

THE MOTION

A charity school is very expensive to run. As we have helped the children so much and given them a better life, they should contribute to the running of the school. Besides, many children are working at this time.

THE CASE AGAINST

The establishment of the Blue Coat School (or Hospital as it was first known) was charitable and was based on Christian principles. These do not mention children having to contribute to their upkeep and education through hard labour. Here is Bryan Blundell, writing about his reasons for founding the school:

“Nothing is more likely to promote the practice of Christianity and virtue than an early and pious education in youth.”

“Many poor people are desirous of having their children taught but are not able to afford them a Christian and useful education; and there being children whose parents are dead, and no friends left to take care of them, must unavoidably come to beggary and ruin, both of body and soul, if not prevented by the care of some charitable and well-disposed people.”

“Finding them with meat, drink, apparel and lodging, and teaching poor children in the said school to read and write, and arithmetic, and instructing them in the knowledge and practice of the Christian religion, as professed and taught in the Church of England; and for learning them such other things as are suitable to their condition and capacity.”

From its founding, there were steady sources of income being generated by the school towards its maintenance and the education and wellbeing of the children. These included: regular subscriptions from local people, many of them wealthy merchants; one-off donations and legacies left in wills; weekly collections made in the nearby St Peter’s Church; and investments in properties in the town owned by the school.

In addition, during 1724, Blundell built on school land 36 alms houses, the rents from which brought an annual income to the school.

In the light of this evidence, why should children at the school have been made to work in dangerous and unhealthy manufacturing jobs, such as weaving and oakum picking?

It was argued that, “in order to promote habits of industry, the children should be employed in manufacturing their own apparel (clothes) till something more profitable was adopted.” Surely, with wealthy merchants and manufacturers in the town supporting the school, there would have been alternatives to making the children weave their own clothes.

The making of pins at the school was the most profitable of any in which the children were engaged, but it was deemed “detrimental to the children’s health,” and ended

by the Governors.

Managers and overseers saw advantages in hiring children, and pointed out that children were ideal workers because they were obedient, submissive, likely to respond to punishment, and unlikely to complain about their conditions. This was morally wrong and exploitative.

During the 18th century there were no laws to compel employers to look after their workforce, which meant work was far more dangerous than it is today. With no 'health and safety' checks, children were particularly vulnerable, and the school was morally wrong to expose its pupils to such dangers.