Withey, Alun. "Cleanse, cut and control: The institutional history of facial hair." *Concerning Beards: Facial Hair, Health and Practice in England, 1650–1900*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 187–206. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350127876.ch-010>>.

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Cleanse, cut and control: The institutional history of facial hair

In 1871, the set of 'Rules for the Guidance of Attendants' at the Surrey County Asylum contained strictures relating to the personal appearance of inmates. Every patient was to be daily washed and combed, 'clean in their persons' and neat and tidy in their dress.¹ But among these fairly standard rules was an unusual concession. While male patients were to be shaved weekly (and, it was stated, they could not shave themselves) any who wished to grow a beard was allowed to do so, on the condition that he kept it 'scrupulously clean and tidy'.² In context of the regulation of appearance of institutional inmates, this was fairly revolutionary, restoring some degree of agency in facial appearance back to individual men. Before this, however, how had institutions regarded and dealt with facial hair?

Thus far, this book has treated facial hair as a personal choice for individual men. But, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were large groups of men for whom decisions as to whether to shave or grow a beard were not their own. Various institutions, including prisons, workhouses and hospitals, exerted control over men's appearance in various and complex ways. Michel Foucault's arguments that the eighteenth century brought changes in methods of punishment, moving away from physically harming the criminal body and towards more subtle means of control, are well known. To take the Foucauldian line, in prisons, shaving heads and faces could be read as evidence of identity control, taking away the individual agency of men in determining their own appearance. In workhouses, barbers were often employed to shave paupers for similar reasons, while the military imposed strictures relating to facial hair as a means of instilling discipline, as well as part of the broader regulation of martial dress and behaviour. Outside institutions, decisions concerning facial

¹ Surrey History Centre, MS 3043/1/3/1/2, 'Rules for the guidance of the attendants, servants, and all persons engaged in the service of the Surrey County Asylum at Brookwood', 1871, 13. I am very grateful to Jane Hamlett for sharing this source. See the broader discussion of material comforts in Victorian asylums in Jane Hamlett and Lesley Hoskins, 'Comfort in Small Things? Clothing, Control and Agency in County Lunatic Asylums in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18:1 (2013): 368–86.

² Surrey History Centre, MS 3043/1/3/1/2, 40.

hair were closely bound with prevailing expectations of manly appearance. For male paupers, prisoners, asylum inmates and hospital patients, however, the mechanisms were different since such decisions were often not theirs to make. The place of facial hair within institutional histories therefore offers an alternative perspective on the interplay between identity, power, health and masculinity.

This chapter explores the place of facial hair and shaving within the institutional regulation of men's bodies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the place of barbers in enforcing conventions of appearance. Drawing on prison and workhouse accounts and individual narratives, it argues that many institutions of various kinds assumed responsibility for determining men's appearance, in the process significantly altering the dynamics between facial hair and masculinity. As we shall see, the mechanisms through which this worked varied according to the institutional context. In prisons and, to a lesser degree, workhouses, shaving could be viewed as part of punitive measures to enforce institutional norms of appearance and the suppressing of individual agency over self-fashioning and appearance as well as hygiene and the control of vermin. In other ways, though, workhouses also acted to return respectability to paupers through hygiene and clean linen. In asylums and hospitals, the focus was more firmly upon cleanliness. In line with changing ideas about the material conditions in which institutional inhabitants were confined, keeping heads and faces closely shorn helped prevent fleas and lice which, along with a regime of regular washing and fresh clothing, aimed to prevent contagion.

Respectability and cleanliness

The eighteenth century brought debates about the place and importance of hygiene. In part this reflected the rise, from the early decades of the century, of a 'genteel aesthetic' in bodily appearance. Cleanliness was an expression of class. A clean, well-ordered and neatly groomed body conveyed taste and manners, in contrast to the rough, almost animalistic, bodies and habits of the unmannered plebs.³ This is not to say that the poor were unconcerned about hygiene and appearance. As Louise Falcini points out, the 'respectable poor' did subscribe to notions of cleanliness as a marker of respectability and also appreciated the physical comfort of clean clothing and clean bodies.⁴ This was exemplified in regular changes of body linen and also, for men, in regular bathing in rivers and open water, increasingly using soap through the second half of the eighteenth century.⁵ As well as the material comfort, being physically clean, decently apparelled and, for men, being clean-shaven, meant potentially better access to charitable funds and institutions for the poor.

³ Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 119. For a broader discussion of the importance of personal grooming as an expression of politeness, see Alun Withey, *Technology, Self-Fashioning and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 7–10, 65–90.

⁴ Louise Falcini, 'Cleanliness and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London', University of Reading, Unpublished PhD thesis, July 2018, 97–8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28–35.

Of more concern were the neglected bodies of the idle poor and criminal, whose ramshackle appearance attracted increasing attention. Set against the regular and refined bodies of the comfortable classes and the simple cleanliness and shift of the industrious poor, idle and criminal paupers were subject to 'rhetorical brutality' and referred to in terms of grotesquery.⁶ Beaten down by harsh existence, malnourishment, vice and alcohol, their bodies were portrayed as chaotic, filthy and unkempt.⁷ In newspapers and pamphlets, the bodies, physical features and appearance of criminals or deserters, were thrown open to scrutiny in 'wanted' advertisements, which listed physical characteristics including body shape, hair and beards.⁸ Clothing also played an important part in distinguishing 'types' of poor. While worthy objects were clean and neat in their apparel, the bodies of the 'ragged poor' shamelessly peeped out through the many holes in their tattered clothing. Paradoxically, those who appeared less in need of help were more likely to get it.⁹ In this context, therefore, the regulation of appearance and the imposition of standards of dress and appearance might be seen as encouraging the idle poor back towards to productivity and morality. At the same time, concerns about the health of the poor saw increased attention being paid to the material conditions in which they were housed, in particular to institutions including workhouses, asylums and hospitals.¹⁰

Control over the body was a central element in various kinds of punitive and non-punitive institutions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As with many other aspects of the lives of supplicants, loss of agency over physical appearance was a consequence of receiving aid. If paupers were to be helped they should be prepared to submit to the regulation of their bodies. For prisoners, physical appearance was carefully managed and forcefully imposed. Hospitals and asylums also intervened to control the bodies, and faces, of patients. There were various reasons for this. One was the inculcation of a bodily regimen as part of institutional routines. Cleanliness, like work, took effort and application. But it was also an obvious physical manifestation of institutional 'care'. In the parish, unkempt paupers reflected badly on those responsible for them, as well as on the individuals themselves. Surveillance of the clothing and cleanliness of the poor by parish vestries, JPs and others was also a way of checking up on overseers and workhouse masters or mistresses. Especially in the nineteenth century, the poor were inspected to check their own conformity to rules and personal hygiene, in turn offering a means to check the functioning of the institution.¹¹ Orderliness, then, was of signal importance and authorities intervened to ensure that certain standards of appearance were upheld.

⁶ Sarah Jordan, 'From Grotesque Bodies to Useful Hands: Idleness, Industry and the Labouring Class', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 25:3 (2001): 62–3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 66–7.

⁸ Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton, 'Visible Bodies: Power, Subordination and Identity in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World', *Journal of Social History*, 39:1 (2005): 39.

⁹ Jordan, 'Grotesque Bodies', 67.

¹⁰ Susannah Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', in Jonathan Reinartz and Leonard Schwarz (eds), *Medicine and the Workhouse* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 48–9.

¹¹ See, for example, Samantha Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 124–7.

Even outside the physical walls of institutions, parish authorities were keen to police the appearance of the poor. In part this was charitable, driven by the desire to provide succour and comfort to those without means. But it also exemplified the wish to remove, or at least disguise, the visible signs of poverty in parishes. As one of the most public and immediate indicators of status, clothing was a central component. There were clearly expectations of decent and comely appearance, especially in church. As Steven King notes, the propensity to own and wear different clothing for different occasions, including 'best', was a measure of means.¹² To appear in tattered clothing, or with dirty, unkempt hair or beard, was a powerful symbol and signifier of being poor. General cleanliness was another important factor, and it was expected that people attended Sunday service clean and in good order.¹³ Satires such as Nicholas Breton's *The Goode and the Badde* caricatured the poor and beggarly as being 'seldome handsome, and often noysome', their ragged and odoriferous bodies distancing them from decent churchgoing parishioners.¹⁴

Gifts of clothing offered the poor a chance to escape the censorious gaze of fellow parishioners, although the stigma of wearing (or indeed needing) parish clothing, or badges, was potent.¹⁵ Cutting hair and shaving poor men could also be viewed as a restorative measure, intended to confer some degree of bodily order and dignity. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, vestry books and churchwarden's accounts contained regular payments to individuals like 'Mr Gorst' of Leyton, Essex, who was regularly paid several pounds for a variety of services, including haircutting, teeth drawing and shaving.¹⁶ In 1734, the overseers of Towcester, Northamptonshire made weekly payments to a barber to shave four men in the parish.¹⁷ The suggestion from accounts is that such shaving was generally done weekly, in preparation for appearance in church. Before the establishment of workhouses, this formed part of the provision of 'outdoor' relief in the parish. It is not clear where the task was undertaken in such cases. One possibility is that paupers were shaved in their own homes, but that obviously depended on individual circumstances. Another is that they were shaved in the shop of the contracted barber. It seems unlikely however, not least because of the potential conflict with their regular customers, that barbers would be overly keen on having the poor objects of the parish descend en masse upon their premises. A third, although not supported by firm evidence, is that of the local church, which was a site for the doling out of alms and payments from the parish chest and might also have provided a ready space for paupers to be shaved. It should be noted, however, that the employment of

¹² Steven King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700–1850: A Regional Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 136.

¹³ Steve Hindle, *On the Parish: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c. 1550–1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 189.

¹⁴ Nicholas Breton, *The Good and the Badde, or Descriptions of the Worthies, and Unworthies of This Age Where the Best May See Their Graces, and the Worst Discerne Their Basenesse* (London: Printed by George Purslowe, 1616), 26. My thanks to Michael Saunby for this reference.

¹⁵ King, *Poverty and Welfare*, 134–5.

¹⁶ John Kennedy, *A History of the Parish of Leyton, Essex, with Maps etc* (Leyton: Phelps Brothers, 1894), 161.

¹⁷ Northampton Record Office, MS 329P/119, Towcester Overseers Accounts, 1734–1760. I am grateful to Charlotte Young for this reference.

barbers and hairdressers as part of outdoor relief continued well into the nineteenth century, after the growth of workhouses. In 1833 the hairdresser Thomas Coxon was paid by the Uttoxeter overseers for shaving the poor and providing ivory combs for the parish.¹⁸ The parish of St Dionis in London paid for various poor men in the parish to be shaved weekly, usually at a penny each time.¹⁹

Shaving could be forcibly imposed on vagrants if their appearance was considered potentially offensive to others. In January 1776 the *Westminster Journal* reported the arrest of an old beggar in St Giles 'with a long beard and a patch'd coat of many colours'. It was 'proposed to shave him' whereupon the man angrily protested 'for he should not long survive it'. Despite his protestations he was shaved, perhaps by force, and reportedly died a few days later.²⁰ It is not clear in this case whether shaving took place within the gaol cell or poor house, or whether specific space was provided by the parish for shaving to take place if not in the barber's own shop. A second example, perhaps apocryphal, or even a masked English satire on Irishisms, highlights the place of unkempt beards and long hair within narratives of vagrancy and poverty. In 1821 an English newspaper reported the Mayor of Cork's idea that reversing the ragged appearance of mendicants would effectively leave them unable to beg. Half a dozen 'beggars found strolling within the limits of the city' were duly gathered up on promise of a reward, but instead found themselves taken immediately to a local barbershop where they were shaved, washed, dressed and powdered 'in the genteelest manner' and were so 'completely metamorphosed' that they left the shop resembling Macaronis.²¹ Once this had been done, however, they were dumped unceremoniously back the street, where their now-fashionable appearance was far less likely to attract a coin. The report noted the apparent success of the Mayor's radical approach, noting that the 'whole tribe' now avoided the city's jurisdiction, 'as carefully as if it had been visited by a pestilence'.²²

Through the eighteenth century, institutions became increasingly important in regulating the bodies of the poor. The management of facial hair was a key aspect in this process, not least since unkempt, filthy beards represented self-neglect and loss of self-control. The general policy of institutional authorities was therefore to intervene to remove it, in turn taking away the agency of individual men in determining their appearance. Throughout the period, and across various different types of institution, the clean-shaven face was the norm for institutional inmates. It is to such institutions, practices and practitioners, that the chapter now turns.

Before proceeding it should be noted that the following discussion explores the place of shaving within broader regimes of cleanliness and hygiene. Except for a brief initial outline below, it takes institutions collectively, rather than separately by institutional

¹⁸ Stafford Record Office, MS D 3891/6/35/1/25, Bill from Thomas Coxon to overseers of Uttoxeter, 29 September 1833.

¹⁹ London Metropolitan Archives, MS DB/AC, Churchwardens and Overseers' Account Books, 1758–62, 97, 198, 292.

²⁰ 'News', *Westminster Journal and London Political Miscellany* (13 January 1776).

²¹ Anon., 'Ludicrous Punishment', *Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet and Plymouth Journal* (19 May 1821).

²² Ibid.

type. This method is not without issue since institutions obviously differed in their purpose and approach, as well as following different trajectories. Also, before 1750, rules about facial hair were neither rigidly nor uniformly enforced. This should not therefore be seen as any suggestion of standardization of approaches to hygiene across institutions, but rather as a means of discussing and comparing attitudes towards the control of facial hair and of bodies more generally.

Prisons, for example, seem to have been unique among institutions in the ways that they dealt with hygiene and appearance, especially in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Since prisons were largely self-governing, the conditions in which prisoners were held depended much on whether they were able to pay keepers for basic necessities or luxuries. For those who could afford it, clean clothing, beds and even perhaps barbering services were relatively easy to obtain. Those who could not pay could be left hungry and filthy and, in such cases, shaving was likely a low priority.²³ Descriptions of escaped prisoners regularly describe the men as being bearded at the time of their escape. Edward Paine, for example, who escaped from Newgate Prison in London in 1725 was described as having a pale complexion and a black beard, while Thomas Richardson, who made off from Oakham County Gaol in Rutland in January 1740, was 'dark-bearded and hollow-voiced'.²⁴ In 1747, a report of the escape of several prisoners from Newgate Prison noted that one not only had a light-coloured peruke (interesting given that he was presumably wearing it while in gaol) but also a 'reddish' beard.²⁵ Such examples may suggest that men were not subject to strictures about facial hair, that there was no enforced shaving, or perhaps equally that there was no barbering provision. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that, even here, plebeian ideas about orderliness and self-regulation meant that prisoners could take responsibility for basic cleanliness of their bodies and prison spaces.²⁶ The beginnings of change came with the 1774 Health of Prisoners Act of 1774 also enabled Justices of the Peace to intervene in the prison administration, including promotion of cleanliness and the provision of bathing facilities, although the extent to which these were used and enforced varied widely.²⁷

In workhouses and hospitals, however, regimes of cleanliness and hygiene were firmly embedded in their rules from the outset, in the former case from at least as early as the 1720s. Here, cleanliness of both body and environment exemplified orderliness, and shaving formed an important and constant part of these routines. The provision of clean linen every week and parading neatly shaved and combed paupers at church on a Sunday was the mark of a successful workhouse. The provision of shaving in asylums was more problematic, as we shall see, in the capacity and willingness of inmates to shave and the obvious dangers of providing access to razors. Here, the question of

²³ Falcini, 'Cleanliness', 262–3.

²⁴ 'Advertisements', *Evening Post* (7 October 1725); 'Whereas One Thomas Richardson...', *London Evening Post* (29 January 1740).

²⁵ 'Custom House, London, 11 July 1747', *General Advertiser* (13 July 1747). See also 'Broke Out of His Majesty's Gaol', *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer* (30 June 1761).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

²⁷ Roy Porter, 'Howard's Beginning: Prisons, Disease, Hygiene', in Richard Creese, W. F. Bynum and J. Bearn (eds), *The Health of Prisoners* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 7.

'control' is also complicated, since the provision of shaving in asylums arguably had more to do with perceptions of asylums and the ease and comfort of patients.

Regulating bodies

From the early decades of the eighteenth century, institutions began to set down regulations regarding the appearance of inmates, including their hair and beards. Hygiene was an important consideration in attempts to limit potential outbreaks of contagion. In workhouses, hospitals and asylums the institutional environment was carefully regulated, with regular programmes of cleaning and washing of cells, wards and facilities. Emphasis was laid upon cleanliness of environment, with orders for the regular change of bed linen and clothing, and also that every effort should be taken to 'keep the people and children free from lice and filthiness'.²⁸ Responsibility for maintaining standards of hygiene and cleanliness within hospitals, workhouses and, from the early nineteenth century, prisons was generally designated to specific individuals, often women. In workhouses this might be the mistress or Matron of the house, but also servants, or even other inmates, to 'keep the house clean', as well as ensuring that 'the poor people be kept clean and neat in their persons'.²⁹ In the workhouse of St Mary, Islington, staff were instructed to be 'careful to promote cleanliness', as well as industry, echoing similar regulations across workhouses, hospitals, asylums and, later, prisons.³⁰

As well as environments, regulating bodies was important, given the risk of contagion caused by the constant flow of inmates – a process that often began immediately upon admission. In workhouses, for example, cleanliness and hygiene were key. On entering the workhouse, paupers were expected to surrender their own garments and dress in regulated workhouse clothes.³¹ In many cases, as in the newly founded Enfield workhouse in 1787, they were also subjected to a potentially humiliating and intimate medical examination, where they were 'stripped and washed clean and examined by the surgeon and apothecary to see that they are not afflicted by any infectious disease'.³² Paupers hoping to enter St Mary's Islington workhouse could get no further than 'one of the rooms in the yard' until they had been examined

²⁸ Anon., *Rules, Orders and Regulations for the Governance of the Workhouse Belonging to That Part of the Parish of St Andrew, Holborn...* (Publisher unknown, 1791), 12; Anon., *Laws and Rules of the Birkenhead Borough Hospital* (Birkenhead: Publisher unknown, 1875), 23, 27.

²⁹ See the references to cleanliness in several London institutions in the 1720s in Anon., *An Account of Several Workhouses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor* (London: Printed and sold by Joseph Downing, 1735), 7, 10, 11, 16, 79, 84.

³⁰ Anon., *Rules and Orders for the Better Regulation of the Workhouse Belonging to the Parish of St Mary, Islington in the Parish of Middlesex* (London: Publisher unknown, 1798), 4; Anon., *Rules and Orders of the Public Hospital in the Town of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Printed by J. Archdeacon, 1778), 15, 18, 19; Anon., *By-Laws of the Governors of the London Hospital* (London: Printed by H. S. Woodfall, 1769), 17, 22; Anon., *Statutes and Rules for the Government of the Kent and Canterbury Hospital* (Publisher unknown, 1793), 54.

³¹ Peter Higinbotham, *The Workhouse Encyclopedia* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014), 286–7.

³² Anon., *Rules and Orders for the Regulation of the Parish of Enfield in the County of Middlesex* (London: Printed by T. Sabine, 1787), 7.

by the surgeon and apothecary and, if necessary, 'properly cleansed and clothed'.³³ By the end of the eighteenth century, many prisons and hospitals had similar rules about entry. The Bridewell in Oxford in 1810 directed incoming prisoners to be examined as to their health and physical condition and, if necessary, washed and clothed.³⁴ At the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh in the 1770s, incoming patients were given the option to swap filthy or tattered clothes for clean linen and could be directed by a physician to have a bath.³⁵

Partly underlying such procedures was the general concern for bodily cleansing and hygiene, but they also represented a 'ritual cleansing and reclothing'.³⁶ When paupers crossed the threshold of a workhouse, they did so both literally and symbolically. The cleansing of bodies and change of clothes signalled a shift from their former degradation into a cleaner, more ordered existence, also offering access to cleaner environments and spaces than many paupers experienced outside.³⁷ Tim Hitchcock has argued that the strict regimes of cleanliness in eighteenth-century workhouses offered paupers the opportunity to escape the indignity and discomfort of filthy clothes and bodies, since poor and tattered clothes were the mark of the beggar.³⁸ As we have already seen, long, unkempt or dirty facial hair had equally strong connotations with poverty. In this sense, then, workhouses offered the most desperate in society the chance to remake their appearance, in the process perhaps escaping the social disgrace of poverty for at least a short period of time.³⁹ It could also be argued, however, that they merely substituted one kind of stigma for another.

Once settled within an institution, inmates continued to be subjected to strict and regular regimens of washing and cleaning, often including daily washing of hands and feet and weekly bathing in a cold or tepid bath.⁴⁰ By the nineteenth century, many prisons expected individuals to take personal responsibility for their own cleanliness and provided space and equipment. In Durham County Gaol, regulations stipulated that 'Every prisoner shall wash himself thoroughly, at least once every day, and his feet at least once each week; and he [i.e. the governor] shall see that there is a sufficient supply of soap, towels and combs'.⁴¹ The rules and orders for Newgate prison in 1814 stated that washing was to take be done immediately after rising at the first bell, when prisoners should 'immediately make their beds respectively, and wash their hands and faces'.⁴² Bedford County Gaol provided 'an adequate supply of wash and foot tubs, and

³³ London Metropolitan Archives, MS P83/MRY1/1769, 'Rules and Orders for the Better Regulation of the Workhouse Belonging to the Parish of Saint Mary Islington', 6 February 1827.

³⁴ Anon., *Regulations for the Government of the Common Gaol and Bridewell of the County of Oxford* (Oxford: Grosvenor and Hall, 1810), 17.

³⁵ Guenter B. Risse, *Hospital Life in Enlightenment Scotland: Care and Teaching at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 87.

³⁶ Ottaway, 'The Elderly', 48.

³⁷ Falcini, 'Cleanliness', 146.

³⁸ Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2004), 100–1.

³⁹ Ibid., 106–7; Falcini, 'Cleanliness', 146.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 100.

⁴¹ Anon., *Rules and Regulations for the Government of the County Gaol and House of Correction at Durham* (Durham, NC: George Walker Junior, 1850), 14.

⁴² MS CLA/035/02/032 – Rules and orders for the government of the common gaol of Newgate, 26 November 1814, unpaginated, Rule 6.

of water, soap, towels and combs', together with 'convenient places for the prisoner to wash themselves', while in Stafford County Gaol, prison 'wards' or 'courts' were each provided with clean towels, mops, soil pails and water buckets, and prisoners were instructed to 'wash themselves from head to foot and bathe when directed by the apothecary'. Each prisoner was also to be examined daily, and only given bread if found to be clean.⁴³ Washing and combing before assembly in the dining room were also part of the daily regime of workhouse life, and paupers were instructed to maintain themselves in a comely, decent and clean order.⁴⁴

Hair, including facial hair, was an important element within institutional regulations about hygiene and appearance, and shaving was often mandatory on entry to many institutions from the eighteenth century.⁴⁵ In Edinburgh Infirmary in the 1790s, the heads of men were ordered to be shaved, and their skin rubbed with mercury ointment to remove lice.⁴⁶ Given the potential for facial hair to harbour lice, it seems fair to assume that unkempt beards would also be shaved. Thereafter, a male inmate's hair was subject to regular inspection and control, which often meant keeping it short, with daily combing to remove vermin – a task that could be allocated to the turnkeys.⁴⁷ On occasions, some prisons also intervened to wash and shave sick patients at the expense of the institution, presumably in attempts to alleviate their suffering or hasten their recovery.⁴⁸ The length to which inmates could grow their hair varied by institution. Durham County Gaol in 1850 merely stipulated that the hair of male prisoners need not be cut, except 'for the purposes of health and cleanliness'.⁴⁹ Some were zealous in their enforcement of regulations. In 1875, George Winterbourne complained at having his hair and whiskers shorn without his consent in an Oxfordshire prison. While the prison rules stipulated that all prisoners should be shaved and that 'when he arrived, his hair was in a state which required cutting', Winterbourne pointed out that he was only detained for three hours while awaiting the arrival of money to pay his fine.⁵⁰

Many institutions standardized their approach to facial hair by regulating the frequency of shaving. While the length of beard considered acceptable varied between institutions, a weekly shave was perhaps most common. Part of the reason for this was likely the issue of identification. Both Petty Session and prison registers regularly noted facial characteristics and distinguishing marks, both of which could be hidden by a beard. It is possible that insisting upon the removal of facial hair was a means to aid warders and others in recognizing prisoners and preventing them altering their

⁴³ Bedfordshire Archives, MS QGV1, *Rules and Regulations for the Gaol and House of Correction of the County of Bedford* (Bedford: Hill and Son, 1841), 6, 7, 52–3; Anon., *Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Gaol and House of Correction of the County of Stafford* (Stafford: Printed by Arthur Morgan, 1824), 57, 68.

⁴⁴ Anon., *Rules and Regulations ... Stafford*, 8.

⁴⁵ Neil Storey, *Prison and Prisoners in Victorian Britain* (London: The History Press 2010), 57.

⁴⁶ Risse, *Hospital Life*, 188.

⁴⁷ For example, Anon., *Rules, Orders, and Regulations, for the Management of the New House of Correction for the County of Middlesex; Approved and Confirmed by the Justices at the Michaelmas Quarter Sessions* (London: Printed by G. Stafford, 1794), 12.

⁴⁸ Falcini, 'Cleanliness', 280.

⁴⁹ Anon., *Rules and Regulations ... Durham*, 15.

⁵⁰ 'Shaving in Prison', *Hairdressers Journal*, 228:9 (1875): 82.

appearance while incarcerated.⁵¹ The regulations of the poor house in Manchester, Durham County Gaol, Holloway Prison and the London hospitals of Bridewell and Bethlem, for example, all suggest weekly shaving of male inmates by barbers.⁵² Institutional accounts show the sums that could be expended in the provision of shaving. At the Leeds General Infirmary in the 1790s, around six pounds per year was expended for 'shaving patients'.⁵³ When the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital was established in 1772, shaving was initially carried out 'as required' by a porter, paid ten pounds per annum, possibly assisted by able patients, with no extra allowance for the task. Thirty years later, male patients were being shaved twice a week, at an annual cost of twenty pounds.⁵⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, rules about the wearing of facial hair had seemingly been tightened. In 1860, rule 77 of Petworth Gaol and House of Correction stated that, in addition to hair being 'decently cut on reception and afterwards when necessary', male prisoners were 'to be shaved *at least* once a week, and no convicted prisoner shall be allowed to wear moustaches, or a beard under his chin' (emphasis added).⁵⁵ Here, the clean-shaven face was effectively part of prison 'uniform', with visible stubble clearly unacceptable.

This last example raises broader questions of control and authority over bodies. Shaving off beards kept inmates neat and tidy to be sure, as well as promoting dignity and self-respect and removing a potential vector for the spread of infection.⁵⁶ The routine of shaving offered regularity and structure for inmates and may have formed part of attempts to offset the demoralizing effects of incarceration.⁵⁷ In this reading, shaving and haircutting formed part of the structuring of institutional time and the preservation of comforting and familiar rituals of personal grooming and cleansing. But the routine removal of facial hair was nonetheless a tangible assertion of authority. While not always or necessarily punitive, regular weekly (or sometimes twice weekly) shaving removed decisions about the length and style of facial hair from individual men. In its place was a standard to which all inmates or patients were expected to conform. When they were bathed, shaved and clothed, therefore, paupers and prisoners were remade in the virtuous image of the authorities.

The question, then, is whether shaving could be considered as part of the construction of institutional male 'uniform'? There are certainly similarities. As Jennifer Craik has argued, a characteristic of formal uniforms is that they are 'rigorously managed by

⁵¹ I am grateful to Henry French for raising this point.

⁵² Anon., *Rules for the Government of the Poor House in Manchester* (Manchester: J. Harrop, 1794), 6; Anon., *Standing Rules for the Government of the Royal Hospitals, of Bridewell and Bethlem, with the Duty of the Governors, and of the Several Officers and Servants* (London: Thomas Parker, 1792), 52; Anon., *Rules and Regulations ... Durham*, 15; Anon., *Regulations for the Government of the City Prison at Holloway* (London: Publisher unknown, 1860), 81.

⁵³ Frederick Eden, *The State of the Poor or, an History of the Labouring Classes in England, from the Conquest to the Present Period* (London: Printed by J. Davis et al., 1797), 861.

⁵⁴ Sir Peter Eade, *The Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, 1770–1900* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1900), 43–4, 73, 222.

⁵⁵ Anon., *Rules for the Government of the Common Gaol and House of Correction at Petworth, and for the Western Division of the County of Sussex* (Lewes: George P. Bacon, 1860), 22.

⁵⁶ Tim Hitchcock, 'The English Workhouse: A Study in Institutional Poor Relief in Selected Counties, 1696–1750', University of Oxford, Unpublished PhD thesis, 1985, 181.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

external impositions.⁵⁸ That is, they reflect the standards and style of the particular authority who exercises control over an individual body. As Hamlett and Hoskins argue, this concept fits well with pauper dress in workhouses and also prison uniform, although pauper dress was not necessarily intended to be overtly punitive and, as we have seen, clean linen could be important in promoting respectability.⁵⁹ Others draw distinctions between uniforms, such as those of the military, which are 'honorific' and others, including punitive institutions and schools, which are 'stigmatic'.⁶⁰ Uniforms, in other words, can carry either positive or negative symbolic meaning.

How far facial hair fits with such ideas again depends on the type of institution. In hospitals, the appearance of patients was not necessarily of paramount importance except where it was at odds with expectations of cleanliness and hygiene or presented a specific threat. With many patients only staying in hospital for short periods there was seemingly little expectation of a standardized hospital uniform appearance. In the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, verminous patients who refused to submit to the barber were summarily reported to the board, although it is not suggested that they were subsequently subjected to forced cutting of hair or shaving.⁶¹ In workhouses too (described by K. D. M. Snell as 'instrument[s] of moral and disciplinary control'), despite the regimented and at times authoritarian regulations governing daily life, it is by no means clear if inmates were physically or forcefully compelled to be shaved.⁶² The weekly shave may even have been welcomed by inmates, as the desire to conform to plebeian notions of respectability – and not to be 'othered' – should not be underestimated. Given, as we saw in the previous chapter, that references to facial hair among the lower orders were relatively scant, it seems fair to infer that plebeian men in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries desired to be clean-shaven and regarded it as part of the broader presentation of a clean and decent body. A letter to the Southwell Union in 1837 referred to the illness of a pauper who regularly shaved the other men and asked for 'guidance for providing this necessary assistance'.⁶³ Shaving was 'necessary' insofar as it maintained appearance but, depending on how it is interpreted, 'assistance' implies a positive or restorative action.

Asylums, however, offer a different perspective, being neither strictly penal nor medical. As Leonard Smith has noted, maintaining the respectable appearance of inmates was a conscious move undertaken to dispel notions of the wildness or savagery of lunatic patients.⁶⁴ Whereas an unkempt body suggested mental disequilibrium, irrationality and neglect of the self, a clean, orderly appearance demonstrated conformity with the broader conventions of society.⁶⁵ Cutting the hair and beards of

⁵⁸ Quoted in Hamlett and Hoskins, 'Comfort in Small Things', 98.

⁵⁹ Ibid.; Falcini, 'Cleanliness', 147.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Eade, *Norfolk and Norwich Hospital*, 43–4.

⁶² K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 211.

⁶³ NA, MS MH 12/9524/110, Letter from Thomas Marriott to the Clerk of the Southwell Guardians, 16 January 1837.

⁶⁴ Leonard Smith, *Cure, Comfort and Safe Custody: Public Lunatic Asylums in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 139.

⁶⁵ Wynter, 'Good in All Respects', 41.

asylum patients conferred dignity, and at least gave the illusion of orderliness, belying their impoverished or wild appearance.⁶⁶ Shaving the head was also one of the treatments recommended for the symptoms of puerperal insanity and was undertaken on that basis.⁶⁷ There were other motivations though. In Bethlem hospital, a regime of regular shaving and reclothing was established for patients in the late eighteenth century, partly as a means to improve general cleanliness and the comfort and ease of the patient, but also since the hospital was open to the public. As Louise Falcini points out, it was no coincidence that prisoners were shaved on Mondays and Wednesdays – the same days on which the public were admitted.⁶⁸ In asylums, responsibility for shaving often fell upon attendants or ‘keepers’. These individuals performed a variety of tasks within institutions, ranging from protection and therapeutics, to the physical management of the body, often including shaving.⁶⁹ In Lancaster and Gloucester asylums, keepers were required to wash inmates’ hair daily, bathe them once a fortnight and shave them twice weekly. In the Middlesex County Asylum, two keepers ‘one of whom is a mechanic’, likely a barber, were employed in each ward ‘in getting up, washing and shaving the patients.’⁷⁰ In Bethlem in 1836, keepers were expected to ‘shave their own patients twice a week’ and also provide clean linen.⁷¹ While this was not necessarily a task that was welcomed, it did provide the compensation of extra income.⁷² This ranged from ad hoc payments of around a penny per head for shaving patients, or as much as five pounds as an annual payment.⁷³

Unsurprisingly, it was prisons that saw perhaps the most rigorous enforcement of shaving, especially after 1800. A number of prison regulations also refer to the shaving of prisoners as part of the daily routines of the institution. In 1825, the Millbank Penitentiary in London placed shaving within rules for the ‘allotment of time on weekdays’. Warders were responsible to see that such prisoners ‘that stand in need of it’ were to be shaved. This might suggest a degree of latitude, with facial hair only cut once it was considered overlong or unruly, but equally could imply that facial hair was not tolerated and that shaving was undertaken as soon as it was visible. It is worth noting that, unlike many institutions, Millbank did not specify the frequency of shaving.⁷⁴ It

⁶⁶ Adrian Green, ‘Heartless and Unhomely? Dwellings of the Poor in East Anglia and North East England’, in Joanne McEwen and Pamela Sharpe (eds), *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1600–1850* (London: Palgrave, 2011), 86. See also Wynter, ‘Good in All Respects’, 40–57.

⁶⁷ William Charles Ellis, *A Treatise on the Nature, Symptoms, Causes and Treatments of Insanity* (London: Samuel Holdsworth, 1838), 242, 336. It was certainly used in the Bristol hospital; see Leonard Smith, ‘Lunatic Asylum in the Workhouse: St Peter’s Hospital Bristol, 1698–1861’, *Medical History*, 61:2 (2017): 230.

⁶⁸ Falcini, ‘Cleanliness’, 246–7.

⁶⁹ Smith, *Cure, Comfort and Safe Custody*, 138.

⁷⁰ Ellis, *Treatise*, 305.

⁷¹ Anon., *Third Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords Appointed to Inquire into the Present State of the Several Gaols and Houses of Correction in England and Wales* (London: House of Commons, 1835), 459. See also Falcini, ‘Cleanliness’, 247.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 138–9, 145.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷⁴ Anon., *Rules and Regulations of the General Penitentiary, Millbank* (London: Philanthropic Society, 1825), 75, 81.

was, however, a regulation that prisoners' hair should be kept short.⁷⁵ The standardized 1840 regulations for prisons stipulated that 'Male prisoners shall be shaved at least once a week', while their hair was to be cut once a month.⁷⁶ Even aboard convict ships men were subject to strict and regular grooming regimes. In 1818, aboard the *Earl St Vincent*, bound for New South Wales, convicts were washed and shaved every few days.⁷⁷ On the *St Petre* this was done on Wednesdays and Saturdays.⁷⁸ The 1819 journal of another convict ship, the *Bencoolen*, recorded that prisoners were taken on deck in their mess groups – usually around twelve individuals – to bathe, shave and get air.⁷⁹ Here again this was in part due to fear of contagion and the effects of confinement in the mephitic air below decks. On some ships, convicts were selected to shave their fellows, and razors were issued as the men came on deck to prevent them being kept for use as weapons.⁸⁰ In August 1821, the surgeon aboard the *Claudine* recorded that he 'Took the irons off James Oxson, Joseph Watts and John Page, three men appointed to shave the convicts', and the practice was repeated on other ships, with convicts being 'employed as barbers'.⁸¹ It is unclear whether this was intended, or regarded, as a punishment or privilege.

These varying degrees to which shaving was enforced in different institutions raises further questions surrounding passivity. In hospitals and perhaps workhouses, male patients and paupers might risk being reported to the board for not submitting to the razor, but there is little evidence of them being physically compelled to be shaved. In penal institutions and, to some extent, also asylums, individual men were required to yield to the officers of the institution for tasks that, outside, would have been their own responsibility. What happened, though, when individuals challenged their lot? In prisons and aboard convict ships, it is clear that refusal to submit to shaving was punishable. In 1821 a convict named Spencer about the *Malabar* was confined in the 'black hole' of the ship, for refusing to be shaved.⁸² Conversely, the forced shaving of hair could also be used as a means of punishment for a variety of offences. In 1823, convicts Kelly and Bilford had half of their heads shaved for stealing biscuits and were

⁷⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁷⁶ Anon., *Regulations for Prisons in England and Wales (Issued by the Secretary of State for the Home Department)* (London: Shaw and Sons, 1840), 35.

⁷⁷ NA, ADM 101/21/7A/3, Journal of the *Earl St Vincent* Convict Ship by John Johnston, Surgeon, September/October 1818, ff. 10–13; NA MS ADM 101/21/7A/4, Journal of the *Earl St Vincent* Convict Ship, October/November 1818, ff. 13, 15.

⁷⁸ NA, MS ADM 101/44/8/4, 'Medical and Surgical Journal of Her Majesty's Convict Ship *St Petre*', 1843, ff. 26–30.

⁷⁹ NA, MS ADM 101/7/10/1, Medical Journal of the Convict Ship *Bencoolen*, by William Thomas, Surgeon, April/May 1819, ff. 2, 3; see also NA MS ADM 101/74/4/2, 'A Nosological Synopsis of the Sick Book ... of Her Majesty's Convict Ship *Westmoreland*', May 1841, 29–30.

⁸⁰ NA, MS ADM, 101/21/7A/2, Journal of the Convict Ship '*Earl St Vincent*' by John Johnston, Surgeon, 15 August 1818, f. 5.

⁸¹ NA, MS ADM 101/17/4/1, Diary of the '*Claudine*' convict ship by Henry Ryan, Surgeon, 21 August 1821, f. 2; see also NA MS ADM 101/1/2/1, Medical Journal of the '*Adamant*' convict ship, 4 April 1821, f. 5; NA, MS ADM 101/46/6/3, Medical Journal of the '*Malabar*', male convict ship, 11 July 1821, f. 24.

⁸² NA, MS ADM 101/46/6/3, Journal of the '*Malabar*', 5 July 1821, f. 24.

confined to bread and water for twenty-four hours, a punishment at once humiliating and uncomfortable.⁸³

Perhaps the most remarkable and graphic illustration of the experience of forced shaving is that provided by John Thomas Perceval, confined in an asylum near Bristol in 1830, suffering from 'derangement and melancholy'.⁸⁴ His beard was a central element in discussions about his sanity. It is clear, for example, that Perceval's family considered his habit of wearing long hair in ringlets and a full beard as symptomatic of his mental decline, and both factored in their efforts to have him confined. On at least one occasion Perceval believed that had received a direct command from Christ to grow his hair and beard long, although he later argued that such 'fancies ... had dissipated long ago', and that his decision was thence little more than the exercise of free will and adherence to nature.⁸⁵ Whatever his motivations, his account shows authorities were perfectly prepared to use force to compel shaving. On one occasion, he lashed out at a keeper who had attempted 'to collar me and to force me to come and be shaved'.⁸⁶ On another, hearing voices inside his head, taunting him for his submissiveness to the rules, Perceval resolved to wear his hair and beard long. This decision resulted in a violent struggle with several asylum keepers, one of whom dislocated Perceval's thumb, another knelt on his stomach, while a third 'seized my throat to suffocate me into submission', before he finally yielded to the razor.⁸⁷ Sometimes his facial hair was arbitrarily removed as a direct form of punishment or 'treatment'. As part of the 'degradation and insult' he endured at the hands of unscrupulous keepers, 'I have had my whiskers cut off, which I have not touched, or suffered anyone to touch since I grew up [and] I have also had them shaved nearly off'.⁸⁸ Chief among Perceval's objections, however, was the 'filthy manner in which I was shaved'.⁸⁹ He was, as he noted, 'shaved in a room full of servants and patients and ... washed in the dirty water others had been using', before being 'wiped with the servants' begrimed towel'.⁹⁰ Only when Perceval was transferred to another institution in Ticehurst, Sussex, was he allowed to grow his beard.⁹¹

Institutional barbering

If, as seems clear, many institutions did require the regular shaving of inmates, who carried out the task? It is easy to assume that shaving was an act done *to* patients or prisoners, not by them. There were, of course, practical reasons for not allowing

⁸³ NA, MS ADM 101/63/6/2, Journal of the Convict Ship 'Recovery', 14 March 1823, f. 4. See also the entry for 21 March 1823, f. 5, for a similar punishment.

⁸⁴ John Thomas Perceval, *A Narrative of the Treatment Experienced by a Gentleman, during a State of Mental Derangement* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1840), 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22, 348.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

paupers, prisoners and, perhaps especially, asylum patients access to sharp instruments like scissors or razors, not least of which was suicide. To give one example from the many, Joseph Farari, a patient at Saint Bartholomew's hospital, was found in the 'Lazarm [*sic*] ward' in 1795 with his throat cut and a razor in his hand, with part of his beard reportedly shaved off. Witnesses, including the house surgeon, testified that Farari had been allowed to shave himself and had probably cut his own throat.⁹² In prisons the need to keep dangerous men away from lethally sharp blades might seem even greater. And yet there is good evidence to show that many prisons did entrust convicts with razors and expected them to shave themselves and each other. The committee of aldermen appointed to visit gaols across England in the early nineteenth century noted the practice, in Woodbridge Bridewell, Suffolk, of requiring all prisoners to wash themselves twice a week, with the men 'obliged to shave themselves on every Wednesday and Saturday'.⁹³ In Manchester City Gaol too, prisoners shaved themselves, or were shaved by each other, under supervision of an officer.⁹⁴ The obvious dangers of the practice are highlighted by the murder of a prisoner in Millbank Penitentiary in 1853, whose throat was cut with a razor. In the subsequent inquest, the coroner asked whether it was usual for prisoners to shave themselves and be left alone with a razor, and was told that four razors were given out and the prisoners left to themselves to shave.⁹⁵ A similar incident in the Hotspur Street Compter in 1843 prompted the magistrate to suspend the practice of prisoners being allowed to shave their fellow convicts there.⁹⁶

Perhaps to lessen the burden on keepers, or even as a result of the reluctance of their own staff to do it, from the early eighteenth century, many institutions employed barbers to undertake the shaving of workhouse and asylum inmates. Among the first recorded, around 1680, was the Bridewell Royal Hospital, who employed John Cockery to 'shave the lunaticks in the Hospital of Bethlem'.⁹⁷

Between 1725 and 1742, St Martin's Workhouse in London made regular payments to a number of individuals for shaving the poor there, as well as purchasing razors, scissors and bowls to be kept in the house.⁹⁸ The workhouse for the parish of St Giles in London employed a barber to 'shave all the men patients every Saturday', presumably, as outside, in preparation for Sunday service.⁹⁹ The records of a number of London

⁹² London Metropolitan Archives, MS CL/IC 65008/00197, City of London Coroners' Inquests into Suspicious Deaths, Inquest into Death of Joseph Farari, 2 April 1795.

⁹³ Anon., *Report from the Committee of Aldermen Appointed to Visit Several Gaols in England, Dated the 19th Day of September 1815* (London: Nichols, Son and Bentley, 1816), 152.

⁹⁴ Westmoreland Epiphany Sessions, *Kendal Mercury*, 11 January 1851, 3. See also 'Shaving of Prisoners in Forfar Jail', *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review* (9 January 1863): 7; 'County Prisons', *Stroud Journal* (4 January 1873): 2; 'Extraordinary Suicide of a Prisoner in Leeds Borough Jail', *Bradford Daily Telegraph* (3 June 1875): 2.

⁹⁵ 'Suicide of a Convict', *Morning Post* (11 January 1853).

⁹⁶ 'Police', *London Evening Standard* (27 May 1843): 3. See also 'Shaving of Prisoners in Forfar Jail', *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review* (9 January 1863): 7.

⁹⁷ Bethlem Museum Archives, MS BCB 18, Bridewell Royal Hospital, Minute Book of the Court of Governors, 7 February 1710, 529.

⁹⁸ City of Westminster Archives, MS F22212, St Martin's Workhouse, 'Fortnightly Extraordinary', ff. 3, 17, 27, 33, 51, 55, 29.

⁹⁹ Anon., *Hints and Cautions for the Information of the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parishes of St. Giles in the Fields and St. George, Bloomsbury* (London: Publisher unknown, 1797), 39.

workhouses and asylums and those of provincial workhouses across the country support the use of barbers as a fairly standard practice. By the end of the eighteenth century, payments to barbers can regularly be found among asylum bills and receipts. In St Luke's hospital in London, the Shoreditch barber and peruke-maker John Shafe was paid nine pounds twice annually for 'shaving the patients'.¹⁰⁰ This arrangement began around 1780 – some thirty years after the hospital first opened. In 1836, the Abingdon board of guardians employed John Abel as the barber of the workhouse, on the basis that he was to shave the children's hair every month and shave the male paupers once a week.¹⁰¹

In general, however, barbers did not appear among the permanent staff of institutions but were instead usually employed on contract or paid piecemeal. There were some exceptions, such as in the Manchester Infirmary in 1837, where a barber was paid fourteen pounds for 'shaving the patients'.¹⁰² Another was the Wakefield House of Correction in Yorkshire, which listed a barber among its officers and servants, paid the relatively large sum of thirty pounds per annum, although it is worth noting that his was the second lowest salary and fully twenty pounds less than the House's porter, miller, baker and watchman, suggesting, again, a low status.¹⁰³ Most commonly they were paid ad hoc, either weekly or for longer periods of work. Particularly in the nineteenth century, some authorities put services out to tender, advertising in newspapers. Along with calls for contracts from butchers, grocers and bakers, the Cambridge Union advertised for a hairdresser to undertake shaving and haircutting in the workhouse in 1839.¹⁰⁴ In 1856 the Billericay Union put out a tender for a 'Barber to shave the paupers in the house twice a week'.¹⁰⁵ The rules of the Bridewell and Bethlem hospitals contained detailed instructions as to the barber's duties. Here, he was directed to shave the patients and servants of the hospital at least once a week and was responsible for the provision of 'clean and proper shaving cloths and towels' in the room before he began his task.¹⁰⁶ A further rule setting out the tasks of the 'Third Assistant Keeper or Basket Man' suggests that he was to attend the barber once a week, but it is unclear whether this was to assist in the task, or be shaved himself.¹⁰⁷

As did their colleagues in urban barbershops, institutional barbers constantly complained about the low pay and poor working conditions. John Cockery, barber at the Bridewell Royal Hospital in London, petitioned for higher wages in 1710. Claiming to have shaved the inmates, officers and servants there for more than thirty

¹⁰⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, MS H64/D05/003, St Luke's Hospital Receipt Book, 1780–88. See entries for 31 December 1780, 31 July 1781, 31 December 1781, etc.

¹⁰¹ Berkshire Record Office, MS GA1/1, Minute Book of Abingdon Union Board of Guardians, 1835–6, entry 31 March 1836.

¹⁰² Anon., *Report of the State of the Manchester Royal Infirmary, Dispensary, Lunatic Hospital and Asylum from June 24th 1837 to June 24th 1838* (Manchester: J. Hayward, 1838), 11.

¹⁰³ Anon., *Third Report*, 618.

¹⁰⁴ 'Cambridge Union', *Cambridge Independent Press* (14 September 1839). See also 'Newbury Union Provisions', *Berkshire Chronicle* (5 March 1842); 'Whitby', *York Herald* (21 May 1864).

¹⁰⁵ 'Billericay Union', *Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties* (10 September 1856).

¹⁰⁶ Anon., *Standing Rules and Orders of the Royal Hospitals of Bridewell and Bethlem* (London: Publisher unknown, 1792), 49.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

years, Cockery complained that he had originally received the sum of twelvecence per head, which decreased, first, to ninepence and, then, to threepence, amounting to a salary between £50 and £60 per year.¹⁰⁸ On finding the sum arbitrarily slashed by the committee to £30 per year, he complained that he had lost his shop business, 'grown antient' and had even been attacked by the 'lunaticks'.¹⁰⁹ Aside from the issue of pricing, it is interesting to note the length of time that Cockery had spent at the hospital, suggesting the regularity of the practice of shaving and also the potential longevity of the relationship with the individual barber. In 1776, the Cumberland barber James Noble petitioned the Westmorland Quarter Sessions, claiming that he had not been paid despite shaving the prisoners of the Appleby County Gaol for the previous two years.¹¹⁰

Even a century later, matters had not improved, and the *Hairdressers' Journal* sardonically congratulated the 'fortunate individual' who would obtain the advertised contract for shaving and haircutting in the Ipswich Union, at one-and-a-half pence per dozen: 'Truly the trade must feel itself elevated indeed by the conduct of this enterprising contractor', with the barber forced to shave 'two customers for a farthing'.¹¹¹ For working four days a week from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. in the Islington workhouse, the barber there received a salary of twelve shillings per week – an amount he claimed was too low. To make ends meet he had to shave and cut the hair 'of hundreds a week in the workhouse' as well as 'cutting the hair of the children at the schools'.¹¹² The same year, John Williams, barber of St Pancras workhouse, submitted a list of grievances, from pressure of numbers to his poor dinner allowance, threatening to resign. His strongarm tactics backfired since the board immediately accepted his resignation and advertised for a new, salaried barber.¹¹³ The numbers of 'clients' involved suggest that institutional barbers would have been very busy and may even have struggled to cope with the task alone. In September 1726, barber William Blockley was paid the large salary of twelve pounds per annum, for 'Trimming the Officers and Pensioners' of Greenwich hospital that year, totalling 6,633 shaves at halfpenny per head.¹¹⁴ Although it is entirely possible that Blockley spent every single day of the year shaving eighteen patients per day, it seems far more likely that he took on helpers to share the workload. The 1833 accounts of the County Gaol of Fisherton Anger, Wiltshire, are explicit in allocating four pounds per annum for shaving the prisoners 'which is shared between the three Turnkeys'.¹¹⁵ As noted in Chapter 3, too, apprentices were sometimes used as assistants to barbers in shaving prisoners.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ Bethlem Museum Archives, MS BCB 18, Bridewell Royal Hospital, Minute Book of the Court of Governors, 7 February 1710, 529.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Cumbria Archive Centre, MS WQ/SR/403/14, Westmorland Quarter Sessions Michaelmas Rolls, 1776, Petition of James Noble, undated.

¹¹¹ Anon., 'A Nut to Crack for Hairdressers', *Hairdressers' Journal*, 9:1 (1 July 1867): 3.

¹¹² Anon., 'A Workhouse Barber', *Hairdressers' Journal*, 253:10 (17 June 1876): 98.

¹¹³ Anon., 'Resignation of a Barber', *Hairdressers' Journal*, 256:10 (5 August 1876): 123.

¹¹⁴ NA, MS ADM/68/374, Greenwich Hospital Accounts, 1 July–30 September 1726, unpaginated. I am very grateful to Dr Judy Stephenson of Oxford University for sharing this reference.

¹¹⁵ Anon., *Third Report*, 616.

¹¹⁶ Thomas Legg, *Low-Life: or One Half of the World, Knows Not How the Other Half Live, Being a Critical Account of What Is Transacted by People of Almost All Religions, Nations, Circumstances, and*

But, aside from the low pay and high numbers of prisoners to be shaved, there were also potential dangers to barbers, especially when shaving patients with psychological illness. In the Bridewell and Bethlem hospitals, for example, keepers were required to accompany patients to the barber, stay with them while they were being shaved and 'take them away as soon as shaved'.¹¹⁷ This was presumably to ensure that the patients could not inflict harm on themselves, or the barber, either by acquiring the razor or attempting a struggle. There were certainly physical dangers in trying to shave the faces of men with mental illness. In 1827 the barber of Hendon Workhouse reported his difficulties in shaving an 'alleged lunatic' there, because the man would frequently leap from his chair with his face half shaved and walk around the room. Apart from the unpredictability of his attacks, the barber feared he could accidentally cut the man's throat.¹¹⁸

As the case of John Perceval's experiences at the hands of the asylum keepers highlights too, the homosocial dynamics of the barber-customer relationship were dramatically shifted within the confines of an institution. The shaved man, for example, was no longer a paying customer, but a potentially unwilling and unruly participant. Away from the familiar and largely jocular surroundings of the 'civilian' barbershop, the workhouse (or prison) barber was now the instrument of the authorities paid, if necessary, to exert force. The role of the barber as a conduit of homosocial relations, therefore, almost certainly operated differently within institutional walls. One exception, perhaps unique, is the Marshalsea debtor's prison. The Marshalsea was separated into two distinct sections: the 'common side' and the 'master's side'. While the 'common side' was the notoriously squalid accommodation in which poor and desperate debtors and beggars were housed, the 'master's side' contained those who still had some means to pay their way. Although imprisoned, they had freedom of movement, could even leave the Marshalsea to seek work and had access to some material comforts, including a chop house and coffee house.¹¹⁹ It was also home to a prisoner-turned-barber, known as 'Trim'. The diary of the Italian musician John Grano, sent to the Marshalsea in 1728, records several examples of having been shaved by 'Trim', sometimes as frequently as twice in a week.¹²⁰ For Grano, whose usual acquaintances had included royalty and prominent society figures and presumably other men in the Marshalsea of similar status, being able not only to maintain appearance but also to pay for and choose the time of the act was a reassuring link with normality and the polite world beyond the prison walls. Unlike those on the 'common side' here was choice and agency over personal appearance.

Even despite the hardships noted by barbers, the attainment of a workhouse contract at least provided a regular income and some measure of security. For their part, however, some institutions began to question the financial necessity and even the propriety of engaging barbers to shave prisoners and inmates. In January 1851 the *Kendal Mercury* published the report of the new governor of Appleby County Gaol

Sizes of Understanding, in the Twenty-Four Hours, between Saturday-Night and Monday-Morning (London: Printed for John Lever, 1764), 52.

¹¹⁷ Anon., *Standing Rules Bridwell and Bethlem*, 52.

¹¹⁸ 'Lunacy', *Times* (23 January 1827): 3.

¹¹⁹ John Ginger (ed.), *Handel's Trumpeter: The Diary of John Grano* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1998), 44–5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

and his recommendations for the improvement of conditions. One was the dismissal of the barber since the 'evils calculated to arise from [shaving prisoners] are of no light character'.¹²¹ The comment was seemingly prompted by the propensity of the barber to spread gossip and convey information from prisoners to contacts outside. The *Leicester Journal* was perhaps only half joking when it suggested that the Board of Guardians at the Leicester Workhouse, 'whose regard for economy is well known' could save the quarterly cost of five pounds paid to a barber by allowing inmates to join the beard movement.¹²²

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the rise of institutional shaving from the early eighteenth century, the contexts in which it took place and the rigorousness with which it was enforced, as well as the practitioners involved. Before concluding it is worth returning to the question of precisely *why* removing facial hair was so obviously important. Frustratingly, institutional records are virtually silent as to precise motivations, but it is certainly worth some conjecture. Hygiene, as we have seen, was an obvious factor, and keeping the hair and beards of inmates short and clean removed an obvious vector for the spread of vermin. To be (literally) clean-shaven also afforded a neat, regimented appearance. Another possibility, though probably unlikely, is that the removal of prisoners' beards followed the prevailing fashion which, after all, for the majority of the period under discussion here, was to be clean-shaven. The fact that shaving continued seemingly unabated once beards grew in fashion after 1850 militates against this, although it does seem that at least some institutions relaxed their strictures during this period to allow prisoners to grow beards.

This leaves the problematic issue of control. As we have seen, the regulation and standardization of hair and beards dovetails neatly with the concept of 'uniform' and, in a sense, the removal of individual identity. Taking away an individual's agency regarding the length and style of their facial hair was a powerful statement of their subjection to institutional rules and their immersion within the system. Given the power of the beard as a symbol of innate masculinity too, and particularly after 1850, it is tempting to view the removal of facial hair in punitive institutions as an attempt to symbolically emasculate prisoners. While control fits well with prisons and, to some degree, with workhouses, it does not necessarily reflect the provision of shaving in hospitals or asylums. Perhaps more accurate is to say that institutions removed the element of individual choice in growing or removing facial hair. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the act of shaving was a defining element in masculine performance. In regulating the practice, frequency and nature of shaving, institutions acted to deny men the opportunity to determine their own appearance, either by shaving themselves or choosing to visit a barber. It was perhaps this *loss* of control that was most keenly felt.

¹²¹ 'Westmoreland Epiphany Sessions', 3.

¹²² 'A Financial Aspect of the Beard Movement', *Leicester Journal* (7 July 1854).