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## Title

‘What a change have I undergone ... so altered in stature, knowledge & ideas!’:

Apprenticeship, Adolescence and Growing Up in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ulster.

## Abstract

Until the late nineteenth-century, apprenticeship was the main way in which young people were trained in crafts and trades. Given that most apprenticeship terms lasted approximately seven years, young people could expect to spend a large part of their youth in service to another. Apprenticeship therefore coincided with an important phase in the life-cycle of many young men (and women) during this period. A study of apprenticeship not only tells us how young people learned the skills with which they made their future living, it also casts light on the process of ‘growing up’. However, we still know little about the everyday lives of apprentices, their relationships with their masters, and how young people themselves understood the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Drawing largely on the diary of John Tennent (1772-1813), a grocer’s apprentice who kept a record of his time spent in service, this article aims to broaden our understanding of these themes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland. It demonstrates that, for young middle-class men like Tennent, apprenticeship played a key role in the transition from boy- to manhood.

## Keywords

Apprenticeship, Service, Youth, Adolescence, Masculinity, Ulster, Ireland, Eighteenth-century, Nineteenth-Century.

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Leaving home and entering into some form of service was a common part of the process of growing up for boys (and less so, girls) of all social ranks across pre-industrial Europe.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it has been suggested that as many as sixty per cent of persons aged fifteen to twenty-four years of age were ‘servants’ of one type or another in early modern England.<sup>2</sup> Dating from the twelfth-century, the apprenticeship system was a long-established tradition of service that provided for the instruction of young people in crafts and trades across Europe.<sup>3</sup> In exchange for a small fee, young people bound themselves in service to a master craftsman, who in turn promised to train them in the skills of their chosen profession. Once an apprentice successfully completed their term, they could apply to become ‘freemen’ of the city in which they trained, a title which granted them settlement, poor relief and the right to set up their own business and trade.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, those apprentices who finished their terms, but could not yet afford to set up business, spent a number of years working as ‘journeymen’, honing their craft, making valuable social connections and saving capital. Until its decline in the later

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1 Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 171-72; Patrick Wallis, Cliff Webb and Chris Minns, ‘Leaving Home and Entering Service: the Age of Apprenticeship in Early Modern London’, *Continuity and Change*, 25:3 (2010), 377.

2 John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain, 1860-1960* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 19-20.

3 K. D. M. Snell, ‘The Apprenticeship System in British History: The Fragmentation of a Cultural Institution’, *History of Education*, 25:4 (1996), 303.

4 Patrick Wallis, ‘Apprenticeship and Training in Premodern England’, *Journal of Economic History*, 68:3 (2008), 838.

nineteenth-century, apprenticeship was the most important formal method of training for skilled workers.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to equipping apprentices with the technical skills they needed to earn a living, apprenticeship also facilitated the transition that young people made from childhood to adulthood by preparing them to be good adults and citizens.<sup>6</sup> The age at which most young people commenced apprenticeship varied over time, by geographical location and profession of choice, but most appear to have entered service sometime in their teens, between twelve and seventeen years of age.<sup>7</sup> Once bound, apprentices spent between five and twelve years of their lives in service.<sup>8</sup> Considering the length of these arrangements, and the age at which most contracts began, young people could expect to spend the better part of their formative years- the period of their adolescence- in service to another. Apprenticeship therefore performed an important social function, in that it acted as a conduit through which youthful energy could be channelled and controlled. Apprenticeship agreements, for instance, were

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5 See for example, Gilliam Hamilton, 'The Decline of Apprenticeship in North America: Evidence from Montreal', *Journal of Economic History*, 60:3 (2000), 627-64; Snell, 'Apprenticeship System in British History', 303-22.

6 Snell, 'Apprenticeship System in British History', 304-05; Springhall, *Coming of Age*, p. 17; E. D. Spindler, 'Youth and Old Age in Medieval London', *The London Journal*, 35:1 (2011), 1-3.

7 Anne Yarbrough, 'Apprentices as Adolescents in Sixteenth-Century Bristol', *Journal of Social History*, 13:1 (1979), 68-9; Spindler, 'Youth and Old Age', 3; Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (London, 2003), p. 32; Peter Fleming, *Family and Household in Medieval England* (Hampshire, 2001), pp. 73-4.

8 Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and Training', 834; Orme, *Medieval Children*, p. 312.

more concerned with controlling the behaviour of ‘wayward’ young apprentices than on the learning of a trade. Stress was placed on inculcating young people with the virtues of morality, soberness and honesty. As noted by Steven Smith, apprenticeship was ‘a way of life’ between childhood and adulthood.<sup>9</sup>

While the connections between adolescence, service and ‘growing up’ are well documented by historians in England and Europe, such extensive studies of youth and apprenticeship have yet to be undertaken in respect to Ireland.<sup>10</sup> In common with research into children and childhood, the study of youth and adolescence, and the experiences associated with these life stages, is only beginning in Ireland.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, *Adolescence in*

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9 Steven R. Smith, ‘The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents’, *Past & Present*, 61 (1963), 157.

10 See among others, Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven and London, 1994); John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770 to Present* (New York, 1974); Wallis, ‘Apprenticeship and Training’, 823-61; Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 127-84; Spindler, ‘Youth and Old Age’, 1-22; Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560-1640* (Oxford, 1996).

11 See, Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan (eds), *Adolescence in Modern Irish History* (Dublin, 2015); Maria Luddy and James M. Smith (eds), *Children, Childhood and Irish Society, 1500 to the Present* (Dublin, 2014); Mary Hatfield, Jutta Kruse and Ríona Nic Congáil (eds), *Historical Perspectives on Parenthood and Childhood in Ireland* (Dublin, 2017); Elaine Farrell (ed.), ‘She said she was in the family way’: *Pregnancy and Infancy in Modern Ireland* (London, 2012). Works that include some discussion of adolescence include,

*Modern Irish History* (2015), the collection edited by Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan is the first sustained attempt by Irish historians to tackle this area. Despite the important contribution this volume makes, none of the essays are concerned with apprenticeship and most deal with the post-Famine period.<sup>12</sup> As the editors have noted, adolescence in Ireland was conceptualized as both urban and problematic, reflecting wider British, American and European trends. Sources for the study of adolescence in Ireland are therefore skewed towards these themes, and have subsequently shaped the focus of the collection.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, much of what has been written on apprenticeship and service is focused on the role that apprenticeship has played in the development of technical education.<sup>14</sup> Virtually nothing has

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Mary O’Dowd, ‘Men, Women, Children and the Family’, in J. Ohlmeyer (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 2018), II, pp. 313-8; Sarah-Anne Buckley, ‘Women, Men and the Family, c. 1730 –c.1880’, in *The Cambridge History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 2018), III, pp. 240-6; Kevin O’Neill, ‘“Almost a Gentlewoman”: Gender and Adolescence in the Diary of Mary Shackleton’, in Mary O’Dowd and Sabine Wichert (eds), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women’s Status in Church, State and Society* (Belfast, 1995), pp. 91-102; S.J. Connolly, ‘A Woman’s Life in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Case of Letitia Bushe’, *The Historical Journal*, 43:2 (2000), 433-51.

12 The exception being, Jonathan Jeffrey Wright, ‘Robert Hyndman’s Toe: Romanticism, Schoolboy Politics and the Affective Revolution in Late Georgian Belfast’, in Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan (eds), *Adolescence in Modern Irish History* (Dublin, 2015), pp. 15-41.

13 Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan, ‘Introduction’ in Cox and Riordan (eds), *Adolescence*, pp. 5, 11.

14 J. G. Ryan, ‘Early Irish Crafts and Apprenticeships: An Historical Background’, in Norman McMillan (ed.), *Prometheus’s Fire: a History of Scientific and Technological*

been written on the experiences of apprentices or the connections between youth and apprenticeship more broadly.

Using the case study of John Tennent, an eighteenth-century grocer's apprentice who kept a record of his time spent in service, alongside the papers of a number of other Ulster apprentices and their families, this article aims to bring into sharper focus the relationship between apprenticeship, adolescence and growing-up in Ireland. The article is organised into two sections. The first section focuses on the experience of John Tennent and explores what his journal reveals about the life of an adolescent apprentice at the turn of the eighteenth-century. Drawing on material collected from other Ulster-based families, the second section considers how representative Tennent's account is of the life of an Irish apprentice during this period.

### John Tennent: An Eighteenth-Century Ulster Apprentice

Who was John Tennent, and why is he worthy of such close study? While much is known of Tennent's activities in adulthood, such as his involvement in radical politics, membership of the United Irishmen and service in the French army, much less is known of his childhood and adolescence.<sup>15</sup> Tennent was born on 11 October 1772 in Ballaghmore, county Antrim, the

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*Education in Ireland* (Kilkenny, 2000), pp. 25-50; Vincent Kinane, 'Printer's Apprentices in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Dublin', *The Linen Hall Review*, 10:1 (1993), 11-4.

<sup>15</sup> For further biographical information on Tennent see the following: W. A. Maguire, 'John Tennent (1772-1813)', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (henceforth *DIB*) (online edition); Albrecht Zimburg, 'John Tennent (1772-1813): Businessman, United Irishman and Soldier of France', *Irish Sword*, 29:115 (2013), 1-18; Jim Cameron, 'Philosophy, Theory and Practice!! Extract From the "journal of John Tennent's Apprenticeship At Coleraine July 1786- July 1790"', *The Bann Disc*, 3 (1996), 31-32; Eileen

seventh child of the Reverend John Tennent, minister of the Seceding-Presbyterian congregation of Roseyards, and his wife Anne Patton. As the son of a Presbyterian minister, Tennent was born into a family of relatively modest means. His father's annual income was derived from two sources: a state grant of £27 per annum, known as the *regium donum*, and a stipend, which amounted to no more than £40 per annum, paid by the congregation.<sup>16</sup> While certainly not wealthy, Tennent enjoyed the benefits of a middle-class upbringing. He appears to have had a good education, attending private academies with his elder sister Margaret in county Antrim, wherein he acquired the 'rudiments of reading and writing'.<sup>17</sup> After learning basic reading and writing skills, he progressed to a school managed by a Mr McMullan in Roseyards, where he was instructed in Latin and the Classics, alongside his elder brother Robert.<sup>18</sup> In July 1786, just three months short of his fourteenth birthday, Tennent was bound

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Black, 'John Tennent, 1777-1813, United Irishman and Chevalier De La Légion D'Honneur', *Irish Sword*, 13 (1977), 157-59; Jonathan Jeffrey Wright, *The Natural Leaders and Their World': Politics, Culture and Society in Belfast, c. 1801-1832* (Liverpool, 2012), pp. 17-9, 26-34.

16 Tennent's father belonged to the Anti-Burgher Seceding faction of Presbyterianism. The Seceders received the state grant from 1784. The amount awarded was augmented in 1803 under a classification scheme, which ranked congregations according to size, with the largest Seceding congregations receiving £75 per annum, middle-sized congregations, £50 per annum and the smallest congregations, £40 per annum. See, Kevin Conway, 'The Presbyterian Ministry of Ulster in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Prosopographical Study' (Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, Belfast, 1997), pp. 209-10.

17 Leanne Calvert, 'Journal of John Tennent, 1786-90', *Analecta Hibernica*, 43 (2012), 87-9.

18 *Ibid.*, 88.



as an apprentice to Samuel Givin, a grocer's merchant in the town of Coleraine, county Londonderry, for a period of four years.<sup>19</sup>

What makes Tennent especially worthy of close study is a journal he kept during his time as an apprentice, entitled *Memoirs of John Tennent while lived in Coleraine 4 years from July 1786 with Samuel Givin*.<sup>20</sup> Written over a four year period, between 12 July 1786 and 4 July 1790, Tennent's journal is one of only a handful of surviving accounts of service, written from the perspective of an apprentice.<sup>21</sup> Documenting his daily routines, conversations, interests, thoughts and feelings, Tennent's journal offers a rare insight into the life of a young apprentice, as and how he experienced it.

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19 Tennent's indenture agreement was signed on 10 July 1786. Calvert, 'Journal of John Tennent', 76; Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI), D1748/D/1A&1B, Indentures and Agreement of John Tennent, 1786.

20 The original manuscript of Tennent's journal can be found: PRONI, D1748/D/2/2, Large Journal Belonging to John Tennent, 12 July 1786 -13 July 1790. This manuscript forms part of the larger Tennent family archive, PRONI, D1748. Other information on Tennent and his time in Coleraine can be gleaned from his correspondence, PRONI, D1748/D/2/3-8, and personal papers. Select extracts from Tennent's journal are printed in M. Lenox-Conyngham (ed.), *Diaries of Ireland: An Anthology, 1590-1987* (Dublin, 1998) and Springhall, *Coming of Age*, pp. 23-4. Direct quotes from Tennent's journal have been drawn from the published version of the diary, Leanne Calvert, 'The Journal of John Tennent, 1786-90', *Analecta Hibernica*, 43 (2012), 69-128.

21 The diary of Roger Lowe, a seventeenth-century apprentice, is arguably the best well-known example. See, William L. Sachse (ed.), *The Diary of Roger Lowe of Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire, 1663-74* (New Haven, 1938).

Furthermore, Tennent's journal holds the potential to tell us something new about how contemporaries understood the process of 'growing up'. In addition to documenting his activities, Tennent used his diary as a space in which to reflect on his progression towards manhood. His diary entries convey a picture of a young man who was keenly aware of the changes associated with one's adolescence, such as that dated 30 December 1789:

Now, ends, the year of our Lord 1789. What a wonderful change have I undergone since 1786 to 1789. I scarce know myself to have been the same person, so altered in stature, knowledge & ideas! Before the year 1790 is expired I must launch out into the world. May I be duly prepared for it. It is an important want, as it is generally in the early years of a person's life that they either lay up their future happiness or misery.<sup>22</sup>

As a source for the study of adolescence, Tennent's journal encapsulates some of the wider themes of 'growing up' which many of his peers would have recognised: leaving home and entering service, youth as a transitory period between childhood and adulthood, and a sense of personal maturation in attitudes and ideas.

### Becoming an Apprentice

As a younger son in a middle-class family, apprenticeship was the usual family strategy for settling young men like Tennent. Indeed, in choosing to enter an apprenticeship, Tennent was following the course taken by his two elder brothers, William (1759–1832) and Robert (1765–1837), who served apprenticeships with a merchant and medical doctor respectively.<sup>23</sup> But, how did young men choose the trade in which they entered, and how involved was the family in this decision?

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<sup>22</sup> Calvert, 'Journal of John Tennent', 109.

<sup>23</sup> Details of the two elder Tennent brothers' apprenticeships can be found in Wright, *The Natural Leaders*, pp. 17–9, 29–31.

John Tennent's diary reveals much about the role the family played, or *should have* played in Tennent's opinion, in such decisions. It is clear from reading Tennent's journal that he was unhappy with his situation in Coleraine. His journal is littered with references to the banality of his working week, which he described on one occasion as a 'continuous round of insipidity & vexation'.<sup>24</sup> Tennent often reflected in his diary on the events that led to his much-hated apprenticeship in Coleraine and he placed the blame on a mix of youthful rashness and bad family planning:

father wishing to put me to some business gave me my choice which profession I should follow. He, not knowing what would be the truly best, he wrote to W[illiam] [Tennent's eldest brother] but got no certain ans[we]r & I being too forward desired to be sent to Coleraine & be made a grocers of. My father not taking the time or pains to enquire into the business he was going to place me in bound me to Samuel Givin of this town.<sup>25</sup>

The folly and indecisiveness of youth is a recurrent theme in Tennent's journal. Reflecting contemporary ideas regarding manliness and adulthood, Tennent used his journal as a space in which to reflect and measure his progression towards manhood. A key component of this transition was the extent to which he was in control of his passions and possessed the ability to make logical decisions. Tennent regularly contrasted his state of mind when a child with that of his adolescent mindset. Remembering his childhood, Tennent recalled that as a boy his mind was 'clouded' and, like all children, he could not 'express [his] own feelings'.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, in an entry dated January 1789, he mused that aged seventeen

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24 Calvert, 'Journal of John Tennent', 81.

25 *Ibid.*, 89.

26 *Ibid.*, 87-8.

and an adolescent, he ‘knew ... rather more & [was] emerging into man’.<sup>27</sup> In attributing part of the blame for his situation in Coleraine on his ‘forwardness’, Tennent was critiquing the ability of young persons to make such important decisions.

If young people were not capable of choosing wisely, the weight of this responsibility naturally fell to parents. Indeed, according to Tennent, parents should not only take care to find a suitable situation, but also one with an experienced and fair master. After witnessing his master, Samuel Givin, interview potential new apprentices in January and February 1790, Tennent noted in his diary the ‘great folly in parents’ who did not consider their children’s education and future prospects.<sup>28</sup> Masters, he continued, were duplicitous and self-serving, taking ‘no pains to teach [apprentices] any thing not to their own advantage’.<sup>29</sup> As will be discussed later, Tennent did not have a good relationship with his master. Indeed, his criticisms of the ‘folly’ of parents were based on his own experience, his own not ‘taking the time or pains’ to find out more about Givin.

Why did Tennent’s father defer this important decision to his eldest son William? While this decision may seem odd, it should be remembered that parents often relied on the social contacts of well-connected family members to source places for their children. At the time of Tennent’s apprenticeship, William was involved in a number of lucrative business dealings, including wine, insurance, sugar and banking.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, by 1809 William was said

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>30</sup> See, W.A. Maguire, ‘Banker and Absentee Landowner: William Tennent in County Fermanagh, 1813-1832’, *Clogher Record*, 14:3 (1993), 8-10; Wright, ‘*The Natural Leaders*’,

to be worth in excess of £80,000.<sup>31</sup> As the Reverend Tennent put it, William was ‘rolling in wealth’.<sup>32</sup>

William’s financial success and social contacts meant that he was often called upon by his parents to help set up his brothers and other family members in business. Indeed, when William was imprisoned for his part in the 1798 rebellion, his family rallied together to ensure that his business interests and household were kept in order for the good of the entire family group.<sup>33</sup> In the months following William’s arrest, the Reverend Tennent instructed his daughter Margaret to go to William’s home and ‘look over ye affairs of his house & Strive ... to save from ruine & loss what may be kept safe & used to the best advantage of family’.<sup>34</sup>

As well as being consulted on the future prospects of his younger brothers, William also played an instrumental role in setting them up in business. In July 1790, he took on both John (who was freshly finished his apprenticeship) and fifteen-year old James (1775-94) at the New Sugar House.<sup>35</sup> Later in 1796, he was called upon by his parents to put his youngest

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pp. 40-2. For further reading on Belfast’s sugar industry and its links with the West Indies see, Nini Rodgers, *Equiano and Anti-Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Belfast* (Belfast, 2000).

31 Wright, ‘*The Natural Leaders*’, p. 19.

32 Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 19.

33 As a prominent member of the United Irishmen, William was arrested just before the 1798 uprising occurred and was imprisoned without trial, first on a ship stationed in Belfast Lough and then in Fort George prison in 1799. He was released in 1802 after breaking his leg. See W.A. Maguire, ‘William Tennent (1760-1832), in *DIB*.

34 PRONI, D1748/C/1/211/9, Reverend John Tennent to Robert Tennent, 20 May 1799.

35 See Calvert, ‘Journal of John Tennent’, 123-4; Wright, ‘*The Natural Leaders*’, pp. 19-20; PRONI, D1748/D/1/5/1, Reverend John Tennent to John Tennent, 30 July 1790.

brother Samuel (1779-1827), then seventeen years of age 'in a way of Business [of] doing Something for' himself.<sup>36</sup> Of these three, John seems to have fared the best under their eldest brother's charge. In a letter to their father, William reported that whereas John was 'slow' but improving, James was 'young and foolish' and had a bad habit of distracting the servants and others from their work.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, within less than a year, William had resolved to turn James out of the business after discovering he had either been embezzling goods or stealing money.<sup>38</sup> Like his brother James, Samuel also seems to have had a penchant for unruliness, refusing to go to church services and turning up late for his work duties and his troublesome behaviour was a constant features of letters sent from the Reverend Tennent to his brothers in Belfast.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, his behaviour seems to have been so bad that William recorded in his diary in August 1803 how an officer on guard had told him 'that Sam was the greatest plague that

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36 PRONI, D1748/B/1/317/10, Reverend John Tennent to William Tennent, 29 August 1796.

37 PRONI, D1748/D/1/5/6, Reverend John Tennent to John Tennent, 17 January 1791.

38 PRONI, D1748/D/1/5/8, Reverend John Tennent to John Tennent, 18 March 1791. Despite this falling out, William was still responsible for his brother's fortunes. He sent James to an academy to learn navigation and mathematics, with the intention of sending him to sea. In 1793, in the company of Mr White, William's partner in the New Sugar House, James set out for Grenada in the West Indies. See PRONI, D1748/C/1/211/4;6, Reverend John Tennent to Robert Tennent, 19 July 1791; 21 May 1793 and PRONI, D1748/D/1/5/8, Reverend John Tennent to John Tennent, 18 March 1791.

39 See for example, PRONI, D1748/B/1/317/13, 21, 29, 33-50, Letters Between Reverend John Tennent and William Tennent, and PRONI, D1748/A/1/5/1-16, Letters Between Robert Tennent and Reverend John Tennent.

they met w[i]t[h] in the Street’ and if he had not been William’s brother, ‘he w[oul]d have been sent to the Barracks’.<sup>40</sup>

## Relationships Between Masters and Apprentices

Once families found a suitable place for their children, the next step was to formalise the arrangement with an apprenticeship agreement. While these contracts outlined the economic terms of service, such as fees and costs of boarding, the emphasis was placed on the behaviour expected from both parties, particularly on the part of the apprentice.<sup>41</sup> Typical of most contracts was that signed between John Tennent and Samuel Givin. As master, Givin’s responsibilities were limited to providing Tennent with the basics of education and board. He promised to ‘teach and instruct’ Tennent the particulars of his business and provide him with ‘Meat, Drinking, Washing & Lodging, and all other Necessaries befitting such an Apprentice.’<sup>42</sup> In return, Tennent pledged his obedience, vowing to serve his master faithfully, keep his secrets and abide by his ‘lawful Commandments’.<sup>43</sup>

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40 PRONI, D1748/B/3/3/6, Diary of William Tennent, 19 August 1803.

41 Barbara Hanawalt, “‘The Childe of Bristowe’ and the Making of Middle-Class Adolescence”, in Barbara Hanawalt (ed.), *‘Of Good and Ill Repute’: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1998), p. 159; Christopher Brooks, ‘Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800’, in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (London, 1994), p. 53.

42 PRONI, D1748/D/2/1/A, Agreement Relating to John Tennent’s Indenture, 9 August 1786.

43 *Ibid.*

Unlike Samuel Givin, Tennent also had to promise to adhere to a set of strict rules prohibiting him from engaging in a long list of activities:

He shall not commit Fornication, nor contract Matrimony ... He shall not play at Cards, Dice, Tables, or any other unlawful Games ... He shall neither buy nor sell, he shall not haunt or use Taverns, Ale-houses, or Play-houses, not absent himself from his said Master's Service, Day nor Night, unlawfully, but in all things, [act] as an honest and faithful Apprentice.<sup>44</sup>

That such prohibitions were explicitly written into apprenticeship contracts is telling of how contemporaries regarded youth. As Alexandra Shepard as noted for early modern England, male youth was characterised as 'an age of extremes', wherein young men had both an 'unrivalled capacity for spirited and courageous actions' and an 'unlimited potential for vice'.<sup>45</sup> Young men were held to be unusually prone to immoral behaviours, such as drinking and gambling, and were regarded as having little or no self-control.<sup>46</sup> Apprenticeship contracts were therefore designed to control the 'natural' impulses of young people and ensure that they acted appropriately.

Despite agreeing to abide by these rules, like many apprentices, Tennent enjoyed a relatively active social life. There are numerous references in his diary to his attendance at drinking parties and participation in activities such as cock fighting, running and bowling, all

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44 *Ibid.*

45 Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 23-4.

46 J. A. Sharpe, 'Disruption in the Well-Ordered Household: Age, Authority and Dispossessed Young People', in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), p. 187.



of which were ‘pleasing to young apprentices’.<sup>47</sup> However, it is interesting to note that as Tennent matured, his attitude towards these past times shifted. Whereas in April 1789, sixteen-year old Tennent enjoyed the company of other apprentices on the bowling-green, by the following year he appeared to have out-grown such ‘idle’ pursuits:

The first & 2[n]d Easter I was here I thou[gh]t I was very happy could I get out for an evening or two. Now more sober sentiments has taken place of those giddy vain & foolish thou[gh]ts that possessed me, which made me think happiness consisted in foolish & idle play & that if I would be disappointed of getting to them I would consider it as a great misfortune.<sup>48</sup>

As Paul Griffiths has noted, one significant aspect of becoming an adult was an alteration in attitudes towards work, time and play.<sup>49</sup> A key marker of adulthood and, more particularly, of manhood, was the art of self-mastery. In marking out these past times as ‘foolish’ and juvenile, Tennent was demonstrating the control he had over his inclinations, time and passions – he was becoming a man.

Under the terms of apprenticeship contracts, masters were ideally to act as surrogate parents to young adolescents under their charge, training them not only to be competent in their craft, but also to be respectful members of society.<sup>50</sup> Some masters and apprentices did form good relationships, built on mutual trust, attachment and respect. There is evidence of

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47 Calvert, ‘Journal of John Tennent’, 117, 91, 107, 122.

48 *Ibid.*, 117-8.

49 Paul Griffiths, ‘Masterless Young People in Norwich, 1560-1645’, in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), p. 149.

50 Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London, 1984), p. 175.

masters marrying their daughters to young men under their charge, and some left apprentices bequests in their wills.<sup>51</sup> Other apprentices, however, were not so fortunate. Disputes and abuses were a typical feature of service, with both masters and apprentices accusing the other of failing to keep up their side of the apprenticeship contract.<sup>52</sup> Common complaints brought against apprentices included idleness, theft and waywardness, whereas masters were most commonly accused of physical abuse or insufficient instruction.<sup>53</sup>

For some apprentices, relations between themselves and their masters grew so bad that they either absconded from service or were dismissed from their positions.<sup>54</sup> Tennent's journal contains numerous references to other young Coleraine apprentices whose unruly behaviour earned them dismissal from their situations: William Gregg was turned out after he was caught 'having slept out of his master's house different times'; James Simpson had made a 'ruin' of his business by 'whoring and drinking'; and Robert Henry, who was a 'great

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51 Hanawalt, "The Childe of Bristowe", p. 163; Brooks, 'Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sorts', 74.

52 Spindler, 'Youth and Old Age', 9; Peter Rush, 'The Matter in Variance: Adolescents and Domestic Conflict in the Pre-Industrial Economy of Northeast England, 1600-1800', *Journal of Social History*, 25:1 (1991), 89-107.

53 Rushton, 'Matter in Variance', 94-6.

54 The dropout rate of apprentices in London between the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries was around fifty per cent. See Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Failure to Become Freemen: Urban Apprentices in Early Modern England', *Social History*, 16:2 (1991), 155; Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and Training', 839; Spindler, 'Youth and Old Age', 7.

drinker', fell out with his master after he 'got a child by a whore'.<sup>55</sup> Being dismissed from service left a stain on the character of many young men, marking them out as untrustworthy and hindering their chances of reputable employment. Reflecting on the fates of these apprentices, Tennent remarked that having to leave service 'before his time is out' was 'the greatest misfortune that can befall a young man ... for the world will too readily blame the boy'.<sup>56</sup>

For masters and apprentices alike, a shared living arrangement generated a potentially uncomfortable mix of familial and professional roles.<sup>57</sup> Tennent's journal provides a fascinating insight into how relationships between masters and their live-in apprentices could sour easily. Tennent clearly did not like Samuel Givin, regarding him 'fit to be a master hardly for a savage.'<sup>58</sup> His diary is littered with complaints that Givin treated him unfairly: he was required to undertake errands in stormy weather; he was tasked with the meanest jobs; he was prohibited from visiting his parents whenever he wished; and he was not allowed the time he wanted to devote to study.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, it appears to have been the lack of education that nettled Tennent most. As part of the terms of his apprenticeship contract, Tennent was to have

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55 Calvert, 'Journal of John Tennent', 93-4, 102-3, 112. It is unclear from Tennent's diary whether or not these young men were his acquaintances. Given the relatively small size of the town of Coleraine, the misbehaviour of its youth would have attracted much gossip.

56 *Ibid.*, 93.

57 Hanawalt, "The Child of Bristowe", p. 60.

58 Calvert, 'Journal of John Tennent', 106.

59 *Ibid.*, 89-91, 111.

'liberty to go to scholl,'<sup>60</sup> as well as receive instruction from Givin. Tennent, however, complained on many occasions that he did not receive adequate training and was prevented from doing so deliberately out of spite.<sup>61</sup>

Although personal dislike did play a part, the disagreement seems to have stemmed more from the difficulties that both men encountered in reconciling the power dynamics of their relationship in a shared domestic environment. The pair regularly clashed over household consumables, such as tea and candles. In September 1788, Givin found that someone had put tea in the teapot and accused Tennent of distributing his personal stock of tea 'in an unlawful manner' to the servant maid, Nancy Kelly.<sup>62</sup> Much to Tennent's delight, however, a woman named Beaton came the next day and testified that she had in fact sold the tea to Nancy.<sup>63</sup>

Although on first reading, we might regard Samuel Givin's accusatory behaviour as unfair, later entries in Tennent's diary reveal that when his master was out of the house, the servants and other apprentices often helped themselves to his stock of tea. In March 1790, for instance, Tennent noted that when Givin went out for the evening, another apprentice named Ben would order the 'kettle to [be] boyled & made tea unknown', until one 'night [Givin] came in so unexpectedly, that he saw us all at it'.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, this instant was not a one-off and it happened so frequently that Tennent noted that when he thought the household drank tea

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60 *Ibid.*, 76; PRONI, D1748/D/2/1/B, Indentures and Agreement of John Tennent, 9 August 1786.

61 Calvert, 'Journal of John Tennent', 77-9, 82-3, 111, 114.

62 *Ibid.*, 78-9.

63 *Ibid.*, 79.

64 *Ibid.*, 117.

every evening when he first came to Coleraine.<sup>65</sup> Other consumables, such as candles, were also a source of contention. Tennent complained on a number of occasions that Givin would not allow him to burn candles; an objection he attributed to his master's meanness and dislike of reading.<sup>66</sup> It should be remembered, however, that like tea, candles were relatively expensive. Rather than objecting to the use of candles, it is more likely that Givin was being economical.

It is also important to remember that Tennent's descriptions of Givin as a vindictive and spiteful master are subjective. It is clear from reading Tennent's journal that he was not an eager apprentice and that he sometimes deserved reprimand, such as in October 1788 when he wrote his name in white paint on a wall in Givin's home.<sup>67</sup> At other times, Tennent was outright confrontational and acted in ways that deliberately usurped Givin's authority. When Givin asked Tennent to weigh a pound of molasses in January 1790, the pair ended up having a heated exchange in the shop. Tennent accused Givin of asking him to perform such a 'trifle' of a task for no other reason than to 'show his authority'.<sup>68</sup> He further told Givin he 'did his business better than he deserved'.<sup>69</sup> According to Tennent's account of the incident, Givin responded by charging him with having a 'bad hand & the like (just like the excuses & wiles villains make when they want to cheat you)'.<sup>70</sup> The matter failed to be resolved, however, due

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65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*, 81-3.

67 *Ibid.*, 80.

68 *Ibid.*, 109.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*

to ‘people coming into the shop’ and Givin’s apparent reluctance to ‘resume it again’.<sup>71</sup> On another occasion Tennent took a gun from the house without Givin’s permission.

Documenting the incident in his journal, Tennent noted he told Givin ‘it did not concern him whether [he] took a gun or not’.<sup>72</sup> Faced with Tennent’s obstinacy and unable to do anything about it (according to Tennent), Givin ‘made a pretence that he came after [him] to ... call at a man for some money.’<sup>73</sup>

The extent to which Tennent’s versions of these incidents is a true reflection of actual events is debatable. Indeed, it is quite possible that Tennent was much more confrontational on page than he was in reality. This in itself is intriguing for what it tells us about Tennent’s self-image as a young adolescent. As Hannah Barker has observed, diaries are important sources for the study of identity and experience because they tell us not just about how people behaved (or said they did), but how they were and how they wished to be.<sup>74</sup> In this context, it is more useful to view Tennent’s confrontations with Samuel Givin through the lens of youthful revolt. Given that adolescence, as a period of ‘conflict, challenge and exertion’ coincided with apprenticeship, it is perhaps unsurprising that Tennent depicted Givin as the villain in his journal.<sup>75</sup> It should also be noted that Tennent’s adolescence coincided with the period that witnessed the French Revolution, the revival of the Volunteering movement, and

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71 *Ibid.*

72 *Ibid.*, 110.

73 *Ibid.*

74 Hannah Barker, ‘Soul, Purse and Family: Middling and Lower-Class Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Manchester’, *Social History*, 33:1 (2008), 15.

75 John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London, 1999), p. 111.

the rise of radical political sentiment. Belfast in the 1780s and 1790s was, as Jonathan Wright has noted, ‘an exciting place for a young man to be’.<sup>76</sup> Growing up in such an environment may well have fostered Tennent’s anti-authoritarian mindset.<sup>77</sup>

### Evidence From Other Apprentices: How Typical Was Tennent?

John Tennent’s diary provides a fascinating insight into the world of an adolescent apprentice, as and how he experienced it. But how representative is Tennent’s experience of other young apprentices in Ireland during this period. How were the apprenticeships of other young men were arranged, and how did their relationships with their masters compare?

Material collected from a number of other Ulster-based families during this period broadly confirm several features of apprenticeship recorded by Tennent. Evidence survives which reveals that parents and other well-connected family members were involved to varying degrees in the decision to enter apprenticeship. Some young men like the Reverend James Morgan, Presbyterian minister of Fisherwick congregation, Belfast, were apparently afforded little say in their future career choice. According to Morgan, it was assumed by his parents that he would become an apprentice to his uncle, a solicitor. Not long after his twelfth birthday, however, a series of events transpired that led to his paternal aunt moving into the household and it was on her recommendation that his ‘attention was turned’ to the ministry.<sup>78</sup>

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76 Wright, *The Natural Leaders*, p. 20.

77 I am indebted to the insights of the reviewers for this point.

78 The death of Morgan’s mother, followed by a workplace accident that injured his father, led to the aunt’s stay in the household. See James Morgan, *Recollections of My Life and Times: An Autobiography by the Reverend James Morgan, D. D., Late Minister of Fisherwick Place Church, Belfast, With Selections From His Journal, Edited By His Son* (Belfast, 1874), p. 4.

Again, Morgan was not consulted as to this career option and he admitted that although he was ‘unconverted and unimpressed’ by their choice, ‘No one spoke to [him] on the subject. It was entirely a matter of business’.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, it was not until his brother’s death that Morgan was finally ‘awakened, enlightened and quickened’ to his religious vocation.<sup>80</sup>

More commonly, adolescent children and their parents took these decisions jointly and sought the help and advice of well-connected family members and friends in choosing suitable placements. A cache of surviving letters between the Reverend William Kennedy, Presbyterian minister of Carland congregation, county Tyrone, and his children, reveal that he took a keen interest in planning their future livelihoods. When Kennedy’s eldest son, Robert, expressed his intention to go to the East Indies, Kennedy asked the advice of a Mr White and a Mr Murray, who all agreed that Robert should remain in his current place in London until European affairs were more settled, and he was better qualified for service abroad.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, when Kennedy was deciding on what business would suit his youngest son, Andrew, he wrote to Robert about the prospect of making him ‘a good clerk’, noting that he had ‘made a pretty good proficiency in some of the higher Branches of Arithmetick.’<sup>82</sup> Robert disagreed and suggested that his brother enter ‘some branch of mercantile business instead’.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> PRONI, D2315/4/14, Reverend William Kennedy to Robert Kennedy, 2 August 1781.

<sup>82</sup> PRONI, D2315/4/16. Reverend William Kennedy to Robert Kennedy, 20 September 1782.

<sup>83</sup> PRONI, D2315/4/21, Reverend William Kennedy to Robert Kennedy, 17 January 1783.



In the end, Andrew entered a store-house owned by his uncle Simpson, who also employed his elder brother John.<sup>84</sup>

Other parents, like the Reverend David Young, Presbyterian minister of First Londonderry congregation, county Londonderry, took the lead and micromanaged the apprenticeship arrangements of their children. Young played an instrumental role in securing his seventeen year old son, James Armstrong Young, an appointment at a counting house in London. He initially attempted to make James a cadet in the East India Company and wrote to his sister-in-law, Mrs Hunter, to put in a good word with her brother-in-law, James Dawes, who had connections there. Dawes was unable to procure the appointment but did find James a position as an apprentice clerk in a London counting house instead.<sup>85</sup>

In his letters to the counting house masters, Young took pains to demonstrate his intimate knowledge of persons known to his correspondents in London, giving the impression that he too was socially well-connected and his son deserving of the post. In a letter to Thomas Reed, one of the counting house partners, Young discussed the health of Reed's friends, how Reed's brother had recently sold his home, the well-being of a councillor Lyttle, and his friendship with Captain James Armstrong Young, a commander under Lord Wellesley, after whom his son was named.<sup>86</sup> Most young men of James's age would not have had the social contacts and networks necessary to source these types of positions, and were therefore dependent on their families to set up introductions. Indeed, after a heated argument

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84 PRONI, D2315/4/24, Reverend William Kennedy to Robert Kennedy, 28 November 1783 and PRONI, D2315/4/20, John Kennedy to Robert Kennedy, 3 October 1783.

85 PRONI, D3874/1/60A, James Dawes to Mrs Hunter, 21 February 1801.

86 PRONI, D3874/1/66A, Reverend David Young to James Law, 1 April 1802.

with one of the counting house masers, James reported to his father he was told he had only been accepted into the house because of his father's exertions.<sup>87</sup>

Other than personal inclination, do any other factors explain such varying degrees of parental involvement? It is very likely that the economic circumstances of individual families dictated how involved they were in these decisions. While Tennent came from a relatively modest background, he did have the good fortune of a wealthy, well-connected brother on whom he could apply to for assistance. It should also be remembered that Tennent 'walked-into' a job with William as soon as his apprenticeship was finished. Evidence suggests that other families were not so fortunate and many struggled to meet the financial demands of keeping their adolescent children in service.

Letters passed between parents and their adolescent children reveal the financial burden that many families endured to ensure they received an adequate start in life. Although most apprentices boarded with their master's household and were supplied with basic food and lodging, they were very rarely paid any wages.<sup>88</sup> The costs of apprenticeship therefore fell heavily on parents. In spite of his best efforts, the Reverend Kennedy found it difficult to support his children financially. In a letter to his nineteen-year old son, Robert, who was at that time apprenticed in a London shop, Kennedy admitted that although he did not have enough money to pay his rent and creditors, he would rather distress himself than disappoint his son of an opportunity.<sup>89</sup> Robert does not seem to have had a penchant for frugality and

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87 PRONI, D3874/1/75, James Armstrong Young to Reverend David Young, 26 June 1802.

88 Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and Training', 835.

89 PRONI, D2315/4/21, Reverend William Kennedy to Robert Kennedy, 17 January 1783.

was frequently directed by his father to be a ‘good oeconomist’ and keep track of expenses.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, between leaving home sometime in 1781, aged seventeen years, and the last surviving letter exchanged between himself and his father in 1791, Robert’s involvement in no less than five occupational endeavours placed a huge strain on the Kennedy household purse.<sup>91</sup> For parents like Kennedy, the cost of maintaining their children continued even after they left the household. It is perhaps unsurprising that Kennedy later took such an interest in securing his son Andrew a reputable post.

Likewise, the Reverend Young also had a vested interest in securing the financial future of his son. Unlike most apprenticeship arrangements, Young was to bear all the expenses of food and lodging for James while he was employed at the counting house. The terms stated that James would receive a salary in his second year (a considerable amount of fifty pounds per annum), rising at a rate of ten pounds per annum thereafter, at which point Young was promised that his son would ‘be of no further charge’ to his purse.<sup>92</sup> In June 1802, less than one year into James’s service, the counting house rescinded this promise of a salary,

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90 PRONI, D2315/4/13; 25, Reverend William Kennedy to Robert Kennedy, 10 April 1781; 22 November 1784.

91 We know that Robert was employed in a London shop in 1781, in 1782 he acquired a position in an apothecary, in 1784 he was employed with the East India Company, and in 1786 he was inquiring about setting up a shop in Belfast.

92 PRONI, D3874/1/60A, James Dawes to Mrs Hunter, 21 February 1801. Fifty pounds is a considerable amount for an apprentice. However, it is repeated in a number of letters between the Reverend Young and the counting house masters. See PRONI, D3874/1/76A, Reverend David Young to Thomas Reed, 9 July 1802 and PRONI, D3874/1/80, Thomas Reed to Reverend David Young, 27 August 1802.

prompting the Reverend Young to enter into a long correspondence with the masters. It appears that James was inclined to slothful habits and was found ‘frequently planted at the fire or doing other different things,’ when he should have been working.<sup>93</sup> Upon hearing of the development, Young wrote immediately to Thomas Reed and stated that he was ‘not ashamed to acknowledge’ that he could no longer support James without the prospect of a salary.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, around the same time Young was forced to resign from his ministerial post after malicious rumours were spread accusing him of adultery. In a letter to his friend, William Plunket, in the wake of his resignation, Young admitted that the costs of supporting James and the rest of his family was greater than his annual £200 income for the past two years, and now with no earnings he could no longer meet these expenses.<sup>95</sup>

Fortunately for Young, the matter was settled a few months later. Impressed with James’s apparent resolution to commit himself to his duties, Reed promised that he would receive the agreed salary and offered to find James another position if he could not keep him after a period of two years.<sup>96</sup> That the receipt of a salary was vital to both James’s future success and the economic survival of his family is evident from letters exchanged between Young and his son on the subject. In a letter to James dated September 1802, Young explained that the livelihood of the family now rested on his seventeen-year old shoulders:

your avowal ... of adhering to the Compting house has given this family uncommon satisfaction. Any thing else would have ruined both you & us. Our circumstances are

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93 PRONI, D3874/1/74-75, James Armstrong Young to David Young, 10 June 1802; 26 June 1802.

94 PRONI, D3874/1/76, Reverend David Young to Thomas Reed, 9 July 1802.

95 PRONI, D3874/1/79, Reverend David Young to William Plunket, 19 August 1802.

96 PRONI, D3874/1/80, Thomas Reed to Reverend David Young, 27 August 1802.

peculiarly distressing. ... Labour for fav[ou]r from y[ou]r employers. ... For your sake, for your afflicted mother's & sisters; & for God's sake exert y[ou]r self in your employment ... & you may yet raise the hopes of this unfortunate family! I may say all depends on your good conduct.<sup>97</sup>

What about relationships between apprentices and their masters? Were other relationships as problematic as that between Tennent and Samuel Givin? Like Tennent, James Young does not appear to have been a very eager apprentice and was often chastised by the counting house masters for his laziness. Despite promising to devote himself wholeheartedly to the counting house in August 1802, James's lazy habits appear to have not only continued but grew worse. By March 1803, Thomas Reed was again writing to the Reverend Young complaining of James's 'lethargic' habits. In fact, he alleged that James's behaviour was so bad that he almost caused a fire.<sup>98</sup> In addition to laziness, James also appears to have participated in immoral activities. In letters to the Reverend Young, Thomas Reed reported how James had fallen into the 'temptations to which Lads at his period of Life' were exposed in London's 'perpetual Scene of Debauch & Vice'.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, subsequent letters between

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97 PRONI, D3874/1/81, Reverend David Young to James Armstrong Young, 6 September 1802.

98 PRONI, D3874/1/92A, Thomas Reed to Reverend David Young, 8 March 1803. See also PRONI, D3874/1/102, Thomas Reed to Reverend David Young, 28 April 1802.

99 PRONI, D3874/1/92A; 94, Thomas Reed to Reverend David Young, 8 March 1803; 20 March 1803.

Young, his son and Thomas Reed hint at the possibility that James had contracted venereal disease.<sup>100</sup>

Fed up with James's behaviour, the counting house masters again tried to have him removed from their service, prompting the Reverend Young to become involved in the affair.<sup>101</sup> It was not until Reed offered to find James a position in the East India Company did the Reverend Young consent to the change in his son's situation. After a failed attempt in January 1804, Reed was able to swap his nomination for a cadet in the Bombay marines for the following season (a nomination he had been keeping for a 'poor relation') and secure James an appointment.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, Young would again use his connections with Thomas Reed to secure a position in another counting house for his youngest son, George Gordon Young.<sup>103</sup>

In assessing how representative these young men were of apprentices in general, it is important to consider the factors they had in common. For example, did their Presbyterian faith shape their experience of apprenticeship? Although each of these young men belonged to the Presbyterian community, there is no evidence to suggest that their faith made a great difference to their daily lives as apprentices. Wider factors, such as economic circumstances,

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100 PRONI, D3874/1/95, James Armstrong Young to Reverend David Young, 29 March 1803 and PRONI, D3874/1/98, Reverend David Young to Thomas Reed, 6 April 1803.

101 See PRONI, D3874/1/92-94, Letters Between Reverend David Young and Thomas Reed, 8 March 1803; 25 March 1803 and PRONI, D3874/1/96;101, Letters Between Reverend David Young and Patrick Crawford Bruce, 3 April 1803; 27 April 1803.

102 PRONI, D3874/1/104-18, 122, 128, Letters Between James Armstrong Young and Reverend David Young, 10 January 1804; 18 January 1804; 4 February 1804.

103 PRONI, D3874/1/153B, 166, 168, Letters Between Reverend David Young and Thomas Reed, 14 September 1806; 7 August 1807; 5 January 1808.

family connections, and personal relationships were more important in determining the experience of apprentices than religious tradition. Indeed, it should be noted that when the Reverend David Young wrote to his son James of the importance of attending church, he encouraged him to attend only the ‘most Convenient’ church, which did not necessarily have to be Presbyterian: ‘I don’t mean presbeterian. you owe them nothing.’<sup>104</sup>

An additional factor that these young men had in common was their socio-economic position. Each of the young men discussed in this article belonged to the middle-classes of society, distinguishing their experience of apprenticeship from that of young men (and young women) lower down the socio-economic scale.<sup>105</sup> While not the focus here, it is sufficient to say that the apprenticeship arrangements of the middle-classes differed in two important respects to those undertaken by the working-class and poor. Firstly, such apprenticeship contracts were considerably more expensive. Young people of the middling orders generally entered more professional and commercialised trades, particularly those which required its apprentices to possess more than a basic education. Like the young men discussed above,

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104 PRONI, D3874/1/82, Reverend David Young to James Young, 6 September 1802.

105 The term ‘middle-classes’ is used here to describe the wide variation in wealth and occupations of groups who were neither very wealthy nor poor. In nineteenth-century Belfast, this group was mainly made up of shopkeepers, merchants and artisans, and were known as the ‘urban elite’. For a discussion on the use of class in Belfast and Ireland, see W.H. Crawford, ‘The Belfast Middle Classes in the Late Eighteenth Century’, in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), p. 64; Alice Johnson, ‘The Civic Elite of Mid-Nineteenth Century Belfast’, *Irish Economic and Social History*, 43:1 (2016), 62-3; Wright, ‘*The Natural Leaders*’, pp. 8-9.

common routes for such apprentices included merchants, grocers, book-keepers, doctors and apothecaries. By contrast, poorer apprentices were more likely to be made weavers, shoemakers, coopers and domestic servants.<sup>106</sup> The premiums to be paid for entry into professional trades could be as much as several hundred pounds, putting them outside of the economic reach of those from the poorer ranks of society.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, as revealed above, the economic costs of service could be equally burdensome for middle-class families.

Secondly, middle-class apprentices were overwhelmingly male. The opportunities for apprenticeship which were available for girls from the poorer ranks were simply not taken up in the same numbers by their wealthier counterparts. While some girls did enter 'respectable' trades such as dressmaking, the greater majority were kept at home with their parents until they were ready to make a suitable match and join the household of their new husband. In Ireland, as elsewhere, middle-class girls worked as companions, housekeepers, seamstresses and nursemaids within their natal families, their labour being used to the advantage of their wider family.<sup>108</sup>

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106 For some examples of Irish institutions that arranged apprenticeships for poorer children, see the following: R. M. Strain, *Belfast and Its Charitable Society: A Story of Urban Social Development* (London, 1961); Jonathan Bardon, *An Interesting and Honourable History: The Belfast Charitable Society. The First 250 Years, 1752-2002* (Belfast, 2003); Kenneth Milne, *The Irish Charter Schools, 1730-1830* (Dublin, 1997); R. A. Colley, 'The Foundation and Early History of the Southwell Schools, Downpatrick, 1733-1800', *Lecalle Miscellany*, 8 (1990), 54-64.

107 Brooks, 'Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort', pp. 60-1.

108 Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (London, 1996), p. 81.



## Conclusion

Written from the perspective of an apprentice, John Tennent's journal provides a tantalising glimpse into the world and mindset of a young adolescent on the cusp of manhood. A close reading of Tennent's journal reveals that he was consciously aware that his apprenticeship coincided with a formative period in his life, that of his adolescence. As such, the diary is written in a reflective-style, mirroring Tennent's struggles to reconcile his place in the world during a period of personal, mental and physical change. The extent to which any one case study can be regarded as truly representative is problematic in itself. Yet, as the examples of the other young men in this study have shown, Tennent's experience of apprenticeship was not that unusual. Leaving home, assuming personal responsibility, and learning their place in the world were common features of growing up. As apprentices, the young men in this study all relied on the guidance of parents and well-connected family members, they entered into professional and mercantile trades, and they continued to depend on their families for economic support, even after they had left home.

Pulling together the findings of this article, what can we learn from a study of Ulster apprentices? This article furthers the study of adolescence in two important ways. Firstly, it develops our understanding of Irish adolescence by examining the experiences of young people through the prism of apprenticeship. Irish historians have tended to examine adolescence through the lens of institutions, reflecting wider conceptions of youth as a problematic and disruptive force. As Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan have highlighted, however, Ireland's institutions were not primarily concerned with adolescents. The residents of Irish workhouses were regarded as adults by fifteen and the inmates of Irish reformatories were discharged at sixteen.<sup>109</sup> Apprenticeship was different because it was specifically

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<sup>109</sup> Cox and Riordan, *Adolescence in Modern Irish History*, p. 8.

designed for the education and (moral) training of adolescents. As noted, most young people entered apprenticeship in their early- to mid-teens, spending at most twelve years in service to another. Apprenticeship therefore coincided with the *duration* of a young person's adolescence, ending for some in their mid- to late-twenties. Consequently, a study of apprenticeship offers us the opportunity to examine the experiences of young people over a longer period of time. This article therefore furthers our understanding of the educational experience of young people, beyond the age distinctions imposed by Ireland's institutions.

Secondly, a study of Ulster apprentices adds to wider debates in the historiography of youth, adolescence and masculinity in Britain. In 2002, Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard re-framed John Tosh's seminal question, 'What have historians done with masculinity?' and stressed that there was still a pressing need to move from examining masculinity as a set of cultural attributes to considering it in terms of subjective identity.<sup>110</sup> Likewise, Hannah Barker has noted that while we know much about how masculine identity was represented in print, the extent to which these ideas were co-opted by those outside of the cultural and commercial elite remains unclear.<sup>111</sup> Given that apprenticeship coincided with the period in which middle-class boys grew into men, exploring what young apprentices thought, said, and did, holds the potential to tell us something new about the process of growing up and the transition from boy- to manhood.

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110 Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard, 'What Have Historians Done With Masculinity? Reflections On Five Centuries of British History, Circa 1500 to 1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 280. See John Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do With Masculinity? Reflections On Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), 179-202.

111 Barker, 'Soul, Purse and Family', 12.

John Tennent's journal is therefore an extremely useful source for historians interested in uncovering the subjective experience of growing up. Spanning the duration of his apprenticeship, Tennent's journal offers an unrivalled insight into the journey to manhood. For Tennent, like many of his contemporaries, the 'long tedious years of bondage' spent in service coalesced with a formative period in his life wherein he left behind boyish amusements and embraced the responsibilities of adulthood.<sup>112</sup> As his apprenticeship progressed, Tennent used the journal to chart the milestones he reached in his transition to manhood. Indeed, Tennent's idea of what made a man is encapsulated in an entry dated April 1790, as he entered the final months of his apprenticeship in Coleraine: 'What different thoughts & ideas possess the mind of a man from the cradle to the tomb. How different are his sentiments of a thing at one time from another.'<sup>113</sup> A study of apprenticeship, through the eyes of apprentices themselves, therefore opens a window into how young men understood and internalised the conventions of the wider world around them.

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<sup>112</sup> Calvert, 'Journal of John Tennent', 128.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.