. Before the hiring day, circulars advertising the facilities being offered and urging their use were sent to all clergy in the surrounding district with a request that they should distribute them to farmers in their parishes. 474 circulars were dispersed in this way. Placards advertising indoor accommodation and refreshments were also placed at every blacksmith's shop in the Bridlington area. On the hiring day itself, helpers were placed on the streets of Bridlington, their task being that of 'directing girls the way of the Corn Exchange as they entered the Town', a task which Mary Simpson felt required 'a good deal of tact and diplomacy'.¹⁰¹ They appear to have possessed the required skill and expertise, however, because according to Simpson:

The room was soon filled, and the hiring went on briskly. The mistresses were greatly pleased, remarking with surprised satisfaction how much better behaved the girls were than when hired in the streets, where all was confusion and rude joking and jostling among the lads.¹⁰²

As was the case elsewhere, those seeking to promote indoor hirings were helped by the police. On the morning of the hiring, Simpson 'found the police already at the Corn Exchange, before the appointed hour, a good fire lighted, and all prepared'.¹⁰³ There appears to have been no attempt to induce male servants to hire indoors at Bridlington.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ M. Simpson, *Gleanings: Being a Sequel to Ploughing and Sowing*, Rev. D Legard, ed., Driffield, 1876, pp. 104-6, cited in Counce, 'Farm Horses', pp. 58-59.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

At Beverley, where Mary Simpson was also active, the Assembly Rooms were first opened for the use of female farm servants in 1861. The male farm servants were allowed to remain about the Market Cross, the traditional location for hiring at Beverley.¹⁰⁴ Here, success was achieved at the first attempt, with the inclement weather playing a helpful hand in overcoming the reluctance of female servants:

Last year, which was the first year that the experiment was tried at Beverley, it had been a pouring day, and it seemed for some time to hang in the balance whether it would succeed or fail: the girls (doubtless backed by the lads) having long persevered standing the streets, till, when quite soaked they were at last induced to avail themselves of the offered shelter.¹⁰⁵

Once this initial wariness and reluctance had been overcome, however, the new measure proved popular and established itself as part of the fabric of Beverley's large hiring fair. On the second year of the experiment, for example, Simpson recalled that 'there was no doubt from the first; all went, like a flock of sheep, into the large public rooms provided for them. There were 1300 present at one time, including, of course, the farmer's wives, who were much delighted'.¹⁰⁶ This description of Beverley Hirings illustrates the type of reforms that had become established there by the mid-1860s:

The Norwood rooms as on former occasions having been engaged by several influential ladies and gentlemen of the town, who some years ago laudably adopted this means of taking young people away from the temptations usually offered in the streets on such occasions. The large room was well filled during the morning, and the hiring was briskly carried on. There was a room also set apart for boys. Bibles prayer books and other books of a moral tendency were offered for sale at very reasonable prices, and many sold. Refreshments were also provided at a reasonable rate.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Beverley Recorder*, 9 November, 1861.

¹⁰⁵ Simpson, 'Gleanings', p. 58.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Beverley Guardian*, 11 November, 1865.

As this account illustrates, Beverley, like York, attempted to offer indoor hiring for male farm servants in the mid-1860s. No mention is made of how successful the attempt to attract males into the room provided was on this occasion but it would seem to have been as unsuccessful here as it was at York: this was the first and final attempt to entice male servants away from the streets at Beverley. The following year the hiring for men and boys took place at its usual location near the Market Cross. Although Simpson's account of the progress made at Beverley hirings implies that reformers swept all before them, some female servants continued to hire outdoors. In 1866, for example, it was reported that the 'greater part' of the hiring for female servants took place at the Norwood Assembly Rooms, suggesting that at least some part of it took place outside in the market place. Indoor hiring for women did generally prevail at Beverley, however. Although the failure to establish indoor accommodation for men was a source of regret to some observers of the campaign at Beverley, on the whole, the reformers' efforts were considered to be a success because it had 'almost entirely done away with the disgraceful, if not indecent custom of open competition in the market place'.¹⁰⁸

At Hedon, the effort began in 1862. Prompted by the urgings of clergy and local magistrates in the district, 'three or four ladies' including the wife of Rev. Fox, vicar of Hedon, opened the Town Hall for the hiring of female servants, providing 'a plentiful supply of tea and coffee' as an added attraction.¹⁰⁹ They enjoyed immediate success and 'the female servants were induced to leave their old standing place in the open air, and to avail themselves of the provision made for their comfort, unexposed to the many evils which inevitably attend hirings in

¹⁰⁸ *Beverley Guardian*, 10 November, 1866.

¹⁰⁹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 20 November, 1863.

the public market'.¹¹⁰ The servants were reported as being 'well satisfied' with the change, and by the late 1860s, the Town Hall at Hedon had become established as the major location for the hiring of female servants at Hedon.¹¹¹ Despite the initial optimism that this change would 'entirely do away with the objectionable system which has hitherto been in vogue' however, there was no attempt to provide indoor hirings for male servants at Hedon.¹¹²

The establishment of sexually-segregated hirings at a number of the East Riding's larger hiring fairs marked a real advance on what had been achieved in the 1850s: principally because it offered a more direct challenge to the internal character of the hiring fair. Although sometimes fitful in their progress and less than comprehensive in their appeal, the indoor hirings had succeeded in establishing a religious presence at the hiring fairs. In establishing accommodation at the hirings themselves, for example, clergy had created an alternative indoor sphere of hiring activity, shaped to a large extent by their moral agenda. This stood in contrast and in opposition to the outdoor sphere of activity shaped, to a large extent, by the culture of the farm servants.

From this initial bridgehead within the hiring fair, clergy began to develop other activities which sought to contest their festive functions. They provided, for example, alternative 'rational recreations' that competed with the commercial entertainment offered in the public houses and at the fairgrounds.¹¹³ The most impressive array of attractions of this kind was at Driffield. Here, in an attempt counter the appeal of the fair outside, and therefore keep servants in the hiring

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 19 November, 1868, November 18 1869.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ As in new forms of public leisure that were controlled, ordered and improving, educational and communal and which sought to compete with and erode a popular culture which was characterised by drunkenness, spontaneity, emotion, and physical contact. For a discussion of

rooms, Rev. James Skinner engaged 'the Volunteer Band to play in the hiring rooms during the afternoon, for the amusement of the servants'.¹¹⁴ This seems to have enjoyed some success as it was reported that 'The music soon tempted those present to a hearty dance'.¹¹⁵ Efforts were also being made to raise the moral tone and character of the proceedings outside in the Market Place, where 'During the afternoon the Nafferton Sax Horn Band played a selection of music', the result, according to the *Yorkshire Gazette*, was that 'all appeared to present a much quieter and more rational aspect than a few years ago, when so much fighting and drunkenness took place'.¹¹⁶

This strategy of trying to compete with the attractions of the public houses and the general holiday-mood culture of the hiring fair continued into the next decade. By 1870 the attractions offered by the Church of England at Driffield during included 'two balls' which took place on Monday and Thursday evenings of Martinmas Week. The purpose of these events was 'the laudable object of attracting some of the country servants from the public houses'.¹¹⁷ From 1877, Martinmas Week at Driffield witnessed another innovation when the Temperance Hall became the venue for 'a social tea and entertainment'.¹¹⁸ This provision was aimed at 'farm servants and their friends' and was designed to act as a 'counter - attraction to other entertainments of a questionable character' and to promote, therefore, the 'well being' of those in attendance 'especially that of the farm servants - a class not always easy of access'.¹¹⁹ The entertainment offered included a 'sumptuous tea' and 'an efficient choir

rational recreations see H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, Croom Helm, London, 1980, especially pp. 90-107.

¹¹⁴ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 16.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 14 November, 1872; *Driffield Times*, 30 November, 1872.

¹¹⁸ *Driffield Times*, 1 December, 1877.

¹¹⁹ *Driffield Times*, 30 November, 1878.

rendering several songs in a charming manner, with Rev. F. Peel at the piano' and 'a triplet of selections' by the Musical Union band.¹²⁰ Each stage of the musical entertainment was interspersed with 'pleasing addressees by clergy and others'.¹²¹ By its second year, this event was considered a great success and was said to be 'highly appreciated by the servants' who numbered 'about 400'.¹²² By 1879, the Rev. Newton of Drifffield, who had instigated these entertainments, had added organ recitals and 'a number of humorous songs, readings and recitations' it was reported that these were 'greatly appreciated by the audience, many of the pieces being in the Yorkshire dialect'.¹²³ Although the attendance that year was down to 200 it was still regarded as a success 'as many were detained from visiting places of less innocent amusements'.¹²⁴ Newton also had 'tolerably large premises ... fitted up as a coffee house which was opened on a temporary basis on each of Drifffield's hiring days'.¹²⁵ Although the numbers attending these activities were modest, they enabled clergymen to establish a least a degree of elite regulation of popular culture. They also built upon the success of the indoor hiring rooms and thereby increased further the religious presence at the hiring fair.

These alternative rational recreations exemplified a new determination on the part of the Church of England to not only challenge aspects of popular culture that it found disagreeable, but also to regard popular recreations as a field in which a more constructive engagement between the Church and the rural working-class might be realised. Canon Randolph had offered an example of this train of thought in the course of criticising and attacking hiring fairs and farm service during the Social Science Congress at York in 1864 and at the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ *York Herald*, 29 November, 1879.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Church Congress, also held at York, two years later. Randolph argued for a more assertive and positive relationship with rural popular culture arguing that 'it was the withdrawal of the upper classes from the festivities of the poor which had led to the evils they deprecated.'¹²⁶ He suggested that the 'upper classes' should not oppose dancing, recreation and play by the working class, but should seek instead to ensure that it occurred under the supervision of their 'social superiors'.¹²⁷ He called for a change of attitude that would: 'Let the poor feel that persons of influence sympathise with them in joys as well as sorrow, and in hours of recreation as well as seasons of affliction'.¹²⁸ Other opponents of the hirings offered similar sentiments. Rev. Greville Chester, for example, argued that one of the reasons why farm servants longed for the hiring fair was that 'some relief is found from the long, dull round of unrelieved toil which is too often their lot'.¹²⁹ He argued that this longing was also fuelled by the failure of the 'richer classes' to offer alternative forms of recreation:

Want of time or place or liberty for anything like *amusement* on *any* day of the week, and the cold water too commonly thrown by the richer classes, upon attempts made by the poor to establish cricket and other manly games, can scarcely fail to cause the farm-lads of the rural districts to long for what will at least bring with it something of novelty and excitement.¹³⁰

Chester then called upon clergy to promote activities that would improve the lifestyle of the farm servant and thereby reduce the allure of events like the hirings. These included encouraging early marriage through allowing supervised courtship, or as Chester put it 'the intercourse of the young people at

¹²⁵ *York Herald*, 28 November, 1879.

¹²⁶ *York Herald*, 1 October, 1864, The Social Science Congress: report of the proceedings of eighth annual congress of the Social Science Association, Paper: Cn Randolph, 'On Statute Hirings'; *York Herald*, 13 October, 1866, Annual Meeting of the Church Congress at York, Paper: Cn Randolph, 'Social Recreations of the Poor'.

¹²⁷ *York Herald*, 13 October, 1866, 'Church Congress'.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Chester, 'Statute Fairs', p. 16.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

stated hours' and providing lending libraries and evening reading rooms.¹³¹ He also cautioned against the supervision of these activities being 'needlessly prudish':

Is it not better that a young man, after a hard day's work, should be *able* to have his one pint of ale without leaving the reading-room, than that he should have his two or three quarts on the bench of the village pot-house? ¹³²

Chester also advocated the encouragement of 'manly games' in summer evenings arguing that 'If young men have these, they will not crave after the less pure amusements of the next town on fair day'.¹³³ Archbishop Thomson, being of an Evangelical persuasion was more cautious than Chester who was clearly influenced by the Oxford movement, but he too, voiced his concern that the Church had lost touch with the culture of the poor.¹³⁴ Evidence that other clergy felt that a creative engagement with leisure and recreation was more desirable than stark opposition can also be found in the form of reformed harvest festivals promoted by Anglican clergy in the East Riding from the early 1860s.¹³⁵ These not only provided recreations with a suitably moral content they also offered, in microcosm, an exemplification of the carefully controlled interactions between rich and poor that many Anglicans believed should be at the heart of the ideal rural parish.

This desire for a more constructive engagement with the culture of the poor was in some respects the root cause of the Church of England campaign against the hiring fairs. It was only when all servants no longer attended hirings that the

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid, pp. 18-19.

¹³³ Ibid..

¹³⁴ Archbishop W. Thomson, 'Sports and Pastimes: a sermon' in J Kempe ed., *The Use and Abuse of the World*, S.P.C.K, London, 1873.

¹³⁵ See for example, *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 30 October, 1862, 'South Cave Harvest Home'; Ibid, 6 November, 1862, 'Kirk Ella Harvest Home'.

broader objective of re-shaping farm service as a labour system could be truly effected. This, in turn, was regarded as a necessary change if the influence of the Church within rural communities was to be increased. In his paper before the Social Science Congress, for example, Canon Randolph had emphasised that attacking the hiring fair was also a means of promoting the reform of farm service because it would erode the basis of the current system of annual contracts.¹³⁶ Two years later at the Church Congress of 1866, Canon Randolph, emphasised again, that the total extinction of the hiring fair was also entwined with promoting a change in the character of farm service.¹³⁷

Alongside the promotion of segregated hiring, indoor hiring for women and providing alternative rational recreations clergy continued to progress, throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s, the original objective of building a network of register offices in the villages and market towns of the East Riding. Most of the rooms provided at the hirings offered registration facilities and during the 1860s committees were created which worked for the extension of this network. These also promoted the compilation of registers of young females leaving situations and appealed to landowners 'asking them to press the subject on their tenants, so as to advise them to use register offices and discontinue the practice of hiring at fairs'.¹³⁸ It was still envisaged that the system could in future be extended to include male farm servants, a measure that was essential if the alternative system was going to totally supplant the hiring fair as the fulcrum of the farm servant system.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ *York Herald*, 1 October, 1864, Report 'The Social Science Congress'.

¹³⁷ *York Herald*, 13 October, 1866, Report: 'The Church Congress'.

¹³⁸ *York Herald*, 10 November, 1866, Meeting of the clergy and laity of the Rural Deanery of Bulmer.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*

In contrast to the 1850s, a sense of the campaign having made significant progress was evident in contemporary evaluations of its efforts towards the end of the 1860s. Although it was regarded as 'regrettable' that more progress had not been made in reforming the hiring of male servants, those active in the campaign were congratulated for protecting females from immorality, inclement weather, pickpockets and the public house.¹⁴⁰ It was also suggested that segregated hirings had brought about an improvement in the general standard of public order at hirings. In 1863, for example, a survey of 'Yorkshire Statutes' by the *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald* observed that unprecedented success had been realised in attracting females to the indoor accommodation that year and correlated this with the fact that 'On the whole the statutes of the past week have been orderly presenting a cheery contrast with those of past years'.¹⁴¹ This line of reasoning was also followed by the East Riding Police. The Chief Constable's report for the last quarter of 1861, for example, concluded that 'a marked improvement in the conduct of and behaviour of the servants in general, together with a decided decrease of the usual amount of drunkenness on such occasions', was to a large extent the result of the reforms that had been implemented:

Great good has been done at Driffield and elsewhere by clergy and gentlemen of the neighbourhood having hired large rooms for the accommodation of female servants, thus enabling masters and mistresses to hire them without any annoyance whatsoever; moreover the young women are not driven to the objectionable practice of loitering about the streets and market places, exposed to the inclemency of the season, and too often subjected to insult and rudeness, both of which frequently lead to scenes of rioting, drunkenness and immorality.¹⁴²

Similarly in his report for the same quarter in 1863, he noted that:

¹⁴⁰ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 13 November, 1862; *Yorkshire Gazette*, 15 November, 1862.

¹⁴¹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 19 November, 1863.

¹⁴² *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 21 January, 1862.

The statute hirings, throughout the year, in all the small towns, had passed off in an exceedingly quiet and orderly manner, and the services of extra police were not required. The excellent arrangements made by the several committees who had engaged rooms had gone far to break down the fearful scenes of immorality which had occurred in previous years.¹⁴³

The view from within the campaign was also positive. According to Canon Randolph, the campaign was making progress in eroding hiring fairs and farm service. When he addressed the Social Science Congress at York in 1864, Canon Randolph claimed that both were falling out of favour as ‘many of the most influential farmers’ were giving up hirings due to the ‘inconvenience and mischief’ associated with the fairs themselves and the system of annual contracts with which they were intimately associated.¹⁴⁴

The contemporary evaluation of the campaign was not entirely positive, however, and from the late 1860s particularly, there was a greater readiness to dwell upon its limitations. The *Yorkshire Gazette*, for example, had generally offered its support for the campaign but when it asked the rhetorical question ‘Who can deny that the annually recurring “Statute hirings” have a charm and fascination for the larger portion of our rustic population far above what our hardworking philanthropists can offer them in the shape of rural sports or recreation?’ it was also indicating that the reformers had failed to offer a fundamental challenge to the hiring fair.¹⁴⁵ Two years later, the *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, offered a more pessimistic evaluation of the impact of the campaign when it concluded that the ‘efforts for the past six or eight years to suppress the objectionable part of these statutes have failed, male and female servants yet celebrating the times as festivals and resorting to the worst

¹⁴³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 7 January, 1864.

¹⁴⁴ *York Herald*, 1 October, 1864.

¹⁴⁵ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 30 November, 1867.

excesses'.¹⁴⁶ To some extent this growing pessimism regarding the progress and impact of the campaign may have reflected overly optimistic expectations what could be achieved in a short space of time. But even if the achievements of the 1860s are evaluated as a stepping-stone towards a more fundamental change in the future, the extent of the campaign's impact remained circumscribed. No indoor accommodation was being offered at Hull, Howden, Hunmanby, Beeford, Kilham, Pocklington or Patrington and every attempt to provide indoor hiring for men had so far failed. At those hirings where segregation had established itself, the impact that this had upon the character of the proceedings was less than might at first be imagined. The rooms provided were often small and could only cater for a limited number of servants at any one time. Another important limitation was that although the accommodation provided was often described as a 'Register Office' this was, in fact, a misnomer. Registration had gained a foothold amongst a minority of females who welcomed its association with a more domesticated form of service; but although registration facilities were usually available at these rooms, they were rarely used. More often, the rooms provided little more than an indoor location for the traditional verbal bargaining between employers and servants. All servants, male and female, refused to accept written characters. Indoor accommodation drew women away from the streets and market places and created an opportunity for clergy to impose a calmer and more rational tone to the proceedings, but as a means of proselytising the alternative system of registration and promoting new more flexible contracts, they had failed. The patronage of the rooms provided reflected an acceptance of their convenience rather than a complete rejection of traditional hiring practices.

¹⁴⁶ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 5 November, 1869.

The limited impact that the provision of indoor hiring had made upon the consciousness of female servants is underlined by the fact that on those occasions when rooms were not provided, or were late opening, women continued to hire in the streets and market places. The conditional acceptance that the reformed system had gained amongst the female servants is illustrated by the example of York in 1875. On this occasion the usual indoor accommodation at the White Swan Hotel, which was adjacent to the market place, the usual location for outdoor hiring, was abandoned in favour of a larger room at 'spacious Drill Hall in St Andrewgate' some distance from the market place. Bills were circulated advertising this new location for indoor hiring, but although 'every comfort had been made for them in the shape of seats and fires and refreshments' the hall was 'seldom if ever busy' as a consequence 'most of the bargaining took place in the open air'.¹⁴⁷ The experiment was repeated the following year but 'the servants preferred to assemble at the accustomed places, and the hall throughout the day was almost tenantless. The stand for the men was in Pavement, and the women congregated in the White Swan Yard'.¹⁴⁸ This failed experiment, which was soon abandoned in favour of a return to the usual practice of accommodating women in rooms at the White Swan Hotel, underlined that fact that reforms only prospered when they complemented rather than confronted the hiring fair. The initial attempt at reform at York in the 1860s had sought to draw females away from the market place to the Merchant's Hall in Fossgate. This had failed and reformers had been forced to compromise by hiring the room at the White Swan Hotel which was close to the heart of the hiring fair. A decade later, a renewed the attempt to realise the original objective of using indoor accommodation as a means of drawing servants away from the market place, had again failed. When confronted with the choice of either remaining close to centre of events or enjoying the comfort of indoor

¹⁴⁷ *York Herald*, 24 November, 1875.

accommodation elsewhere, females voted with their feet and chose the former. The register offices were, it seems accepted only as a convenient annexe of, rather than a complete alternative to, the broader festive atmosphere of the hiring fair. In any case, even when large numbers of women were attracted into these rooms, once hired they could and did return to the streets, public houses and amusements offered outside. Indoor hiring was, therefore, at best only a temporary enclave of moral control. Similarly where some success had been obtained in persuading females to hire through registration societies away from hirings they still 'rushed to the fair for the sake of its amusements'.¹⁴⁹ It was this propensity on the part of women to return to the streets and public houses after hiring and their general predilection for the attractions offered at the fairs that had prompted the provision of alternative rational entertainments. These were often located in the late-afternoon and evenings when hiring had ended and the festive aspects of the hiring day gathered pace. Despite the undoubted energy and enthusiasm that went into such initiatives, however, their effectiveness was limited. The most vigorous efforts were those at Driffield but reports of Driffield's hirings in the 1860s and 1870s indicate that the streets remained thronged with large numbers of female and male servants. Indeed, it was during the 1870s when the countervailing attractions offered by clergymen were at their peak, that Driffield hirings experienced its greatest disturbances: a fact that suggests that the attempt to promote a calmer and more rational atmosphere through the provision of alternative recreations was, at best, intermittent in its impact.

During the 1860s then, the second stage of Church of England campaign against hiring fairs in the East Riding had made some progress on the first largely unsuccessful phase of reforming activity. They had provided themselves with a

¹⁴⁸ *York Herald*, 24 November, 1876.

platform for contesting the hiring fair as a popular festival and farm service as a labour system. The ultimate objective of the campaign - Canon Randolph's wish that both the hiring fairs and farm service would be 'generally abandoned' as they had in many of the southern counties - had not been realised however.¹⁵⁰ Randolph's claim that the more substantial tenant farmers had abandoned hiring at the fairs must also be regarded with scepticism. There is no evidence that the numbers of farmers attending hiring fairs declined during the 1860s. By the end of the 1860s, the segregation of male and female hiring at some fairs remained the one area of significant reform.

The reasons for the limited success of this stage of the campaign are similar to those of the first. Significant change could only progress with the consent and co-operation of those who had the greatest involvement in the hiring fairs: farm servants and farmers. In general this was either absent or present in only a very limited and conditional sense. In offering indoor rooms for females, the reform campaign had identified an area in which change was welcomed. As female farm service increasingly came to resemble a form of domestic service both female farm servants and their mistresses had less of a role outside of the farm house. The hiring rooms were not only more comfortable they also helped to affirm this transition. They also provided a means of distinguishing those servants seeking employment in the domestic sphere of labour. As the latter commanded both higher wages and a more respectable status, female servants saw a connection between indoor hiring and their own social and economic advancement. This facilitated acceptance of this reform. Female servants did not wish to be completely separated from either the pleasure fairs or the informed comment on wages and conditions available in the market place, however. This

¹⁴⁹ *York Herald*, 10 November, 1866.

¹⁵⁰ *York Herald*, 1 October, 1964.

helps to explain their non-compliance with attempts to move the indoor accommodation away from the centre of the hiring fairs.

If women still retained a strong attachment to the vibrancy and bustle of the open air, the level of identification amongst the male servants was almost total: they flatly refused to patronise indoor hirings. As these became established as centres for the procurement of female labour this served to enhance further the burgeoning correlation between outdoor hiring, outdoor work, and masculinity: men worked and hired in their natural environment - the open air. As had been the case in the 1850s, even those farmers who wished to participate in the alternative hiring system promoted by clergy found that the resistance of farm servants precluded this. Given the relative scarcity of labour they had little choice but to follow the farm servants' example. Many male employers appear, in any case, to have regarded indoor hirings with some ambivalence. E. B. Portman, who reported on the East Riding for the Royal Commission on Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture in the 1860s noted that many farmers objected to register offices because they felt that it was 'too much trouble' to attend them.¹⁵¹ Perhaps they too felt that the public sphere of the market place was their natural environment.

A similar ambivalence on the part of farmers was also apparent in relation to written characters. In one sense, the issue of written characters was also determined by the farm servants, who still generally refused to accept written documents of any kind, but many farmers remained sceptical. Canon Randolph claimed that the more substantial tenant farmers - who were more likely to be Anglican in their religious orientation - were supportive of change, but the overriding impression is that the majority remained, at best, cautious in their

attitude towards the desirability and especially the practicality of progressing the more radical reforms proposed by rural clergy. E.B. Portman also found little support for written characters and register offices amongst the East Riding farmers he met, he attributed, for example, 'the very limited success' in promoting these reforms to local farmers' 'utter disregard of character'.¹⁵²

A reasonable evaluation of the success of the campaign by the late 1860s was that offered by the *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald* when it judged that 'the strenuous efforts, made a few years ago to put these great gatherings down has not succeeded, though there is no doubt that the proceedings have been much modified in consequence of the attention which was directed to their grosser features'.¹⁵³ Modification in the form of indoor hirings for female servants remained the main achievement of the campaign by the end of the 1860s. Dissatisfaction with the level of success achieved by this time fuelled a final phase of reforming activity. This will be considered in the following chapter.

¹⁵¹ BPP XVII, *First Report From The Commissioners on The Employment of Children Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, 1867-8, I, pp. 98-100.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 18 November, 1869.

Chapter Seven

The Final Phase of Reform: The Church of England and Farmers' Organisations 1870-80

As we have seen in the previous chapter, by the 1870s the principle of segregated hirings for men and women, and indoor hirings for female domestic farm servants, had become established as the prevailing mode of hiring at the larger hiring fairs in the East Riding. This and the partial establishment of a system of register offices for female servants were the main long-term achievements of the Church of England's campaign against hiring fairs during the mid-Victorian period. From the end of the 1860s, however, when further success became increasingly elusive and into the 1870s when the attendance and unruliness of farm servants at hiring fairs seemed to reach new heights, a new phase of opposition emerged. Clergymen continued the practice of offering indoor hirings and alternative rational recreations, but there was also a renewed interest in galvanising support for a more fundamental change.

There were two schools of thought on how a more radical approach might be progressed. One, represented by that long-standing critic of hiring fairs and farm service, the Rev. F.O. Morris, favoured outright suppression. This approach had always had its advocates and recent legislation in the form of the Fairs Act of 1871 (34 Victoria C 12) which had simplified the process of securing the legal suppression of fairs revived interest in this means of taming the hiring fair. Those in favour of suppression argued that parliamentary support should be mobilised as a means of securing the formal abolition of hiring fairs in the East Riding. In order to attract attention to the issue and win support for abolition F. O. Morris had written to *The Times* newspaper and had succeeded in having two letters published. He and his supporters felt that the

interest and support that these had generated indicated that parliamentary support might be mobilised behind a campaign designed to secure the legal suppression of hiring fairs.¹ The second position represented a radical extension of the current practice of segregating male and females at the hirings. It was argued that there should be a complete separation of the hirings for male and female servants. Men would continue to be hired at Martinmas but female hiring would be moved to May.² There was also at this time also some resurgent support for the idea of promoting written characters and register offices as the basis of an alternative system of hiring contracts.³

It was recognised that the active co-operation of farmers would have to be secured if either of the proposed measures were to be achieved. Meetings of farmers, principally gatherings of local Chambers of Agriculture, were attended and addressed by clergymen in order to secure their support. After some deliberation farmers chose to pursue their own independent campaign of reform. In order to understand why this was the case and why those farmers organised into Chambers of Agriculture were reluctant to support this last phase of reforming activity it is necessary to examine the nature of the divisions that had emerged between the Church of England campaign and local farmers' organisations by the 1870s. These divisions have already been alluded to in the previous chapter, but they will be examined in more detail here in order to illustrate how they influenced, in a largely negative fashion, the course of the Church of England's campaign towards the end of the mid-Victorian period.

East Riding farmers had already demonstrated, at the beginning of the mid-Victorian period, that if they acted collectively they had the capacity to exert

¹ *Beverley Guardian*, 10 April, 1875.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

considerable influence over a hiring fair. In 1852, for example, Drifffield's first hirings, traditionally held on the second Monday of November, fell on the unusually early date of the 8th of that month. A notice announcing this as the date of the hirings was issued by local magistrates. Farmers objected to this date, arguing that such an early hiring was inconvenient because of the labour they would lose at a time when they were pressed in their work. They persuaded local magistrates to postpone the hirings from the 8th to the 15th.⁴ This action 'aroused the ire and indignation' of local shopkeepers who then proceeded to issue a counter-notice to the effect that the hirings would in fact occur on the 8th as originally announced. The response of local farmers was to issue a printed declaration signed by 'nearly a hundred farmers' which announced that 'they would neither attend Drifffield on the 8th nor permit their servants to do so'.⁵ This declaration was 'speedily followed' by another from the magistracy now endorsing the farmers' position and the official hiring day became the 15th as they had demanded: despite the continued protests of shopkeepers. As the *Hull Advertiser* pointed out, what this rather farcical episode illustrated was that 'farmers themselves can fix their own time and place, irrespective of any authority, whether civil or *uncivil*, ecclesiastical or judicial and assemble to hire their servants when and where they please, without let or hindrance'.⁶

A similar line of reasoning had lain behind the Church of England's decision to use farmers' organisations as the vehicle for their initial phase of reform in the 1850s which was initiated shortly after this altercation between farmers and shopkeepers at Drifffield. As we have seen, however, this strategy proved to be unworkable for a number of reasons. Firstly, the farmers' ability to prevent

⁴ *Hull Advertiser*, 12 November, 1852.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

their servants attending Driffield's first hiring in 1852 was aided by the depressed condition of the labour market; a circumstance which was about to disappear and would remain absent for most of the mid-Victorian period. This changed market situation was compounded by the fact that farmers were being asked to progress a far more radical change than that of merely preventing servants attending a hiring. Imposing written characters was beyond even those farmers who were, in principle, supportive of the changes advocated by clergy. The contrast between the unity and purpose displayed by farmers in preventing their servants attending Driffield hirings in 1852 and the absence of such determined action when called upon to support the Church's effort two years later suggests also, however, that from the outset there was some dissonance between the Church campaign and the interests of farmers. This was the case, the majority of farmers not only doubted the practicality of written characters but they had not been persuaded by the Anglican vision of a farm service system reconfigured by paternal social relations.

This limited enthusiasm on the part of employers may partly explain why the Church campaign demanded less of employers from the early 1860s. Although some degree of employer co-operation remained crucial for the success of the campaign in its second phase, their role was reduced from being co-initiators of reform to acting as diligent consumers of the provision offered by clergymen and landowners. As Rev. James Skinner's appeal for a united action from all members of the rural hierarchy had put it:

The labour may be divided thus. Let the Clergy and the Landowners, in connection with the society as suggested, establish Register Offices in every Town and Village where statutes are held and others if found necessary. Let the farmers and their wives undertake to use them.⁷

As the campaign increasingly focused upon female servants it also adopted a more matriarchal tone which recognised the importance of farmers' wives or 'Mistresses' as managers and employers. Skinner, for example, portrayed them as the natural supporters of reform and appealed directly to them on the grounds of their special moral responsibility towards female servants.⁸ As we have seen, this tactic had some success, because indoor hirings were a relatively uncontroversial innovation which became accepted by both female farm servants and farmer's wives. Building upon this limited success towards more fundamental changes proved more difficult, however, with the ambivalence, and even the negativity of male employers proving to be barrier against further progress. Much of this negativity was rooted in a sense of irritation prompted by the arguments that continued to accompany the Church campaign. Although the tactics employed by clergy had exhibited greater pragmatism during the second stage of reform they continued to portray the farm service system as a major source of immorality in rural society and in doing so placed much of the blame for this at the farmer's door. As we have seen when evaluating the impact of the reforming effort of the 1850s, even those farmers who were well disposed towards the Church had regarded this critique as exaggerated and ill informed.⁹ By the 1860s, this contradiction between the paternalist vision of the Church and the prevailing trend towards segregation and proletarianisation within farm service was greater than ever. East Riding farmers continued to progress the re-shaping of farm service in ways that contravened the Anglican critique of farm service and the paternalist ideal that underpinned it. A prime example of this was the expansion of the practice of boarding farm servants with married foremen under the hind-house system. A graphic illustration of the

⁷ Rev. J. Skinner, *Facts and Opinions concerning Statute Hirings, Respectfully Addressed to the Landowners, Clergy, Farmers and Tradesmen of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, London, 1861, p. 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*

manner in which farm service continued to be reshaped from a system of direct control exercised by farmers, to a regime of indirect control based upon delegated authority and discipline. In continuing to advocate paternalism and bemoaning its absence, clergy were not only placing themselves against the course of agricultural change in the East Riding but also the economic and social interests of farmers.

By the 1870s the one area in which an alliance between clergy and farmers might still have been forged was in relation to the labour market position of farm servants and farmers' ability to enforce their contracts. The reshaped farm service system, based as it was upon more indirect forms of control, required that the market and the law functioned as additional mechanisms of discipline and control. Whilst these offered a relatively flexible regime of regulation for the employer, they were also, as was demonstrated in chapter three, capable of generating structural conflicts between capital and labour. These structural conflicts provided a window of opportunity for reformers and abolitionists because they offered the possibility that the resulting farmer dissatisfaction with the system might articulate them to their own agenda for change. In the 1850s, for example, a tightening labour market and the effect this had had upon farmers' ability to enforce their contracts had provided a degree of common ground between farmers and the Church campaign.¹⁰ In the 1860s also, there was a degree of farmer dissatisfaction with the fact that farm servants engaged at the hirings returned their 'fests' and some farmers felt that written agreements should be adopted instead.¹¹ This farmer dissatisfaction with aspects of the

⁹ W. Barugh, *'Master and Man', A Reply to the Pamphlet of the Rev. John Eddowes, entitled "The Agricultural labourer as He really Is"*, Drifffield, 1854.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Bridlington Free Press*, 18 January, 1868, Bridlington Chamber of Agriculture. After 'a general and animated discussion', this meeting passed a resolution stating that in its opinion 'it is desirable, when possible, that all engagements for yearly service between agriculturalists

farm service system reached new heights in the 1870s when all three forms of structural conflict which had afflicted the farm service system in the past - bargaining gains in the form of wage increases, the breaking of contracts at the hirings, and the practice of servants absconding, particularly in the Spring - reached new and unprecedented levels as the farm service system experienced its own version of the 'revolt of the field'. These difficulties were exacerbated by the fact that farmers often found that they could not find redress and enforce their contracts under the existing law because many servants were hired at pre-Martinmas hirings. This meant that as their contracts were over a year in length and not in writing, under the provisions of the Master and Servant Act of 1867, they were not legally binding.¹² The response of farmers to the difficulties posed by these 'structural conflicts' was a revival of interest in the idea of reforming the hiring fair in order to reduce the servants' bargaining power and ensure that they fulfilled their contracts. It was this revival of interest in the hiring fair question that encouraged some clergymen towards the view that farmers might at last be persuaded to support an agenda for radical change. Despite their lack of enthusiasm in the past, campaigners clearly felt that farmers' difficulties with the operation of the farm service system in the early 1870s could possibly provide the basis for co-operation between the two parties. The fact that farmers chose not to embrace the various solutions proffered by Anglican clergy in the early 1870s was not only a reflection of their antipathy towards the reforms advocated by clergymen but also of the fact that there was now a greater capacity and will on their part to act independently. By the early 1870s there was a developing sense of common identity and self organisation amongst the East Riding's farmers. The origins and nature of this are worth discussing in some detail as it helps to explain the widening gulf that

and their labourers should be in writing'. One farmer present at this meeting claimed to have used them for over twenty years.

¹² This was stipulated in the first schedule of the Master and Servant Act of 1867.

developed between farmers and the Church of England over the hiring-fair question during the 1870s.

The major vehicle for this independent action on the part of farmers were the Chambers of Agriculture formed in the mid-to late-1860s. In the short term these organisations had emerged in response to what farmers regarded as local magistrates bungled handling of the problems and issues that had emerged during the course of the outbreak of the Cattle Plague (rinderpest) which affected in the East Riding during the 1860s. The feeling amongst many local farmers was that their opinions, expertise and most importantly, their interests, had been disregarded by the largely clerical magistracy. The latter, in their handling of the various regulations and in their administration of the question of monetary compensation had, it was felt, 'humiliated' local farmers.¹³ The fact that a majority of local magistrates were clergymen was regarded as the fundamental problem as it had placed 'the whole management of local expenditure in the hands of parties who were not ordinary businessmen, and who had very little interest in the matter'.¹⁴ What this mishandling revealed, it was claimed, was that farmers as a group 'had no voice' and 'suffered very much from want of organisation' and needed, therefore, to organise themselves so that they might exercise some influence over the political-decision making process at both national and local level.¹⁵ The outcome of this dissatisfaction amongst local farmers was the formation, at a well attended meeting at Beverley

¹³ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 16 June, 1866; *Beverley Guardian*, 16 June, 1866. This outbreak of rinderpest began in London in July 1865. The Privy Council delegated powers to Justices of the Peace to appoint inspectors who could slaughter animals, prohibit movement of diseased stock and to close fairs and markets. Under the Cattle Diseases Prevention Act of 1866, magistrates and inspectors were given increased powers to control movements of cattle and to slaughter diseased animals; it also authorised the payment of compensation to farmers for stock slaughtered. This compensation came from the county rate. C. S. Orwin and E. H. Whetham, *History of British Agriculture 1846-1914*, David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1964, pp. 200 - 21; A. B. Erikson, 'The Cattle Plague in England 1865-67', *Agricultural History*, 35, 1961.

¹⁴ *Beverley Guardian*, 16 June, 1866.

which included 'some of the most influential agriculturists in the district', of the East Yorkshire Farmers' Association.¹⁶ This organisation which was modelled upon the Chambers of Commerce quickly became known as the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture.¹⁷ Branches were soon formed in the major towns and cities of the region including York, Beverley, Howden, Bridlington and Driffield, creating a network of local farmers' organisations across the East Riding. These rapidly became an important forum for farmers to meet, debate and formulate their views and represent their interests to both national and local governance. Although expressly non-political, in the formal party sense of the term, emphasis was placed upon them being independent farmers organisations 'for the purpose of organising the agricultural interest, in order to enable the occupiers of land and others to take united action on any matters in which in their opinion are calculated to benefit farmers'.¹⁸

In encouraging a greater awareness amongst farmers of the differences in outlook and interests between themselves and clergymen, the Cattle Plague issue and the resulting formation of the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture had significance for the future course of the campaign against the hiring fairs. It offered a practical illustration of the fact that clerical influence in the form, for example, of their dominance of the magistracy might conflict with farmers' interests. It also promoted the feeling that farmers, instead of accepting the legitimacy of clerical influence on such matters, should instead represent their own interests through their own actions and organisations.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ For limited discussion on the emergence and nature of Chambers of Agriculture see: J.R. Fisher, 'The Farmer's Alliance: An Agricultural Protest Movement of the 1880s' *Agricultural History Review*, 26, 1978; J. R. McQuiston, 'Tenant Right: Farmer Against Landlord in Victorian England 1847-1883, *Agricultural History*, 47, 1973; G. Cox, P. Lowe, and M. Winter, 'The Origins and Early Development of the National Farmers' Union', *Agricultural History Review*, 39, 1991.

The development of a more assertive and independent attitude amongst tenant farmers and its organisational expression in the form of Chambers of Agriculture had a second significant consequence for the Church-led campaign. The clerical campaign placed considerable reliance upon the traditional alliance between itself and local landowners. Landowner's influence over their tenantry was regarded as an important conduit through which the co-operation of farmers might be secured for the campaign. The Church made this explicit when it called upon landowners to use their influence over their tenants and encourage farmer support for the campaign, assuming that:

Their influence with their tenants is sufficiently effectual with regard to the adoption of new systems of agriculture and there can be no doubt of its being equally effectual in producing a material change in a system has so great effect upon the agricultural population. ... such influence has only to be wisely and judiciously exerted, in order to procure a more healthy tone in the rising generation.¹⁹

This represented the conventional approach of Anglican pressure groups. It was also a rational approach in that it seemed to offer prospects of success because the East Riding had a preponderance of large estates and 'close' parishes where landowner influence could be brought to bear. Several local landowners had also established a reputation for their readiness to support the cause of the established church in education, church building and restoration, and other charitable activities.²⁰ Furthermore, relations between landowners and tenant farmers in the East Riding had traditionally been positive. Tenant right had not been a major source of contention and in general farmers had accepted landowner representation in local and national politics and their leadership in

¹⁸ *Beverley Guardian*, 16 June, 1866.

¹⁹ Memorial, 'The Hiring of Farm Servants', Clergy of the Deanery of South Dickering, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 14 November 1863.

agricultural societies and Farmers' Clubs.²¹ A number of local landowners supported the Church campaign in the 1850s. Both Sir Tatton Sykes and Sir Henry Boynton became involved in measures designed to counter the appeal of hiring fairs. Sir Henry Boynton, for example, encouraged his tenants to sign a petition condemning the hiring of female servants at statute fairs.²² By the mid-1860s, however, such tactics were less likely to succeed. One difficulty for Anglicanism in the East Riding areas was the fact that the already limited number of landowners were increasingly non-resident. The concentrated nature of East Riding landownership and the increased absenteeism of landowners meant that clergy were often left to act without this traditional form of support. James Skinner, for example, complained that he had acted 'in default of more influential persons coming to the rescue' and other clergy bemoaned the absence of resident landowners in their parishes.²³ On the other hand, as the formation of Chambers of Agriculture indicates, there was less readiness on the part of farmers to accept directed guidance of this kind. Those advocating the creation of a more independent farmers' organisation for example also criticised existing landowner dominated organisations, principally Agricultural Societies, for excluding the discussion of issues of practical significance for the farmer, complaining that 'it was a great question whether they had really been of any practical benefit to the farming interest'.²⁴ The formation of the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture with its declared aim of offering direct and independent representation of the interests and opinions of farmers to the legislature, and its call for state intervention on such issues as tenant right and the appointment of a

²⁰ J.T. Ward, *East Yorkshire Landed Estates in the Nineteenth Century*, East Yorkshire Local History Series: No 23, 1967, p. 9.

²¹ *Ibid*, and Adams, 'Agricultural Change in the East Riding of Yorkshire, 1850-1880: An Economic and Social History', Unpublished Ph. D Thesis University of Hull, 1977. pp. 305-326 for a discussion of the general satisfaction of East Riding farmers with their existing tenancy agreements and the strength of the landlord-tenant nexus.

²² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 19 November, 1859.

²³ Skinner, 'Facts and Opinions', p. 3.

²⁴ *Beverley Guardian*, 16 June, 1866.

Board of Agriculture, reflected a desire on the part of farmers to supplement and even by-pass existing channels of influence. In doing so, those involved in the Chamber of Agriculture movement challenged landowners' traditional claim to represent the interests of all farmers.²⁵ The extent of the division between farmers and the traditional ruling elite should not be exaggerated. Farmers sought landowner involvement in the Chambers and emphasised that they 'wished to keep on good terms with their landlords and with magistrates', and at least one of the most active protagonists in creating the Beverley Chamber, G. Bainton of Beverley Parks, was himself a landed proprietor, albeit at the bottom end of the landowning hierarchy.²⁶ In creating their own organisations designed to 'rouse themselves and their own interests', however, farmers were clearly indicating that they were no longer so ready to accept and defer to the hegemony of squire and parson on issues that concerned their economic and social interests.²⁷ They also now had, in the form of the Chambers of Agriculture, permanent organisations through which they could initiate their own actions on such issues. By the end of the 1860s then, the increased absenteeism of East Riding landowners and a burgeoning sense of independence and self organisation of farmers in the East Riding rendered the Church of England's strategy of mobilising the traditional rural hierarchy increasingly inappropriate. By this time farmers were prepared to initiate actions of their own which advanced reform of a different kind to that advocated by the increasingly abolitionist moral reform movement. The alternative reforms advocated by farmers will now be examined.

The first reform considered by farmers was that of introducing written contracts and/or fixing all statutes in Martinmas Week. This was obviously inspired by

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid; W. Bainton, the first president of the East Riding Farmer's Association owned 1,295 acres, Ward, 'Landed Estates' p. 62.

the Church of England's attempt to promote written characters and it took a similar form in that it was suggested that a printed document with a statement of character be used as a common hiring currency between members of Chambers of Agriculture. Its aim and emphasis was different, however, in that it was designed not so much to enforce a form of moral regulation but provide a secure form of contract under the law of master and servant. The 1867 Master and Servant Act required that contracts over a year should be in writing and written contracts would therefore prevent those servants hired at pre-Martinmas hirings claiming that their verbal contracts were invalid and therefore unenforceable. Moving all hirings into Martinmas Week would mean that all agreements would be made after the termination of the contract and would be of less than a year's duration. As a consequence they would no longer contravene the aforementioned Act. Both of these proposals were first outlined in a long and detailed circular issued by the Howdenshire Chamber of Agriculture in October 1874:

Much inconvenience and loss having been sustained of late by various members and others from the increasing practice of servants sending back their earnest-money and refusing to fulfil their engagements entered into at the statutes, held usually sometime before Martinmas, and upon resorting to the usual means, of supposed redress under the Master and Servant's Act, the magistrates having constantly dismissed the cases stating that as the engagement was legally from the time of hiring until the Martinmas of the ensuing year, it extended over a longer period than twelve months and therefore only by word of mouth it was not binding on either party. We are therefore driven to review our present customs and practices to see what remedy lies in our power. The simplest remedy that presents itself would be a written contract, if it could be made universal, but the great objection on the part of servants and some masters to documents of this kind renders the carrying out of this ideal hopeless. There are very considerable objections to the custom of holding the statutes before Martinmas at all, in the loss of time involved by the absence of servants at the statutes so near the end of their contract, when there is such a press of work to be got through before the customary week of recreation of this period of the year. There

²⁷ *Beverley Guardian*, 16 June, 1866.

is also great unsettlement, and not infrequently much recklessness and idleness on the part of the servants during the rest of the time, the dread of increasing which often causes a just and fair character to be withheld by the employer. To prevent this state of confusion, uncertainty and loss, it is proposed that the authorities be requested be requested to fix the statute hirings during Martinmas Week. The advantages to be derived are: 1st - the validity of the contract and 2nd - the absence of the unsettled time betwixt the holding of the first statute in the district and the leaving day. 3rd - a greater disposition on the part of masters to complete contracts for future service without unnecessary loss of time.²⁸

This memorandum, which was circulated within all Chambers of Agriculture within the East Riding, generated considerable debate and not a little disagreement amongst those present at their meetings. Farmers at Beverley, for example, initially favoured written contracts but did not support a change of date for the hirings.²⁹ Later discussions of the issue at this and other Chambers of Agriculture saw other proposals advanced as possible alternatives to either written contracts or changing the dates of hiring fairs. These included securing a change in the law that would make the acceptance of a 'fest' legally binding and even complete abolition of the hiring fairs.³⁰ The three proposals that attracted the greatest interest, however, were: introducing written contracts, moving all hirings to the post-Martinmas period, and introducing separate hiring fairs for men and women at different times of the year. The latter proposal was advocated by clergymen who attended Chamber meetings but generally received little support from farmers.³¹ It was pointed out, for example, that even if such a measure could be imposed, in creating two separate Martinmas Weeks it would cause farmers great inconvenience. It was also suggested that as each sex would in any case attend each others hirings, this change would not realise any

²⁸ *York Herald*, May 7, 1875, The York Chamber of Agriculture: 'Discussion on The Hiring of Servants', this was prompted by a paper delivered by Mr Hutchinson of Howden Chamber of Agriculture entitled 'The Hiring of Farm Servants'.

²⁹ *Beverley Recorder*, 10 October, 1874.

³⁰ *Beverley Recorder*, 13 March, 1875; *Beverley Guardian*, 10 April 1875; *Driffield Times*, 1 May 1875; *Beverley Recorder*, 8 May 1875; *Hull Times*, 8 May 1875.

³¹ *Beverley Guardian*, 10 April, 1875.

significant moral improvement.³² As the circular issued by the Howdenshire Chamber had anticipated, there was also considerable doubt regarding the practicality of trying to enforce a system of written contracts. Although this proposal had its supporters, it was felt by the majority that the proven failure of the recent attempts to establish a system of written characters had demonstrated that most servants would not accept documents of this kind.³³ The final proposal given serious consideration was the one that was clearly favoured by the Howdenshire memorandum, that of moving all hirings into the post-Martinmas period. The general view was, however, that it would be impossible to crowd all the hirings into Martinmas Week.³⁴ Whilst each of the proposals for reform drew practical objections from those farmers present there was at least a degree of unity on the question of total abolition. Many farmers chose to defend both farm servants and hiring fairs against the charges of immorality levelled at them by their clerical critics. The farmer who opposed separate hirings on practical grounds for example, stated also that he saw 'nothing objectionable' in hiring fairs and added that 'farm lads were better conducted and steadier than most other bodies of working men', his views received support from others present, including one farmer who stated that 'he liked the lads to enjoy themselves'.³⁵ Those advancing such opinions were not generally arguing against any change, but were concerned to keep the debate focused upon the question of securing contracts that were legally enforceable. When discussion centred upon the alleged immorality promoted by the hirings it tended to fuel enthusiasm for changes of a more radical nature or even complete abolition within clerical opinion. In contrast, the majority of farmers present at these meetings preferred to believe that 'The subject was more a commercial

³² Ibid.

³³ *Beverley Recorder*, 13 March, 1875; *Beverley Guardian*, 10 April 1875.

³⁴ *Beverley Recorder*, 13 March, 1875.

³⁵ *Beverley Recorder*, 10 April, 1875.

than a moral one'.³⁶ During the early stages of the debate, therefore, farmers were clearly dissatisfied with the manner in which the hirings were functioning but remained divided over what should be done to remedy the situation. They were, however, relatively united in the view that hiring fairs should not be completely abolished.

A degree of consensus was eventually forged at a large public meeting which was attended by farmers from the various East Riding Chambers of Agriculture. At this meeting, which was hosted by the York Chamber at the Queen's Hotel, Micklegate, York in May 1875, the debates and arguments of the previous months were revisited. The debate now centred upon deliberating over the practicality of three reforms: written contracts, altering the dates of hirings, and securing a change in the law of master and servant that would make the traditional verbal agreement and 'fest' legal for contracts of over a year's duration. After considerable deliberation, written contracts and moving the dates of hirings were dismissed as impractical and undesirable. Doubts were also expressed regarding the likelihood of securing a reform in the law. Both local members of Parliament had indicated scepticism regarding the prospects of achieving success and there was concern that organised labour would oppose such a reform.³⁷ Nevertheless the meeting eventually supported the following resolution:

That this Chamber take steps to have the following clause inserted in the amendments to the master and servants Act which is to be introduced into Parliament by the Home Secretary after Whitsuntide, viz.: 'That whenever any servant in husbandry has entered into any contract of service with and on behalf of a farmer for any service of time, and shall have received any some of money or earnest, in consideration of such contract, such receipt of money should be of the same force and effect to all intents and purpose, and as binding as if

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *York Herald*, 7 May, 1875

the contract had been in writing, within the enactments of the first schedule of the master and servant's Act, 1867.³⁸

It was agreed that the secretary of the York Chamber, should prepare a memorial to the Home Secretary asking him to insert this amendment into the Master and Servant Act. Instead of amending the Act as farmers had hoped, however, the Conservative Government passed the Employers and Workmen's Act of 1875. This exacerbated the problems experienced by farmers, as it not only failed to address the problem posed by unwritten contracts that were in excess of a year, it also repealed the penal clauses of the Master and Servant Act (local Chambers had also lobbied against such a change). On both counts then, the independent representations of Chambers of Agriculture had been ignored. Cases brought before magistrates against farm servants after this Act became law confirmed that verbal contracts of over a year's duration were still technically invalid.

This setback forced farmers to reconsider their strategy and consequently the hiring fair question continued to feature prominently at Chamber meetings as they pondered the best way forward. Farmers found, however, that their own deliberations were in danger of being swamped by a resurgence of interest on the part of clergy and others in securing the abolition of hirings. A key factor in this was the levels of disorder and violence at local hirings in the Autumn of 1875, particularly the riots at Driffield and Bridlington. These were seized upon by opponents of the hirings and a renewed outcry against hiring fairs ensued which included a calls for the suppression of hiring fairs from the Chief Constable of the East Riding Police, the Lords Feoffees of Bridlington and the Boards of Guardians of Beverley and Driffield Unions. The latter forwarded its resolutions in favour of abolition to Chambers of Agriculture in an attempt to

³⁸ Ibid.

draw farmers into supporting a programme of suppression.³⁹ The response of Chambers of Agriculture was to oppose this move arguing that those calling for suppression were offering no practical alternative.⁴⁰ On these grounds they managed to secure the support of both local members of parliament who voiced their opposition to the idea of abolition.⁴¹ Farmers then sought to seize the initiative and called for Boards of Guardians to co-operate with them in prosecuting what was now their favoured option: that the dates of all hiring fairs should be 'altered to the week following the 23rd of November'.⁴² In this the Chambers of Agriculture were successful as Beverley, Driffield and Skirlaugh Unions agreed to offer their support for such a change. Having secured this support it was decided to press the High Sheriff of the County to call a public meeting at York to discuss and establish a consensus on the question of reforming hiring fairs in the East Riding.⁴³

The meeting, presided over by the High Sheriff of the County, took place at York in July 1876, passed three resolutions and in doing so clarified the relative positions of farmers, clergymen and other moral reformers on the question of reforming hiring fairs. The first resolution, moved by Mr Bainton of the Beverley branch of the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture, rejected abolition of hirings in favour of reforms that would legalise contracts made at the hirings.

The motion went as follows:

The whole question of Statute hirings having been raised by recent discussions and correspondence this meeting, while regretting the evils of the present system, recommends that efforts should be directed to improve rather than abolish them.⁴⁴

³⁹ *Driffield Times*, 8 January, 1876.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Driffield Times*, 29 January, 1876.

⁴² *Driffield Times*, 12 February, 1876.

⁴³ *Driffield Times*, 11 March, 1876.

⁴⁴ *York Herald*, 14 July, 1876.

In moving this resolution, which was greeted with applause from those present, Bainton emphasised the continued utility of hirings for farmers but suggested that it was necessary to 'revise and remodel them to the present circumstances' by introducing 'some steps necessary for the safety of agriculturists'.⁴⁵ Given that changes in the law and written contracts had proved impractical, he suggested these steps should be 'to legalise the hirings by having them after Martinmas'.⁴⁶ No doubt anticipating opposition to this from farm servants, he emphasised that any changes desired by farmers were designed to safeguard the institution of the hiring fair and to benefit both farmers and servants because, as he put it 'There was nothing more desirable for the welfare of farmers than to have a good feeling between employer and employed'.⁴⁷ Perhaps as an olive branch to clerical feeling, Bainton also lent his support for the idea of instigating two hirings a year in May and November arguing that such a change would 'lessen the large attendance at the hirings, and would have the effect of preventing a great many evils'.⁴⁸ If Bainton was conciliatory towards those seeking more fundamental change than that of moving the dates of hirings, other farmers present were more assertive in their defence of the *status quo*. The seconder of Bainton's motion, for example, Mr Jonathan Dunn, Chairman of the York Chamber of Agriculture, drew vocal support from farmers in the audience, when he dismissed written characters and register offices as impractical and offered a spirited defence of the traditional hiring system against those who sought its outright abolition:

Statute hirings had been in existence nearly 300 years in this part of England. They were instituted by act of parliament in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and the system had come down

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

to them as an old established custom ... statute hirings were in full vigour in this part of the country. They furnished a rustic and rude but at the same time a simple and most efficient plan for servants and masters and mistresses to meet together. In these days of comparative scarcity of labour they seemed more necessary than ever.(Hear Hear).⁴⁹

Dunn suggested that neither masters, servants nor the general public demanded the abolition of hirings fairs and urged farmers to ignore the 'few individuals who were loudly demanding it' because, as he explained:

They had heard a good deal of talk about servants in the newspapers - about their being very much ill used and having the appearance of slavery. These were the expression of mere sentimental feeling, and the only way to deal with parties who held such opinions was to quietly take no notice of them (Applause).

If neither masters nor servants nor the public were asking for the abolition of these hirings, and if they were found very useful, and nothing was essentially wrong in the system, were they to take so very much notice of those perhaps well intentioned but mistaken individuals who were so loudly asking them to abolish statute hirings (Applause).⁵⁰

Dunn's riposte to his own question, which was delivered amid loud applause from those present, was that farmers would 'make a great mistake if they did'.⁵¹ He then suggested that 'They should look to their own interests, and to the benefits of the system, before they abolished it'.⁵² The meeting then proceeded to pass the resolution in favour of retaining hirings by 'a large majority'.

Having dismissed the question of abolition, the meeting then proceeded to pass the following resolution in favour of moving the dates of hirings so as to restore the legal basis of verbal agreements made at them:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

That the ordinary verbal engagement of farm servants, made previous to the commencement of the year's service having no legal binding operation, it is strongly recommended, in order to remove such defect, that statute hirings for the future be held not earlier than May Day or Martinmas Day, whichever the district and hiring season, and that a memorial to this effect be signed by the chairman on behalf of this meeting, and copies thereof forwarded to the various local Authorities having jurisdiction in the matter.⁵³

Almost as an afterthought, the meeting also proceeded to pass a third resolution recording its gratification at having heard of the good that had resulted from the provision of indoor accommodation at hirings and welcoming the extension of such provision in the future. The mover of this resolution also supported the idea of written characters. In doing so he received support from clergymen in the audience but significantly neither this nor the idea of separate hirings was received with much enthusiasm from those farmers present. In contrast to the enthusiastic reception given to the earlier resolutions there was neither applause nor vocal support from the audience for this last resolution. Although the resolution was passed, its wording and location in the agenda of the day's proceedings and its cool reception, offer the impression that its main function was to affirm that intervention into the hiring fairs should remain limited to the provision of indoor accommodation. The meeting thus underlined what had become increasingly obvious for some time, that Chambers of Agriculture had their own agenda for moderate and limited change. These were designed to restore the employers' bargaining position with, and legal control over, their farm servants. They had, therefore, drawn a line between themselves and those that sought fundamental change or abolition.

The advantages of changing the dates of hiring fairs for farmers was not only that contracts would be enforceable under the law but also that it would

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

foreshorten the hiring season. As Jonathan Dunn, Chairman of York Chamber of Agriculture, pointed out in a letter to the *York Herald* Such a change offered a number of advantages for farmers:

By doing away with these statutes which have customarily been held previous to November 23rd, and appointing them in Martinmas Week, a great improvement will be effected on the present state of things. Ample opportunity will still be given for all hiring to take place; the two or three weeks disturbance, disorganisation and general unsettledness will be largely prevented. All contracts made at the public hirings will be within the scope of the law, and consequently the prevalent scandal of unceremoniously and wantonly repudiating the hiring contract as soon as made will be very much lessened.⁵⁴

This truncated hiring season would also have undermined the servant's ability to exploit the more favourable market situation that had developed. With fewer hirings over a shorter period of time they would have had reduced opportunities for hiring, less time to test the condition of the market, and less opportunity to hold out for higher wages. It was also envisaged that a shorter hiring season would encourage a more localised pattern of hiring so that farmers would find themselves hiring from a pool of labour that was known and, therefore, less inclined to 'scrimshank' or abscond from service.⁵⁵

This was part of a general campaign by Chambers of Agriculture across the north of England. In total, 40 different authorities in Yorkshire, Northumberland, Durham, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire received deputations from Chambers of Agriculture requesting that the dates of hirings be altered so that the contracts would in future be valid.⁵⁶ In the East Riding, the Chamber presented a memorial summarising the decisions made at public meetings in favour of reforming rather than abolishing hirings and advocating

⁵⁴ Letter, J Dunn, Chairman of York Chamber of Agriculture, *York Herald*, 28 October, 1876.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

that in future hiring fairs should be held after Martinmas to the Justices of the Peace at the East Riding Quarter sessions held at Beverley in October of 1876.⁵⁷ Each local Chamber then approached what they regarded as the appropriate authority regulating the timing of the hirings in their locality. The Beverley Chamber, for example, sent a deputation to the mayor 'with a view to induce him to alter the time of holding the statute hirings to some day later than the 23rd of November (instead of the 6th of that Month), in order that the contracts then entered into with servants might be binding'.⁵⁸ The Mayor agreed to fix the hirings for 24th November and farmers were advised to release their servants on the day before, a day earlier than usual, so that they might return home with their wages prior to the hiring day.⁵⁹ At Driffield, memorials were placed before the Board of Guardians and magistrates. The hirings were duly appointed to take place on Monday 27th of November.⁶⁰ The hirings at Malton, Bridlington, Market Weighton and Howden were also moved to post-Martinmas dates in accordance with the representations of local farmers.⁶¹

The results of what initially appeared to be an impressive display of organisation by Chambers of Agriculture proved to be less dramatic than had been expected. The main reason for this was an absence of co-operation from a number of quarters including farmers themselves. At Beverley, for example, although notices had been issued by the Lord Mayor stipulating that the annual hirings would now take place on the 24th of November instead of the usual date of the 6th, the hirings proceeded as usual on the 6th. As report from the

⁵⁷ East Riding Record Office, Quarter Sessions Order Books, 1872-77, QSV/1/Memorial of East Riding Chamber of Agriculture, received and read in open court.

⁵⁸ *Hull Times*, 28 October, 1876.

⁵⁹ *Driffield Times*, 11 November, 1876.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, for the alterations at Driffield and Bridlington; *Driffield Times*, 18 November, 1876, for Market Weighton and Malton; *York Herald*, 28 October 1876, for Howden.

Driffield Times illustrates, a major reason for this was the determination of the servants to ignore the new regulation:

Notwithstanding the efforts of the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture and other bodies to get the hirings altered to a date subsequent to Martinmas-day, the servants are determined not to be done out of a holiday, and Tuesday being the annual hiring day there was a large attendance of lads and lasses - nearly as many as in former years.⁶²

It was not only that farm servants had determined to continue with their traditional festivities or that most farmers had clearly failed to prevent them attending the hirings, but also that 'Many farmers, too, attended, and a considerable amount of hiring was done at high prices'.⁶³ As well as this embarrassing act of non-compliance by their farming brethren, the Beverley Chamber of Agriculture had to contend with the active resistance of the tradesmen and innkeepers of the town. They, having heard of the changes proposed issued a counter-notice declaring 'that as many farmers and servants will be observing the old date they will be prepared to receive them'.⁶⁴ Despite this disappointing outcome, particularly the fact 'that many farmers were disposed to take part with the opposition, and keep the old day' the Beverley Chamber of Agriculture remained committed to their objective and even voiced the view that they had 'come to the beginning of the end, and would shortly be able to make contracts with servants which would be binding'.⁶⁵

Similar confusion reigned at Driffield. Here, the magistrates had acquiesced to the farmers' request and appointed the hirings for the 27th, but this decision was objected to by the 'tradesmen' of the town. They, 'finding that one of the main business days of the year would be greatly affected by having only one

⁶² *Driffield Times*, 11 November, 1876

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Hull Times*, 4 November, 1876.

hiring day instead of two' issued hand bills announcing that the annual hirings would, in fact, held on the traditional day of 13th November.⁶⁶ This news was 'publicised far and wide for nearly a week' and as a result, the issue of when the hirings should take place was reported as generating 'quite a fever' amongst the farmers at the market day preceding the proposed first hirings at Driffield.⁶⁷ According to the local press 'the most influential farmers in the neighbourhood' were against the proposed abandonment of the first hirings.⁶⁸ The eventual result was that, as had been the case at Beverley, the usual pre-Martinmas first hirings went ahead at Driffield and 'despite the very inclement weather, and the notice issued by the magistrates fixing the hirings for the 27th inst., the lads and lasses attended in large numbers'.⁶⁹ Once again it was not only the servants who were resisting the change: 'Farmers, too, mustered equally strong, and business was carried on briskly for some hours'.⁷⁰ Although the newspaper reporter noted that 'there was a falling off in the number of shows, and those stationed on the hill did only a limited business' its general evaluation of the day was not a sanguine one for those farmers seeking change:

Judging from the appearance of the town on Monday -the day fixed by the 'unauthorised' for holding the annual statute hirings, the prediction of the Beverley Chamber of Agriculture that they had 'come to the beginning of the end' of the hirings being held before Martinmas-day would seem to have little foundation in fact.⁷¹

The results of these initial attempts by farmers to eliminate pre-Martinmas hirings was equally fitful elsewhere. At Bridlington the magistrates fixed a new

⁶⁵ *Hull Times*, 11 November, 1876.

⁶⁶ *Hull Times*, 4 November, 1876.

⁶⁷ *Driffield Times*, 11 November, 1876.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Driffield Times*, 18 November, 1876

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Driffield Times*, 18 November, 1876.

'authorised' hiring date of Saturday 25th November but 'some person or persons unknown' responded by fixing them on their traditional pre-Martinmas date.⁷² The latter proved popular for 'Notwithstanding the unfavourable state of the weather, the uncertainty of holding the hirings, and the want of the usual publicity, they were well attended by servants of both sexes, and by masters and mistresses in want of servants'.⁷³ At Malton also, the attempt to abrogate pre-Martinmas hirings was limited in its impact as although 'Female servants were very scarce' there was 'a very large attendance of male servants and employers'.⁷⁴ The large number of the latter in attendance prompting the *Driffield Times* to comment on the 'the want of unanimity on the part of the farmers on the question of altering the hirings'.⁷⁵ Counter-notices were also issued against the attempt to alter the dates of the hirings at Brandesburton and Market Weighton. There is no record of the outcome at Brandesburton but at Market Weighton those farmers seeking change achieved their only major success as there was only 'a very thin attendance' at the traditional hirings due to the fact that 'Both masters and servants in this district seem to think that the 27th will be the most convenient time for holding the hirings'.⁷⁶

The new or 'authorised' post-Martinmas hirings proceeded as planned at Beverley, Bridlington, Malton, Driffield, Brandesburton, Howden and Market Weighton, but in general were less well attended than their pre-Martinmas rivals. At Driffield, for example, it was reported that 'there were very few servants in comparison to the numbers on the unauthorised days'.⁷⁷ At Beverley, the Chamber of Agriculture's hope that the new hiring day would still be a success, despite the numbers seen at the traditional first hiring day, proved

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

to be misplaced. The 'authorised' hirings, which took place on the 24th, proved to be a disappointment because there was little hiring as most of the servants present had already hired at the previous 'unauthorised' hirings. Similarly at Bridlington, there was large attendance of masters and servants, but 'The pick of the servants, however, had been engaged at the previous hirings'.⁷⁸ At Market Weighton however, where the experiment had been more successful than elsewhere in eroding the original hiring day, the new 'authorised' day enjoyed a 'a fair attendance of both masters and servants'.⁷⁹ Hiring took place as normal at York, Pocklington and Hunmanby as these hirings had traditionally been held in Martinmas Week.

Reflecting on the course of events during this first attempt to bring about change, Chambers of Agriculture remained optimistic that the reform would, despite the set-backs experienced, eventually progress. Those farmers attending the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture meeting at Beverley, for example, thanked the Mayor of Beverley and the East Riding Magistrates for their co-operation and argued that 'although the alteration had not proved so successful as they expected, still the principal had been recognised, and seeing that it took a long time to renovate old institutions, ... they might take heart at what had been done'.⁸⁰ In an attempt to press the reform more forcefully, the Goole and Marshland Chamber of Agriculture attempted to solicit the support and intervention of R.A. Cross the Home Secretary in promoting a change in the dates of hiring fairs. His response, was a negative one, however, as he sent a communication stating that he had 'no authority by law to interfere in the arrangements for the holding of Statute fairs'.⁸¹

⁷⁷ *Hull Times*, 2 December, 1876.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Driffild Times*, 2 December, 1876.

⁸⁰ *Hull Times*, 9 December, 1876.

⁸¹ *Hull Times*, 11 August, 1877.

In the absence of governmental support, Chambers of Agriculture decided to continue to attempt to progress reforms of the kind attempted in 1876. In 1877, therefore, local authorities were once again requested to fix hirings on dates after Martinmas. In an attempt to increase attendance, it was suggested that days coinciding with existing market days and fair days should be chosen if possible. Once again, however, this failed to prevent the earlier 'unauthorised', pre-Martinmas hirings taking place. At Driffield, for example:

Despite the efforts which were last year made by Chambers of Agriculture and others to subvert the old custom of holding the statute hirings before the 24th of November the attendance of both masters and servants on Monday was quite on a par with previous years.⁸²

Elsewhere there was at least some indication that some farmers were demonstrating an inclination to conform and were hiring their servants only at those fairs held after Martinmas. At Beverley the Mayor once again appointed the 24th as the official hiring day and once again his decision was opposed by the trades people of the town who issued bills 'stating they would be glad to see their friends on the 6th'.⁸³ Although the earlier hirings went ahead and attracted a gathering of farm servants 'as great as in former years', the *Beverley Guardian* felt that: 'there did not seem to be the usual amount of hiring done'.⁸⁴ The reason given for this decline in the number of contracts made, was that many farmers had 'stayed away, with the view we suppose of making their contracts after Martinmas, when they can be enforced by law'.⁸⁵ A large attendance of both male and female farm servants was recorded at the pre-Martinmas hirings at Bridlington where, as usual, 'the men and youths stood

⁸² *Driffield Times*, 17 November, 1877.

⁸³ *Hull Times*, 10 November, 1877.

⁸⁴ *Beverley Guardian*, 10 November, 1877.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

packed in crowds in the Market-place'.⁸⁶ In contrast, however, the attendance of masters and mistresses was reported to be 'somewhat limited'.⁸⁷ At Malton, as normal, there were two hirings fairs the prior to the 23rd. The first was reported as being 'exceedingly well attended' especially by male servants, but although the number of employers present was also 'pretty numerous' many of these refrained from hiring, although the reason for this was said to be the high wages asked by servants.⁸⁸ At Malton's second hirings employers were almost as numerous as servants, but once again hiring was limited because 'Many of the farmers refrained from hiring until after the 23rd' as they believed that 'engagements, unless in writing, are not valid for more than a twelve month'.⁸⁹

Despite these indications that Chambers of Agriculture had had more success in winning the support of farmers this second year, the 'authorised' hirings held after Martinmas still experienced mixed fortunes. At Driffield, for example, they took place on the last Thursday in November - the usual location for Driffield's second hirings - and the attendance of servants was 'about on a par with previous years'.⁹⁰ Hornsea hirings which had been re-arranged from the 7th to the 25th of November enjoyed 'a good attendance of masters and servants'.⁹¹ Curiously the hirings at Howden were fixed by the Chamber of Agriculture but were still allowed to fall prior to Martinmas!⁹² At Beverley the 'authorised' hirings were set for the 24th which coincided with the traditional Martinmas Saturday fair which had always served as a social gathering and as a late hiring when required. The *Beverley Guardian's* assessment of this event was less than positive, however, when it suggested that 'it differed little in appearance from

⁸⁶ *Driffield Times*, 17 November, 1877.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Hull Times*, 24 November, 1877.

⁹⁰ *Driffield Times*, 1 December, 1877.

⁹¹ *Hull Times*, 1 December, 1877.

⁹² *Hull Times*, 24 November, 1877.

the ordinary Martinmas Saturday' adding that 'as a hiring day it was evidently a failure for very little was done comparatively'.⁹³ The Assembly Rooms, were opened for female servants by local clergy but 'the large room which has so often been so crowded as to prevent free locomotion, was empty'.⁹⁴ The *Beverley Guardian* concluded that:

The whole question of the hirings is one which at present seems muddled. Neither the attendance nor the usual attractions in the market were so good on Saturday as on the 6th, the old hiring day, and so long as there is so much difference of opinion amongst the farmers, the same thing will continue.⁹⁵

The position of those farmers seeking to erode the custom of pre-Martinmas hirings received another set-back at this time in the form of the outcome of a highly publicised case brought before the magistrates at Malton in November 1877. This resolved what was described as 'An important question viz. as to the right of farm servants to attend the statutes for hire before their period of service is expired'.⁹⁶ The case involved Richard Nelson, farmer and horse dealer, and one of his farm servants William Douthwaite. Nelson claimed that Douthwaite had illegally left his service on Saturday 17th of November when he had attended Malton hirings 'contrary to his master's express orders'.⁹⁷ Nelson had already allowed Douthwaite to attend Malton's first hirings on the 10th, but refused permission for him to attend the second hirings on the 17th on the grounds that 'it was the only day in three weeks he had had a chance to get his wheat sown'. He had, therefore, ordered his men to undertake this task instead of attending the hirings.⁹⁸ Two of his servants refused, this act of defiance being, in Nelson's words 'accompanied by language of a most unparliamentary

⁹³ *Beverley Guardian*, 1 December, 1877

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *York Herald*, 26 November, 1877.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

description'.⁹⁹ Nelson decided, therefore, to bring one of these men, Douthwaite, before the bench as test-case 'to see if he could legally act in such a way', and claimed damages against him for illegally attending the hirings. The response of the Magistrates was to dismiss the case on the grounds that 'it was the custom of the country to allow servants to attend the statutes twice'; they also stressed their reluctance to interfere with what they described as 'old customs'.¹⁰⁰ Nelson not only found himself losing the case and having to pay costs but on leaving the Magistrates Court was subject to 'an ovation from those worthy tillers of the soil, quite the reverse of complimentary, gratis'.¹⁰¹ An outraged and frustrated Nelson vented his spleen in a letter to the editor of the *York Herald* in which he posed the question:

What is the law? Or is there any law in the matter? It seems to me a very one sided affair. It suggests that an employer is in a similar position to the man in the stocks. Had some of our dispensers of justice a little more experience in the handling of these agricultural specimen, they would open their eyes. ... Now sir we hear great exclamations not only from the pulpit but from Gentlemen all round, no doubt actuated by the best of motives, respecting the "evil, vice, immorality and disgrace arising from Statute Hirings", when - a point in question - we have a full bench of magistrates encouraging the thing in its very entirety. There is something wrong where is the remedy? We know the system exists. That men and boys do get engaged before their present engagement expires, not only once, but it is well known that in many instances boys get hired to several masters, and draw hiring money from each. Where is our redress?¹⁰²

This judgement attracted considerable attention and generated much discussion. Those farmers who had sought to prevent their servants from attending pre-Martinmas hirings felt that they had been undermined by decision which meant that 'magistrates are encouraging farm servants to attend illegal hirings contrary

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Letter, R Nelson, *York Herald*, 28 November, 1877.

¹⁰² Ibid.

to masters orders'.¹⁰³ Similar consternation was to be found within the East Riding Chamber of Agriculture whose members expressed their disbelief at the decision which in reversing previous decisions in which farmers had prevailed had, they felt, placed them in 'a very unpleasant position'.¹⁰⁴

These problems continued into 1878 when Chambers re-affirmed their view that 'that the time for hiring should be when contracts made at them are legally binding' but found that the pattern of the 'authorised' hirings coexisting with, rather than supplanting, the 'unauthorised' hirings continued. Driffield's first hirings had a 'very large' attendance and Beverley's 'unauthorised lettings' saw 'more company present than usual'.¹⁰⁵ There was also a large gathering of employers and farm servants for the pre-Martinmas hirings at Bridlington.¹⁰⁶ At all of these hirings, however, there was less hiring than in previous years but this was not so much the result of more farmers adhering to the prescriptions of Chambers of Agriculture as a reflection of the onset of a change in the labour market. A combination of good weather and a decline in the availability of alternative industrial employment in Cleveland had combined with the deepening depression in agriculture to turn the labour market against those seeking to be hired. This allowed farmers to revert to their preferred tactic of delaying hiring in an attempt to drive down wages. Only female servants were able to mount an effective resistance against the implications of an increasingly flooded labour market at the early hirings in 1878.¹⁰⁷

The effort by Chambers of Agriculture to promote the later post-Martinmas hirings as the only legitimate hiring fairs was in fact petering out by this time. It

¹⁰³ Letter, H. Neyland, *York Herald*, 28 November, 1877.

¹⁰⁴ *Driffield Times*, 8 December, 1877.

¹⁰⁵ *Driffield Times*, 9 November, 1878.

¹⁰⁶ *Driffield Times*, 16 November, 1878.

was becoming obvious that neither a majority of farmers, farm servants or local shopkeepers and publicans were going to be persuaded to accept the change. Local authorities too, were increasingly regarding the whole affair as irksome, as the course of events at Beverley in 1878 was to illustrate. That year, the authorised hirings were fixed by the Town Clerk for Saturday 23rd November.¹⁰⁸ The result was a poorly attended hiring day because the fact that the hirings were held on the day that farm servants were leaving their present employers prevented many of them from attending. This prompted criticism from local shopkeepers who complained of the manner in which the town authorities' actions had adversely affected their trade.¹⁰⁹ In his response, the Mayor of Beverley vented his exasperation and frustration with the task of fixing the hiring day. He complained that it had become 'one of the most troublesome duties connected with his office' because it had demonstrated that the appointment of hiring days 'did not bind anybody'.¹¹⁰ What the effort to alter the day had revealed, he claimed, was that 'they were powerless, for the people of the country came on the old day'.¹¹¹ He declared that 'His experience showed him that it was a very difficult matter to interfere in, and in future it had better be left to the parties most interested'.¹¹²

By this time, however, as the example of the early hirings had indicated, the pattern of hiring was being reshaped by a more informal, but ultimately more influential, factor: the changing balance of power between employers and employed in the labour market. The combination of the industrial downturn in the north and the onset of agricultural depression in the East Riding had created

¹⁰⁷ *Hull Times*, 9 November, 1878; *Driffild Times*, 16 November, 1878; *Hull Times*, 23 November, 1878.

¹⁰⁸ *Beverley Guardian*, 16 November, 1878.

¹⁰⁹ *Beverley Guardian*, 7 December, 1878, Beverley Town Council, Discussion of the Hiring Day.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

a situation in which more bodies were chasing fewer places. This turn from boom to slump was removing the beneficial circumstances that had empowered servants in the market place and facilitated their testing of farmers' capacity to control and retain their servants. Perhaps the most significant factor that had limited farmers' capacity to follow the lead given by the Chamber of Agriculture campaign and abstain from pre-Martinmas hirings, was the fear of not being able to obtain servants or having to pay higher wages at the later hiring fairs. The likelihood of a post-Martinmas scarcity of servants was now receding, at least with regard to male farm servants. By the late 1870s, farmers were once again in a position to decline what they regarded as the excessive demands made at the early hiring fairs and wait until the later hirings in Martinmas week or even after this, before hiring at reduced wages. Their fear of legal impotence after hiring was also receding because the opportunities for servants to either 'scrimshank' or abscond were reduced by the lack of competition for their labour. A situation that was replicated at the later peak periods in the agricultural year, as the overcrowded Harvest Hirings in 1879, for example, illustrated.¹¹³

This shift to a pattern of hiring that favoured farmers rather than servants had become firmly embedded by 1879 when the reports of the hirings that year noted that there were less masters and mistresses, less hiring and lower wages at the pre-Martinmas hirings that year. At Beverley, for example, although the town was 'crowded with lads and lasses' there was little hiring and those present had to be 'content with the public houses, swing boats, shows and other attractions provided for them'.¹¹⁴ Similarly, at Malton and Bridlington first hirings and even at Malton's second hirings, the labour market was reported as being overstocked: only those servants taking reductions being

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ *York Herald*, 8 September, 1879.

¹¹⁴ *Hull Times*, 8 November, 1879.

hired.¹¹⁵ A similar situation prevailed at Market Weighton where the attendance of farm servants was high but hiring slow and Howden where both the attendance and the level of wages were down. Significantly, even females also were now having to accept lower wages because of the reduced demand for their labour.¹¹⁶ Such was the downturn in the labour market that this lacklustre pattern of hiring continued at the post-Martinmas hiring fairs. Many servants were still seeking places after Martinmas and due to the adverse market for their labour those who could get hired had to accept lower wages. At Beverley's second hirings, for example, 'little was done in the way of hiring'.¹¹⁷ The second post-Martinmas hirings at Howden were 'very slack' and 'there was a larger number of men servants unhired than for some years'.¹¹⁸ The reports of Driffield featured comments on the festive aspects of the event there but not hiring, whilst at York the hirings continued for several days into Martinmas Week but many servants of both sexes still remained unhired.¹¹⁹ As the hiring season came to its close at Malton's final hiring fair it was reported that 'The market is overstocked with adult labour and farming men who three years ago received £28 to £32 per annum as foremen are hiring at £24 to £28 per year'.¹²⁰ As farmers economised 'youths' were in greater demand and their wages held to a better level but wages for all farm servants had seen 'a fall all round'.¹²¹ By the early 1880s when the depression in agriculture had become firmly entrenched, the practice of holding both the pre and post-Martinmas hirings continued but at both hiring was slack and many servants remained unhired at the end of the hiring season. Thus changes in the market for the farm servants'

¹¹⁵ *Hull Times*, 29 November, 1879, for Malton; *York Herald*, 12 November, 1879, for Bridlington.

¹¹⁶ *York Herald*, 12 November, 1879 for Market Weighton; *York Herald*, 22 November 1879, for Howden.

¹¹⁷ *Hull Times*, 29 November, 1879.

¹¹⁸ *York Herald*, 1 December, 1879.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid* for York; *York Herald*, 28 November, 1879.

¹²⁰ *Hull Times*, 29 November, 1879.

¹²¹ *Ibid*.

labour had rendered the attempt by Chambers of Agriculture to abolish the pre-Martinmas hirings an irrelevance because it removed most of the problems they had posed. At Beverley's first or 'unauthorised' hirings in 1881, for example:

Monday last being the day on which the Sittings were always held before the attempt was made to alter them to some date beyond the 23rd November. There was as usual a large attendance of lads and lasses from the country. Indeed the efforts alluded to do not seem to have had the slightest effect upon the day so far as the servants are concerned. There were not many farmers present and very little hiring appeared to be done.¹²²

The changed labour market had resulted in the circumstances close to those long desired by the local Chamber of Agriculture but without any concerted action on its part. Servants attended the early hirings but most farmers were now able to avoid hiring and were taking advantage of this. Indeed such was the parlous state of the labour market that hiring was 'slow and wages offered below what had hitherto been paid' at what were still being referred to as the 'authorised hirings' a fortnight later.¹²³

The campaign conducted by Chambers of Agriculture against hiring fairs and their practices had some similarities with the Church of England campaign in that it represented a collective and institutional response to the workings of the market economy and its impact upon the relationship between employer and employed. In contrast to the Church campaign farmers sought not to reverse the trend towards an increasingly impersonal and commercial relationship but to ensure that it was channelled in a direction which ensured a new equilibrium compatible with their economic interests but without sharing their lives with their farm servants. The Anglican campaign had failed to build a substantial and sustained coalition against the hiring fair as a cultural institution. The Chamber

¹²² *Beverley Guardian*, 12 November, 1881.

of Agriculture campaign had suffered a similar fate with the added embarrassment that it had failed to mobilise the constituency that it claimed to represent in support of its actions. The irony is, however, that although the farmer's campaign enjoyed less direct success than the campaign conducted by the Church of England, its underlying objective was realised. The shift in the labour market had restored what farmers' regarded as a correct legal and market balance between capital and resident farm servant labour. It also meant that farmers continued to forgo a restoration of paternalism and to delegate the day to day supervision of their workforce to supervisory workers. Both ensured that farmer support for the more radical demands of the Anglican campaign remained absent and helped also, therefore, to guarantee the survival of the hiring fairs.

¹²³ *Beverley Guardian*, 2 December, 1881.

Conclusion

In their delineation of 'Popular Culture and its Enemies' since the Reformation, J. M. Golby and A.W. Purdue identified two major thrusts deployed against popular culture: firstly a religious concern that popular culture was irreligious, immoral and profane and secondly a secular concern that popular culture was detrimental to economic efficiency and social order.¹ In many respects the critique of East Riding hiring fairs and the attempts to reform and abolish them in the mid-Victorian period conformed to this pattern. The major assault against hiring fairs was provided by a religious institution - the Church of England - which was undoubtedly concerned with the immorality of the hirings. A second campaign conducted by a section of the East Riding's tenant farmers and owner occupiers was primarily motivated by concerns relating to the economic aspects of the hiring fairs. The major deviation from the model is that of these two impulses for change, it was the religious rather than the secular was most concerned with the challenge that the hiring fairs posed to the social order. The reasons for this deviation and the impact that these campaigns had upon the hiring fair will now be evaluated within the context of other piecemeal forces for change.

On the surface the inspiration and motivation behind the Church of England's campaign was a concern regarding the threat that the hiring fairs posed to the souls of those exposed to their temptations. This genuine and deeply felt disquiet was, however, also related to another anxiety: the relative failure of the Church in its parochial context and a desire to reverse this and re-establish Anglican hegemony. It was the Church's conception of itself as a social institution that explains its more organic perception of hiring fairs as a strategic

problem within the social order. The attack upon the hiring fairs was, therefore, also an assault upon farm service, the labour system that gave them and the problematic subculture of the farm servants sustenance. In this respect the campaign was unsuccessful in that farm service continued to be important in the East Riding. Indeed, as we have witnessed, it not only remained important, it was reshaped in ways that eroded its capacity to act as a regime of social control. The contradictions between the nature of farm service and the Anglican desire to restore its hegemony were, therefore, as least as great at the end of the mid-Victorian period as they had been at its outset.

With regard to the hiring fairs themselves the Church of England campaign had greater success. Although the ultimate objective of securing the complete abolition of hiring fairs was never close to being realised, the campaign succeeded in raising a hue and cry around the immorality of the hirings and effected some significant reforms. The most important of these was the introduction of segregated hiring for male and female servants at the major hiring fairs. This reform enhanced an already existing tendency for farm servants and their employers to be regarded as occupying separate, natural, masculine and feminine spheres of activity which correlated with prevailing notions of the essential, natural, characteristics of men and women. The reasons for the campaign's success in introducing segregated hirings and its failure to progress the other more ambitious aspects of the campaign offer insights into the difficulties that faced would-be reformers of nineteenth-century popular culture and these will now be considered in more detail.

A key problem for the campaign was the continued dynamism and functionality of the hiring fairs and their ability to thrive in a time of considerable economic

¹ J. M. Golby and A.W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd : Popular Culture in England*,

and social change. Although public hirings had a long history and although many nineteenth-century commentators believed that their practices were unchanged since time immemorial; hiring fairs in the East Riding, like the farm service system to which they were structurally related, were not a static hangover from a pre-industrial past. They were integral to the process of economic, social and cultural changes taking place in the East Riding from the later-eighteenth century. This process included enclosure and the expansion of large-scale capitalist agriculture and the reshaping of farm service. East Riding hiring fairs proved to be adaptive to these changes, an adaptability that meant that the major hiring fairs developed and expanded in symbiotic fashion alongside the modernisation of agriculture. They also adapted readily to the stimulus provided by: railway development, an expansion of commercial retailing, and capitalist leisure entrepreneurship. One example of this symbiosis is the manner in which the practice of hiring farm servants for 51 weeks instead of a year had allowed for a weeks' annual holiday for the farm servants. This enhanced the status of the later hirings as labour markets and, increasingly, as sites for retail and leisure consumption. Ultimately, the adaptability and dynamism of the hiring fairs and farm service proved to be more dynamic and resilient than the Church of England campaign and the ideological vision that underpinned it. In the one significant area of success - that of offering indoor hirings for female servants - the Church was reinforcing an already existing process of change within the agricultural labour force as women's work being increasingly associated with an indoor domestic sphere. The provision of indoor hiring facilities perhaps helped to accelerate this process of domestication, but its ability to gain a foothold was also due to the fact that there was an element of congruence between the aims of moral reformers and the direction of social change. Progressing the more radical aspects of the

1750-1900, B. T. Batsford, London, 1985, p. 42.

reforming agenda: introducing of written characters, separate hiring fairs for men and women and totally supplanting hiring fairs proved to be far more problematic. This was because they attempted to confront and reverse the process of reshaping that had characterised both farm service and the hiring fair during the nineteenth century. What this case-study in recreational reform suggests, therefore, is that those attempting to alter practices which continued to fulfil important economic and cultural functions faced a difficult task when their reforms failed to complement those functions. The dissonance and contradiction between the underlying thrust of the Anglican campaign and the direction of societal change worked against its attempt to exert social control and restore its institutional hegemony in local society.

Given the contradictions between the prevailing pattern of economic and social change and the objectives of the campaign those advocating reform or abolition needed to offer an alternative ideological framework through which these practices could be critically reinterpreted. The failure of the Anglican campaign to achieve this is also significant in explaining the limited success of its campaign. Here the prevailing weakness of the Church of England as a religious and social force within the East Riding played a role. The expansion of rural Nonconformity in the East Riding and its greater purchase upon the religious loyalties of many farmers and labourers created or reinforced significant barriers before the Church of England's project. The number of dedicated members and activists may have remained a minority but through their presence, their message and their practices both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists offered an alternative ideological and organisational framework that was able to articulate with the changing world in ways that even the more dynamic and professional Anglican clergy were not. Methodism was organisationally dynamic and flexible, its evangelism and revivalism reached

out to the isolated hamlets and farmsteads which were more likely to be without Church influence. Methodism also offered a robust, independent and meritocratic religious message which articulated with the social experience and way of life of many farmers and labourers. One example of the Methodist's easier articulation with rural culture was their attitude towards farm service and hiring fairs. The Methodists preached against sin and drunkenness and they sought to offer other recreational activities that offered an alternative to attendance the hiring fairs but Methodism in the East Riding appears not to have opposed farm service or hiring fairs in the systematic manner of the Church of England. Anglican critics may have exaggerated the extent that Methodism accommodated itself to what they regarded as the immoral and irreligious aspects of popular culture but its success did stem, in part, from its ability to maintain a more reflexive attitude towards facets of this culture. Its emphasis upon conversion through faith rather than baptism, for example, was less hostile and reproachful towards the liminal nature of the young farm servants' way of life and allowed for reincorporation at a later stage of life.

In contrast and despite the renewed energy and professionalism of its clergy, the Church of England's efforts to reverse the successes of Methodism and reassert itself was undermined by its continued elitism. Church of England clergy still sought to exploit their traditional connection with the landed interest and their world view remained hierarchical, paternalist and authoritarian. In place of what they saw as the damaging and corrosive effects of the penetration of market relations in rural society, the more socially-conscious clergy advanced the ideal of a 'moral economy' in which relations between farmers and servants would be regulated by non-monetary norms. This regulatory regime not only reasserted the values of paternalism and hierarchy it was also designed to reassert the Church as a social institution. The system of written characters, for

example, asserted a role for the Church within an ordered system of corporate regulation which set itself against the increasingly market-driven process of negotiation between farmers and servants. This advocacy of moral and paternal regulation failed to resonate with either farmers or servants despite the tensions and conflicts present within the farm service system. Local tenant farmers had been instrumental in promoting the changes that the Church of England felt had demoralised farm service and clerical attempts to secure support for reform and abolition amongst farmers proved to be an increasingly forlorn effort. Limited support for written contracts instead of verbal agreements was not the same as embracing the Anglican ideal of written characters and it was even further from that of totally supplanting the hiring fairs and farm service. A divergence of opinion between Anglican and employer opinions of what farm service was at present and should be in the future became increasingly salient during the mid-Victorian period. For clergy it should either function as a system of moral paternalism that regulated and disciplined rural society or it should be done away with. Farmers in contrast sought what farm service increasingly was, a market orientated system of hiring with legal means for the enforcement of the contract of service. The campaign mounted by the East Riding Chambers of Agriculture reflected this divergence of opinion that existed between the Church of England and at least some of the Ridings' farmers. Chambers of Agriculture tended to be comprised of the more substantial tenant farmers who were likely to be Tory in politics and Anglican in their religious orientation but their attempts at reshaping the hiring fair and its bargaining practices were directed at restoring what they perceived as the deteriorating bargaining and legal position of the farmer: the immorality of the hirings and farm service was not a significant concern.

The fact that a section of the East Riding tenantry sought to reshape the legal and market relations between farm servants and farmers is testimony to the effectiveness with which farm servants had been able to utilise the system to their advantage and mitigate their legal and formal subordination. Given their relative autonomy, their opportunities for advancement within the system and their ability to utilise the hiring with increasing effectiveness, the farm servants were not inclined to support a reform movement which sought to envelop them within a regime of patriarchal control over their everyday life, dilute and even abolish a centre of leisure and consumption they still regarded their own, and undermine their ability to shape their own lives through the, at this time, relatively favourable labour market. The intensification of capitalist market relations and the contradictions associated with it were portrayed within clerical discourse as symptomatic of a fundamental breakdown in the farm service system. In response they advocated the creation of new patterns of paternalism and deference. In fact the tensions and conflicts between farmers and servants were not a sign of breakdown; tensions and conflicts had always been a facet of farm service in its traditional pre-modern form. The modernisation of agriculture and the proletarianisation of the farm servant had prompted a partial reshaping of these conflicts. The problem of controlling adolescence as a stage in life remained, but it had become overlain with the problem of class as a station in life. These contradictions, although problematic for capital and labour, were not sufficient for either to abandon the farm service system. When faced with the choice between the Anglican critique of farm service and the reforms it advocated and the uncertainties and conflicts associated with capitalist market relations, the majority of farmers and farm servants opted for the latter. For both, the Anglican ideal of a corporate community within which the farm service system operated as a form of social paternalism did not offer an attractive or credible alternative to a system which appeared to offer them the

means of shaping their own lives. The failure of the Church of England to reshape itself sufficiently to bridge the gulf that had emerged between itself and a society which had become attuned to a less deferential and less hierarchical world helps, therefore, to explain the partial failure of the Church-led campaign against the hiring fairs

The limited success of both the Church of England and the Chamber of Agriculture campaigns also illustrated another important factor that militated against significant change: the tolerance and increasingly the support that both hiring fairs enjoyed from businessmen, politicians and even the police. In all cases, tolerance and benign regulation were increasingly preferred to outright opposition and suppression. The reasons for this are not difficult to discern. In the case of both local authorities and local businesses the annual invasion of farm servants and farmers around Martinmas was of considerable economic and social significance for the towns and cities that acted as their hosts. Urban development and expansion in the East Riding was intrinsically connected with the provision of goods and services for the surrounding countryside. The burgeoning prosperity of agriculture during its mid-Victorian golden age served to reinforce this interdependence between urban settlements and their surrounding rural hinterlands. Although hiring fairs caused the police and local authorities problems of control they also attracted customers to the hotels and public houses and brought trade to local shopkeepers. The farm servants' rising cash incomes meant that they had more to spend on the attractions offered, particularly from the 1850s when their concentrated numbers at the larger fairs stimulated an expansion in the range of goods and services offered before them. This provision was embraced by the servants who increasingly asserted and explored their identity through the consumption of clothes, other possessions and the rides, shows and attractions offered. The development of the railway

network from the late 1840s had not only enabled a greater concentration of farm servants it also encouraged more visitors to the major fairs whose concern was not to get hired but to enjoy a day's consumption and pleasure. As the pleasure fairs expanded in size and sophistication they generated increased revenue for the town authorities in the form of tolls and rents. Perhaps most importantly, the ability and right to hold and supervise a major fair remained integral to a city and market town's status and identity. As they competed for status and prosperity the retention, expansion and effective management of their fairs and markets became a symbol of their virility as regional centres.

What we find, therefore, is a reluctance on the part of civic leaders and town authorities to offer encouragement of those calling for the abolition of hiring fairs and even a degree of suspicion towards relatively minor alterations to their character. York, which was a centre of Evangelicalism and whose authorities had a reputation for their intolerance towards irreligion and immorality provides a clear example of this process. Here, as elsewhere, regulation and management of the fairs was preferred to outright abolition. Indeed in 1847 the council had even considered changing the date of the hiring fair so as to attract more farmers and servants.² The regulation and management of the fair at York took many forms but centred upon the co-operation of various public authorities. The police became more adroit at dealing with large crowds and preventing crime at the fair. In the 1850s, the police at York adopted a policy of pre-emptive policing which centred upon observing known thieves as they arrived prior to the fair and giving them notice to quit.³ By the 1870s it was claimed that vigilance of this kind meant that pickpockets were now afraid to visit York's Martinmas Fair.⁴ The market and fairs committee of the city council co-operated

² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 27 November, 1847.

³ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 29 November, 1851.

⁴ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 26 November, 1870.

with the police in ordering the environment of the fair through, for example, stipulating the location of the stalls and attractions, issuing regulations requiring attractions to be closed by 11pm at night, and closing those attractions considered to be distasteful character. The fairground entrepreneur 'Lord' George Sanger, who complained that York 'still wore the trammels of the dark ages' regarding its regulations at the beginning of the mid-Victorian period was prevented from performing his conjuring show at York's hiring fair and served with a notice to quit the town within the hour.⁵ Thus at York, even before the abolitionist clamour began in earnest, measures designed to regulate the hiring fair were in place, measures which reflected the fair's importance to the town. During the early 1860s when criticism of the hirings peaked, despite some support for abolition from within its council chamber, its hiring fair survived and even the idea of segregating male and female servants initially encountered opposition.⁶ Here, therefore, the measures deployed against the hiring fair by moral philanthropists fell into a pattern already established by the town authorities, that of ordering and regulating the proceedings but not opposing or threatening their essential purpose or nature.

A similar pattern increasingly prevailed at the other major hirings. The police and the town authorities co-operated on measures that regulated them and which curtailed as much as possible the level of disorder: but showed little interest in securing their extinction. Indeed, when, the authorities did co-operate with measures that threatened the hiring fairs, as was the case at Driffield and Beverley in the 1870s, when there was some assistance for the Chamber of Agriculture's attempt to end the first hirings, they encountered opposition from local shopkeepers who resented the threat posed to their incomes. This as much

⁵ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 27 November, 1847; 29 November, 1851, G. Sanger, *Seventy Years a Showman*, London, 1910, p. 189.

as the resistance of farm servants and the lack of co-operation amongst farmers undermined these efforts. Becoming embroiled in measures that angered their own ratepayers offered town authorities little reward. More profitable, both economically and politically, was to co-operate with those - the farm servants, the majority of farmers, shopkeepers and fairground showmen - who, like the town authorities themselves, had a vested interest in maintaining both the labour market and the leisure functions of the fairs. The mutual relationship that developed between the leisure entrepreneurs that offered so much of the commercialised pleasure provision available at the fairs and the town authorities that now sought to organise and regulate them, was illustrated in 1890 by the funeral of Robert Johnson, the market superintendent of York Corporation. This took place during York's Martinmas fair and hirings. The proprietors of the shows and rides stopped all musical performances for one hour and many attended the funeral - but the fair continued.⁷

In general, although criticism of hiring fairs and farm service continued into the late nineteenth century it would become more muted and the segregation of hiring would remain the sole significant measure that resulted from the Church of England campaign. This was a significant reform and placed alongside the measures taken by the police and town authorities contributed to a process through which the hiring fair had, by the end of the nineteenth century, experienced a degree of reshaping into an event that was disciplined and regularised. The following reflection from a Wolds' clergyman, Rev. M.C.F. Morris, who was the son of one of the leading campaigners, Rev. F.O. Morris, suggests a direct correlation between changes in hiring practices and this more orderly hiring fair:

⁶ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 16 November, 1861 for a discussion of the abolition of the hiring fair and the desirability of introducing segregated, indoor hirings for women.

⁷ *York Herald*, 26 November, 1890.

Until recent years, when improved arrangements have been accepted, it was not too much to say that this institution was one of the curses of the county. ... Happily the worst part of the old system is now done away with. The stalties go on as of yore, but they are conducted in an altogether improved fashion. Both clergy and laity combined to get rid of the worst phases of the institution, if possible, and rooms are now hired in every town, in which the girls are assembled by themselves, and can be engaged by the farmer's wives in a orderly and befitting manner. ... occasional brawls and disturbances take place, yet there is no comparison between the state of things now and what it was thirty years ago.⁸

Perhaps, like those other fairs that survived those early and mid-nineteenth century assaults, the hiring fairs also became gradually integrated into 'an accepted world of leisure'.⁹ If so the hiring fairs integration was possibly facilitated by the behaviour of those that attended them in large numbers - the farm servants. The modernisation of agriculture and farm service involved a decline of paternalism, increased proletarianisation and gender segregation. Initially this encouraged the development of an independent and increasingly masculine 'rough' culture which found expression at the hiring fairs. Indeed in segregating hirings the clergy's efforts - in promoting a more exclusively male gathering - may have initially facilitated this. As we have seen, in the short term the introduction of segregated hirings in the 1860s was followed by an increase in riotous behaviour during the 1870s. After the 1870s, however, the farm servants do seem to have become less volatile and less prone to collective acts of violence. A decline in the buoyancy of the labour market may well have contributed to a dampening of the spirit of those present but longer-term processes may also have begun to exert an influence. Possibly, in the longer term, the piecemeal reforms of clergymen combined with other rationalising

⁸ M.C.F. Morris, *Yorkshire Folk Talk, with Characteristics of Those who Speak it in the North and East Ridings*, Second Edition, A. Brown, London, 1911, pp. 207-210.

⁹ H. Cunningham, 'The Metropolitan Fairs: A Case Study in the Social Control of Leisure', in A. P. Donajrodski, ed., *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Croom Helm, London, 1977, p. 163

forces within 'capitalist civilisation' such as compulsory education and the influence of rural nonconformity to promote increased discipline and self control, sobriety and seriousness of behaviour. The extent of this civilising process should not be exaggerated, however. Although mass disturbances such as those that occurred in the 1870s do seem to have declined in frequency, unlike most fairs, hiring fairs retained a direct and intimate relationship with the world of work and the conflicts that it could generate. This continued to inform their character and ensured that a capacity for excess and disorder remained into the twentieth century.

The factor that was possibly as important in reshaping the hiring fair by the latter part of the mid-Victorian period was the changing perception in society of mass leisure and recreation. As the influence of Evangelicalism within Victorian society waned, its disapproval of 'the world' and its suspicion towards leisure and recreation became less salient as prevailing notions of acceptable leisure and recreation widened.¹⁰ One significant reflection of this less puritanical attitude towards public amusement within society was the growing interest in carefully controlled 'rational recreations' within the Church of England during the mid-Victorian period. This itself was a recognition that within the wider society there was a burgeoning interest in and demand for leisure and recreation and that in the absence of more improving alternative provision this was being met by an expanding leisure industry. Within High and Broad Church circles at least, there was a feeling that engagement with leisure and recreation was necessary, therefore, in order to channel this demand towards a positive social function. This philosophy of positive engagement saw the Church becoming more and more active in offering increasingly secular forms of leisure in an effort to

¹⁰ P. Bailey, "'A Mingled Mass of Perfectly Legitimate Pleasures': The Victorian Middle and the Problem of Leisure", *Victorian Studies*, Autumn, 1977; P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in*

compete with commercialised provision. This engagement with and even enthusiasm for sport and recreation facilitated a gradual redefinition of what was acceptable within religious circles which in turn helped to establish a greater margin of tolerance towards public gatherings orientated towards the pursuit of pleasure and recreation. The comments of Rev. M.C.F. Morris above need to be placed within this context as do other descriptions and accounts of hiring fairs by the later-Victorian period. This is not to say that criticisms of hiring fairs totally disappeared, but by the late-nineteenth century events and behaviour that had once been condemned were increasingly tolerated and even celebrated as an important survival of a local folk tradition. The York hirings which in 1890 were regarded as a suitable context for the funeral of the corporation's Superintendent of Markets were also celebrated in the local newspaper as 'The yearly festival of the agricultural men and maidens'.¹¹ The report continued in a manner which regarded farm service, hiring fairs and York's association with them as unproblematic:

The toilers of the soil have a happy way of transacting the commercial affairs which settle their destiny for the whole year. If they decide to seek 'fresh fields and pastures new' and discard their former employers they have recourse to the nearest market town, where is generally provided for them 'all the fun of the fair'. Being the centre of so an important agricultural community, York attracts hundreds of the young people who follow occupations of a bucolic description, and the Market-place was crowded with them yesterday afternoon.¹²

The extensive descriptions of the entertainments which followed were detailed and in their emphasis upon their attractiveness bordered on product-placement advertising. If hiring fairs and farm service had undergone a degree of commercialisation, rationalisation and modernisation so had the gaze which mediates their nature to the historian.

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¹¹ *York Herald*, 25 November, 1890

¹² *Ibid.*

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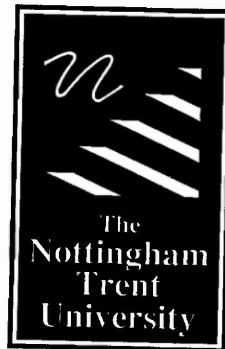
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