

Citation for published version:

Anne L. Murphy, 'Clock-Watching: Work and Working Time at the Late Eighteenth-Century Bank of England', *Past & Present*, Vol. 236 (1): 99-132, August 2017.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtx015>

Document Version:

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CLOCK-WATCHING: WORK AND WORKING TIME AT THE LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BANK OF ENGLAND*

By the end of the eighteenth century the Bank of England was the largest private employer of white-collar workers in Britain. In 1783 there were 321 permanent clerks working at the Bank, more than double the white-collar staff of the East India Company and ten times the numbers employed by the large insurance companies, the Royal Exchange and Sun Assurance companies.¹ The Bank's workers were organized into two large departments: the Cashier's Office and the Accountant's Office and each of those departments was subdivided into more than a dozen offices, some employing just a few men, while managing the Three Per Cent Consols Office made work for more than fifty.

The work of those clerks partly concerned the provision of banking facilities to the London business community but the Bank's primary role by the late eighteenth century was as banker to the state and manager of the national debt.² As such, public scrutiny, and indeed criticism, of the institution could at times be intense. One response to this was the establishment in 1783 of a Committee of Inspection 'to inspect and enquire into the mode and execution of the Business as now carried on in [the Bank's] different departments'.³

* I would like to thank Owen Davies, Alejandra Irigoin, Peter Kirby and participants at the Institute of Historical Research Economic and Social History of the Early Modern World seminar for their comments on previous drafts of this paper.

¹ H. M. Boot, 'Real Incomes of the British Middle Class, 1760–1850: The Experience of Clerks at the East India Company', *Economic History Review*, lii (1999), 639. The EIC employed a total staff of over 1,700 if warehouse labourers and dock-workers are included in the count. Barry Supple, *The Royal Exchange Assurance: A History of British Insurance, 1720–1970* (Cambridge, 1970), 70.

² H. V. Bowen, 'The Bank of England in the Eighteenth Century, 1694–1820', in Richard Roberts and David Kynaston (eds.), *The Bank of England: Money, Power and Influence 1694–1994* (Oxford, 1995).

³ Bank of England Archive, London (hereafter BEA), M5/212, Minutes of the Committee of Inspection (hereafter M5/212), fo. 1.

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doi:10.1093/pastj/gtx015

This committee of three, appointed by the Court of Directors from amongst their own number, was empowered to investigate every aspect of business and inspect 'all such Books and Papers as they may think necessary'.⁴ They did just that, spending over a year visiting offices, observing working practices and interviewing senior and junior clerks, porters and watchmen about the nature of their work and the conditions in which they operated. The Committee's report, which ran into two volumes, over eighty thousand words, forms a comprehensive record of the Bank's business at the end of the War of American Independence.⁵

A great deal can be learned from this document about the management of early banking, the printing and issuance of bank notes, staffing and security issues and the Bank's roles in the management of the national debt. The report also offers detail about the scale of the Bank's business and reveals that the institution had adopted working patterns and modes of organization that made it akin to a large-scale factory. It concentrated most elements of 'production' under one roof and operated under centralized control with supervisors being responsible for specific areas of the business. It charged its employees with specific tasks that had to be co-ordinated with their fellow-workers both within and between offices and departments. Unlike the factory, the Bank had the added complication of performing many of those tasks under public scrutiny and at a site which, by virtue of the Bank being the manager of the national debt, became the embodiment of public credit. By this is meant that the Bank became the physical representation of the state's financial promises and the place where investors, both domestic and foreign, could witness the effective functioning of public credit.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Only one of the Bank's historians, W. M. Acres, has given serious consideration to the Committee of Inspection, attributing its appointment to the increase in incidences of counterfeit notes being presented to the Bank and to a number of high-profile frauds committed by Bank staff; see W. Marston Acres, *The Bank of England from Within 1694–1900*, 2 vols. (London, 1931), i, 238. Sir John Clapham made only brief mention of the Committee of Inspection in his history of the Bank and he followed Acres's line of reasoning. He dismissed the Committee's task and its reforms as 'matters of purely internal history'; see Sir John Clapham, *The Bank of England: A History*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1944), i, 1694–1797, 202. John Giuseppe also attributes the appointment of the Committee to the need to address lax procedures; see John Giuseppe, *The Bank of England: A History from its Foundation in 1694* (London, 1966), 69.

One consequence of the levels of specialization, co-ordination and scrutiny that were evident in the Bank's business was a heavy reliance on the clock. Specific tasks were regulated by the clock, as were breaks from work, and both required co-ordination with other members of a particular office and often between offices. Thus the clerks, most particularly those at a junior level, were subject to a degree of time discipline. By restricting access to its various services to particular times, the Bank also imposed its time discipline on its customers and the investing public who went there to buy, sell and transfer shares or government securities and to collect their dividends. Symbolic of this were the large clocks which dominated the banking hall and hung on the external wall over the Bartholomew Lane entrance to the Transfer Offices. In addition to managing the time of the investing public, the Bank co-ordinated its own routines with the external time-specific routines of the City and the requirements of the bankers, brokers and notaries who used its services and wanted the right to interrogate its records.

It was E. P. Thompson who first opened up debates about the significance of the clock to work in Britain's industrializing economy. In brief, he argued that industrialization resulted in the quantification of work by time and led to a significant change in workers' relationships with the clock.⁶ His work has been both extended and challenged. It has been shown that he overestimated the intensity of industrial work and the speed of adoption of new habits of working. In particular, it has been argued that Thompson's conception of time-discipline within factories was too rigid and that a variety of arrangements for production and irregular hours of working were common at the end of the eighteenth and indeed well into the nineteenth century.⁷ Equally while it is acknowledged that time was a key element in both the organization of work and the experiences of

⁶ E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, no. 38 (Dec. 1967).

⁷ Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, *Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales, 1300-1800* (Oxford, 2011), 46. See also, for discussions of specific working environments, Jeremy Stein, 'Time, Space and Social Discipline: Factory Life in Cornwall, Ontario, 1867-1893', *Journal of Historical Geography*, xxi (July 1995); and Eric Hopkins, 'Working Hours and Conditions during the Industrial Revolution: A Re-Appraisal', *Economic History Review*, xxxv (Feb. 1982).

those who were employed, it is clear that we cannot assume connections between the way people were supposed to behave and the way they did behave.⁸ There is some evidence to suggest that workers actively resisted the constraints of time-discipline.⁹ Even when they complied, they may merely have been paying lip service to the demands of their employers and the clock and still failing to internalize the lessons of time-discipline.

If Thompson overestimated the intensity of industrial work, he also failed to appreciate the widespread access to and awareness of clock time prior to industrialization. Indeed, Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift go so far as to talk of the ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of clock time in everyday life.¹⁰ They show that the workplace was not necessarily the only site of imposition of time-discipline and identify a variety of sites and occasions on which clock time mattered including religious observance, schooling, the simple routines and making of appointments that facilitated social interaction and the necessary face-to-face contact that resulted from economic exchange.¹¹ Most notably, it appears that the urban environment, and especially London, was instrumental in both allowing an easy access to clock time and imposing precise co-ordination by the clock. Commerce, markets, sporting events and other organized leisure activities, the arrival of the mail and the arrival and departure of coaches all helped to force people to take notice of clock time and to adhere to it at a precise level.¹² This article will show that the financial

⁸ Richard Whipp, ‘“A Time to Every Purpose”: An Essay on Time and Work’, in Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge, 1987), 210; Glennie and Thrift, *Shaping the Day*, 47.

⁹ Sarah Peers, ‘Negotiating Work: Absenteeism at Quarry Bank Mill, Cheshire in 1790’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, clviii (2009); Sidney Pollard, ‘Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution’, *Economic History Review*, xvi (Dec. 1963).

¹⁰ Glennie and Thrift, *Shaping the Day*, 244.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 234–6.

¹² Penelope J. Corfield, ‘Walking the City Streets: The Urban Odyssey in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Journal of Urban History*, xvi (Feb. 1990), 146; Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, ‘Revolutions in the Times: Clocks and the Temporal Structures of Everyday Life’, in David N. Livingstone and Charles W. J. Withers (eds.), *Geography and Revolution* (Chicago and London, 2005), 190; Mark Harrison, ‘The Ordering of the Urban Environment: Time, Work and the Occurrence of Crowds 1790–1835’, *Past and Present*, no. 110 (Feb. 1986), 141.

revolution was another driver of change in the use of time and that bankers, brokers, notaries and investors formed, adopting Glennie and Thrift's term, a 'community of practice', the centre of which was the Bank of England and the functioning of which depended on adherence to more or less precise clock time.¹³

The Bank's Committee of Inspection reports, on which the following analysis draws, were produced through a process of observation and interrogation. The inspectors visited each of the Bank's offices in turn to view the clerks at work. They then conducted interviews with the senior men in each office to establish the principles that underpinned working practices, connections between sections and offices and any problems that affected the efficiency of the work. Further interviews were conducted with some of the more junior men in each office as a means of testing what the Committee had been told by the senior men and exploring alternative strategies to address shortcomings in security and efficiency. With regard to the inspectors' agenda, two factors made the use of time in the clerks' testimonies important. The first was the inspectors' desire to establish that work at the Bank was not defined by sinecurism and corruption. Thus they were keen to establish that each worker had a specific role with defined duties and that he personally fulfilled the requirements of that role. The second aim was to gather detail about the functioning of the Bank with a view to identifying changes that might improve efficiency. In this respect it might be argued that the inspectors were conducting what we would refer to today as a time-and-motion study.

Arguably, there also emerges from the reports an agenda pursued by the clerks. The clerks, especially the more junior men, used the inspection to bring to light some poor working conditions and to highlight what they regarded as their commitment, effectiveness and service to the public. As we shall see, clock time was used as an important element in those discussions and thus the inspectors' reports reveal not only the use of time in an eighteenth-century working environment but evidence of the internalization of time discipline.

This article is arranged around the three above-mentioned agendas identified within the Committee of Inspection's reports. Section I considers the use and meanings of time in

¹³ Glennie and Thrift, 'Revolutions in the Times', 182–5.

the inspectors' reports. Section II shows how time was used in the control of the Bank's functions and its interactions with the public. Section III considers evidence to suggest that time discipline was internalized by the Bank's clerks and, in particular, explores the clerks' compliance with and resistance to clock time. Banking historians have seldom paid attention to the work of eighteenth-century clerks and this article, therefore, fills a significant gap in our understanding of the nature of the work that took place in early financial institutions. Equally, it provides a unique analysis of the use of time in one of the eighteenth century's most prominent institutions and one of its most important 'modern' working environments.¹⁴ The article does not just inform our understanding of early modern financial systems. Anecdotal evidence suggests that by the eighteenth century there was greater concern among the middling sort about the effective management of time spent in secular, rather than devotional, matters.¹⁵ Yet this aspect of eighteenth-century life has seldom been explored. The Bank of England's Committee of Inspection examined the working lives of over three hundred of London's middling sort and offers much detail on the way they understood time and how it impacted upon their lives.

I

The inspectors' first aim, rooting out corruption, emerged from the particular circumstances in which the Committee of Inspection was established. It began its work in early 1783, at the end of the American War of Independence and in the context of much public and political discontent. Aside from war, and subsequent defeat, in America, the late 1770s and 1780s encompassed industrial, religious and political unrest and, as Gilmour argues,

¹⁴ See, in particular, Margaret Ackrill and Leslie Hannah, *Barclays: The Business of Banking, 1690–1996* (Cambridge, 2008); S. G. Checkland, *Scottish Banking: A History, 1695–1973* (London, 1975); W. F. Crick and J. E. Wadsworth, *A Hundred Years of Joint-Stock Banking*, 3rd edn (London, 1958); L. S. Pressnell, *Country Banking in the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1956); R. S. Sayers, *Lloyds Bank in the History of English Banking* (Oxford, 1957). Histories of white-collar work tend to begin in the late nineteenth century, notably Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester, 1976); Gregory Anderson, (ed.), *The White Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870* (Manchester, 1989); Michael Heller, *London Clerical Workers, 1880–1914: Development of the Labour Market* (London, 2011).

¹⁵ Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley and London, 1996), 53–6.

‘almost every symptom of discontent and decay’.¹⁶ With regard to public finance, the unprecedented expense of the American War of Independence had aroused serious concern not only about the levels of national indebtedness but also the supposed corruption of the financial system. One anonymous author elucidated:

Reports are gone about of the immense profusion of the public Treasury; of the enormous emoluments of some places; of large sums not accounted for; of a vast expense in favouring contractors . . . and providing for a useless set of men in order to keep up an extravagant parliamentary influence under the direction of the Crown.¹⁷

The most obvious manifestation of this discontent with the management of the public finances was the emergence of a reform agenda which would ultimately culminate in the establishment of the Commission for Examining the Public Accounts.¹⁸ The Commission sat between 1780 and 1787 and the six commissioners produced a total of fifteen reports which resulted in sweeping reforms of all aspects of Britain’s public finances.¹⁹ Yet, the Bank of England, while an integral part of the public finance system by virtue of its position as banker to the state, did not come under its jurisdiction. On some levels this is not surprising since the Bank was a privately owned company answerable to its shareholders and subject to periodic renewals of its charter that would have allowed the government to terminate the association had it become dissatisfied with the Bank’s performance.²⁰ Nonetheless, the East India Company, also a private company, was by this time under intense Parliamentary scrutiny. This scrutiny had been both gradually increasing and becoming formalized since the 1760s. In 1773 it had resulted in the Regulating Act which reformed the Company’s electoral system and by the 1780s government interference encompassed

¹⁶ Ian Gilmour, *Riot, Risings and Revolution: Governance and Violence in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1992), 342–3.

¹⁷ British Library, London, Add. MS, 38213, fo.137: extract from a letter from a gentleman in Norfolk to his friend in London, quoted in J. E. D. Binney, *British Public Finance and Administration, 1774–92* (Oxford, 1958), 8.

¹⁸ Binney, *British Public Finance and Administration*, 7–11. Broader reforms were also proposed during the 1780s but most proposals failed to bear fruit until the early nineteenth century. Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain, 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 2003).

¹⁹ Binney, *British Public Finance and Administration*, 11, 14.

²⁰ J. Lawrence Broz and Richard S. Grossman, ‘Paying for Privilege: The Political Economy of Bank of England Charters, 1694–1844’, *Explorations in Economic History*, xli (Jan. 2004).

not just matters relating to the Indian states but also matters of finance. Ultimately, a government-appointed Board of Control would be imposed to supervise the East India Company's affairs and prevent shareholders from interfering in the governance of India.²¹ Although the slowly creeping imposition of state control over the East India Company does not offer a straightforward precedent for interference in the Bank's business, the Bank's intimate connections to the financial stability of the state would undoubtedly have provided a valid excuse for interference had its performance been less than satisfactory and the Board of Control a template for the imposition of that interference. While the Bank might have escaped the attention of the Commission, it had not escaped very severe criticism from some commentators.²² There is no question that, had the political will existed, replacement or, at least, reform of the Bank of England would have found acceptance in many quarters.

It was in the context of increasing criticism of, and investigation into, the state of the public finances that the Bank of England appointed its own Committee of Inspection. Moreover, we can point to an intimate connection between the Commission for Examining the Public Accounts and the Bank's own inspection both with regard to motivations and working practices. Indeed, two of the Bank's directors, Richard Neave and Samuel Beachcroft had been among the Commissioners. Both Neave and Beachcroft were also in positions of significant power at the Bank, with Neave being the institution's governor at the time of the appointment of the inspectors.²³

The working practices of the Committee of Inspection were also a close match with those of the Commission for Examining the Public Accounts. The Bank's Committee, like the Commission, had been given permission to call any and all papers it required before it and to question any persons necessary. Both were empowered not just to inspect but also to recommend any such changes as would improve efficiency and

²¹ H. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833* (Cambridge, 2006), 70–3.

²² Bowen, 'Bank of England in the Eighteenth Century'.

²³ Binney, *British Public Finance and Administration*, 13; John Torrance, 'Social Class and Bureaucratic Innovation: The Commissioners for Examining the Public Accounts, 1780–1787', *Past and Present*, no. 78 (Feb. 1978).

eliminate corruption. Each body pursued a similar mode of inspection. They both visited one department after another and published interim findings and recommendations as their work continued.²⁴ As noted above, similarities existed between the practical agendas of the two bodies also. Both were concerned chiefly with the effectiveness of working systems, the nature of the work and the integrity of the postholder with regard to job performance and remuneration. In this respect the Commissioners, of course, were faced with somewhat different problems from the Bank's inspectors. The Commissioners were dealing with a long-established system mired in tradition and dependent on sinecure posts. The Bank's inspectors found a system that was, on the whole, fit for purpose and provided no obvious sinecures but that had grown out of all proportion in the years running up to the inspection. The result of this was systems that relied upon shortcuts and had grown lax to accommodate much higher volumes of work.

Nonetheless, it was the inspectors' desire to establish that each office had set hours of attendance and the expectation that clerks would be present during those hours that explains why the starting point for testimonies from each office was the parameters of the working day. Hence, Mr Bridger of the Dividend Warrant Office informed the Committee that 'the attendance in this Office is from 9 in the morning 'till 5'.²⁵ Mr Landifield of the Chancery Office responded likewise.²⁶ Mr Laverick of the Accountant's Office, whose task was to abstract details of old unpaid notes from old ledgers, noted that 'his attendance is from 9 in the morning 'till 3, when he goes away, as he takes no dining hours'.²⁷ Mr Osmond of the Drawing Office told the inspectors that he had been at the Bank 'about half a year; that he is one of the Junior Clerks in the Office; his attendance is 'till a later hour than most of the others, & that he frequently comes after dinner'.²⁸

Temporal specificity had another role in evidence-giving. Indeed, in starting their evidence with the parameters of the

²⁴ Torrance, 'Social Class and Bureaucratic Innovation', 66; BEA, M5/212 and M5/213, Minutes of the Committee of Inspection (hereafter M5/213), *passim*.

²⁵ BEA, M5/212, fo. 125.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 117.

²⁷ BEA, M5/213, fo. 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 15.

working day the clerks were doing nothing new. Glennie and Thrift show that an ability to use clock time in the narration of events, and particularly in testimonies given in court, was common long before the Committee of Inspection took its evidence. They also argue that this tendency relates to the notion that temporal specificity raised the value and credibility of evidence.²⁹ Arguably, therefore, when the clerks used clock time as part of their testimonies they were engaging in common and accepted methods of establishing the veracity of their evidence, as well as attempting to establish the rectitude of their working lives.

The clerks were all describing daily and oft-repeated routines and therefore can be assumed to have a reliable recall of the times at which they performed certain tasks, but in some cases it is clear that their testimony represented the way they were supposed to work rather than the way they actually worked. Thus, in evidence relating to the management of the Bill Office, Mr Church, the chief man, initially talked about the full extent of the working day. He was later reported by one of his subordinates to 'quit the Office about 3 o'clock' each day. Following this revelation the inspectors perceptively observed that Church 'cannot be so well acquainted with the business transacted after his departure as the other Clerks'.³⁰ There were, however, relatively few examples of clerks misrepresenting their attendance and the fact that the inspectors' investigations appear to have revealed such anomalies means that they need not invalidate the uses of time to be found in the reports.

Aside from the parameters of the working day, there were a wide variety of alternative occasions in the reports where specific times were used. For example, deadlines were often mentioned. Hence any bill or draft which fell due that day but was brought into the Bank after twelve o'clock was recorded in the books as falling due the following day. In other words the Bank operated a midday cut-off for the management of bills and drafts.³¹ The cut-off time for payments was five o'clock.³² The cut-off point for entries into the

²⁹ Glennie and Thrift, *Shaping the Day*, 215. Hans-Joachim Voth also noted, and indeed took advantage of, the prominence of clock time in court depositions; see Hans-Joachim Voth, *Time and Work in England, 1750–1830* (Oxford, 2000).

³⁰ BEA, M5/212, fo. 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 22–3.

³² *Ibid.*, fo. 172.

General Ledger each day was also five o'clock and the balance was made up each day after that time.³³ These types of deadlines, a specific time of day, probably operated with some flexibility. Undoubtedly on quiet days a line might have been drawn somewhat before a deadline and more generous clerks probably allowed valued customers to present bills a little after midday. The specificity of the deadline is less important than its theoretical imposition and the implication that it was necessary to facilitate accurate and efficient record-keeping. It also offers evidence of the Bank's timekeeping defining the actions of other parts of, and actors in, the City.

In addition to mentions of specific clock time, a wide range of occasions and actions were described in which some measurement of, and observance of, the passage of time or the imposition of time-specific routines mattered. Clerks gave approximate clock times for the completion of tasks. Thus, Mr Martin told the Committee that it was not the custom to lock up the drawers containing the dividend warrants until 'a little before 5 o'clock'.³⁴ Mr Laverick noted that it was 'the custom throughout the Accountants Office . . . for the Clerks . . . to stay 'till their business is done, which is usually about 3 o'clock'.³⁵ Mr Jones from the Discount Office noted that 'it is sometimes 8 or 9 o'clock at night before they receive all the Warrants from the Drawing Office of the business of that day, particularly last Thursday it was about 8 o'clock; that they can never make up the Balance 'till they have got in all the Warrants'.³⁶

Otherwise generic times were used to encompass broad sets of activities or to indicate when tasks generally took place. There were, for example, mentions of 'office hours' and 'hours of business' as terms for differentiating between the times when customers had access to the Bank and times when the Bank was still active but not dealing directly with customers. There were also, as might be expected, numerous mentions of tasks being performed in the morning, afternoon or evening. Bills of exchange, for example, were removed from the safe 'every morning' and locked up again 'at nights'.³⁷ Daily, weekly and

³³ *Ibid.*, fo. 82.

³⁴ BEA, M5/213, fo. 71.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 4.

³⁶ BEA, M5/212, fo. 88.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 11–12.

sometimes monthly or annual timings were also used to define the frequency of the Bank's checks and balances. Hence, waste ledgers relating to the work of the Accountant's Office were checked every six weeks. Records relating to the management of banknotes were prepared and presented to the Court of Directors every Thursday.³⁸ Checks on the state of all the 'great accounts' held by the Bank were performed every Monday morning.³⁹ Checks were performed on the Bank's four fire engines on the first Thursday of every month.⁴⁰

There were also testimonies that indicated a sense of the personal time of individuals. Thus Mr Vitu, giving evidence with regard to the checking of bank notes during the printing process, stated '[i]t takes up the greatest part of one person's time to go through this examination'.⁴¹ Mr Lander, one of the cashiers, on being asked how many notes he could sign in a specified time answered 'about 100 Notes in 20 Minutes if not interrupted'.⁴² The business in the Discount Office was reported to

pass progressively through the hands of 5 different Clerks, who either compute, or enter the particulars of the Bills in different books: this operation takes up a considerable space of time, & frequently occasions the business of the Office to continue, 'till very late at night before it is finished.⁴³

Reinforcing this notice of time by the clerks is evidence from the inspectors' reports and other records preserved in the Bank's archives to show that, both internally and externally, clocks formed a visible presence at the Bank. Thus the minutes of the Committee of Treasury in 1777 record that eight clocks had been cleaned and repaired by Mr Tutt at a cost of £3 and 10 shillings. The number of clocks mentioned here would seem to imply that clocks were placed in most, if not all, offices.⁴⁴ Most of the Bank's clerks would also have had clocks in their homes and might have carried their own pocket watches as an essential tool for delivering them to work on time each day. Certainly by the late eighteenth century the ownership of both clocks and

³⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 53.

³⁹ BEA, M5/213, fo. 20.

⁴⁰ BEA, M5/212, fo. 192.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 101.

⁴² *Ibid.*, fo. 117.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, fo. 68.

⁴⁴ BEA, M5/452, Minutes of the Committee of Treasury, 16 Apr. 1777. Mr Tutt was to be allowed £10 per annum for future cleaning and repair of the clocks.

pocket watches was within the reach of men paid less than the Bank's clerks and they were likely to have been used by individuals working in environments that required a high degree of time co-ordination.⁴⁵

The large clocks in the banking hall and over the Bartholomew Lane entrance to the Transfer Offices have already been noted.⁴⁶ Moreover, the inspectors' reports reveal that these clocks functioned not only as time pieces but also helped to define the physical environment by acting as points of orientation within the Bank. Thus, the inspectors were informed that the A, B and H cash books were stored 'in the Hall on the side under the Clock'. And on another occasion reference was made to customers being asked to carry their notes to the cashiers who sat under the clock for signature.⁴⁷ That the clock in the banking hall was a common reference point for orientation within the Bank is confirmed by *The Bank of England's Vade Mecum or Sure Guide*, a kind of guide book for customers, apparently written by a 'gentleman of the Bank'. The guide included a map of the banking hall detailing for potential customers which desks dealt with which types of transaction. The dominant reference point on the plan was the large clock which was positioned above the cashiers' desks.⁴⁸

In the various uses of time in the inspectors' reports, it is notable that while office hours and deadlines were spoken of in specific terms, other mentions of time were given in approximate or generic forms. This indicates that perhaps the former should be looked upon as expressions of an understanding of a formal obligation, rather than necessarily a representation of actual behaviour. There are, however, more than enough expressions of approximate timings and other uses of the clock to indicate that notice of time represented more than just an understanding of a formal obligation. The Committee of Inspection's report establishes that some of those who gave evidence did indeed measure their time precisely by the clock or, like Mr Vitu, had a strong sense of the personal time which their work consumed.

⁴⁵ Glennie and Thrift, 'Revolutions in the Times', 187; John Styles, 'Time Piece: Working Men and Watches', *History Today*, lviii (Jan. 2008).

⁴⁶ Many public buildings by this time placed clocks on external walls. See Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, 'The Spaces of Clock Times', in Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Social in Question: New Bearings in History and the Social Sciences* (London, 2002), 155.

⁴⁷ BEA, M5/212, fos. 91, 120.

⁴⁸ *The Bank of England's Vade Mecum; or Sure Guide . . . By a Gentleman of the Bank Etc.* (London, 1782).

Other clerks certainly worked by a set of well-established routines and deadlines, and understood time management and time coordination as part of their working lives. Even if it may be suggested that some clerks merely paid lip service to the defined routines and deadlines, the sheer amount of work undertaken by the Bank indicates that time pressure would have been experienced by many clerks. The Committee's reports tell us that the issue of 4 per cent annuities during the War of American Independence resulted in such an increase of business that the clerks had to open 19,500 new accounts in one day.⁴⁹ More than 65,000 dividend warrants were issued for payment on 5 January 1783 and nearly 59,000 in April 1783.⁵⁰ The clerks who kept the K cash book, in which were recorded notes in long lists for the Exchequer, for other public offices and to some bankers, estimated that they made up around 20,000 notes a month.⁵¹ Mr Isaac Pilleau estimated that 137,000 bills of exchange had been discounted in the course of 1782. Each discount required a posting to the account with and the account upon at the time of discount and from the two accounts at the time of payment.⁵² At the late eighteenth-century Bank of England, therefore, routine and time pressure were inescapable.

II

The origins of this heavily time-oriented regime cannot be traced but it is clear that some elements of time discipline had been in place since the early eighteenth century. Indeed, a rule book from 1704 specifies the timings of breaks for lunch.⁵³ Moreover, it is likely that the modes of working were borrowed from other systems of good practice that were already in existence at the Bank's foundation in 1694. Edward Hughes argues that the Bank's organization and management was modelled on that of the

⁴⁹ BEA, M5/213, fos. 43–4.

⁵⁰ BEA, M5/212, fo. 126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, fos. 91, 99.

⁵² BEA, M5/213, fos. 8–9.

⁵³ Anne L. Murphy, 'Learning the Business of Banking: The Management of the Bank of England's First Tellers', *Business History*, lii, 1 (2010), 150.

Excise.⁵⁴ Parallels can also be drawn with the management structure at the East India Company.⁵⁵ Routine was, therefore, likely to have been always a feature of the Bank's work. By the end of the eighteenth century it is clear that time-co-ordinated work and deadlines represented not just a desirable routine but were necessary to facilitate the smooth functioning of the Bank of England. As noted above, by the later eighteenth century the Bank employed a staff of over three hundred clerks, was dealing with thousands of transactions every month and was managing records relating to a huge balance sheet. It controlled the majority of the public debt and much of London's bullion inflows. It was required to oversee what was, by eighteenth-century standards, a vast process for the manufacture and circulation of banknotes and obliged to provide effective liaison with the Exchequer. All this was done by hand in processes that involved the endless recording of details in ledgers, adding columns of figures, calculating interest and dividend payments, transferring information from day books and transfer ledgers to permanent records and checking and double-checking to ensure the integrity of the records. The work had to be managed through the specialization of tasks and labour. Indeed, there is firm evidence in the Bank's records of the 'subdivision of process' and the 'synchronization of labour' that E. P. Thompson claimed required attention to the clock.⁵⁶

One of the most important functions of the clock at the Bank of England, therefore, was to define when certain tasks had to take place to ensure that all necessary tasks were completed within the working day. We have already noted the midday and 5 p.m. cut-off points for payments and transactions which were designed to allow records to be updated in time for the next business day. But the level of co-ordination required extended beyond the imposition of deadlines. There were effectively two working days at the Bank. Clerks worked from 9 a.m. to between 3 and 5 p.m. in most offices to facilitate customer business and then some clerks worked from the late afternoon, sometimes into the very late evening, in order to update the ledgers and ensure that

⁵⁴ E. Hughes, *Studies in Administration and Finance, 1558-1825: With Special Reference to the History of Salt Taxation in England* (University of Manchester Economic History Series x, Manchester, 1934), 172.

⁵⁵ Murphy, 'Learning the Business of Banking', 157.

⁵⁶ Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', 70.

the records accurately reflected the various accounts at the start of the next working day. Thus, Mr Southey, of the Accountant's Office, noted a basic working day that commenced at nine and commonly finished around 2 p.m. but he said that besides that job he was also employed, at a small additional salary, in posting bills and notes into the Discount Ledgers. That business could not start until late in the working day and had to be completed prior to the start of the next working day. Mr Southey estimated that on a moderate day he did not get away until six or seven in the evening and that frequently he stayed much later.⁵⁷ Mr Bentley had a similar working pattern except his main job generally extended until four or five in the afternoon and then he commenced posting bills which never took 'less time than two hours & a half or three hours, but very frequently 4 or 5. That he is very seldom out of the Office before 8 at night, if the business is heavy much later, & on a Saturday generally 'till 10 or 11 o'clock'.⁵⁸

Timed co-ordination of work was also evident in the clerks' arrival times and breaks from work. In particular, co-ordination was necessary to ensure that full cover was maintained during hours of business. Thus, an early start to the day was mandated for some workers. This included the porters who came in to clean the offices and lay the fires and the out-tellers, whose job it was to go out of the Bank to deliver and collect payments from customers at their homes or places of work. The out-tellers had to arrive early at the Bank to collect their lists of customers before setting out on their day's work. Clerks in some offices also arrived early to set up for the day. The clerk who provided liaison to the out-tellers was expected to arrive at work by 7 a.m.⁵⁹ The pay clerks were obliged to apply to the storekeepers in the warehouse for their drawers of notes prior to nine o'clock to be ready for business when the public were allowed into the Bank at nine, so they also arrived early.⁶⁰ Mr Holmes of the Drawing Office likewise told the Committee that the clerks there 'often come before 9 o'clock in the morning to forward their business' but their compensation was that they generally had finished by two or three o'clock in the afternoon.⁶¹

⁵⁷ BEA, M5/213, fos. 5-6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, fos. 6-7.

⁵⁹ BEA, M5/212, fo. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 171.

⁶¹ BEA, M5/213, fo. 13.

During the day, breaks from work were also co-ordinated by the clock. Mr Collins, the keeper of the G cash book noted that there were three clerks working in his section and 'one of them goes to dinner at 1 & returns at 3, another goes off at 2 & returns at ½ past 3, & the third goes off at 3' and, if business was quiet, sometimes did not return.⁶² Among the tellers in the banking hall, four or five went to dinner at one o'clock and returned at 2.30, the remainder then went to dinner and returned at 4 p.m. Mr Campe, the senior man, also reported that if it was a quiet day he sometimes left the office at 3.30 p.m. and that he might let two or three others do the same but, in that case, they were not allowed to have a dinner break.⁶³ There was acknowledgement of the problems of maintaining this level of co-ordination in sparsely manned departments. Hence, the keeper of the H cash book commented 'that this Book is generally left with only one Clerk, during the hours of Dinner; a circumstance very disagreeable to the Clerks themselves, as it is attended with much Risque'.⁶⁴ In other offices this problem was avoided by the expedient of dining at one's desk. Hence it was noted that in the Drawing Office, the clerk whose job it was to close the office for the day 'stays 'till 5 & he is allow'd an absence of 2 hours for dinner, from 1 to 3, the rest never go out to dinner, but if the business is very heavy a dinner is allow'd them in the Office'.⁶⁵

Implicit in all these arrangements is a response to the needs of the public and, in particular, regular users from the financial sector. This is especially evident in the co-ordination of the Bank's work to meet the demands of those whose own businesses required them to perform oversight at the Bank, or who used the Bank for the purposes of clearing. Thus, Mr Selby of the Three Per Cent Consols Office explained the importance of maintaining the accounts of foreign bondholders 'which the Notaries come to inspect in the Ledgers, in order to certify the Sums standing in any particular names. The Notaries generally come about 5 o'clock & expect to find the Articles posted'.⁶⁶ Equally, the keepers of the cash books noted that extra facilities were laid on 'towards evening when the Bankers

⁶² BEA, M5/212, fo. 108.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, fo. 36.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 98.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 59.

⁶⁶ BEA, M5/213, fos. 68-9.

come in'.⁶⁷ The co-ordination of the Bank of England's time with that of the City was also evident in the fact that, while the Bank observed public holidays in some offices, in others a skeleton staff was obliged to attend for the convenience of the customers.

It is clear in the above examples that labour was not only being co-ordinated between offices and between clerks within offices, it was being timed to ensure accurate record-keeping and consistent service to the public. This offers us firm evidence that the financial sector was a broad community with its own timed routines and rhythms. Because of this public function, the clock had clearly become a measure of the clerks', and indeed the institution's, performance. Moreover, deadlines, especially as they related to the demands of public scrutiny, were in many ways tyrannical. They could not be easily shifted or avoided and they kept the junior clerks working, sometimes until late into the evening and at other times on public holidays, in order to ensure that all tasks were completed. Linked to this is evidence that for the inspectors, and indeed for the clerks, the timing of tasks, as exposed during the inspection, was not taken for granted. It was accepted that time-sensitive tasks should be interrogated and could be improved upon and, importantly, made more expeditious.

In the recommendations that emerged from the inspectors' reports numerous mentions of the goal of increased expedition can be found. Thus, a plan to revise systems of issuing banknotes was offered with the endorsement that 'the Publick will be accommodated on demand without the delay they are now subject to'.⁶⁸ It was also noted that the plan might involve sending the cancelled notes to the pay clerks 'from time to time, as they come in . . . & by this means occasion less delay in making up the Pay Clerk's account in the evening'.⁶⁹ Similarly, recommendations for changes in systems used in the Bill Office were made because the inspectors observed that 'this operation takes up a considerable space of time, & frequently occasions the business of the Office to continue, 'till very late at night before it is finished'.⁷⁰ It is notable that many of the initial suggestions for these changes came from the clerks themselves, thus offering further evidence for the internalization of time discipline amongst the Bank's workers.

⁶⁷ BEA, M5/212, fo. 91.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 166.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 172.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 68.

Unsurprisingly, the most obvious manifestations of this concern with improving the efficiency and timeliness of the Bank's work were the discussions in the reports about service to the public. During the working day the Bank was full of people transacting business, checking accounts or just using the Bank as part of a daily routine of business intelligence-gathering. The inspectors' reports reveal that customers demanded an efficient service. Thus, Mr Lander informed the Committee that 'at present many persons refuse to wait at the Bank the time necessary to have their Notes changed & made out afresh, & go away to Bankers to have their business done with less delay'.⁷¹ The reports also noted 'very frequent complaints, in regard to delays and inconveniences experienc'd by the Publick in receiving their Dividends'.⁷² Mr Selby, one of the supervisors in the Three Per Cent Consols Office, explained

that the number of tickets for transfers put in in the last quarter of an hour before 1 o'clock is more than the whole number given in during the rest of the day: these take so much time to be entered, that it is usually 2 o'clock or very near it before they are compleated. This of necessity compels the Clerks very frequently to desire those persons who come for Dividends to wait 'till the Transfers are finished, & is always cause of much complaint.⁷³

Mr Walton of the Dividend Office continued the account:

The Transfers which ought to be made between 11 & 1 o'clock, not being all compleated by the stipulated time, interfere with the payment of the Dividends which are directed to begin punctually at 1: & this interference is considerably increased by the confined State of the Office, so inadequate to the business carried on in it that the Clerks are obliged to put the Books upon one another.⁷⁴

Notable in the foregoing examples is the expression of impatience. As Glennie and Thrift demonstrate, this offers us an insight into not only the use of the clock but the internalization of clock time.⁷⁵ The Bank's failure to meet the time expectations of its customers elicited the physical reactions of irritation and anxiety. It is rare to find evidence that waiting could lead to this kind of response and its several mentions in the inspectors' reports must indicate that the

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 117.

⁷² BEA, M5/213, fo. 136.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, fo. 68.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 52.

⁷⁵ Glennie and Thrift point out the importance of considering how time was 'taken into the body'; see Glennie and Thrift, 'Revolutions in the Times', 169.

late eighteenth-century City was a site where time was perceived to matter more than it did in other environments.

The clerks' responses to those complaints and expressions of annoyance are also worthy of note. They were keen to assert to the inspectors that no special treatment was given to prominent customers or public creditors. Hence, Mr Miller stated that it was 'a constant rule in this Office to make no distinctions of persons, but to dispatch every one in the order he comes, as far as they are able to judge'.⁷⁶ Clerks were, therefore, outwardly at least, concerned with managing their customers' time and in ensuring that delays were suffered equally regardless of social status or other distinction.

In seeking solutions to the delays evident in the work of the Transfer and Dividend Offices, a great emphasis was placed on the management and co-ordination of time. Mr Turner, head of the Three Per Cent Reduced Office, noted 'the time for putting in Transfer tickets might be restrained to ½ past 12 o'clock without any inconvenience to the Publick'.⁷⁷ Mr Reeves of the same office agreed, noting that

time for putting in Transfers might be restrained to ½ past 12 o'clock, & that no objections would be raised to it by the Principal Brokers: for it would facilitate their attendance at the East India house & South Sea house, where the time of Transfer is from 12 'till 1 o'clock, which at present interferes very much with their business at this house.⁷⁸

The above-mentioned examples suggest that the clerks were not only conscious of clock time but some were also able to think about their work and their interactions with customers in ways that emphasized a sense of speed and efficiency. The inspectors' report also contained numerous references to what we would refer to as efficiency and was clearly hostile to wasted time and effort. In this the inspectors might have been drawing on well-worn discourses of time-thrift. As Thompson notes, there were many variations within this theme not the least of which was an idea of time as a form of currency which had to be spent wisely.⁷⁹

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to argue that the efficient management of time at the Bank also had an alternative,

⁷⁶ BEA, M5/213, fo. 61.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 44.

⁷⁸ BEA, M5/212, fo. 55.

⁷⁹ Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', 87–9. See also, David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (London, 2000), 94–5.

deeper significance. Scholars, notably Douglass C. North and Barry R. Weingast, have suggested that the successes of the English financial revolution depended on a ‘credible commitment’ on the part of the state to honour its financial promises. Following the Glorious Revolution, public creditors lent their money to Parliament, which was, as North and Weingast argue, prevented from behaving as an irresponsible borrower by the institutions of representative government. This new state debt was backed by the appropriation of tax revenue and guaranteed by Act of Parliament.⁸⁰ Of course, this interpretation of the Glorious Revolution as a significant turning point in the state’s relations with its creditors has been questioned.⁸¹ Most significantly, Nathan Sussman and Yishay Yafeh have demonstrated that British borrowing costs did not fall significantly until the mid eighteenth century, indicating that ‘credible commitment’ took far longer to establish than North and Weingast suggested.⁸² Nonetheless, it remains clear that the state was able to borrow significant amounts from its citizens with ease and at low rates by the mid eighteenth century. A number of factors facilitated that ease of borrowing, including a history of sound credit and the growing economic stability and geo-political power of the British state. It is also important to consider how ‘credibility’ was demonstrated to the ordinary public creditor and here it is necessary to note that, as manager of more than 70 per cent of the state’s debt, the primary contact between the state and its creditors was the Bank of England. The Bank became the embodiment of the state’s financial promises and provided a daily demonstration of the integrity of public credit.⁸³ Arguably, the fact that the Bank

⁸⁰ Douglass C. North and Barry R. Weingast, ‘Constitutions and Commitment’: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Journal of Economic History*, xlix (Dec. 1989).

⁸¹ Gregory Clark, ‘The Political Foundations of Modern Economic Growth: England, 1540–1800’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxvi, 4 (1996); D’Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard and Larry Neal (eds.), *Questioning Credible Commitment: Perspectives on the Rise of Financial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2013); Patrick O’Brien, ‘The Nature and Historical Evolution of an Exceptional Fiscal State and its Possible Significance for the Precocious Commercialization and Industrialization of the British Economy from Cromwell to Nelson’, *Economic History Review*, lxiv (May 2011); Henry Roseveare, *The Financial Revolution, 1660–1760* (Harlow, 1991).

⁸² Nathan Sussman and Yishay Yafeh, ‘Institutional Reforms, Financial Development and Sovereign Debt: Britain, 1690–1790’, *Journal of Economic History*, lxvi, 4 (Dec. 2006).

⁸³ Barry R. Weingast, ‘The Political Foundations of Limited Government: Parliament and Sovereign Debt in 17th- and 18th-Century England’, in John N. Drobak and John V. C. Nye (eds.), *The Frontiers of the New Institutional Economics*

opened for business regularly and at specific hours, that it maintained strict routines and more or less precise timekeeping, and its seeming adherence to the rule of first-come, first-served, emphasizing the equality of public creditors, reinforced the message that here was an institution, and a representative of the state, that guaranteed the security of invested funds.

III

The requirements of providing a high level of service to the public imposed working hours on some of the Bank's clerks that were seemingly more onerous than those enjoyed by many in similar work. Indeed, the eighteenth-century financial services sector has typically been recorded as being characterized by work that was neither intensive nor urgent. Accounts of work in the Treasury during the 1780s, for example, indicated short working days and the toleration of a degree of absenteeism. One clerk noted that he was given to understand that 'on account of his long services, his constant attendance is not required'. Another wrote of his attendance as being 'in general daily, from about ten in the morning to four in the afternoon'.⁸⁴ Barry Supple noted that the work required of the Royal Exchange Assurance clerks was not demanding and that the day was broken by a two- or three-hour dinner break.⁸⁵ Moreover, the positions held by individuals were often not formalized and the expectations of the job not laid down with any precision.

The Bank's clerks, on the other hand, spoke often of the urgency of their work, frequently had strict deadlines to meet, all had specific roles and, as we have seen, all had specific hours of work. In some offices that still did mean a relatively short day. Some clerks certainly finished by two or three in the afternoon which, since they did not take a break during the day and assuming an 8.30 or 9 a.m. start, implies a working day of

(n. 83 cont.)

(San Diego and London, 1997); Anne L. Murphy, 'Demanding "Credible Commitment": Public Reactions to the Failures of the Early Financial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, lxvi (Feb. 2013).

⁸⁴ *Second Report of the Commissioners Appointed . . . to Enquire into the Fees, Gratuities, Perquisites and Emoluments . . . in the Several Public Offices*, quoted in Henry Roseveare, *The Treasury, 1660–1870: The Foundations of Control* (London, 1973), 186–8.

⁸⁵ Supple, *Royal Exchange Assurance*, 71.

between six and seven hours. Those working in offices where business hours were between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. generally started a little before 9 a.m. and usually took one and a half hours for dinner, again implying working time of around seven hours. For such clerks this meant a working day that, although somewhat more onerous than other white-collar workers, was less hard than that of many of their fellow Londoners. Indeed, Hans-Joachim Voth showed that many workers in the capital worked close to a twelve-hour day, starting work between 6 and 7 a.m. and finishing at around 7 p.m.⁸⁶ This working pattern was, however, characteristic of some working days at the Bank, especially those worked by the more junior clerks in the Accountant's Office, those men such as Mr Southey, mentioned above, who undertook two separate roles: a morning and an evening job. Here, excluding breaks for dinner, they might have been working around ten to twelve hours and sometimes not finishing until ten or eleven in the evening after which they endured a potentially long walk home.

The Bank's clerks also worked six days a week. The Bank was open from Monday to Saturday. The clerks were, of course, free on Sundays but possibly many thought, as did Charles Lamb, that day to be the 'very worst adapted for days of unbending and recreation'. It was a day when London was quiet, the shops shut and even the 'strollers in the fields on that day look anything but comfortable'.⁸⁷ There is no indication that the Bank's clerks were allowed regular periods of annual leave. They were, however, allowed to apply for leave to be away from their desks for periods of time, usually around two weeks. Hence, in 1775 the then governor, Samuel Beachcroft, gave permission for two clerks to take additional time off over the Easter period.⁸⁸ Governors were also prepared to grant leave of absence to those suffering from ill health and as compensation following particular periods of hard or intensive work. Thomas Campe was granted

⁸⁶ Hans-Joachim Voth, 'Time and Work in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of Economic History*, lviii (Mar. 1998), 33.

⁸⁷ Charles Lamb, *The Superannuated Man* at <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/l/lamb/charles/elia/book2.12.html>> (accessed 12 June 2016).

⁸⁸ Jonathan Warren was allowed to be away from 14 Apr. to 1 May and George Vincent from 16 Apr. to 24 Apr., BEA, M5/451, Samuel Beachcroft, 'Governor's Diary', fo. 1.

leave to be absent for a month following 'his long attendance at the melting of the guineas which finishes this day'.⁸⁹

The Bank did observe around forty-five public holidays a year by the mid eighteenth century but some of the clerks had to forego those holidays. In the Drawing Office, for example, it was noted that around half the usual number of permanent staff worked on holidays. Moreover, they generally received no extra pay because the allowance granted by the Bank for holiday working had to be reserved for paying additional temporary staff to attend on that day. This was because business was so heavy even on holidays that a minimum of seven staff was always needed and it seemed that very seldom could more than six be found from the permanent members.⁹⁰ The willingness of the Bank to open on public holidays and its ability to staff those days, albeit sometimes with unwilling or temporary clerks, corroborates the view of scholars who have suggested that the late eighteenth century did witness some erosion of rights to traditional breaks from work.⁹¹ It also indicates that financial capitalism, not just as expressed at the Bank but in the wider City as well, had begun the process of transforming irregular working patterns long before the cotton mills of the mid nineteenth century.

In other working environments, there is evidence of workers gaining leisure time by taking unauthorized holidays from work. In particular, the persistence of Saint Monday, the tradition of taking Monday off to recover from the excesses of Sunday recreation, is observed.⁹² Furthermore, with or without the taking of Saint Monday, historians have argued that for many workers there were wide variations in physical effort during the working week either as a result of a desire for increased leisure time or as a result of fatigue from gruelling work. Peter Kirby's study of workers in the Great Northern Coalfield, for example,

⁸⁹ BEA, M5/451, fo. 22.

⁹⁰ BEA, M5/212, fo. 87.

⁹¹ Herman Freudenberger and Gaylord Cummins, 'Health, Work and Leisure before the Industrial Revolution', *Explorations in Economic History*, xiii (Jan. 1976); Voth, 'Time and Work in Eighteenth-Century London', 35.

⁹² It has been argued that in some industries this practice persisted well into the nineteenth century; see Hopkins, 'Working Hours and Conditions during the Industrial Revolution', 56. Other scholars argue that Saint Monday was of late eighteenth-century origin; see Jan de Vries, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution', *Journal of Economic History*, liv, 2, (Papers Presented at the Fifty-Third Annual Meeting of the Economic History Association, Jun. 1994).

found short working times following pay days, which persisted into the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹³ There is no evidence of Saint Monday or indeed any other form of irregular attendance being observed at the Bank. Work was also constant. The ‘traditional’ working pattern of light working at the start of the week with compensatory longer working hours towards the end of the week was simply not appropriate to the Bank’s style of working or the nature of its business.⁹⁴ Nor, arguably, was it an appropriate method of working for salaried men. Men on piece rates could make decisions about their own working time based on their financial needs; salaried men had no such luxury. For them the consequences of such absenteeism were certainly censure and perhaps dismissal.

There is evidence of the day-to-day management of attendance at the Bank. Like all large-scale workshops and early factories, the Bank kept an appearance book to record the clerks’ arrival times. Matthias Alcock, the principal doorkeeper and the man charged with keeping the appearance book, told the inspectors that he drew ‘a line every day about 10 minutes after 9, to mark the names of those who do not come to their time’. With regard to those who were not present by the required time, Alcock marked against their name ‘either leave of absence or sickness, as the case may be; but for this he has no other authority than the information given by the Clerks themselves’.⁹⁵

The factory system tended to fine poor timekeeping, sometimes harshly. Some owners employed the expedient of locking the gates of the factory to prevent latecomers from working that day.⁹⁶ There is no evidence of such measures being taken at the Bank. On the other hand, tardiness was not ignored and the inspectors reinforced the expectation of punctuality. In their interviews with each senior man, they asked for an account of their staff which included details of their regularity. Thus Mr Clifford, head of the Drawing Office, informed the Committee that his men were ‘very regular & well qualified for their business, which was very

⁹³ Peter Kirby, ‘Attendance and Work Effort in the Great Northern Coalfield, 1775–1864’, *Economic History Review*, lxxv (Aug. 2012), 966.

⁹⁴ See Hopkins, ‘Working Hours and Conditions during the Industrial Revolution’, 56, for a discussion of traditional working habits.

⁹⁵ BEA, M5/213, fo. 165.

⁹⁶ Sidney Pollard, *The Genesis of Modern Management: A Study of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 215.

necessary, for matters of immense consequence passed through their hands'.⁹⁷ Mr Bridger, principal of the Dividend Warrant Office likewise told the Committee that the 'persons at present under his charge are very regular'.⁹⁸ Of course, it might be argued that the senior men were merely representing their offices in ways that cast the best light on their own management abilities. A Special Committee appointed in 1790 to examine the rules and regulations then operating at the Bank noted that 'many evasions are practised in respect to the time of the clerks' appearance in the morning and of continuing in their respective stations during the hours of business'. At that time it was discovered that leave of absence was easily obtained and the appearance books inaccurately kept.⁹⁹ Later accounts of office work also suggested that arrival time was treated with some flexibility with a variety of excuses being given, including being distracted by household matters and diverted by unusual sights on the journey into work.¹⁰⁰ Extended hours at the end of the working day, especially during busy periods, do, however, appear to be a consistent feature of office work in any period.¹⁰¹

Although these examples imply a certain flexibility about timekeeping that is at odds with the evidence from the inspectors' reports, there were nonetheless very few reprimands offered by the inspectors to men seemingly absent without good reason. Mr Windsor, who worked in the Three Per Cent Consols Office was noted to be 'absent from his place on the 16th Instant, without having previously obtained leave for it from the Head of the Office' and the Committee advised him 'not to make a practice of absenting himself in this manner, but to be more regular in his attendance in future'.¹⁰² Likewise Mr Lazenby, also of the Three Per Cent Consols Office, was 'examined concerning his bad attendance in his place, & admonished to be very careful & regular in future'.¹⁰³

It is interesting that both of these men worked in the Three Per Cent Consols Office. This indicates that what can be observed

⁹⁷ BEA, M5/212, fo. 85.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 123.

⁹⁹ Acres, *Bank of England from Within*, 246.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, 15.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

¹⁰² BEA, M5/213, fo. 95.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, fo. 96.

here was not necessarily a case of obtaining additional leisure time through absence. Indeed, the Committee of Inspection's investigation revealed that the clerks working in the various Transfer Offices could often be found to be supplementing their incomes through acting as brokers and sometimes jobbers in the financial market. During Lazenby's and Windsor's interviews with the Committee it emerged that they were both guilty of this transgression of the Bank's rules. Mr Lazenby confessed to acting as a broker 'but in a very small way' and Mr Windsor stated that 'he has acted as a Broker himself, but usually employs one to do his business . . . That he has not jobbed of late years, though he has now & then sold & bought a little stock which he has held for his friends'.¹⁰⁴ It was not additional leisure time that was being obtained here, therefore, but additional income.

It was also the Three Per Cent Consols Office that offered an interesting case of abuse of the notion of time-discipline. The only office head to be overtly critical of his staff, Abraham Vickery, prefaced his evidence to the Committee by saying that 'as soon as he heard this Committee was appointed, he informed all the clerks under him that, when called before the Committee, he would openly & candidly declare all he knew concerning their conduct'.¹⁰⁵ He went on to allege that clerks frequently went out during the day without asking his permission or came in late in the mornings and that they gave preference to their friends in making out transfers and paying dividends.¹⁰⁶ Yet Vickery was a complex character and, in a private notebook kept by Samuel Bosanquet, one of the inspectors, it was revealed that a number of clerks had poor relations with Vickery, that 'bad words' had been exchanged in a number of instances and that there was 'cause for discontent in the Consols Office against Mr Vickery'.¹⁰⁷ Mr Nesbitt, a more junior clerk, reported that Mr Vickery had many enemies in the Stock Exchange because he was viewed to have too close a connection with one of the brokers. He also noted that Vickery 'acts improperly & over rough with the clerks' and that he sometimes came late to work himself. Nesbitt himself was

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fos. 96, 84.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 63.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 64.

¹⁰⁷ BEA, M5/471, Memorandum book of Samuel Bosanquet, 1783-1791, unpaginated.

judged by Bosanquet to have been ‘intelligent, gentlemanlike and respectable’, so his testimony might be regarded as reliable. Other clerks too spoke of Mr Vickery as being a partner in a broking firm and privileging his own customers over those of the Bank.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps there is someone like Vickery in every workplace and the rights and wrongs of the squabbles in the Transfer Offices are not the chief concern of this investigation. More important is the notion that working time, late arrival and absenteeism were being used here as part of a discourse of dispute between colleagues and power struggles within offices. This is clear evidence that while the clerks may have been telling the inspectors what they wanted to hear about their own willingness to adhere to clock time, they still fully understood and arguably had internalized the meanings of time discipline within the Bank. They knew that lateness carried the price of disapprobation and, as David Landes asserted, that was a powerful notion.¹⁰⁹ It meant that clerks constructed their own activities as punctual but knew accusations of unpunctuality could be used as weapons against colleagues who were lazy or simply disliked.

Thus far we have seen little overt resistance to the tyranny of the clock on the part of the Bank’s junior men. There is no evidence in the inspectors’ reports of the type of tardiness or unauthorized leave that might have made staffing the Bank problematic. Moreover, as we have seen, there is evidence that some men were working very hard. Some junior clerks took on additional work at the Bank, other men juggled their work in the Transfer Offices with broking and sometimes speculation in the stocks. Although the issue was not addressed by the Committee of Inspection, a register of clerks in business begun in the early nineteenth century can also reveal that clerks were working at second jobs outside the Bank. Several of the cohort of 1783 were acting as merchants of some description. Henry Vonholte, Christopher Olier and William Mullens dealt in coal, Isaac Cooper and Charles Stuart were wine merchants. Jeremiah Kelly was an agent to a Yorkshire carpet manufacturer. Thomas

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Landes, *Revolution in Time*, 2.

Brennand performed the same function for Mr Greenwood, a dealer in patent medicines.¹¹⁰

The fact that some clerks maintained second jobs raises the question of whether this indicates ‘industrious’ behaviour as defined by Jan de Vries, yet without further details about the clerks’ household structures and total incomes, it is difficult to assess whether this additional economic activity was driven by necessity or by ‘consumption aspirations’.¹¹¹ There is evidence to suggest that the Bank’s starting salary of £50 per year was not a sufficient wage for clerical workers. An anonymous pamphleteer writing in 1767 calculated a budget which depended on living in the meanest parts of London, being clothed in plain style, keeping barely clean enough to keep one’s place and taking little leisure. He demonstrated that, even with those constraints, £50 per annum still left little or nothing to put aside against sickness or old age.¹¹² Yet while the allocation of second jobs within the Bank seems to have been reserved for the more junior, and less well-paid, men, broking activity and additional outside work persisted as men rose up the ranks and their salaries increased. There is also evidence of clerks making significant external investments. Insurance records show that John Holland and Jacob Coulthard, both members of the cohort of 1783, together insured various properties and businesses in Lad Lane, including the tap house of the Swan Inn, a barber shop, a counting house, stables and lodging rooms.¹¹³ Seawallis Larchin owned a house in Chelsea that was, in 1786, valued at £300. It was at the time standing empty but had been rented out to a Captain Pakenham.¹¹⁴ Thomas Nisbett, of the Three Per Cent Consols office, owned a house in Gracechurch Street which in 1794 was valued at £800 and rented to a haberdasher.¹¹⁵ Some clerks, therefore, put their time, both within and outside of the Bank, to uses which indicate at the very least that wealth accumulation was a priority.

¹¹⁰ BEA, M5/691, Register of clerks in business, *passim*.

¹¹¹ Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2008), 73.

¹¹² [J. W.], *Considerations on the Expediency of Raising . . . the Wages of Servants that are not Domestic, Particularly Clerks in Public Offices* (London, 1767), 5–10.

¹¹³ London Metropolitan Archives, London, MS 11936/427/740354.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, MS 11936/341/526365.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, MS 11936/399/634968.

Yet industriousness among the Bank's clerks also had its limits since the Committee of Inspection did note 'a practice that strikes us a very extraordinary one'. Their investigations revealed that 'the Chiefs of the two great departments, & the Heads of most of the Offices throughout the Bank, are the first to quit the House, some at a certain hour; & others as soon as their particular part of the business is over'.¹¹⁶ The inspectors condemned the idea of 'leaving the charge of every thing to the vigilance & honesty of the Junior Clerks, (frequently such as are very young in Office)' and admonished the senior men for 'not considering it as any part of their duty to attend to the subsequent transactions of the day'. The inspectors went on to say:

This practice, beyond a doubt, must have crept in by degrees, for we deem it impossible that it ever could have received the deliberate approbation of a Court of Directors; & however Time may have sanctified the custom, the reverse of it would have appeared a much more natural regulation: for surely if in any situation of Trust a compleat superintendence is desirable, it must be more immediately necessary where the Trust is of such infinite importance.¹¹⁷

Their solution to this problem implied not a demand that the senior men be more regular in their attendance but a negotiation of longer hours. Thus they asked the Court of Directors to consider 'whether means may not be found to enable the two Chiefs or their respective Deputies to give a more constant attendance at the Bank, & to exercise a general superintending care until the business of the day is closed, & the Keys properly disposed of'.¹¹⁸

It is interesting that it was not the junior men exercising a supposed right to take Saint Monday or acquiring additional personal or leisure time through absenteeism, but those in the most senior positions. It usually took a considerable time to rise up the Bank's hierarchy. The institution operated a strict internal labour market in which it recruited only at entry level and promoted from within. The pyramidal structure of the Bank meant there were relatively few very senior posts, and the longevity of many of the clerks' careers meant some men might never attain high office. Abraham Newland, for example, held the post of chief cashier from 1782 to 1807. Senior men, however, could earn considerable salaries and were assured of generous

¹¹⁶ BEA, M5/213, fo. 173.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 174.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

pensions if they chose to retire. Nonetheless, while some might have been tending to other work in the late afternoons, it also seems reasonable to assume that once other men had attained the highest office that appeared available to them within the Bank, they made the choice to take additional leisure time. This certainly seems to have been the case for Newland who, according to a biography produced after his death in 1807, spent his afternoons and evenings at his house in Highbury, drinking tea, playing cards and engaging in ‘free, unreserved communication with a few intimates’.¹¹⁹

The assertion that more senior men sought additional leisure time is supported by Douglas Reid’s findings about working men making a choice between greater affluence and more leisure. Although referring to workers paid on piece rates, he noted that the prime supporters of Saint Monday were the better paid men who were willing to accept a moderate wage in return for more time away from work.¹²⁰ The senior salaried men at the Bank were not being forced to make this particular choice but clearly were making a statement that previous years of hard working and additional hours put in at the lower ranks should be compensated by additional leisure in the higher ranks. Reid also argued that the eradication of Saint Monday ensured that, within industrial capitalism, a proper balance between work and leisure time was lost.¹²¹ In the Bank’s archives there is surely evidence of a better work–life balance being earned through many years’ work and as the privilege of rank.

The junior men, it seems, had to accept a poorer balance between work and leisure, whether by choice or necessity, but did use the inspection as a means of highlighting deficiencies in their working arrangements and improving their working conditions. Thus, the clerks at the K cash book complained that ‘they have great numbers of long Lists to make out, generally issuing 20,000 Notes a Month; & for this Business there ought to be 6 Clerks constantly, tho’ at present through a scarcity of hands there are only 4’.¹²² As we have seen, the

¹¹⁹ John Dyer Collier, *The Life of Abraham Newland Esq. Late Principal Cashier at the Bank of England . . . with a Portrait, etc.* (London, 1808), 101.

¹²⁰ Douglas A. Reid, ‘The Decline of Saint Monday 1766–1876’, *Past and Present*, no. 71 (May 1976), 78.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹²² BEA, M5/212, fo. 99.

clerks in the Transfer and Dividend Offices also highlighted the deficiencies in the arrangements of their work. Moreover, the inspectors acknowledged the importance of their complaints, noting in their report, 'a good deal of our time has been employed in endeavouring to ascertain how far the very frequent complaints, in regard of the delays & inconveniences experienc'd by the Publick in receiving their Dividends, are well founded, from what causes they arise, & to what degree they may be remedied'.¹²³ The inspectors then recommended physical reorganization of the Dividend and Transfer Offices, changes to hours of opening, alterations of working practices and the employment of seven additional clerks as a means of easing the burden on these offices and of accommodating public creditors in a more timely fashion.¹²⁴

The junior clerks in the Accountant's Office who were employed in posting discounted bills also used the occasion of the inspection to seek better conditions. Having revealed their working conditions to the inspectors, their approach was then to petition the Bank's governor 'praying an increase in their annual allowance for doing this extra work'. The inspectors were asked for their opinion and offered one that was wholeheartedly in support of the clerks. They recorded

That the 16 Clerks employed in the Accountants Office upon the Business of entering & posting discounted Bills into the Discount Ledgers appear to the Committee to be paid very inadequately to the additional trouble & labour bestowed by them in doing this Business, receiving the sum of £300 only, which divided among the whole number amounts to about £18.5 each in addition to their Salary, although they work in an Office which does not partake in the smallest degree of any present or gratuity given by the Publick, & are allways kept 'till a very late hour at night: & that it be recommended to the Governor & Committee of Treasury to take their case into consideration.¹²⁵

It is clear here that these particular clerks were selling their time. They asked for, and were granted, not a removal of work, a decrease in the number of hours or the employment of additional hands but rather an increase in the pay for hours worked. Thus these clerks demonstrated the ability to think of their time as a medium for exchange and the willingness to allow the Bank to purchase their time at any hour of the day or evening with sufficient monetary

¹²³ BEA, M5/213, fo. 136.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, fos. 139–42.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 48.

compensation. The clerks' demand to their employer was, therefore, an expression of their acceptance of the capitalist working day, a day in which labour could be sold and bought for the right price.

* * *

The chief value of the Committee of Inspection's report is that it can reveal very specific details about the Bank of England's operations at a time when it was the City's chief financial institution and the centre of the edifice of public credit. What is shown very clearly is the extent to which time mattered in the operation of this business. The working day at the Bank was characterized by regular, and sometimes long, hours. The clerks' labour was time-oriented rather than task-oriented and controlled by the need to co-ordinate work and deadlines both within and between offices. Customers, public creditors, brokers and notaries also demanded a timely service from the Bank's staff thereby reinforcing the tyranny of the clock. The majority of those who worked for the Bank would, therefore, have been aware of the clock and many would have been all too aware of their obligation to complete work by certain inescapable deadlines.

The senior men's inclination towards leaving the Bank at the earliest opportunity each day suggests a common feeling that this system of working was not agreeable. This should not surprise us. Employers during the transition to industrial capitalism often argued that men had a high preference for leisure and a resistance to timed work.¹²⁶ The Bank's inspectors seemed somewhat inclined to share such feelings. In the conclusion to their reports, they noted 'the various discordant humours & passions of Men, & the natural unwillingness to obey, where no distinct line is drawn, of Power on one side, or of Obedience on the other'. And yet they also acknowledged that 'on the whole . . . after a minute enquiry we have found no very material causes of complaint subsisting either in regard to their [the clerks'] behavior towards one another, or in regard to the conduct of their business'.¹²⁷ Moreover, as we have seen, the junior men who could not escape the tyranny of the clock found ways of

¹²⁶ Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism'.

¹²⁷ BEA, M5/213, fo. 152.

using the constraints of timed work and the notion of service to the public to improve their own working conditions. This is indicative of their internalization of clock time and demonstrates that, while the impact of industrial capitalism on time-discipline remains contested, by the late eighteenth century financial capitalism had entrenched regular time at the Bank of England and in the minds of its clerks.

University of Hertfordshire

Anne L. Murphy