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Economies of shaving, c. 1650–1750

On 25 May 1713, Richard Steele's *Guardian* newspaper ran a short article purporting to be a rebuke to the editor for his tatty appearance. It was signed by a group of 'capital artificers', including a noted haircutter Bartholomew Pidgeon, a barber, the perfumer Charles Lillie and a wig-maker. These 'cephalic operators' begged his 'more frequent attention to the mechanic arts' and humbly offered their services. With regard to the beard, 'Longbotham, above all the rest of mankind, is skilful in taking off that horrid excrescence on the chins of all males, and casting by the touch of his hand, a cheerfulness where that excrescence grew.'¹ Even with its humorous tone, the point of the letter was clear. By the early eighteenth century, the clean-shaven face had become an essential element in the conveyance of manliness. Barbers, unsurprisingly, argued that it was their place, not that of the individual man, to fashion the head and face.

But the true situation was not necessarily as straightforward as the 'capital artificers' would have it. In her brief study of barbers and shaving, Susan Vincent has drawn on the experiences of three early modern diarists – Pepys, Woodforde and Swift, to interrogate the place of the barber in male grooming. Vincent argues that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men used barbers interchangeably with shaving themselves, and that the provision and quality of barbering services varied widely.² The small scale of this study, though, raises questions about the typicality of the experience. Each of the three individuals chosen were from the south of England and two from London, and between them span more than a hundred years, leaving little sense of change over time. The issue of social status is also relevant. Can Pepys's experiences in mid-seventeenth-century London be easily comparable either with those of James Woodforde in rural Oxfordshire or Norfolk a century later, or of the urban or rural poor?

It is clear that the frequency with which men shaved in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – and who performed the act – depended on many factors,

¹ Robert Lynam (ed.), *The Guardian: With a Biographical, Historical and Critical Preface, Volume 1* (London: Printed for Cowie, Low, 1826), 253–4. Despite their unusual names, Longbotham, Lillie and Pigeon were real men, based in St Clement Dane's Parish, on the Strand. For 'Bat Pidgeon', see John Nelson, *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Islington* (London: Privately printed, 1829), 88.

² Susan Vincent, 'Men's Hair: Managing Appearance in the Long Eighteenth Century', in Hannah Greig, Jane Hamlett and Leonie Hannan (eds), *Gender and Material Culture in Britain since 1500* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 54.

including location (and access to a barber), social position, fashion, individual preference and necessity. Also important is the issue of change over time. In the 1660s, for example, the wearing of some form of facial hair was still relatively common. By 1700, however, the opposite was true. The role of the barber thus changed subtly according to fashion and the requirements of individual customers. How, then, did men in the long eighteenth century experience shaving, both in their interactions with the barber and in performing the task themselves? Relatively little is known about the relationship between barber and customer, even for some of the most basic questions. How often did men visit barbers to be shaved? What was the cost of shaving and how did it vary by region, status or practitioner? Also, how did the growing trend for the clean-shaven face from the later seventeenth century affect the role, and even the status and wealth, of the barber? This chapter first samples a broad range of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century diaries, along with records of barber accounts and payments, from across Britain, to address the frequency, costs and consumption of barber services. As will be shown, such sources reveal little uniformity in the use or costs of barber services.

Second, it explores the nature and frequency of self-shaving, arguing that, before the mid-eighteenth century, the practice was probably not as widespread as Vincent's case studies might suggest. Factors including the cost and inconvenience of purchasing shaving materials, the sometimes awkward act of shaving itself, the absence of instruction manuals and the easy availability of barbers and even servants to perform the task, all militate against self-shaving as the main, or even perhaps a regular, method of depilation by the majority of men.

There are obvious evidential problems in addressing such questions, not least the fact that the overwhelming majority of barber visits likely went unrecorded. Unless something remarkable occurred, or the diarist was preternaturally disposed to record the minutiae of their day, there was generally little reason to record such a mundane task. Contemporary diary references are necessarily skewed to middle and upper levels of society where, it could be argued, attention to the minutiae of personal appearance was closely bound up with self-fashioning and appearance in public. Also, aside from a few exceptional cases it is extremely difficult to gauge the regularity either of barber visits or self-shaving. As the chapter suggests, the cost of barbering was also by no means uniform and varied greatly depending on location and status. Investigating the economics of shaving is frustrated by the lack of separation between shaving and other barbering services in household and barber's accounts. Thus, a generic payment 'to the barber' could encompass shaving, haircutting and any of the ancillary medico-hygienic procedures he undertook. Even the terminologies used to describe these procedures are not straightforward. The word 'shaving', for example, is problematic since it could refer to depilation of either (or both) the face and head. 'Trimming' was another word used interchangeably and could refer variously to shaving (again, head, face or both), haircutting and perhaps wig-dressing too. In 1681 the barber Bartholomew Pigeon visited Sir William Kingsmill daily, for which he charged a shilling. Whereas most days on the bill, covering three months, merely have a line and the charge, every third day, the word 'shav'd' appears in the list, with the price rising to two shillings and sixpence, apparently indicating days on which the face was

shaved as well.³ Having a barber visit daily might appear excessive but, before the end of the eighteenth century, it was apparently common for gentlemen without valets to be dressed every morning by a barber and have their 'face shaved very clean, and the hair of the head loaded with powder and pomatum, before being arranged according to the mode'.⁴

Acknowledging these limitations, however, it is still possible to reconstruct something of the consumption of barber services in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries through a qualitative study of barber interactions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century diaries. As will be shown, men shaved themselves and also used barbers, but it was the latter that remained the primary source of shaving at least before the mid-eighteenth century. Many men employed barbers regularly and bargained with them for their services over relatively long periods. The frequency of shaving raises a number of questions about barbering in the long eighteenth century, including the regularity with which barbers were employed, the relationship between shop businesses and home visits and the costs of their services. As the chapter will also show, the issue of frequency also raises further questions about accepted norms of male appearance and the potential social acceptability of stubble.

Visiting the barber

The barber was an important figure in the lives of early modern men. Among all medical practitioners, it was barbers with whom men came into most frequent contact. As the previous chapter showed, barbering required close proximity to, and intimate contact with, the customer's body. On one level this required trust; to lie prone and submit to the swiping of a potentially deadly blade around some of the most vulnerable and sensitive areas of the neck and face required some faith on the part of the customer that the barber was skilful enough not to cut his throat. It also called for the suspension of propriety or embarrassment relating to the potentially foul emissions of the body. As well as removing the 'excremental' remnants of the beard it was, after all, the barber (and barber-surgeon) who picked and pulled carious teeth, scraped the sanious effluvia off the tongue, dug globs of wax out of ears and hived off the fetid scurf and dandruff accumulated after weeks of wig-wearing.⁵ Allowing the barber access to these intimate and unpleasant matters was not just to acknowledge their existence, but to freely open them up to scrutiny. While there were certainly female barbers, the close relationship between male barbers and men's bodies rendered this a predominantly homosocial encounter. It was, as Vincent notes, a relationship that could be cultivated; the practice of billing customers by the quarter (known as the barber's quarterage)

³ Hampshire Record Office, MS 19 M61/1666, Barber's bill from Bartholomew Pidgeon to Sir William Kingsmill, June 1651.

⁴ Joseph Simms, *Nature's Revelation of Character* (London: Printed for the author, 1873), 527.

⁵ Margaret Pelling, 'Appearance and Reality: Barber-Surgeons, the Body and Disease', in A. L. Beier and Roger Finlay (eds), *The Making of the Metropolis: London, 1500–1700* (London: Longman, 1986), 95; Sandra Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body in Early Modern Italy: Identities, Families and Masculinities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 55.

enabled longstanding links to be established and trust to be built over time.⁶ But an examination of contemporary diaries also suggests that men were active agents in securing the best prices for barber services and did not necessarily always use the same barber for long periods of time.

There was certainly little uniformity in how often men took up the services of the barber, or in the ways that they recorded such encounters. Many barbers were paid quarterly – or sometimes even yearly – on account, a practice that unfortunately obscures the frequency of services. In 1717, for example, Thomas Milward, a Stourbridge attorney paid ‘Mr Hopkins the barber [for] 1 yrs shaving and powdring me’, but the number or frequency of visits covered by this sum is unknown, as is whether ‘shaving’ referred to the head, face, or both.⁷ In the mid-seventeenth century the Oxford antiquary Anthony Wood was diligent in his regular payment, over several years, of ‘quarteridge’, while others, like the Reverend Giles Moore, vicar of Horstead Keynes in Sussex, combined aggregate payments with ad hoc sums for individual visits.⁸ The diary of Thomas Mort, lord of the manor of Astley, Lancashire, also suggests that shaving could simply be done at need, rather than on a regular, fixed basis. An entry in December 1708 recorded that he simply paid his barber Thomas Green ‘when he trims me ... but doe not sett it downe’.⁹

In other cases, individual barber visits were separately accounted for, allowing some insight into the frequency of shaving. It is not clear, however, whether these men were visiting a barber in their shop, or whether the barber was attending them in their own houses. The account books of Sir John Foulis of Ravelston, a wealthy Edinburgh baronet, in the late seventeenth century, contain various entries for barbering services. In January 1680 he recorded a single payment to the barber John Wood. There were no entries in February 1680, but four the following month, on the 9th, 16th and 24th and again on the 27th, including one payment to Wood ‘for razing me’. This suggests visits to (or by) the barber roughly once a week. There is no mention of the barber in Foulis’s accounts for April 1680, but on 13 May he paid John Wood ‘for cutting my hair and barbourising me’.¹⁰ The irregularity of payments might suggest intermittent use and perhaps that he shaved himself in-between. On two occasions in 1705, there is a reference to the payment of the barber’s quarterage.¹¹ It is also worth noting that, while Foulis generally preferred John Wood, others were also involved, including barbers James Peacock and George Gourdone, a ‘barber lad [who] tooke of my bearde’ and a

⁶ Vincent, ‘Men’s Hair’, 55–6.

⁷ J. W. Willis-Bund (ed.), *A History of the County of Worcester, Volume 3* (London: Constable, 1913), 221–3. See also Huntington Library, Battle Abbey MSS, Vol. 3, no. 2, Cash accounts of Sir Thomas Webster, 27 December 1722. Webster paid ‘Mr Raycourt’ £2 for half a year’s shaving.

⁸ Andrew Clark (ed.), *Life and Times of Anthony Wood* (Oxford: Oxford History Society, 1891–1907), 210, 229, 238, 254, 260, etc.; Sussex Archaeology Society, *Sussex Archaeological Collections, Illustrating the History and Antiquities of the County* (London: John Russell Smith, 1848), 71, 76, 114.

⁹ Huntington Library MS HM 72811, account book of Thomas Mort (c.1648–1725), entry unpaginated/unfoliated, entry for 27 December 1708. I am very grateful to Sara Pennell for passing on these examples and alerting me to Mort’s book.

¹⁰ A. W. Cornelius Hallen (ed.), *The Account Book of Sir John Foulis of Ravelston, 1671–1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1894), 18, 26–8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 367, 399.

servant.¹² The continuation of payments over a relatively long period, though, does at least imply regularity and consistency in the consumption of barber services.

The 1665–76 journals of the prominent Edinburgh jurist Sir John Lauder, Lord Fountainhall, are more suggestive, recording regular visits to the barber usually once or twice a week, for which payment was made each time.¹³ Like those of Foulis, Lauder's records show that shaving was undertaken by a variety of individuals, including barbers in various locations and a servant.¹⁴ The diary of Roger Whitley, royalist officer and later Member of Parliament for Flint, north Wales, also suggests weekly visits. Whitley regularly saw the barber to be trimmed, most often on Saturdays, presumably in readiness for his appearance at Sunday service.¹⁵ In other cases, however, as with Bartholomew Pigeon's visits to Sir William Kingsmill, it seems that two or three shaves per week was the norm.¹⁶ In seventeenth-century Westminster, Robert Phillips declared himself to be 'John Powell's barber', the use of the possessive adjective suggesting something of the exclusivity of this relationship.¹⁷ Phillips noted that he shaved Powell 'some times thrice, some times twice and at other times but once a week', as well as washing his feet and sometimes performing other tasks such as cutting corns.¹⁸ The costs of such indulgence were probably too prohibitive to be available to any but the wealthiest, however.

It is clear that charges for an individual shave varied widely according to location and probably also with status. The issue of where the shave was carried out also further complicates the matter. It might be assumed, for example, that payments to a barber to minister to a customer in their own home would be higher, reflecting the extra time, travel and trouble on the part of the barber. It might equally be countered, however, that the cost of maintaining a shop, its fixtures, fittings and materials, might make this the more expensive option. It is difficult to assess from extant sources. While there was almost no inflation between the mid-seventeenth and later eighteenth centuries, in general, there was little standardization in prices, and the amounts paid could vary from a few pence for a shave, to a shilling or more.¹⁹ At the lower end of the payment scale, for example, in Lancashire in 1708, Thomas Mort paid a penny to be trimmed, while his contemporary, Colonel Thomas Tyldesley, paid fourpence and sixpence.²⁰

¹² Ibid., 90, 172, 218.

¹³ Donald Crawford (ed.), *Journals of Sir John Lauder, Lord Fountainhall, with His Observations on Public Affairs and Other Memoranda 1665–1676* (Scottish History Society, May 1930), 238, 240–3, 245–6, 251–2.

¹⁴ Ibid., 248, 251, 259.

¹⁵ British History Online, 'Roger Whitley's Diary: May 1686', in Michael Stevens and Honor Lewington (eds), *Roger Whitley's Diary 1684–1697*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/roger-whitley-diary/1684-97/may-1686> (accessed 21 October 2016).

¹⁶ Hampshire Record Office, MS 19M61/1666.

¹⁷ Quoted in Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London 1650–1750* (London: Methuen, 1994), 206.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Stephen Broadberry, Bruce M. S. Campbell, Alexander Klein, Mark Overton and Bas Van Leeuwen, *British Economic Growth, 1270–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 189–91; N. J. Mayhew, 'Prices in England, 1170–1750', *Past and Present*, 219 (May 2013): 4–5. I am grateful to Patrick Wallis for these references.

²⁰ Joseph Bellow and Anthony Hewitson (eds), *The Tyldesley Diary* (Preston: A. Hewitson, 1878), 30; Huntingdon Library MS HM 72811, account book of Thomas Mort, entry for 27 December 1708.

Sir John Lauder's accounts record twenty-seven different payments to Edinburgh barbers, including sixpence, ninepence, a groat, a mark and a shilling. In 1754, the Bristol barber Henry Harnes advertised his prices and services, with a shave costing twopence – a penny less than a haircut.²¹ By far the most frequent payment, however, was for sixpence a shave, accounting for thirteen of the entries.²² In early modern London the usual price of a shave, plus dressing the wig, has been put at sixpence.²³ Others, however, seem to have paid more and, in some cases, barber companies could act to keep prices artificially high, as a means to regulate the trade. The guild book of the barber-surgeons of the City of York contains a specific ordinance stating that no barber was to shave for less than one shilling.²⁴ In 1659, Reverend Giles Moore paid one shilling (twelve pence) to William Batchelor 'for barbouring mee'.²⁵

The sum taken by the barber depended on many factors, from the price they charged to the time taken to shave, and how many shaves they could physically undertake in a day as well as the cost of materials. In theory, assuming that a shave took around thirty minutes, and a barber worked ten hours a day and charged sixpence per time, then, even if he took only threepence profit each time after costs, this equates to five shillings per day. If that is multiplied by 300 days, it represents an income of £75 which, in the seventeenth century, represented a solid middling income. Obviously, this is speculative since there were many variables. Shaves might take longer, especially if combined with other tasks. Income relied on a steady stream of customers and also varied in time and costs depending on whether the barber travelled to his customers. Even so, it does suggest the potential earnings that could be achieved by some barbers.

The custom of paying barbers quarterly on account was fairly common. Here again prices could vary considerably and also raise questions about the regularity of shaving. It is worth noting, for example, that some barber guilds enforced minimum pricing for quarterage – in this case referring to the cost per quarter, rather than the more usual use of the term, relating to dues payable to a guild. (In Shrewsbury, the original fifteenth-century ordinances for the barber-surgeons' guild put this figure at threepence, and this likely remained in place until the revision of the ordinances in 1662.²⁶) The accounts of Anthony Wood, noted above, contain twenty-three separate quarterly payments to his barber Thomas Haselwood varying from three shillings to four shillings and sixpence, averaging at just below four shillings.²⁷ In December 1656, for example, he 'Paid the barber 6s 6d whereof 4s was for his quarteridge, and 2s and 6d was for powder and mending of my periwig'.²⁸ In Wood's case, the price for quarterage

²¹ R. Milnes Walker, 'The Barber Surgeons of Bristol', *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal* 90 (1975): 56.

²² Crawford, *Journals*, 238, 240, 241, 242, 243, 245, 246, 251, 252, 259, 262, 264–5, 266–7, 248.

²³ This amount is given on the Old Bailey Online website, in an article about London wages. Frustratingly, the source is not given, so caution must be exercised: <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Coinage.jsp#reading>

²⁴ British Library, MS 2572, *Guild Book of the Barber Surgeons of York*, 15th–17th century, ff 14 b–34.

²⁵ Robert Willis Blencowe, 'Extracts from the Journal and Account Book of Timothy Burrell, Esq., Barrister at Law, of Ockenden House, Cuckfield from the Year 1683 to 1714', *Sussex Archaeological Collection III* (1850): 114.

²⁶ W. A. Leighton, 'The Guilds of Shrewsbury', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* 5 (1882): 267, 273. I am grateful to Margaret Pelling for drawing my attention to this source.

²⁷ Clark, *Life and Times*, 210, 215, 220, 238, 239, 254, 260, 264, 275.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

actually dropped over time from four to three shillings between the 1650s and the last entry in 1670. The Reverend Giles Moore sometimes paid annually for his barber, averaging three shillings per quarter.²⁹ For six quarters in 1698 and 1699, however, Sir George Sitwell paid the much higher price to his Edinburgh barber of seven shillings or more each time. In January 1698 he 'agreed wth my barber to trym me for 7 shillings per quarter. April 13th 1698, paid him 7 shillings for 1st quarter, July the 13th paid him 7 shillings for the second quarter, October the 13th paid him then the 3rd quarter, 7s 6d'.³⁰ It is possible that the higher prices reflected occasions when the barber came to him, and not vice versa. In April 1699 he noted paying five shillings for two months' shaving, giving a figure of two shillings and sixpence per month.³¹ Even well into the second half of the eighteenth century, quarterage still usually cost between three and five shillings. It is clear that individuals were active agents in negotiating prices for barber services. Some sources refer to this as a process of 'agreement'. In 1698, the Derbyshire baronet George Sitwell recorded that he had 'agreed with my barber to trym me for 7s per Quarter' and, in January the following year he 'agreed then with Ledder my barber to trym mee'.³² The diary of the Reverend Giles Moore also noted that he had 'agreed with William Batchelor of Lindfield to barbour mee'.³³ In November 1699, however, Sitwell also noted that he 'bargained with my barber by the quarter', again suggesting a process of negotiation, rather than a straightforward contract of work.³⁴ It is difficult to ascertain how many trims were covered under this blanket sum, but they are suggestive of either a major discount, or of fairly irregular shaving. At a figure of four shillings per quarter for example, assuming the common sum of sixpence per shave, this would only represent eight shaves in twelve weeks. Even with a 50 per cent discount, this would still only suggest one or two weekly shaves.

Evidence of the variety of corporeal tasks undertaken by barbers and barber-surgeons is also often reflected in account books and bills. Barber charges could vary according to the number and types of different tasks undertaken along with shaving. Entries in the 1714–28 diary of the West Sussex landowner Thomas Marchant show that he paid sixpence each time he had his face or head shaved, or a shilling when both were attended to.³⁵ Bloodletting was another common source of payment in accounts for barbering services. In 1659 barber William Batchelor was paid by Giles Moore for 'bleeding mee in bed'.³⁶ In January 1713 Tyldesley was let blood for a cold and stitch in his arm but there were suggestions that his barber was perhaps not best suited to his occupation: 'Tom Tomlinson, ye barber who shaved mee, was frighton [*sic*] with

²⁹ Blencowe, 'Giles Moore', 114.

³⁰ Sir George Sitwell, 'Pocket Almanacks at Renishaw, 1671–1721', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 12 (1890): 205.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

³² Sitwell, 'Pocket Almanacks', 205.

³³ Blencowe, 'Giles Moore', 76.

³⁴ Sitwell, 'Pocket Almanacks', 208.

³⁵ Anthony Bower (ed.), *A Fine Day in Hurstpierpoint: The Diary of Thomas Marchant, 1714–28* (Hurst: Hurst History Study Group, 2005), 73, 76, 79, 83, 93, 104, 110. See again the variations in Pigeon's bill to Sir William Kingsmill, Hampshire Record Office, MS 19M61/1666.

³⁶ Blencowe, 'Giles Moore', 71, 76.

the sight of ye blood'.³⁷ Haircutting was another obvious reason for payment. In 1671, and again in 1674, Sir John Lauder's payments included haircutting as well as shaving, which saw the price paid rise to between tenpence and a shilling.³⁸ Adam Eyre's barber almost certainly earned his sixpence fee in June 1647 when he cut Eyre's hair, 'which hath not been cutt this 3 yeres'.³⁹ Although by no means conclusive, it is nonetheless interesting to note that, in each of the cases discussed above, individuals were described as barbers in account entries, rather than barber-surgeons.

To briefly summarize, then, the cost of a single shave therefore varied widely, from as low as a penny to more than a shilling, with sixpence appearing quite common. This was doubtless affected by many factors, from the social status of the client to the abilities, reputation and status of the barber. Quarterage could also vary from between three to seven shillings per quarter, although it is more difficult to ascertain what proportion of this sum was attributable to shaving the face alone.

Turning to the issue of social status, what effect did the price of barber services have upon the ability of individuals – and especially the lower orders – to utilize barbers? Like other medical practitioners, it is likely that barbers and barber-surgeons tailored their prices to the pockets of their customers. Moreover, barbers themselves varied widely in status and income. Evidence from probate inventories in the previous chapter demonstrates the wide variations in the size, equipment and value of barbershop contents and suggests a social structure of barbering, catering to all needs. In towns, small scale, single-room businesses sat cheek by jowl with high-end, well-equipped barbershops, each serving different customer bases. By the early decades of the eighteenth century too, the 'penny shave' had become a common metaphor in popular culture for a cheap and cheerful (if not entirely risk-free) operation and could be used as an enticement on the shop sign.⁴⁰ In 1798, the barber George Charlemore of Brighton was keen to stress that he 'condescends to shave the poor almost *gratis*, viz, for a PENNY each'.⁴¹ Charity clearly didn't quite extend to a free shave! It is certainly not safe to assume that men of the lower orders were excluded from being shaved by the barber. The place of the barbershop as a space for socializing and gossip arguably made it more appealing to the lower orders. It would also be problematic to infer that attention to personal appearance was only of concern to middling and elite men. Nonetheless, it is still worth considering the financial outlay of visiting a barber, versus capacity to pay. The average wage of a day labourer in London in the second half of the seventeenth century has been estimated at between twenty and twenty-four pence per day.⁴² For craftsmen it was higher, at between roughly thirty and thirty-six pence per day.⁴³ In rural areas the amount was

³⁷ Bellow and Hewitson, *The Tyldesley Diary*, 70. I am grateful to Peter Tydesley of Exeter University for pointing out inconsistencies in the diary transcriptions.

³⁸ Crawford, *Journals of Sir John Lauder*, 241–6.

³⁹ Charles Jackson (ed.), *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Durham, NC: Surtees Society, 1877), 41.

⁴⁰ For example, see Banish'd Hermit, *Democritus, the Laughing Philosopher's Trip into England* (London: Printed for Sam Briscoe, 1723), 9.

⁴¹ W. C. A. Blew, *Brighton and Its Coaches: A History of the London and Brighton Road* (London: John Nimmo, 1893), 18.

⁴² Jeremy Boulton, 'Wage Labour in Seventeenth-Century London', *Economic History Review*, 49:2 (1996): 279.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 281.

likely to be lower still. If the popular trope of the penny shave is accurate then it was clearly affordable on a labourer's wage. But if the charges here are representative, then a shave by the barber would still amount to a substantial percentage of the daily wage, almost certainly ruling it out as a daily activity, and perhaps even one undertaken more than a couple of times per week. For middling or elite men these prices were unlikely to be prohibitive. But, for poorer men, a shave by the barber was more of a luxury than a necessity.

The issues of the frequency and costs of shaving also raise further questions about facial appearance, particularly lower down the social scale. As Chapter 2 showed, from the end of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, at least for middling and elite men, the clean-shaven face spoke of polite masculinity. A visible beard bore unfavourable connotations of loss of manly control and even of rustic backwardness. What, though, of stubble – the growth of beard hair after one or two days of not being shaved? As we have seen, for those able to pay, a daily shave was possible, although two or three times per week seems more likely. By the mid-eighteenth century, James Woodforde was regularly contracting barbers to visit him at first twice, then several times a week.⁴⁴ Assuming that he was shaved on every visit, Woodforde's face was seldom marked by more than a couple of days' growth of beard. But if shaving was undertaken less frequently lower down the social scale, visible beard growth must surely have been the norm, given that, for many men, stubble is visible after two or three days, and heavy after five.

It seems likely that being truly clean-shaven was restricted to certain days and contexts. Perhaps the most obvious motivation was in preparation for appearance in church – the 'hebdomadal' or once-weekly shave. While direct evidence that shaving was expected here is scarce, the onus was certainly on individuals to appear respectable in church, and that slovenliness was censured. A shaved face could therefore be regarded as part of what might be termed 'Sunday best'. As noted above, there is certainly evidence that some men were shaved on Saturdays, consistent with appearance the next day at church, and also since this was often wage day. For the less well off, this might have been the only impetus for a single weekly shave, leaving them with heavy stubble by the end of each week. This was not necessarily even limited to the lower orders. In 1666 Samuel Pepys noted that he rose early and 'shaved myself after a week's growth'.⁴⁵ Given his notoriously ambivalent attitude to church services and also how 'ugly' he felt this stubble had made him look, this may simply have reflected a desire to freshen the face and appearance rather than an attempt at corporeal piety. As well as church, however, shaving could take place in preparation for business activities. In both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the clean-shaven face appears to have been a standard of commercial or formal appearance and one that again made men conscious of their stubble. Both Pepys and Jonathan Swift felt ill at ease when conducting business in public without having been shaved and groomed.⁴⁶ Even a century later, Thomas Tyler, prisoner in a 1779 fraud case, testified that, when officers

⁴⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Vincent, 'Men's Hair', 49.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 54.

arrived to arrest him he was shaving 'as it was my usual mode to do so between ten and eleven o'clock, in preparation for "Change" – in other words to visit the Exchange.⁴⁷ For labourers and working men, though, the social performance of facial hair likely worked on a different level. Shaving may well have been an occasional activity, simply undertaken once they considered that their beard growth had become unruly, or they had the means, motivation and time to do so.⁴⁸

Taken in the round, even if shaving were undertaken at a frequency of two or three times a week, many (perhaps most) men must have displayed some growth of beard for much of the time and often probably several days' worth. To regard the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as 'beardless' is therefore perhaps to misunderstand the extent to which being truly clean-shaven was an achievable (or even wholly desirable) aim for large numbers of men in the long eighteenth century.

The emergence of self-shaving

So far, this chapter has explored the role of the barber as the provider of shaving, the potential frequency of barber visits and the costs involved. It now turns, however, to the question of self-shaving. It has been argued that self-shaving was fairly common in the seventeenth century. Vincent's evidence from the diaries of Pepys, Swift and Woodforde seems compelling, not only in revealing the practices through which they removed facial hair and the practitioners they patronized, but also the broader somatic and emotional feelings connected with the act of shaving itself.⁴⁹ The question is how typical their experiences were and how representative of men elsewhere in Britain. Was self-shaving commonplace across Britain, and across society, in the long eighteenth century?

A broad survey of published diaries between 1650 and 1740, written by men of various occupations, status and locations, reveals scant evidence of references either to shaving or barbers. Since shaving was a mundane task, many diarists likely saw little point in recording. But among those who did, it is interesting to note that none recorded shaving themselves. Some entries are admittedly ambiguous. In June 1680 Sir Richard Newdigate of Arbury, Warwickshire, recorded that he 'Four o'clock dined, five o'clock prayers and homily, six o'clock shaving and walked out; Eight o'clock prayers; undressed.'⁵⁰ It is not clear whether this implied that Newdigate shaved himself, or whether another performed the task. It is interesting to note that this was a Sunday and that he shaved in the evening *after* attending church earlier that day.⁵¹ The 1705

⁴⁷ Anon., Old Bailey Proceedings: Accounts of Criminal Trials (hereafter OB), Thomas Tyler, 20 October 1779, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div=t17791020-39&terms=shaving#highlight> (accessed 28 March 2018).

⁴⁸ For a fascinating discussion of Bulstrode Whitelocke's removal of his beard and the circumstances surrounding it, see Margaret Pelling, "'The Very Head and Front of My Offending': Beards, Portraiture and Self-Presentation in Early Modern England," in Jennifer Evans and Alun Withey (eds), *New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair: Framing the Face* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 66–7.

⁴⁹ Vincent, 'Men's Hair', 51, 54.

⁵⁰ Lady Newdigate, *Cavalier and Puritan in the Days of the Stuarts* (London: Smith, Elder, 1901), 124.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

diary of Jacob Bee of Durham also contains an entry, noting that 'I began with William Wood to shave and shaved one moneth'.⁵² This could imply that Wood was a barber with whom Bee had been shaved, but alternatively might suggest that he, and perhaps a friend, had undertaken to start shaving at the same time.

The very lack of references to barbers in diaries and account books could itself perhaps be read 'against the grain' as evidence for self-shaving, especially where the level of detail on other routine matters suggests that such encounters would normally be included. The diary of the Sussex barrister Timothy Burrell, between 1683 and 1717, included extremely detailed records of payments for medicines, medical practitioners and other 'tradesmen', but contains no references to barbers, shaving or trimming.⁵³ Joseph Taylor's 1705 travel diary likewise recorded a host of detailed and intimate encounters with local people and customs over several months as he travelled, including such minutiae as obtaining a drink of water from an elderly woman. And yet, neither shaving, barbers or haircutting were mentioned.⁵⁴ Similarly, the accounts of the first Earl of Bristol, Sir John Hervey, are diligent in their records of payments for medicines, clothes and various goods and services but, again, contain nothing relating to shaving. Coincidentally, however, an entry in Hervey's diary in 1715 does show a payment for wigs and cutting his son's hair, made to Bartholomew Pidgeon, noted in the chapter introduction.⁵⁵ The lack of payments or references to barbers might suggest each man was shaving himself or, as with Hervey, having a servant do it for them. A further note of caution should be raised, however, regarding the nature of each of these sources as published editions. It is of course entirely possible that their Victorian editors saw little point in including such a prosaic task in their transcriptions and simply excised them.

In considering the propensity of men to shave themselves, it is worth considering the market for shaving utensils in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. From where would men buy razors and shaving materials? The proliferation of newspaper advertising and other mechanisms such as trade cards was extant before 1700, but there is little actual evidence for razor advertising before the mid-eighteenth century. Clearly this does not prove that they were not available, or even that they were not advertised or sold informally. Razor-makers could certainly be found in large towns and especially in centres of metal production, and they presumably sold to both retail and trade, although the latter were most likely the largest consumers. Cutlers might also sell razors and shaving tackle, along with other, somewhat surprising, retailers. In July 1702, for example, the 'so much fam'd strops for setting razors' were available at Jacob's Coffee House in Threadneedle Street in London and were 'very useful to all persons, Especially Surgeons, barbers &c'.⁵⁶

But early modern steel razors were notoriously difficult to sharpen and maintain. Before the mid-eighteenth century the type of steel used in their construction was prone to brittleness, meaning that razors required constant maintenance. Once

⁵² Surtees Society, *Six North Country Diaries* (Durham, NC: Andrews, 1910), 64.

⁵³ See Blencowe, 'Extracts', 117–72.

⁵⁴ William Cowan (ed.), *A Journey to Edenborough in Scotland* (Edinburgh: W. Brown, 1903).

⁵⁵ Anon, *The Diary of John Hervey, First Earl of Bristol, with Extracts from His Book of Expenses from 1688–1742* (Wells: Ernest Jackson, 1894), 102.

⁵⁶ Advertisement, 'so much fam'd razor strop', *Post Man and Historical Account* (23 July 1702).

the edge was blunted beyond the capabilities of a domestic strop, the services of a professional grinder would be required. Between 1674 and 1678, William Cunningham of Craigends, Renfrewshire, regularly sent his razors to the towns of Paisley or St. Johnston to be resharpened. In 1674, this was done every two or three months, at a cost of two shillings per razor. In February 1676 he paid four shillings 'for sharpening a razour and penknife'.⁵⁷ It also seems that he purchased shaving supplies by post. On 11 March 1678, for example, three shillings were paid 'for 4 ounces Sope to raze me with'.⁵⁸ Thomas Mort's also paid his regular barber for grinding old and new razors.⁵⁹ The fact that both men owned and maintained their own razors and also purchased soap strongly suggests that they shaved themselves, or kept shaving paraphernalia at their homes for use by servants or perhaps visiting barbers. Owning razors and shaving products also did not mean that barbers were not utilized. Sir John Foulis of Ravelston kept and maintained his own razors, but also regularly visited barbers.⁶⁰

Such examples also highlight the function of barbers as retailers of shaving goods as well as providers of services. A 1681 bill from barber Bartholomew Pigeon to the Hampshire gentleman William Kingsmill, for example, indicates that he sold Kingsmill horn combs and a sponge, as well as shaving him.⁶¹ Thomas Marchant's diary also shows that he received supplies including five dozen cakes of soap and 2lb of wash balls from an Arundel supplier – likely a barber – in 1716.⁶² But men like Kingsmill, Cunningham and Foulis were wealthy, with the means to afford such expenses. How far their experiences speak to those of 'ordinary' men in this period is up for debate.

Particularly lower down the social scale, questions might be raised about the fitness of domestic space, as well as ownership of equipment, for shaving. Shaving could be, and clearly was, carried out either in the barbershop or in the customer's own home.⁶³ But it was also a messy and potentially uncomfortable task, requiring time, patience and skill.⁶⁴ To make it even basically comfortable, shaving ideally required hot water, soap or wash balls to create lather, a basin or receptacle, as well as a useable razor and a hone or strop to maintain it. If a man wished to shave himself, a looking glass, mirror or other reflective surface was necessary to prevent accidents. Most houses could provide hot water from the fire and a receptacle to contain it. Soap and wash balls might be procured from local shops. But whether poor households could afford the costs of maintaining razors is debatable. Rough and ready strops could be fashioned from leather, but having razors properly sharpened and ground was expensive. Mirrors were a costly item, and ownership varied according to status and location. By the end of the seventeenth century in Kent, around 36 per cent of domestic probate inventories

⁵⁷ James Dodds (ed.), *The Diary and General Expenditure Book of William Cunningham* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1887), 33, 39, 43, 93.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁹ Huntington Library MS HM 72811, account book of Thomas Mort, entry for 27 December 1708.

⁶⁰ Cornelius Hallen (ed.), *Account Book*, 179, 187, 208, 220.

⁶¹ Hampshire Record Office, MS 19M61/1666.

⁶² Bower, *Diary of Thomas Marchant*, 67.

⁶³ Vincent, 'Managing Hair', 55.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

contained mirrors; in Cornwall for the same period, however, the figure was only 4 per cent.⁶⁵ A study of seventeenth-century domestic probate inventories from the Yorkshire town of Darlington yielded only two references to mirrors or looking glasses, both in elite households.⁶⁶ Joseph Harley's study of pauper inventories in Dorset, Kent and Norfolk suggests that ownership of looking glasses in poor households averaged only around 10 per cent, while further statistical analysis of probate inventories across early modern England has also shown that the ownership of mirrors occurred far more frequently in the houses of parish officeholders, linking them with higher-status households and also perhaps highlighting the need to appear respectable in parish duties, such as vestry meetings.⁶⁷ As Margaret Ezell points out too, modern mirrors, understood as a reflective coating over a glass surface, did not come into being until the end of the seventeenth century. Before this a 'mirror' was more likely to be a polished metal surface and also not necessarily flat, giving an unclear or distorted reflection.⁶⁸ Even small glass mirrors were prohibitively expensive; Pepys's gift of a small looking glass for his wife cost the equivalent value of over one hundred pounds in modern currency.⁶⁹ Clearly this does not rule out the potential to shave at home; a competent spouse, friend or servant might well perform the task. It is also worth noting that, as Adrian Green points out, the poor could make do with small shards of broken mirror, or pieces of reflective metal, in which they could check their appearance.⁷⁰ But the potential inconvenience and expense, along with the requisite skill to use and maintain the razor, made a visit to the barber quicker, cheaper and more convenient.

If men were beginning to shave themselves more frequently, how – and from whom – they learned to do so is harder to discern. Before the mid-eighteenth century, there were no manuals to instruct men in the processes of shaving, or broader issues of bodily care or appearance. Conduct literature offered men some general advice about dress and cleanliness, but none contained advice about shaving. Learning by observation and imitation was one possibility, although risky where an open razor was involved. It seems likely that, as was the case with informal medical advice networks, advice about shaving and personal grooming came from peers. Given its nature as a uniquely male task, advice about shaving likely formed part of a broader vernacular economy of homosocial knowledge about the body. Brothers or fathers were obvious sources of reference, and the limited extant evidence suggests that fraternal mentors

⁶⁵ Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600–1750* (London: Routledge, 2004), 111–12.

⁶⁶ B. Flynn and V. Portass, *Darlington Wills and Inventories, 1600–1625* (ed. J. A. Atkinson) (Newcastle: Athanaeum, 1993), 112, 152.

⁶⁷ Henry French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England, 1600–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 164–6, 170–1, etc.; Joseph Harley, 'Material Lives of the English Poor: A Regional Perspective, 1670–1834', University of Leicester, Unpublished PhD thesis, 2016, 190–1. I am very grateful to Joe Harley for alerting me to these figures and also for the references to razor ownership in pauper inventories. See also Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660–1760* (London: Routledge, 1988), 169–71.

⁶⁸ Margaret Ezell, 'Looking Glass Histories', *Journal of British Studies*, 43:3 (2004): 323.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁷⁰ Adrian Green, 'Heartless and Unhomely? Dwellings of the Poor in East Anglia and North East England', in Joanne McEwan and Pamela Sharpe (eds), *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1600–1850* (London: Palgrave, 2011), 86.

were important guides in matters of appearance and personal grooming. While Samuel Pepys was not taught to shave by a third party, for example, he was instructed by an acquaintance in the use of a pumice stone to rub away his beard.⁷¹ In other cases, male friends could serve a more practical function. When he was 20, the Yorkshire landowner Ralph Jackson noted in his journal that ‘I shav’d James & he shav’d me by way of learning ourselves, this being the first time we either of us shav’d any body’.⁷² Jackson’s note is interesting in highlighting the mutual benefit of a willing and familiar face upon which to hone shaving skills, but also in suggesting that, for both men, this was their first experience not only of shaving another person, but potentially of wielding a razor at all. If this example is in any way representative, the age at which this occurred seems late in puberty. The homosocial nature of shaving was reinforced in the barbershop, but also at home, and being shaved either by friends or in their company appears to have been fairly common. William Livesey’s etching after a 1732 drawing by William Hogarth was titled ‘Breakfasting &c’ and depicted various friends of Hogarth in their morning routine. Among the figures was ‘Mr Tothall shaving himself in a mirror’ and ‘Mr Thornhill’ being shaved by another man – a barber who was also by chance a fisherman. Here, shaving was a communal and homosocial activity, though this time carried out in the lodgings of the companions, rather than in a barbershop. Hogarth himself was the figure in the bottom left of the scene, making the drawing.⁷³

If able to shave servants could prove useful in bypassing the cost and inconvenience of visiting the barber at all and might also act as informal tutors. In 1710, the account book of Thomas Mort contained a payment of five shillings made to the barber, to teach Mort’s servant ‘how to trim’ – information and skill that could be passed on.⁷⁴ The didactic role of the barber here is interesting not only in providing ad hoc instruction for a fee but also for the fact that, in teaching the servant, he was effectively doing himself out of a job. That he agreed to do this for such a relatively small sum seems even more surprising, and some guild regulations actually forbade the practice of freemen teaching anyone but their apprentices.⁷⁵ Having a manservant trained to shave was also a useful asset. In the late seventeenth century, young men seeking posts in service of gentlemen often emphasized their ability to shave or manage a wig, especially after 1750, when the need to appear clean-shaven was more pressing.⁷⁶ Young men like ‘T. W.’ – who advertised in the *Times* newspaper in April 1788 seeking a position as a valet to a ‘single gentleman’ – commonly emphasized their ability to ‘shave and dress hair’.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Vincent, ‘Men’s Hair’, 59.

⁷² Middlesborough Record Office, MS U/WJ/F, Diary of Ralph Jackson, 1740–90, 10 January 1757, <http://greatayton.wdfiles.com/local-files/ralph-jackson-diaries/01-Introduction-to-diary.pdf> (accessed 1 March 2017). I am extremely grateful to Dr Andy Burn of Newcastle University for his generosity in sharing this reference with me.

⁷³ A description of this scene can also be found in John Nicols, *Hogarth’s Tour* (London: Publisher unknown, 1781), 79, which describes sending out for a barber, who was also a fisherman.

⁷⁴ Huntington Library MS HM 72811, Account book of Thomas Mort, 9 December 1710.

⁷⁵ See Frederick Furnivall and Percy Furnivall (eds) *The Anatomie of the Body of Man by Thomas Vicary* (London: The Early English Texts Society, 1888), 251.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Barry, ‘John Houghton and Medical Practice in William Rose’s London’, University of Exeter, Working Paper, <http://practitioners.exeter.ac.uk/working-papers/> (accessed 2 October 2018).

⁷⁷ ‘A Young Man Who Can Shave and Dress Hair’, *Times* (11 April 1788): 4. See also ‘Wants a Place as Butler and Valet’, *World* (22 February 1787): 4.

Figure 6.1 Richard Livesay, 'William Hogarth making a drawing of his companions and himself as they shave and take their breakfast', 1781. Copyright Wellcome Collection.

'F. G.' of Cavendish Square went even further, arguing himself to be a 'steady and sober man' who could 'shave and dress hair and wigs equal to any hair-dresser'.⁷⁸

Again, however, questions remain as to the ubiquity of the practice and also the social depth to which self-shaving penetrated. Advice literature about shaving was likely inaccessible to large numbers of men, and the cost of buying and sharpening razors was prohibitive. It is equally unclear as to whether men of the lower orders necessarily shaved, or even wished to do so.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the relationship between men, barbers and shaving was complex and depended on a wide variety of factors, including social status, location, the costs of barbering services and the propensity of the individual to own their own shaving equipment.

There was, for example, little uniformity in the consumption of barber services. Some men visited the barber every few days for a shave; for others it was a weekly occurrence, in preparation for appearance in church for Sunday service. The wide variety of prices paid to barbers by individual men reflects differences in location and status, suggesting

⁷⁸ 'Wants a Place, a Steady, Sober Man', *World* (6 March 1787).

both that barbers tailored prices according to the purses of their customers and that there were poor barbers as well as better-off barbers. While some undertook to shave the poor for a penny, a well-heeled customer might pay up to a shilling. Prices were also dependent on whether the customer visited the barber, or whether the barber came to the customer's own home. There are also some suggestions that men might patronize individual barbers for long periods, establishing a relationship over time.

Despite the close association between barbers and their shops, however, it is also clear that barbering was not necessarily dependent on shop space. In some cases, barbers simply used a room in their house. Given the potentially prohibitive costs of establishing and running a barbershop, other 'flying barbers' made a living by visiting customers. Securing a regular contract for 'quarterage' in a wealthy country house could prove lucrative, but there are suggestions that barbers also undertook home visits lower down the social scale.

Throughout the period, self-shaving, as Susan Vincent has suggested, was used interchangeably with barber visits, although the extent to which men shaved themselves was greatly influenced by the costs of purchasing and maintaining equipment. That some men were shaving themselves in the seventeenth century is clear. But this was likely to have been more the domain of wealthy, metropolitan elites and middling sorts, who had the means to buy shaving paraphernalia, as well as access to places to purchase them, than of men lower down the social scale. Visiting the barber to be shaved was often simply cheaper and more convenient and meant that barbers remained key figures in fashioning the male face well into the eighteenth century.

As the following chapter will argue, however, the late eighteenth century brought important shifts in who was responsible for managing the male face. In part this reflected the increasing availability of high quality, fashionable, domestic razors and other equipment, along with a growing body of didactic literature instructing men in the art of personal grooming. But it also reflected deeper shifts in ideas about bodily refinement and grooming as the responsibility of individual men, rather than practitioners.