

Second Series. Vol. III.
Part V. Chap. III:
Warehousemen and
Messengers.

Booth

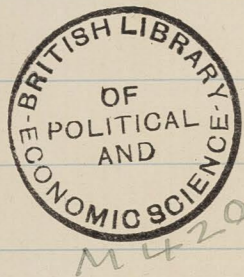
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Life and labours ... 1902-3.

Second Series, Vol. III. Part V.

Chap. III: Warehousemen and Messengers.

Interviews



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[i]

Warehouseman, Packer etc.

Sept. 24th.

Interview with Mr Josiah Pentecost:-

Mr Pentecost is an Export Packer at
53 Upper Thames St.

Wages average about 30/- a week the
most honest wage being from 25/- to 30/-.

Hours. Mr Pentecost's men work from 8
to 6 with half an hour for dinner, and until
1 on Saturday. The hours usual to throughout
the trade are from 9 to 9 with intervals for
breakfast, tea, and dinner. Mr Pentecost
works little or no overtime, but there is a
good deal in other houses. As a rule except on
Saturday afternoon there is no extra pay for
overtime, but on Saturday it is paid at
time and a half.

Replacement. All houses keep a staff of
permanent hands who are never turned off
throughout the year, and they never take
on casual labour.

Method of learning. Packers used forty years ago to be a highly organized and very exclusive set of men who had passed through an apprenticeship, which has now died out. But now it is hard to take to the business young, as the work requires great skill and knowledge and takes a long time to learn. Owing to the multiplicity of goods which now have to be packed it becomes daily more difficult for any man to learn the business thoroughly.

Packers as a rule are a highly respectable body of men; there are of course great opportunities for theft, and those who cannot be trusted soon get weeded out.

The work though difficult is not of an arduous or unhealthy nature.

Sept. 26th.

Note of Interview with Mr Thomas Jones:-

Mr Jones is a Bankhouseman, Bonded Bankhouseman, and Wharfinger in Lower Thames St. He has two warehouses, the Bonded for Spirits, the other chiefly for wool and hides.

Wages. Foreman in the Bonded Warehouse is paid 50/-, other men get from 25/- to 30/-. In the wool Warehouse Foreman gets 32/- and others from 25/- to 30/- a week. They casual men who are employed get the regular dockers' and wharf labourers 6/- an hour.

Hours. In the Bonded Warehouse the hours are from 8 to 4, and in winter from 9 to 4, half an hour being allowed for dinner. A certain amount of overtime is worked, but it is minimized as far as possible, as the custom house officials have to be paid extra as well as the men. In the wool Warehouse the hours are

from 8 to 6 with half an hour allowed for dinner, but the men usually take an hour.

Regularly Mr Jones keeps on a permanent staff throughout the year; and has to take on casual hands at times: perhaps he has two men who average from 3 to 4 days a week; they are paid 6^d an hour.

The class of men employed by Mr Thomas and generally in the warehouses on the river ^{as permanent hands} are the picked hands of the dock class; most of them are respectable and steady, though there is sometimes a good deal of trouble with drink. The casual hands are of course of a lower class. It is only since the dock strike that warehouses generally have taken to the system of permanent hands with a fixed weekly wage. Previously they were paid 5^d an hour.

Mr Jones' men went out with others during the strike, but were only out for

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a few days. Both then and since his
relations with his men have been quite
amicable; he thinks the relations between masters
and men are now generally good.

Sept. 25th.

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Note on Interview with Mr Arthur Low:-

Mr Low is Secretary and Manager of the District Messengers Co.

The Company employ from 620 to 920 persons of whom 47 are men. The men are either heads of offices or sergeants, who superintend the boys: their wages range from 25/- to 47/6.

Boys are taken on when they leave school usually at about 14, and receive 5/- a week rising by 1/- a month to 10/-. If by the time his wages reach 10/- a boy is still with the Company, his wages are sometimes raised if he does his work well, but few remain rise to or remain beyond the 10/- limit as with few exceptions they get other employment: as a rule they are smart, good looking boys and they are very soon snapped up by some of the many people on whom they call. Some of them however stay with the Company.

and of the 47 men, 14 boys as
messenger boys.

Hours. The offices are open day and night,
and each office superintendent has a night
& hours shift. Boys are on duty for ten
hours. There are no fixed hours for meals,
but boys have no difficulty in getting them,
as they are often free for half an hour, or
an hour or so.

The boys are provided with a uniform;
two coats, three pairs of trousers, and two
pairs of boots a year. The cost of their
clothes is 4/6 per head per week.

The Company have a club at Waltham
for their boys.

The position of Messenger is much
sought after, as it is regarded as an
excellent avenue to better employment.

The Company has never yet made any profit owing to the opposition of the Post Office, who have done all they can to crush them, and still charge exorbitant royalties.

Oct. 2nd.

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Letter from Mr C. T. Perrott of Perrott
and Perrott, Export-Packers:-

"We employ about 120 hands. The
wages of journeyman packers and clothworkers is
31/6 per week, rising in specially deserving
cases to £2. There are six journeymen who
get from £2.15.0 to £4; and a
few labourers at 22/ to 26/.

Apprentices. We have 8 bound for 7 years.
Wages commence at 10/; rising 2nd year
to 11/ or 12/; 3rd year 12/ to 13/;
4th year 13/ to 14/; 5th year 15/;
6th year 18/; 7th year 20/ to 21/. On
expiry they have 31/6 at once. We are
discontinuing as we do not find them
altogether satisfactory. They are averse to
discipline, and insist too much on supposed
rights, although some of the City apprentice
laws, dating back to Elizabeth's time,
give us large powers over them; for instance
in case of refractoriness we can bring them
before the Lord Mayor's Court (who can

deal summarily with them), a privilege
 of course he never resorts to.
 we have sick times from middle
 of Feb. to middle of May, and from
 middle of Sept. to end of Nov. he do
 not discharge any hands at this period.

we have profit sharing. The
 employes participate in a bonus, calculated
 at same rate as dividend to shareholders,
 on their wages. Half is paid to them
 at end of each year and half placed
 in a pension or retiring fund, which
 all who leave from any cause receive
 with 5 p.c. interest added. Started 12
 years ago. Some of our men have now
 £100 to their credit. a few more.

Each man pays into a sick fund
 2/- per week, and when unwell gets
 10/- a week from the fund and the rest
 of his wages from the firm. This is
 managed by the men themselves. Any surplus
 after putting aside a small reserve is
 divided among the men at the end of

the year.

No overtime is paid, but $1/4^d$ per hour for refreshments. The men having an interest in the profits perhaps endeavor to minimize overtime charges.

But altogether I do not think our efforts secure as much goodwill and cooperation as might be expected.

Our are a fairly intelligent class of men but class bitterness, fostered by present-day labor leaders, has its effect.

I may add we supplement the amount due to an employe (on being past work) from the pension fund to make it 20% a week for life if he has been with us the best part of his life.

Our employe is somewhat sought after, so perhaps on the whole our system appears "okay" to the men.

Oct. 12th.

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Note on Interview with Colonel Reid,
Commander of the London Division of the
Corps of Commissioners:-

Colonel Reid gave me a number of
papers which contain the bulk of the
information which came out in conversation.

Wages - which as a rule are paid
by employers direct though some pay through
the Corps - average from 27/ to 30/ a
week for permanent jobs, and though no
doubt the majority of men are in positions
where they earn something extra from tips.
No men get less than 20/ a week and
when the wages are so low there is always
either lodging or whole or partial board.
Some men have got as much as £4 a
week.

The average earnings of the men on
temporary jobs is about 20/ a week, but
this low average is due to the fact that
many of the men who are completely off

do not want to work every day in the week and will only take certain jobs such as fatchupus etc. at race meetings. The ordinary pay for a day's work is 5/- or 6/-. One very common form of day work is acting as guides or conductors, meeting children or ladies at railway stations and taking them across London.

Hours. The Corps have no control over the hours worked but will not let men go to places where the hours are unduly long, or the work is unhealthy as they waste the men's time.

Colonel Reid will only take on men of thoroughly good character and physique; as explained in the letter among the papers the Corps is in no sense a charity and it is useless to attempt to force second rate men on employers.

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Colonel Reid showed me all the books of the Corps and took me all over the Barracks and into the Canteen. The sleeping cubicles were neat and comfortable, much like a boy's study at school.

The Books showed that the strength of the Corps to-day was 2184 of whom 1464 are attached to London, and nearly all of whom were in employment. The majority in permanent places.

The Savings Bank book showed that 2046 men have £69595- to their credit.

Oct. 15th.

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Note on Interview with Mr. R. Pitt:

I asked Mr Pitt to call on me under the impression that he was general warehouseman, but found that he was more of a draper's warehouseman. It is however so difficult to differentiate the various sorts of warehousemen that I report the interview here.

Mr Pitt has worked as Warehouseman at Peter Robinson's; Spencer, Turner, and Bowers; and Liberty and Co.

Wages. At Peter Robinson he was paid 24/- a month (paid weekly) with board and lodging; this is about the usual pay for a journeyman, and few rise much above 28/- a month except foremen.

At S. T. and B. some receive no more than 16/- as a start; Mr Pitt, who when he went there had had some experience, began with 30/- a month, paid on the first of each calendar

month; Mr Pitt rose to 35/- a month and some few get as much as 40/-. The former are well paid and may get as much as 40/- a week; in all cases with board and lodging.

At Liberty the men live out but have their dinner and tea in 4/- a week being deducted from their wages for food. Mr Pitt received 16/- a week.

At Peter Robinson's ^{and Liberty} there was no pay for overtime but supper was given. At S.T. and B. there was no overtime pay when Mr Pitt was there, but one night when they were working up to 12 o'clock he and another struck for overtime pay, and after that 1/6 was paid for any work after 10.30.

Hours. At P. Robinsons the hours were from 7 to 7 with an hour and a half for meals. at S.T. and B. and Liberty work did not begin till 8 and lasted nominally till 7. In each case overtime was common.

frequently till 8, and sometimes as late as 12. In every case there were fines for being late. On Saturday work usually stops at 2, but on P. has worked as late as 5.

The Warehousemen has his meals separately from the Shop Assistant. They are as a rule not so good. His living accomodation too is generally inferior, too many being included in one room, and two men sometimes having to share a bed.

Mr Pitt much preferred liberty to the other places owing to the greater freedom secured by living out. At Peter Robinson's they were never allowed out during the day, but at S. F. and P. they were allowed to go out for a bit after dinner. Peter Robinson and Whitley's have about the worst reputation in London for the way they treat their warehousemen.

Oct. 22nd.

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Note on Interview with Mr L.
Hill of 422 Caledonian R. R.:-

Mr Hill has been a warehouseman
at many places, John's, Barry's Cocoa
~~Works~~ Works, Mayawattie Tea Co.
Latterly, he has worked as a Packer, though
not of a high class.

Wages. The wages of a warehouseman
range from 17/ to 23/ a week. Very
few with the exception of Foremen, who
may get up to 40/, would get more
than 23/, and the average would probably
not exceed 20/. As a rule they are
not paid for overtime unless work continues
almost through the night, when they
may get 4^d an hour. The warehouseman
is never more than a labourer; his work
consists entirely of carrying goods, and
requires no skill and experience.

The Packer on the other hand is a
skilled workman, and earns from 25/ to

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25 of a week. Some kinds of packing
and especially of glass and crockery,
require years of experience.

Hours. The hours of warehousemen
and Packers are nearly always 12 a day,
with an hour and a half for meals.
In nearly all warehouses there is a
good deal of overtime at busy seasons.
There are seldom any holidays except
statutory, but it is becoming more
common to give a week's holiday
every year.

Warehousemen are generally a
short-lived race; their wages do not
enable them to get sufficient food,
and they often work under very unhealthy
conditions, entirely by artificial light.

Mr Hill has never known a
warehouseman who belonged to the Anti-
and Warehousemen's Union; for the

most part they are hatched out, and quite incapable of association.

Oct. 28th.

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Note on Interview with Mr Brighton
of Trinity Bonded Warehouse, Cooper's Row.

Mr Brighton tells me he is the
oldest Bonded Warehouseman in London, having
been in the trade 52 years.

The Bonded Warehouseman really comes
under this heading in the Census, as in no
case does he keep goods for sale, but merely
stores them for others.

Wages. Mr Brighton has sent us
a full return as to wages, with a list
and slack work. Before the Dock strike he
paid his men ^{unpaid} by time, now they are paid
entirely by piece, and their earnings work
out at about 7¹/₄ per hour. Before the
strike the men were engaged and paid by
contractors, who made a large profit by
sweating the men; now the contract system
is quite done away with, but in their
place a few head men or gangers are
employed, who get about 5/- extra a week

beyond their piece earnings. Good has come out of evil, and both masters and men have really gained greatly by the strike. The only people who have suffered are the contractors. The men earn much higher wages and the masters find that they can do with fewer hands. Mr. Brighton gets his work done now with about half the men that were required under the old system. The result no doubt has been that the weakest have gone to the wall, so now that masters are obliged to pay at the rate of at least 5⁰ an hour they will not keep men who do not fairly earn that sum.

The strike too in Mr. Brighton's opinion has benefited trade by producing a certain amount of cooperation and fellowship among the masters, in place of the old deadly competition. They no longer incessantly try to put a spoke in one another's wheels, but look to some extent in harmony.

Hours. The official hours in all bonded
Warehouses are from 8 to 4 from March
1st to Oct. 31st and from 9 to 4 for the
other four months, but by paying overtime
to the Custom House officers work is nearly
always carried on for longer hours: the
usual hours are from 8 to 6.

Mr. Wighton thinks that his
men would probably return themselves for
the Census as Labourers: but they are
a superior class of men to the ordinary
dock labourer, and many of them are
very highly respectable men.

Work is slower in summer than in
winter, but the men seldom work for less
than 8 hours a day.

Oct. 28th.

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Note on Intervision with Superintendent
Davis of the Execution Department, New
Scotland Yard: -

30 and 31 Vic. c. 134. sec. 19 etc.
enacts that: -

"The Commissioners of Police may
if he thinks fit from time to time
license Street Shockacks, and Commissionaries
or Messengers, to exercise their calling, and
appoint places at which they may stand
to exercise their respective callings and
direct the number of each class who may
stand at the appointed places.

Any Shockack and Commissionary
or Messenger, other than those authorized
by the Commissioners of Police, who
occupies the Standings appointed by the
said Commissioners or who remains there
after being required by a Constable on
Duty to leave, and any person molesting
or obstructing any authorized S. C. or M.
in the exercise of his calling, and

Every person not being an authorized
 Sheriff or Commissioner who fraudulently
 puts on or imitates the dress or takes
 the same designation or character as any
 authorized S. or C. shall for each
 offence be liable to a penalty not
 exceeding forty shillings.

Under this act it has been the
 custom till this year to issue practically
 without restriction licenses to any men
 of decent character who applied for them;
 no charge has been made for the license,
 and the enquiry into character has not
 been stringent. The licenses have been given
 one for all, ~~ie.~~ but they can and have
 been revoked for ~~drunkenness~~ drunkenness or
 other misconduct. Mr Davis could not
 say how many men who have licenses are
 now alive, but he believes that just over
 300 standings are actually occupied. Numbers
 of men apply for a license, choose a
 standing, and give it up after a week

or two, finding that the amount earned is insufficient; but as they are not required to report themselves or renew their license they are never heard of again. The whole system is futile and absurd and for ten years the authorities have been considering the advisability of changing it. This year they have given no licenses, and Mr Davis has suggested that there should be a change of it and that licenses should be renewable annually.

There is no tariff, of charge for the use of a messenger's service, and probably few of the men make more than a few shillings a week. The best standings are in wet-end squares where men may get daily jobs of mending or boot-cleaning.

Men who apply for licenses are nearly always men who are poor work of any other kind.

