

Regency Manor

Occupations

A host of 19th century occupations have passed into oblivion, owing to changes in taste, scientific advances, social customs and the like. Naturally, the rich were not inclined to work as they had their incomes from land-ownership, grants from peers and their titles - there was very little need as it was not deemed respectable to earn a living in the upper class. Here's a handful of the occupations taken up by the more "common" people:

Article clerks - thies were young men who had been apprenticed or "articled" to practicing lawyers, generally for a period of five years, so they could learn the profession. Bouts were not articulated to courtroom lawyers like barristers but rather to solicitors and other non-litigating practitioners.

Chandlers - Originally, a chandler was a dealer in candles. By the 19th century however, a chandler was the man who ran the neighbourhood store on the corner. He sold many of the basics needed by the poor such as cheese, bacon and other groceries.

Cheap-jacks - A familiar figure at fairs, the cheap-jack sold inexpensive metal objects and harward like watch chains, knives, and the like and was a "patterer" - his spiel was a key to his success.

Coal porters - The men who unloaded coal from ships at wharfside or from the lighters into which coal had been unloaded by coal whippers. Also delivered to residential customers.

Coal whippers - So called because they "whipped" the coal out of the colliers that brought it down the coast and into the Thames river and into the lighters and barges from which it was then unloaded by the coal porters.

Costermonger - In theory a fruit and vegetable seller, but he also sold fish, sometimes at a stall, sometimes walking on the street crying his wares. In London, costermongers brought their merchandise at Covent Gardon or Billingsgate, sometimes travelling ten miles a day on foot to hawk it.

Crossing sweeper - There was a crossing sweeper at every major street intersection in London. Dodging in and out of passing waggons and carriages they brushed away the mud and dust collected in the strets - they did their best business in wet weather - so that the genteel could cross the street without getting their feet dirty. It was not a well-paying job, seven shillings a week being a decent average wage, but with luck a sweeper who stayed at the same spot might know the "regulars" who might send him on small errands.

Dustman - Most city houses had dustbins into which dust - the refuse from the ashes and cinders of coal fires and similar household matter - was regularly dumped. The dustman would periodically come around to collect the dust, whence it would be hauled away to be used for bricks and manure after being carefully sifted for carelessly discarded valuables.

Mudlarks - Because the Thames is a tidal river, at low tide, it is possible to walk out into the mud and scroung for anything that might have washed up to shore - small trinkets, rope - basically anything of salable value. Many of them were six-to-twelve year-olds and this "occupation" could garner thruppence a day - if you were lucky.

Orange girl - Selling oranges or bootlaces was among the most viable street occupations if you were very poor because the start-up costs were so low. Of course, the next step down from this were the *match girls* who wandered house to house selling their wares and practically begging off the kindness of strangers (usually with an infant tucked under their arms).

Packman - No, not a yellow, round computer character that eats ghosts. Packmen were travelling peddlers who carried their wares around in his pack. He usually sold small fineries for the ladies such as linens, silks (if lucky) and cotton.

Pieman - A pie seller of course! Fruit pies and meat pies - though it was debatable as to exactly what sort of meat found it's way into the pies during winter... (meow?).

Ratcatcher - A very good occupation for a lower-class boy who had little education. Rats were all over, due to inadequate sewage, granaries and stables filled withoats for horses. The ratcatcher used poison or a ferret to chase the rats out of holes where upon his little terrier would pounce and kill the rodents. The going rate for de-ratting a house in London ranged from two shillings to a pound.

Sweeps - A good old chimney sweep! Not as romantic as the kindly one we find in *Mary Poppins*. Often young boys were sent to be "apprentices" to older chimney sweeps - many as young as four years old, and pushed up chimneys as small as 7 inches square to sweep out the huge deposits of soot deposited by the coal fires in residential homes. The boys were "encouraged" up the chimneys faster by cruel masters pressing pins into or holding a lit newspaper up to their feet - or they were beaten into obeying. Country children were often warned "the sweeps will get you!" to keep them from wandering and indeed, small children in very rural areas were often kidnapped for the trade.

Watermen - The name was applied to two different kinds of London workers. First, to the men who rowed people across the Thames - this required seven years apprenticeship. The second was the name given to the men who watered the horses at cab stands.



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