

## 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 FOR

The practice of putting children to work was first documented in the medieval era, when fathers had their children spin thread for them to weave on the loom.

Child labour was the crucial ingredient which allowed Britain's Industrial Revolution to succeed. It has been argued that the idleness of children was more of a problem during the Industrial Revolution than the exploitation resulting from employment.

The children in the school were being helped enormously and should be grateful for the privilege. Here is what Bryan Blundell said about why he founded the Blue Coat School:

“I saw some of the children begging about the streets, their parents being so poor as not to have bread for them, which gave me great concern, insomuch that I thought to use my best endeavours to make provision for them.”

“Whilst the children are forced to go to their parents for meat, some of them having no meat to give them, but send them out begging for it, by which the children get such habits of idleness, and meet with so many diversions that they either neglect the school, or profit little by coming.”

“Raising a fund which might be sufficient to find them with meat, drink and lodging, in one entire house, by which they would be kept under such discipline as by the blessing of God, might have the desired effect.”

“The charity schools erected in the several parts of this kingdom have abundantly improved the morals of poor children educated in them to the Honour of God and the benefit of the nation.”

In any case, the children at Blue Coat were give fourteen days' holiday at Christmas ('for amusement').

“The money arising from the sale of sundries (produced by the children) and also part, or perhaps the whole, of the money received in the boxes in the chapel, or given by any individual to any of the children, shall form one fund for supplying them balls, tops, marbles and other indulgences.”

Even though the children had to work to generate income, they should be grateful that people in the town were very generous towards the school: “Some of the most respectable inhabitants (of Liverpool) joined in the business, and subscribed, some twenty, some thirty, some forty shillings a year, to the amount of £60 or £70 per annum.”

When completed in 1725, the school cost £2,288 to build, which with the exception of £500, was all raised by donations, demonstrating the concern local donors had for the orphan children.

Blundell himself was personally committed to the children's wellbeing: "We take the children into the School at 8 years of age, and put them apprentice at 14; I give 40 shillings apprentice fee with each." So, even though they had to work hard, they were guaranteed an apprenticeship and good start in life.

In 1765, £220 was paid to the proprietors of a stocking manufactory towards a building for boys to weave in. Jonathan Blundell, the school's Treasurer, was a partner in the stocking manufactory and he, with his partners, proposed to the Trustees of the school to employ the children in that manufactory: "the proposals they made were *so fair*, and *the advantages so much greater* than any which had before been realised from the labour of the children, that the Trustees readily and gratefully consented."

We should regard manual work as bad for a child's education, and should note that at the time, not everyone believed that writing and arithmetic were necessary or suitable for the poor, particularly the female poor. From a contemporary perspective, this is clearly wrong, but we must not make a moral judgement based on what we consider is right or wrong today – the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a harsher time, and the people who ran the school felt what they were doing was ultimately in the children's best interest.

At this time, there was not really a concept of childhood. Children often became active participants in work as soon as they were competent.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were no laws to compel employers to look after their workforce, so the school was not acting illegally in getting its pupils to work, nor the conditions they worked in.