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The bearded classes: Facial hair and social status, 1700–1900

The history of facial hair fashions has been suggested as the almost overwhelming predominance of the clean-shaven face, punctuated by several distinct bearded phases.¹ The past five hundred years have witnessed two of these beard phases, first during the early modern period and again in the mid-nineteenth century, when beards were closely bound up with prevailing notions of masculinity and sexuality. The period between 1700 and 1850, by contrast, has generally been assumed to be a beardless age, one where the smooth face became the new exemplar of polite and refined manliness. As a general narrative this has much to commend it. In general, the sources are supportive of these broad trends, particularly for the second half of the nineteenth century when the popularity of beards across Europe appears conclusive. And yet, questions remain about the homogeneity of beard fashions and, in particular, the social depth to which beard fashions penetrated. Is it safe to assume, for example, that the lower orders simply followed class or elite fashions? Part of the problem in accessing plebeian facial hair fashions, however, is the relative lack of source material. As with so much historical evidence, the majority in society are either obscured altogether or refracted through source material created by, and therefore necessarily weighted towards, the middle and upper levels of society.

Nevertheless, it is possible to persuade the faces of lower-class men out of the shadows. While admittedly more difficult for the seventeenth century, some glimpses of eighteenth-century plebeian facial hair are possible from images and depictions in satirical literature and also through descriptions of the characteristics of runaway servants, apprentices, vagrants and outlaws. From the late eighteenth century, some institutions, most notably prisons, began to record the physical characteristics of individuals upon admission to an institution, which could include facial hair. By the mid-nineteenth century the increasing use of photography affords a direct view of criminal bodies.

¹ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men: The Revealing History of Facial Hair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 3–4.

There are obvious problems in this approach. First is the indiscriminate nature and patchiness of survival for each of these source types, ruling out a systematic, diachronic or regional study of plebeian facial hair fashions. In some cases, for example, it is not clear from institutional admissions registers (before photographs) whether facial hair has been consistently recorded as a physical characteristic. It is plausible, for example, that physical features were only noted if there was a danger of misidentification or confusion with another man, perhaps of the same surname. Second is the reliability of satires and cartoons as evidence of actual appearance, given their emphasis upon deliberately extreme or exaggerated characteristics. The inclusion, or lack, of facial hair in such depictions, however, might at least reveal expectations of appearance for the lower orders. Third, is the typicality of photographic evidence. It could fairly be argued that criminal 'mugshots' or physical descriptions may not offer a fair representation of the working poor. Men arrested for vagrancy, for example, might be assumed to be more likely to have facial hair, especially if they were too poor to shave or be shaved. But, as evidence from at least one institution (Bedford gaol) suggests, inmates came from a variety of social, economic and geographical backgrounds. Assumptions about the facial hair fashions of the lower orders are therefore far from straightforward.

With these limitations in mind, this chapter will suggest that the history of beard fashions is neither as neat nor as linear as might be assumed. Beard fashions varied according to time and location, but also class. Also, rather than simple binaries between 'bearded' and 'beardless', facial hair existed along a spectrum, was prosthetic and malleable. Beards could be long or short, thick or thin. There were many variations in style, from full beard to side whiskers or moustaches, and faces could be clean-shaven or stubbly. Many beard styles still required at least part of the face to be shaved. In some cases, plebeian fashions appear to confirm broad assumptions about facial hair fashions. But, in others, there are suggestions of important differences between classes. To explore such issues further, this chapter focuses on two particular time periods – the supposedly beardless eighteenth century and the height of the beard movement, after 1860. This approach allows us to test questions of ubiquity and homogeneity in facial hair fashions and what this might reveal about assumptions of masculinity and male appearance at different levels of society.

Facial hair in the age of shaving

The decline of facial hair from the end of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth might initially appear total. Contemporaries certainly viewed themselves as living in a beardless age. By 1802, the chemist and natural philosopher William Nicholson felt confident in declaring that the 'caprices of fashion have deprived all the nations of Europe of their beards'.² As we have seen, shaving was an – perhaps *the* – essential grooming practice of the enlightened gentleman. The clean-shaven face evinced gentlemanly neatness and elegance. But is it safe to assume that what stood for

² William Nicholson, 'Philosophical Discquisitions [sic] on the Processes of Common Life: Art of Shaving', *Journal of Natural Philosophy, Chemistry and the Arts*, 1 (1802): 47.

elite men was necessarily reflected in the appearance of the lower orders? Questions might be raised, for example, about both the desire and means for men of the lower orders to maintain a shaved face. Even despite the availability of cheap penny shaves by barbers, shaving was still, for many men, a once-weekly task undertaken for Sunday service, leaving them with increasingly heavy stubble for the rest of the week. For the poorest men it was probably cheaper and easier to grow a beard, trimming it when it became too unruly. If poorer men did choose to shave, it is by no means clear if their motivations reflected the same ideals of manly appearance or politeness as those of middling or elite men. Given that there is seemingly little contemporary discussion of the decline of beards, visual sources or descriptions offer the best opportunity to explore the faces of eighteenth-century men. To begin with, it is useful to consider the place of facial hair within formal portraiture.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the portraiture of eighteenth-century gentlemen is the overwhelming lack of facial hair. On one level this is perhaps to be expected, given the elite social demographic of those who commissioned portraits. Even stubble or 'five o'clock shadow' was generally purged from portraits. To be sure, images of clean-shaven faces cannot be taken as *prima facie* evidence that sitters had no stubble at the time. Some may simply have indulged in a pre-portrait shave, or else relied on artistic licence to portray them with their 'best face'. But the almost total lack of bearded portraits strongly suggests that both artists and sitters were complicit in the desire to depict men with smooth faces.

The ways that artists depicted the face reflected new ideas about the portrayal of corporeal features and their significative power. Just as eighteenth-century portraiture used light and colour to draw attention to the leg and thus to the lower half of the body, depictions of smooth chin and cheeks emphasized the head – literally the 'public face'.³ Echoing physiognomic ideas, the *philosophe* Denis Diderot saw the face as a canvas from which the character or emotional state of a man could be divined.⁴ Painters paid particular attention to faces, both through individual qualities, such as the luminosity of the skin, and also their place in highlighting the relationship between the body's exterior and its surfaces.⁵ For this reason and reflecting the polite fashion for the smooth face and the open countenance, the subjects of portraits by celebrated artists such as Joshua Reynolds and Allen Ramsey were generally clean-shaven. In his 1780 self-portrait, Joshua Reynolds portrayed himself in academic dress, next to a bust of Michelangelo. Borrowing stylistically from portraits by Rembrandt, the main light in the image strikes Reynolds's cheek, showing a clear, healthy complexion, with only a hint of stubble around the lips and chin – in sharp contrast to Rembrandt, who often included facial blemishes. It is also interesting to note that the light striking Michelangelo's bust falls on the upper head, emphasizing his mental acuity and the

³ Karen Harvey, 'Men of Parts: Masculine Embodiment and the Male Leg in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 54:4 (2015): 807.

⁴ Mechtild Fend, 'Bodily and Pictorial Surfaces: Skin in French Art and Medicine, 1790–1860', *Art History*, 28:3 (2005): 313.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 316.

status of the head as the site of learning. His bearded face, however, lies in heavy shadow.

This is not to say that facial hair played no part in eighteenth-century art: rather, where it did appear, its inclusion was usually freighted with meaning. As Reynolds's self-portrait illustrates, depictions of biblical or classical figures often showed them bearded. The fact that fashion had excised the beard from British men's faces did not diminish its symbolic power as a sign of the venerable wisdom of the philosopher, or the 'pard'. Given the popularity of genre paintings, bearded models were highly sought after by prominent artists. Various studies by Sir Joshua Reynolds, including 'A Man's Head' (c. 1771) and 'The Banished Lord' (1777), depict men with full beards. In some

Figure 9.1 Sir Joshua Reynolds, self-portrait, 1780. Royal Academy of Arts collection.

cases, the models for such portraits are known. One of Reynolds's regular sitters was George White, a labourer and beggar and sometime artist's model, favoured for his muscular physique.⁶ White was depicted in various situations, standing for a Pope in one picture and an imprisoned noble in another. James Turner, another elderly beggar, regularly sat for the English artist Nathaniel Hone, as well as Reynolds, charging them a shilling each time as a fee.⁷ But men such as Turner and White were in demand by artists as models precisely *because* their beards rendered them unusual. As the author and print seller James Caulfield suggested in 1820, the 'silvered locks and flowing beard[s]' of White and Turner gave them a 'patriarchal appearance'.⁸ Several painters were apparently struck by the 'singularly reverend character of [Turner's] aspect', making him an invaluable model for popular artistic themes, from neoclassical genre paintings to biblical studies.⁹ In European portraiture more generally, beards could be deployed as a visual shorthand for age, or poverty. Italian artists such as Gaetano Gandolfi (1734–1802) and Giacomo Ceruti (1698–1767) painted a series of portraits, sometimes of bearded saints and other biblical figures, but also of peasants and labourers, often with long, untidy beards, to emphasize their plebeian earthiness. Similar themes were also to be found in French art, in paintings such as François Le Moyn's (1688–1737) 'Head of a Bearded Man', or Jean-Claude Nageon's 'Head of an Old Man'.

Some eighteenth-century portraits of elderly men, for example, deliberately chose rough, stubbly skins, perhaps to emphasize the abandonment of attachments to worldly considerations. The German artist Balthasar Denner's portrait of an old man in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, depicts a weary face with heavy stubble, but not a full beard, suggesting declining regard for personal grooming and perhaps vanity, accompanying the onset of age. Several others of Denner's portrayals of elderly men include stubble or light beards.

The apparent popularity of bearded models such as George White and James Turner, both of whom were labourers or beggars, raises the further issue of class and could be read as evidence that beards were common among the lower orders. It is possible that their low status and ragged appearance worked precisely because they matched the figurative and allusive qualities desired by artists for their particular subject matter. It seems almost certain that the intention in using them was not to formally portray the lower orders. In an artistic culture that valued precision, rule, harmony and the removal of nature's aberrations, the poor were not generally thought worthy subjects for the painter's brush. They were, however, regular subjects in satirical cartoons, either as individuals, or in among the crowd or 'mob'. Satirists naturally exaggerated grotesque features and bodily characteristics. But as Diana Donald has argued, eighteenth-century caricatures equally often depicted the crowd sympathetically, as a reflection of the diversity of English society and the absence of social regulation, allowing rich

⁶ William T. Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends in England. 1700–1799, Volume 2* (London: Publisher unknown, 1928), 266.

⁷ James Caulfield, *Portraits, Memoirs and Characters of Remarkable Persons, From the Revolution in 1698 to the End of the Reign of George III, Volume 3* (London: T. H. Whiteley, 1820), 223–5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Figure 9.2 Sir Joshua Reynolds, a man's head, c. 1771–3. Tate Gallery.

and poor alike to mingle at public events.¹⁰ Image and symbolism, rather than direct observation, were key in capturing the crowd. As Donald also argues, Georgian caricaturists sought to provide a 'picture of England', one sometimes sympathetic to the lower orders and as yet did not deploy the 'physiognomic and moral complexities' of Victorian cartoonists.¹¹

If caricatures relied on stereotypes, it seems fair to assume that any apparent plebeian fashion for facial hair would be emphasized. But depictions of the poor in

¹⁰ Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Age of George III* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1996), 113.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 109, 113.

Figure 9.3 Balthasar Denner, 'Alter Mann' (old man), 1726. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Georgian caricatures and satires strongly suggest the ubiquity of the clean-shaven face. Caricatures containing street scenes and large, mixed crowds often contain no evidence for beards, or even whiskers. John June's *A View of Cheapside, as It Appear'd on Lord Mayor's Day Last* (1761) depicts a busy street in full carnival, including gentlemen, soldiers and unruly citizens hanging off balconies and brawling.¹² No bearded figures are visible. The almost Brueghel-esque attention to plebeian appearance among the onlookers in Luke Sullivan's (after Hogarth) *Representation of the March of the Guards Towards Scotland in 1745* shows no bearded figures, a feature repeated across similar

¹² John June, *A View of Cheapside as It Appear'd on Lord May's Day Last* (London: Smith, 1761).

scenes throughout the century.¹³ A character with a chin beard in Thomas Rowlandson's 1809 *Mad Dog in a Coffee House* is the only individual with facial hair among twenty-one visible male faces depicted in detail.¹⁴ As in portraiture, where facial hair was depicted in caricatures it was often intended to convey a specific point or purpose. James Gillray's *New Way to Pay the National Debt* (1786) contrasted the richly dressed William Pitt greeting the king emerging from the treasury, with the figure of a limbless and supplicant soldier begging in the gutter. The soldier's face is covered by a thick white beard, emphasizing his bodily dereliction and distance from polite society in not being physically able to attend to his appearance.¹⁵

If caricatures represented exaggerated, stylized or symbolic views of the body, how can the appearance of actual Georgian men, and particularly the poor, be assessed? As Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton have argued, the growing availability of printed material in the eighteenth century brought lower-class bodies into public view as never before.¹⁶ One of the most regular sources of information about bodies could be found in descriptions of men on the run. The proliferation of relatively cheap newspaper advertising space offered a ready means to seek information relating to runaway servants, apprentices and criminals. As their physical characteristics were described in the advertisements, the bodies of the 'poor, troublesome and criminal' were increasingly opened up to public scrutiny.¹⁷ As the most public surfaces of the body, the features of heads and faces were key elements in descriptions of criminals and runaways. Facial hair was regularly remarked upon. Using such advertisements as evidence for the wearing of facial hair is problematic, however, not least because it was a useful device for criminals wishing to evade detection. The prosthetic nature of beards meant that appearance could be swiftly and radically altered, either by shaving it off, growing it or even applying false whiskers. At the very least, however, 'wanted' advertisements, reveal the facial hair styles worn at the time of flight, offering a unique insight into the appearance of individual men.

In the seventeenth century, when facial hair was relatively common, the lack of a beard could be a distinguishing feature worth noting. The physical descriptions of two escapees from Dorchester gaol in 1658 both specifically noted their having no beards, while a French youth run away from his master in 1701 had but 'very little beard'. In each case, the lack of beard was unusual and could be used to mark an individual out.¹⁸ In the largely clean-shaven eighteenth century, however, facial hair was just the sort of characteristic worth noting in the limited space of an advertisement, particularly if it was of unusual size, shape or colour. If a runaway had a beard, moustache or whiskers, it seems reasonable to assume that this would be included. In many cases, rather than

¹³ Luke Sullivan after William Hogarth, *A Representation of the March of the Guards towards Scotland in the Year 1745* (London: Publisher unknown, 1750). See also Anon., *Christmass Gambolls* (London: P. Griffin, 1747); Thomas Rowlandson, *Miseries of London* (London: R. Ackerman, 1707).

¹⁴ Thomas Rowlandson, *A Mad Dog in a Coffee House* (London: Publisher unknown, 1809).

¹⁵ James Gillray, *A New Way to Pay the National Debt* (London: William Holland, 1786).

¹⁶ Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton, 'Visible Bodies: Power, Subordination and Identity in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World', *Journal of Social History*, 39:1 (2005): 39.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 'Advertisements', *Publick Intelligencer* (28 February 1659); 'Run Away on Saturday Last...', *Post Man and the Historical Account* (8 February 1701).

suggesting widespread facial hair among poor men, references to facial hair often occur within broader narratives of bodily difference and otherness. This could occur in several contexts. If the missing man was considered mentally disturbed, for example, a beard could both embody and emphasize his disordered mind. John Boys, reported missing from his mother's house, was a 'walking melancholy man', wearing a long brown beard, while 'Peter the Wild Youth', run away from his 'keeper' in May 1748, had a 'shock head of hair and a long beard'.¹⁹ Here the beard evinced wildness and loss of care over the self. In other cases, as with portraits, beards emphasized dereliction and age. While the long beards of elite patriarchs commanded gravity and respect, the tatty fronds of old beggars and vagrants merely amplified their generally 'ragged' appearance.²⁰ Race offered a further context in which beards were mentioned, and prominent or unusual facial hair could be remarked upon as a marker of racial difference. Jewish men were often identifiable during the eighteenth century for their beards and ringleted hair, but such features could also be applied to exotic foreign 'others'.²¹ A seven-foot-tall 'fortune teller', arrested in Tothill Fields in 1767 who 'dressed like an Armenian, and says he came from that country', was noted as having an unusually large beard and whiskers.²²

Trial records also provide evidence for facial hair in the eighteenth century, especially in witness descriptions of criminals. Again, at a time when the shaven face was in vogue, large, thick or dark beards, like the thick black hair and black beard of the forger John Cattipodi in 1794, perhaps an Italian, were distinguishing features that witnesses were apt to recall.²³ Facial hair also offered criminals a useful means of disguise in attempts to evade justice. In January 1743, during the trial of reputed sodomites John Deacon and Thomas Blair, a witness was asked to confirm the identity of one of the men in the dock, at which he replied, 'I am sure he is the Person, he has a long Beard on now; I suppose that is to disguise himself'.²⁴

But beards were also noted in advertisements as part of general appearance, rather than simply being of an unusual shape, size or colour. While not numerous (often fewer than ten references in advertisements per decade of the eighteenth century) they

¹⁹ *London Gazette* (7 July 1705); see also 'Whereas a Person Insane...', *Daily Advertiser* (19 April 1773); 'Whereas on Saturday Last', *Daily Advertiser* (26 April 1744); 'Stray'd from Thomas Fenn's', *London Evening Post* (3 May 1748).

²⁰ 'Postscript', *St James Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (16 October 1781); 'Whereas Thomas Leach...', *Daily Advertiser* (10 October 1743); 'News', *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (5 May 1778).

²¹ For example, 'Whereas the Following Persons Stand Charged with Felony', *Public Advertiser* (21 October 1784); 'Whereas Joseph Solomons', *Public Advertiser* (27 January 1774); 'Whereas David Mani', *Public Advertiser* (24 October 1775).

²² 'London', *London Evening Post* (15 September 1767).

²³ Trial of John Cattipodi, 17 September 1794, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t17940917-22&div=t17940917-22&terms=black%20beard#highlight> (accessed 23 April 2018); see also Trial of Luke Hand, 28 June 1780, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t17940917-22&div=t17940917-22&terms=black%20beard#highlight> (accessed 23 April 2018); Trial of William Girdler, 19 February 1752, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t17940917-22&div=t17940917-22&terms=black%20beard#highlight> (accessed 23 April 2018).

²⁴ Trial of John Deacon Thomas Blair, January 1743, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t17430114-31&div=t17430114-31&terms=long%20beard#highlight> (accessed 23 April 2018).

are at least regular enough to suggest that the sight of facial hair was not necessarily rare. References to beards occur variously in descriptions of poor or criminal men of various ages and occupations, including the military.²⁵ Even after 1750 when 'polite shaving' was at its height, some men still chose to be bearded. When he deserted from the ninth Regiment of Foot in Bristol in 1756, William Williams had a 'brown beard and a jolly face'.²⁶ Appeals for information about another unnamed criminal in 1795 noted his 'strong black beard and whiskers'.²⁷ Whiskers and moustaches in general, however, seem to have been far less common than beards. In fact, it wasn't until the last decades of the century that 'whiskers' were specifically referred to. In 1788 a reward was offered for the arrest of William Brodie of Edinburgh for stealing. Among his distinctive characteristics were a set of whiskers, sandy at the ends and 'frizzed at the sides'.²⁸ In February 1794, Thomas Bell deserted from the Yorkshire Volunteers, and an advertisement was placed for his apprehension. As well as his 'fresh complexion' and sandy-coloured hair, it noted that he had 'reddish whiskers'.²⁹ Facial hair that was 'red' (ginger) was often particularly remarked upon.³⁰ Overall though, references to whiskers as distinct characteristics again number in the tens, rather than hundreds.³¹

Individual motivations for wearing beards during this period are difficult to assess. For those of limited means, unable to afford either their own shaving tackle or the barber's fees, a beard was apparently the cheapest option. Wearing beards to hide the physical marks of disease, such as smallpox, was a common motivation. A number of references to bearded criminals, for example, also mention pockmarks or scars. Wanted for robbery in 1747, Morgan Clarke of Dublin was a 'middle siz'd gross man, well-limbed, black beard' and also 'marked with the small pox'.³² The burglar Henry Tandy was described as having a large black beard, a dark complexion and 'pock-fretten' face.³³ While pockmarks could be useful in assessing the immunity of potential employees, some stigma over the scarring still lingered. A beard was therefore a useful means of concealment. But there were also some who still clung to the beard as a mark of masculinity. 'Temerarius', a correspondent to the *Morning Chronicle* in 1774, was inspired to examine his own beard, having just read a new treatise about physiognomy, testifying that large beards were a sign of temerity. Holding a looking glass in one hand and a candle in the other, he inadvertently set fire to his beard and 'sing'd off the best half of it'. After extinguishing the blaze, he felt compelled to add an annotation to the

²⁵ See 'Deserted', *London Evening Post* (4 December 1735); 'There Is Now in Nottingham Gaol...', *General Evening Post* (22 October 1745); 'Stolen Last Sunday Morning', *Public Advertiser* (27 July 1767); 'Stolen This Morning from the Cock in Clapham', *Public Advertiser* (29 August 1771); 'Country News', *True Briton* (30 November 1796).

²⁶ 'Deserted at Bristol', *London Evening Post* (8 January 1756); see also 'John Bell or Beal', *London Evening Post* (9 January 1773).

²⁷ 'Public Office Bow Street', *True Briton* (31 March 1795).

²⁸ 'Sheriff's Clerk's Office', *World* (20 March 1788).

²⁹ 'Deserted from the Yorkshire Volunteers', *World* (7 February 1794).

³⁰ For example, see 'Eight Pounds Reward', *True Briton* (28 July 1794).

³¹ Based on keyword searches of online newspaper databases. For other examples of 'whiskers', see 'Transport Office', *Sun* (7 August 1799); 'Public Office Bow Street', *Sun* (14 April 1800).

³² Such as 'Whereas It Appears by the Examinations of John Healy...', *Dublin Journal* (14 November 1747); 'Mickleham, June 3rd 1755', *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer* (5 July 1755).

³³ 'Whereas Henry Tandy...', *Lloyd's Evening Post* (4 April 1763).

physiognomical tract: 'As to this assertion, *Probatum Est*.³⁴ The fact that he had a beard is, itself, noteworthy and suggests that some men were still wearing them.

Overall, however, the impression left from a survey of Georgian newspaper advertisements for wanted or missing men is that beards were by no means ubiquitous, but neither were they necessarily rare. Anyone perambulating the streets of a Georgian town would likely have encountered at least some men wearing some form of facial hair, rather than a sea of shorn faces. There is also little evidence to suggest marked class distinction in facial hair fashions during the eighteenth century. Despite the obvious existence of facial hair among poor and criminal men, it still seems likely that perhaps the majority of the poor and lower orders in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain were, like the polite, elite gentleman, beardless. This is not to say, as discussed in an earlier chapter, that poor – or indeed elite – men were necessarily always completely clean-shaven, and it is worth noting again the problematic issue of stubble. The terminology of complexion, as described in advertisements, provides useful evidence of 'stubbliness' or swarthinness. As Morgan and Rushton suggest, for example, the term 'swarthy' could be used to denote an unshaven, stubbly face.³⁵ Scores of examples attest to the swarthy complexions of criminals, which could be taken as evidence of heavy stubble, in turn perhaps suggesting irregular shaving either through necessity or design. Care should be taken not to overstate the reliability of the term, however, since some descriptions noted a swarthy complexion *and* a beard.³⁶

Conversely, it was not only the lower orders who sometimes chose to grow facial hair, and the potential existed for sporadic, localized 'outbreaks' of particular beard or whisker styles. In the early nineteenth century, in London and some provincial towns, for example, an often-overlooked fashion for side whiskers spanned more than two decades. An emerging fashion for whiskers in France and Germany began to be noted in the English press in the early 1800s and, by 1806 the trend had spread to Britain. In December that year the *Hereford Journal* reported a new trend for whiskers among 'our young bucks of distinction'. Not content with their 'enormous whiskers', they had begun to 'add Jewish moustachios', which the writer considered an 'odious barrier'.³⁷ By 1812 the trend was apparently in full flower and certainly appears to have been popular in London. One correspondent to the *Tradesman, or Commercial Magazine* in July that year professed astonishment at the 'spreading proportion of hair on the human face' he witnessed there, describing it as nothing less than a 'whiskered *mania*' (original italics) which had 'very far over-stepped its bounds'.³⁸

There were certainly some who supported the return of facial hair after so long a period of beardlessness. One motivation was the apparent connection between beards and mental acuity, evidenced most prominently by the abundance of facial hair in

³⁴ 'For the Morning Chronicle', *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (22 June 1774).

³⁵ Morgan and Rushton, 'Visible Bodies', 42.

³⁶ See, for example, the description of 'Colonel Lally' in 'News', *General Advertiser* (17 January 1746); 'Whereas a Person...', *General Evening Post* (16 August 1748).

³⁷ Anon., 'Friday's Post Concluded', *Hereford Journal* (3 December 1806): 4.

³⁸ Tim Bobbin Jr, 'On the Absurdity of Whiskers', *Tradesman or Commercial Magazine* (9 July 1812): 29–30. An article on the 'Whiskers Movement' of the early nineteenth century is currently in preparation and due for submission in 2021.

depictions of ancient philosophers. The beards of the great thinkers of antiquity were considered symbols of wisdom which, as one correspondent argued, made the weak appear strong; the old appear young; the cowardly appear brave, and the ugly look beautiful.³⁹ Another, 'Aenobarbus', argued that whiskers conjured up the 'grave and manly countenance' of the ancients. They were 'natural' and even 'beautiful'. Shaving, by contrast, was a cruel and unnatural act, which disfigured the 'Human Face Divine'.⁴⁰ Such arguments neatly prefigure those made during the 'beard movement'; facial hair was depicted as a natural, God-given, edifying feature of the male face. In an age 'so attached to antiquities', it was 'silly to oppose so ancient a custom' as the cultivation of whiskers.⁴¹ It was obvious too that whiskers were viewed as an affectation of the urban elite – *the fashionable adornment of the young city beau*.⁴² The popular song 'The Grand Panorama in London' lauded the vibrant culture of the capital and its inhabitants and included the verse 'Our bucks and gay loungers of spirit and fashion/ For whiskers terrific betray a strong passion'.⁴³ But there are also suggestions of the spread of the trend to other levels of society. The diary of an imagined apprentice in *The Scourge*, for example, noted that 'If my whiskers don't grow soon I'll buy a pair of false ones, *for whiskers I must have*' (emphasis added).⁴⁴ The implication, although humorously intended, was that whiskers had become an essential accoutrement to any young man with pretensions to adulthood.

Nevertheless, some saw the return of facial hair as a threat, one with connections to foreign, revolutionary and even effeminate men. In 1801, the *Ipswich Journal* noted the new French fashion for whiskers, which, it sneered, 'were spread too far upon the cheek'.⁴⁵ In January 1802 the *Morning Post and Gazetteer* felt confident in asserting that there was little danger of 'broad and black whiskers' being imported by British gentlemen. Such 'disgusting adornments' were specifically identified as an unwelcome effect of revolution.⁴⁶ For the satirical writer 'Tim Bobbin Jr', this 'absurd and indecent fashion' belonged to Europe; the '*visage a la baboon*' (original italics) had no place on an Englishman's face.⁴⁷ At a point when masculinity was also closely bound to the clean-shaven face, whiskers formed part of wider debates about gender, effeminacy and the 'dandy'. Questions were certainly being raised, for example, about what exactly represented the 'ideal' male body. There was no easy answer. As Joanne Begiato notes, the period was characterized by a series of alternative and overlapping models of male physicality.⁴⁸ Concerns about the physical appearance of young men reflected broader fears about their physical and moral degeneracy, and particularly about effeminate

³⁹ 'Whiskers', *Liverpool Mercury* (1 January 1813).

⁴⁰ Aenobarbus, 'Whiskers and Mustachios', quoted in Anon., *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1813* (London: Printed for James Ridgeway, 1814), 147–50.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴² Eliza, 'The Value of Whiskers', *Lady's Monthly Museum* (12 March 1812): 153.

⁴³ 'New Songs', *Ladies' Fashionable Repository* (c. 1810): 26.

⁴⁴ Anon., 'The London Apprentice's Journal; or How to Pass a Sunday', *Scourge or Literary, Theatrical and Miscellaneous Magazine* (7 February 1814): 106–7.

⁴⁵ Anon., 'Friday's Post', *Ipswich Journal* (12 December 1801): 2.

⁴⁶ Anon., 'Our Connections with France', *Morning Post and Gazetteer* (2 January 1802): 2.

⁴⁷ Bobbin, 'Absurdity of Whiskers', 30.

⁴⁸ Begiato, 'Between Poise and Power', 130.

dandyism. While there was no explicit suggestion that whiskers were an effeminate adornment per se, they were seemingly part of the recognized 'uniform' of the dandy. Whether condoned or condemned, however, the debates surrounding the wearing of facial hair reveal much about attitudes towards those who chose not to follow prevailing fashions. Both the 'whisker mania' of the early nineteenth century and the evidence for bearded and whiskered men throughout the eighteenth century also demonstrate the dangers in assuming homogeneity in any beard trend.

Facial hair styles in the age of beards

As Chapter 4 showed, after 1850 men were bombarded by literature extolling the virtues of the beard and attempting to convince them that a clean-shaven man was scarcely a man at all. As we have seen, many and various arguments were put forward emphasizing the innate healthiness and natural protective qualities of the beard, as well as the deadly perils that supposedly accompanied each swipe of the razor. At first glance the triumph of the beard might appear total. So deeply entrenched is the image of the heavily bearded Victorian man that the two were virtually synonymous and, it has been claimed, this was consistent 'throughout society' after the 1850s.⁴⁹ That beards were popular has been amply proved, as has their relationship to changing concepts of manliness. But there are reasons to question whether the return of facial hair was either as rapid or complete as has been assumed. Again, class is central to questions about the potential spread and social depth of the fashion for beards.

There are certainly questions surrounding the social demographics of facial hair during the 'beard movement'. Discussions of male appearance in the nineteenth century often focus upon dress and consumption by elite and middle-class men. Brent Shannon, for example, argues that middle-class male interest in fashion after the mid-century was directly linked to consumption, and particularly the purchase of clothing and accessories that had formerly been markers of elite appearance.⁵⁰ A similar process had occurred during the eighteenth century, as the second-hand market for clothing made previously expensive, high-quality fashion items and other goods accessible to men lower down the social scale.⁵¹ As Shannon also argues, however, this was not a simple case of emulation. What emerged was the assertion of a distinct middle-class sartorial aesthetic.⁵² It could be argued that facial hair was an equally potent symbol of masculine self-expression, one reinforced continually across lay and medical literature. But, like fashion, it is by no means clear whether this new bearded aesthetic applied, or was meant to apply, to all classes, or simply to elite or middle-class men.

⁴⁹ Jacob Middelton, 'The Beard and Victorian Ideas of Masculinity', in Dominic Janes (ed.), *Back to the Future of the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), 36.

⁵⁰ Brent Shannon, *The Cut of His Coat: Men, Dress and Consumer Culture in Britain, 1860–1914* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 10–11.

⁵¹ See John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁵² Ibid.

The potential for class-based variations in the wearing of facial hair raises a second issue of style. The often-uncritical use of the collective term 'beard' obscures the myriad forms and styles of facial hair and the meanings that each could carry. As with side whiskers, for example, certain styles bore positive or negative associations, depending on the contexts of wearer and observer. Both contemporaries and recent histories of facial hair emphasize the full, heavy Victorian beard as virtually the standard. But the visual and even literary sources upon which this evidence is founded are generally weighted towards middling and elite men. Assessing the appearance of the criminal poor in this period offers a more nuanced understanding of the politics of Victorian facial hair styles. Just as with dress and consumption, facial hair was a powerful expression of male class identity and a highly visible, public and powerful means of self-fashioning. The evidence discussed in this part of the chapter suggests, first, that men wore a variety of facial hair styles in the second half of the nineteenth century, rather than simply the full beard, and that one, perhaps unexpected, variation appears to have predominated among the lower orders. This should not necessarily be surprising. By 1872, the proliferation of facial hair styles was beginning to draw ridicule. An article in the *Treasure of Literature* noted that:

Every man does exactly as he pleases with his beard. We have [facial hair] of all sorts and sizes now ... Here we see a 'swell' barbed after the drooping fashion. There goes a businessperson with beard as forked as lightning, and almost as fiery; and by him there shoulders a professional bully, with short blue-black moustaches nestling under his puggy nose. And Lo! to crown all, here comes somebody's grandfather, looking like an Arctic Owl in the whiteness of his puffy beard.⁵³

As the evidence presented in this chapter also shows, there are clear signs that potentially significant numbers of men chose to remain beardless.

There is some precedent for quantitative analysis of Victorian facial hair, in Dwight Robinson's 1976 study of images in the *Illustrated London News*.⁵⁴ Robinson's article has tended to be used for its 'headline' findings suggesting that the numbers of images of clean-shaven men fell dramatically with the onset of the 'beard movement', while images of bearded men grew accordingly.⁵⁵ But a closer look at Robinson's findings, based on images (generally cartoons and sketches, along with some photographs) of only around 100 men per year, actually reveals a more diverse picture. First, Robinson was concerned with facial hair in all its forms, and not simply beards. His study was predicated on five categories of facial hair: beards (defined by him as 'any amount of whiskers centring on the chin'), sideburns alone, sideburns and moustaches in combination, moustache alone, clean-shaven.⁵⁶ The distinctions between these

⁵³ Charles Dawson Shanly, 'Capillary Freaks: The Romance of Facial Hair', *Treasury of Literature and Ladies' Treasury* (1 February 1872): 181.

⁵⁴ Dwight E. Robinson, 'Fashions in Shaving and Trimming of the Beard: The Men of the Illustrated London News, 1842–1972', *American Journal of Sociology*, 81:5 (1976): 1135.

⁵⁵ For example, Christopher Oldstone-Moore, 'The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 48:1 (2005): 11; Middleton, 'The Beard', 35.

⁵⁶ Robinson, 'Fashions in Shaving', 1134.

categories are extremely important in order to fully understand the trajectory of facial hair fashions in the nineteenth century and also the extent to which men still needed to shave at least part of their faces. Figure 9.4 shows Robinson's graphs for each of his categories of those men with facial hair. Each line on the horizontal axis represents a five-year interval, starting at 1840. The vertical axis shows frequency in percentages. Dots on the graph represent the percentage frequency for each year, while the plotted lines give a five-year moving average.

With the exception of 'sideburns' alone, the trajectory of all categories seems plain enough, appearing to show a consistent period of growth in the second half of the nineteenth century. How many men were depicted wearing each style depended greatly on the specific type of facial hair. The frequency of moustaches before 1880 was low and generally less than 10 per cent, while combinations of sideburns and moustaches, although slowly increasing, never represented more than 20 per cent of men in any given year. In line with what might be expected given the apparent success of the 'beard movement', there was, however, a sharp rise in the numbers of bearded men depicted after 1850. The frequency of images of bearded men continued well above 40 per cent for several decades thereafter.⁵⁷ The figures for sideburns (i.e. side whiskers, not meeting under the chin) are interesting, peaking at around 60 per cent of men in 1853, before dropping back to between 30 and 40 per cent for the following two decades, logical if they were supplanted by full beards. It is worth remembering, however, that sideburns could be no more than short extensions from the hairline, as much as they could be large, bushy appendages running along the jawline. These variations are not discernible from Robinson's data. It is equally difficult to know how variations such as the 'chinstrap' or 'Shenandoah' styles with no moustache, or the 'goatee', just around the mouth and chin, were categorized within this data. As we shall see below, the distinction between these forms was potentially important.

Further, the bundling of clean-shaven men into a single category is problematic, since it creates the illusion of a simple binary between those who had facial hair and those who shaved. At first glance, Robinson's data for clean-shaven men again appears to provide compelling evidence for the domination of facial hair. In 1840, more than 40 per cent of images depicted men with no facial hair. By 1850 this had fallen to 30 per cent, after which there was a continued decline, reaching a low point of around 5 per cent in 1885.⁵⁸ But it was not just clean-shaven men who shaved. As the data also unwittingly reveals, a large number – perhaps even the majority – of Victorian men still needed to shave regularly. Both sideburns (or longer side whiskers) and moustaches required at least part of the face to be shaved, as did certain beard styles such as the 'goatee'. Here again, the lack of data for individual beard styles within the 'beard' category in Robinson's study makes this impossible to quantify but the suggestion is that, in addition to those men who wore no facial hair, a significant proportion of Victorian men still shaved, even at the height of the 'beard movement'.

Taken as a whole, while Robinson's graphs reinforce the dominance of facial hair, they offer little evidence that beards, or any particular facial hair style, was

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1135.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1136.

Figure 9.4 'Frequencies of Whisker Forms, 1842–1972', reproduced from Dwight E. Robinson, 'Fashions in Shaving and Trimming of the Beard: The Men of the Illustrated London News, 1842–1972', *American Journal of Sociology*, 81:5 (1976): 1135.

privileged. As a 1874 encyclopaedia entry on beards noted, 'It is now rare to see a clean-shaved face, either beard or moustache, or both, being almost invariably worn, and cut according to the taste of the wearer'.⁵⁹ By his own admission, Robinson's subjects were part of a 'cultural sub group' and often notable members of society.⁶⁰ The *Illustrated London News* specialized in stories about prominent figures in British life and current affairs, so its reliability for assessing the facial hair fashions of the majority of Victorian society is questionable. It is also unsafe to assume that men with facial hair necessarily kept the same style (or even kept it at all) over long periods of years.

How, though, are we to access facial hair styles at the lower levels of Victorian society? The nineteenth century saw renewed interest in working or poor bodies amidst broader concerns about the criminal 'class'. Recording bodies was part of a campaign of monitoring criminal characteristics and habits, and institutions paid increasing attention to the physical characteristics of prisoners and inmates, partly to identify individuals, but also to monitor repeat offenders.⁶¹ In the earlier part of the century, many registers only recorded basic details of physical appearance, with no space for additional information. The Bridewell hospital in London, for example, had a tabulated admission register, with space for comment on eyes, hair, build and complexion, but nothing about facial hair.⁶² In other cases it was left to the discretion of the clerk as to whether to record it. A detailed register of criminals committed to Southwark Sessions in London from 1814 to 1842 provides a case in point. In a list of more than 1,600 individual prisoners, there are only around ten references to facial hair among the notes of physical characteristics.⁶³ In July 1819 John Brown, convicted of stealing a bed, was described as having a 'fair complexion, sandy hair, rather bald' and wearing 'red whiskers'.⁶⁴ In 1828, John White, aged 25, was noted as having 'dark bushy whiskers'.⁶⁵ The overwhelming absence of facial hair in this sample could be taken in several ways. First, it might be a genuine reflection of a preference for being clean-shaven among men during this period, which would certainly match with assumptions about fashions before the 'beard movement'. In this case, whiskers might have been noted precisely because they were exceptional. As we will see in the next chapter, institutional rules often stipulated shaving for male inmates, so this may have been done before admission. Even so, in such a big sample, the almost total lack of facial hair (less than 1 per cent) does appear anomalous. Far more likely is the diligence, or otherwise, of the recorder and the perceived value of recording facial hair. It is worth noting that the register was compiled by at least three different individuals, with several examples of recorded hairiness appearing as a cluster. Perhaps more tellingly, most of the references

⁵⁹ A. Whitelaw (ed.), *The Popular Encyclopaedia: or 'Conversations Lexicon'* (London: Blackie and Son, 1874), 468.

⁶⁰ Robinson, 'Fashions in Shaving', 1133.

⁶¹ Helen Johnston, *Crime in England, 1815–1880* (London: Routledge, 2015), 25–9.

⁶² London Metropolitan Archives, MS 33138/3, Bridewell Hospital Commitment Book, 1824–7.

⁶³ London Metropolitan Archives, MS CLA/031/01/009 – List of prisoners committed at Southwark Sessions, 1814–42.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 153.

to whiskers describe them as either 'red' or, more usually, 'carroty'.⁶⁶ It may therefore be the case that 'red' whiskers were regarded as the exception, with dark or brown perhaps overlooked. Extrapolating general trends from such a sample is therefore too unreliable.

From the 1850s, however, the new technology of photography offered a solution to the problematic of reliance on written description to recognize and identify criminals. Photographs offered a quick and fairly easy means through which to identify previous offenders, or those who had breached conditions of release.⁶⁷ As the century wore on, more institutions began to include photographs within their admissions registers, analysis of which provides some intriguing insights and raises questions about the nature and spread of the Victorian beard trend. Crucially, since photographs were apparently usually taken just after sentence, they offer a window into the facial hair styles of criminals as they appeared on admission to prison, rather than once they had been admitted, processed and, presumably, washed and shaved. Given the range of ages, backgrounds and occupations of such men, they can shed light on important factors such as regional fashions, life stage and even occupation. Analysis of such registers therefore offers a rare glimpse into the faces of lower-class and criminal men at the height of the Victorian beard movement.

For the purposes of this discussion, photographic images of prisoners from three gaols in different parts of Britain (Bedford Gaol, Carmarthen, in West Wales, and Wandsworth in London) were collated, and details including age, place of origin and occupation recorded for each inmate, along with the facial hair styles visible in each case.⁶⁸ Some qualifications must be made. First, it is important to note that the smaller numbers of individuals, and restricted dates of the photographs, do not allow a direct comparison with Robinson's five-yearly data points. Instead, it has been necessary to consolidate and analyse the sample data by institution, and as a whole, across the available time periods – an approach which has drawbacks in assessing typicality, local variations or change over time. In order to give the best possible comparison with Robinson's data, though, the categories broadly follow his, but with one important distinction in the reclassification of sideburns as 'whiskers', which I again define as hair on the sides of the face, not meeting under the chin. Where variations in the length and appearance of whiskers appeared in photographs these were noted, in order to permit a more nuanced discussion of styles. Second, because of the relatively small numbers of individuals and the nature of the sources, some of what follows must be tentative. But, in the absence of a full database of all prisoner photographs, or other similar sources, beyond the scope of this book, it is at least worth some conjecture to open the door to further study.

The first register to be analysed is that of Bedford Gaol, a large prison that had been substantially expanded around 1850 and which was one of the pioneers of inmate

⁶⁶ For examples see *ibid.*, 21, 25, 26, 73.

⁶⁷ Johnston, *Crime in England*, 37.

⁶⁸ Bedfordshire Archives, MS QGV 10/4, Printed copy of List of Prisoners in Bedford County Gaol, 1859–1876; Carmarthenshire Gaol Felons Register, 1844–71, <http://www.welshlegalhistory.org/carms-felons-register.php> (accessed June 2017); NA, MS PCOM 2/290 and PCOM 2/291, Photograph Albums of Prisoners in Wandsworth Prison, 1872–3.

photography. The Bedford register covers the period from 1859 to 1876 and contains 181 photographs of male criminals. Taken as a whole across the period, within this sample, 111 men (62 per cent of the total) displayed some form of facial hair, with eighty-six men (47.5 per cent of the total) wearing beards. But there were variations in style. Perhaps surprisingly, only around a quarter of beard wearers had full, thick beards, redolent of the archetypal Victorian 'patriarchal' style. Instead, by far the most common style in the Bedford sample was the 'chin beard' or 'chin curtain'. This was a distinctive form, emerging from the sideburns and following the jawline down the sides of the cheeks and under the chin, but with much of the cheeks, and upper lip, shaved. More than two-thirds of Bedford prisoners with facial hair wore chin beards, amounting to 32.5 per cent of the total sample. Some styles, though, appear to have been relatively unpopular. For example, just thirteen men across the period (7 per cent of those with facial hair) wore only moustaches, and the same number wore side whiskers of varying lengths and styles. Three men in the sample wore 'goatee' beards.

But the other important fact to note is that seventy men (39 per cent across the period) were completely clean-shaven and, at times, the percentage was significantly more. With the caveat that the numbers of prisoner photographs in each year varied dramatically, from only five in some years to more than twenty in others, there were multiple years (1861, 1862, 1865, 1868 and 1873) in which 50 per cent or above of the photographed men had no facial hair, and the percentage rarely dropped below 33 per cent in others.

The second sample, from Carmarthen Gaol in West Wales, mirrors the same time period and numbers of prisoners as Bedford. Given the physical distance between the two gaols, the results here are remarkably similar. Among Carmarthen Gaol inmates, 114 (61 per cent of the total sample – virtually identical to Bedford) displayed facial hair, with seventy-six (39 per cent of the total sample) wearing beards. Here again, the 'chin curtain' beard was most common, with 55 per cent of bearded men in the Carmarthenshire sample wearing this style, compared to 36 per cent with full beards, and the majority of the rest having 'goatee' beards. Also, compared with Bedford, an identical percentage of men (39 per cent) were completely clean-shaven. There was some variation in whiskers and moustaches, however. Unlike Bedford, around a third of Carmarthen prisoners with facial hair wore side whiskers, while the incidence of moustaches was slightly lower, accounting for only 3 per cent of those with facial hair.

The results from the third register, from Wandsworth, cover only two particular years, 1872 and 1873, but contain a larger number, of 270. Here, 54 per cent of the total numbers of prisoners wore facial hair and 38.5 per cent of the total wore beards. The frequency of the chin beard was the highest out of the three registers, accounting for 79 per cent of beard styles. Only four individuals displayed full beards, and there were variations including goatee beards and trimmed sideburns, but also a distinctive style, worn by a number of Wandsworth inmates, of a thick patch of beard only beneath the chin – a style not replicated in either of the other registers, highlighting the relevance of regional variations.

In order to ask broader questions of the data, relating to factors such as age, occupation and styles, however, it is more useful to combine all three registers into one

Table 9.1 Facial hair styles in British prisoner photographs, 1856–76

Style	Number	% of total
Beard	264	41.60
Whiskers	85	13
Moustache	16	2.50
Other/comboination	5	1
Total with facial hair	370	58.20
Clean-shaven	265	42

bigger sample, giving a total of 635 men, between 1856 and 1876, and aged between 16 and 68.

As Table 9.1 shows, taken as a whole over 58 per cent of the prisoners in this collated sample wore facial hair, with bearded men making up more than 40 per cent of the total number of those photographed.⁶⁹ Whiskers appeared less popular, while moustache-wearing in this sample (i.e. those wearing only a moustache, rather than as part of a beard) was extremely small, suggesting that this particular fashion was not popular. Equally interesting, however, is the large number of men in this sample – as many as wore beards – who were completely clean-shaven. If these figures are in any way representative of plebeian men in Britain more broadly (and when compared to the figures given in individual registers), then well over a third – and probably closer to around 40 per cent – of lower-class men in Britain potentially had no facial hair during the peak years of the Victorian beard movement. Despite the fact that men with facial hair clearly form the majority, this figure seems remarkably high, especially given the supposed ubiquity of the beard and the background ‘noise’ drummed up by the raft of literature in support of beards during this period.

Turning to the styles of facial hair among prisoners, the prevalence of the chin beard in photographs in each of the three, geographically distinct, gaols appears compelling. Across the whole sample fully 72 per cent of beard wearers displayed a variation of this style. What might be regarded as the more typical Victorian style of full, thick beard and moustaches, by contrast, accounted for just 15 per cent of beard wearers. Other styles such as ‘goatee’ beards, light beards or even thick stubble represented other choices. Generalizing from a relatively small sample is always difficult, but the frequency of this style and in different areas of the country does raise questions about class distinctions in beard styles. Was the ‘chin beard’ perhaps the working man’s manifestation of the ‘beard movement’? It might be speculated that full beards were inimical to certain types of work, where they could become dirty, or perhaps even get trapped in machinery.

Another question seldom considered is that of the age demographic of facial hair. It is unclear whether the imperatives levelled at men to wear beards were either universally adopted by, or even meant for, all adult men. Is it even safe to assume that

⁶⁹ The figure does not total 100 per cent because of rounding.

lower-class men were necessarily aware of or interested in the beards fashion? The evidence from the data here certainly suggests differences in the wearing of facial hair according to age. Table 9.2 shows beard styles broken down into age groups by decade. The figures in brackets represent the percentages for each category of the total numbers of prisoners for that age group.

The variations in the number of prisoners in each age group, and especially the lower numbers of older men, mean that conclusions can be no more than provisional. Nonetheless, there do appear to be some interesting variations in the adoption of certain styles according to age. Because of the smaller age range of the first group, it is instructive to widen the discussion to include men between the ages of 16 and 25, to give a bigger sample. These are represented in brackets in Table 9.2 for illustrative purposes, and do not appear in the final total to avoid double counting. Given the implications in the sample data of the late appearance of beards in younger men, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that the vast majority (179) of the 261 prisoners in the sample aged between 16 and 25 were completely clean-shaven. Of the eighty-two men with any kind of facial hair, forty-two had chin beards, but most occurred after the age of 20. Eleven prisoners in this age range had full beards of varying lengths, sixteen had side whiskers and a further seven had moustaches, with the remaining men displaying scattered examples of goatee beards or stubble. The earliest appearance of a full beard (and in fact of any form of facial hair) is that of the 18-year-old labourer David Jones of Llangeller, Carmarthenshire.

Among the next group, however, those aged 21–30, facial hair was much more frequent. Fifty-eight per cent of this age group wore facial hair, dominated by the chin beard, with no moustache. Seventy-nine men out of 112 with beards wore this style, suggesting its popularity among younger men. Only seventeen men (17 per cent of beard wearers) wore full or thick beards. Whisker-wearing among this group was close to the overall average, but there were some variations, including combinations

Table 9.2 Facial hair styles in the total sampled British prisoner photographs, per decade of age (extra category of 16–25 is not included in totals)^a

Age group	Beard	Whiskers	Moustache	Clean-shaven	Other/combination	Total
16–20	11 (9.4%)	2 (1.7%)	1 (0.85%)	101 (86.3%)	2 (1.7)	117
(16–25)	57 (21.8%)	16 (6.1%)	7 (2.7%)	179 (68.6%)	2 (0.8%)	(261)
21–30	112 (40.5%)	38 (13.7%)	7 (2.5%)	117 (42.3%)	2 (0.72%)	276
31–40	86 (63.7%)	17 (12.6%)	4 (2.4%)	28 (20.7%)	0	135
41–50	30 (52.6%)	12 (21%)	2 (3.5%)	12 (21%)	0	56
51–60	16 (64%)	6 (24%)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	0	25
61+	9 (34.6%)	10 (38.5%)	1 (3.9%)	5 (19.2%)	1 (3.9%)	26
Totals	264	85	16	265	5	635

^a Again, variations from 100 per cent occur because of rounding.

of whiskers and moustaches and also a style apparently peculiar to parts of London in 1873, of a bushy outcrop of hair underneath the chin, but with all other parts shaved.⁷⁰ Why, then, did many young men seemingly choose to remain clean-shaven? It is possible that, for some younger men, beards were associated with patriarchal ideals of family formation, marriage and domesticity, attributes perhaps seen as the realm of older men. To remain clean-shaven (or even to display shaved cheeks) signified some retention of youthfulness. For others, however, beards instead represented a step *towards* manhood, a conscious decision to replace the smock face of youth with the manly tufts of maturity.

The popularity of the chin beard continued in those aged 31–40, with sixty-six (77 per cent of beard wearers) choosing this style. Here again, a relatively low percentage (17.4) of beard wearers chose to wear a full beard. Nevertheless, with the caveat that it is based on a much lower number of men, the percentage of beard wearers among those aged between 31 and 40 was significantly higher than in the previous cohort, while the percentage of clean-shaven men appearing in the sample dropped by almost a half.

Among 41–50-year-olds (again a frustratingly smaller sample) the pattern of the predominance of beard-wearing continues. While it could be assumed that older men might have been more likely to present with full beards, the chin beard was still undiminished in its popularity, accounting for more than 73 per cent of beard wearers, in contrast to only 20 per cent with full beards. The percentage of clean-shaven men remained relatively low, at around 20 per cent of the men in that age group. One noticeable change, however, was the apparent rise in the popularity of side whiskers among this age group. As Table 9.2 suggests, however, it was seemingly among men aged 51–60 that beards reached their peak, reaching their highest point in percentage terms, before dropping again thereafter. The figures also tentatively suggest the increasing adoption of whiskers with age, since they rose in popularity for nearly every successive decade of age. Remarkably though, despite the apparently overwhelming contemporary evidence in support of the full beard, its popularity – at least among this group of society – seemingly remained low.

Taken together, these results raise interesting questions, not only about the relationship between facial hair, masculinity and fashion in the nineteenth century, but also about the impact of health claims made in support of facial hair. The apparent popularity of the ‘chin curtain’ style of beard, together with the high incidence of clean-shaven prisoners, appears to suggest that arguments for the supposed health benefits of beards were either disregarded, failed to make an impact among working-class men, or never reached them in the first place. As this chapter has shown, many claims for the supposed health benefits of facial hair emphasized its role as a filter, protecting the throat and also the area around the mouth and nose. These were attributes that only a full beard could possess, the longer, thicker, softer and more luxuriant the better. The chin beard, however, depending on its size and thickness, was surely a poor relation, one that could neither filter nor protect. Often it simply

⁷⁰ See, for example, PCOM 2/291, John Lee, 18 May 1873, Alfred Waller, 21 June 1873 and Richard Leonard, 16 August 1873.

skirted the jawline, leaving shaved cheeks, chin and lips. As such, the primary areas designated as nature's protection against illness and the elements by beard advocates were left naked.

The particle-capturing properties of facial hair were especially commended for use within certain trades where the inhalation of dust or soot was potentially problematic. Although the numbers involved here are small, it is still worth some speculation. Among the prisoners in the Carmarthen register, for example, were eight coal miners – precisely the type of 'dusty' occupation appealed to by proponents of the beard. Half of those men were completely clean-shaven. Three wore chin beards, therefore missing arguably the primary component of the 'natural respirator' – the moustache. One other wore a light goatee beard, the filtering properties of which cannot have amounted to much. Other similar occupations show a like pattern. Of the eight chimney sweeps in the sample, three had no facial hair, three had chin beards and the others either a light beard or stubble. Four out of the seven railway workers in the sample (another occupational group directly encouraged to grow beards) were clean-shaven, with only two having chin beards and another just with a light beard. The sample data contains nineteen carpenters, ten of whom had beards, of which eight were chin beards. The suggestion from this limited sample is, again, that health claims were not necessarily accepted in large numbers.

Continuing the theme of occupation, there is little evidence for beard styles as tokens of occupational identities, although the limited number of examples of specific trades rules out detailed analysis. It is interesting to note, however, that among the recorded occupations, from travelling hawkers and rag gatherers to a variety of artisanal trades, retailers and, occasionally, white collar workers such as clerks or accountants, the sample also includes thirty-four vagrants, ranging in age and supposed occupation. It seems reasonable to assume that such men would be bearded, without (presumably) the means to shave themselves, or the money to spend on a barber. Seventeen of the men were bearded. But rather than long, unkempt beards, consistent with a life spent on the road, thirteen wore chin beards, and only two had full beards, with a further two wearing heavy stubble. The other half were clean-shaven. Again, based on a limited sample, the implications are nonetheless intriguing, suggesting that even the poorest of men still found the time, motivation and means to shave. Clearly possessing a basic razor and shaving crudely, perhaps without soap or hot water, when the opportunity arose was a possibility. But it also speaks of the importance of shaving as a male ritual, perhaps linked to the maintenance of dignity and routine, even amidst the hardest of circumstances.

Conclusions

What inferences are to be drawn from the evidence of prisoner photographs? The relatively small size of the sample, the patchiness of the data and demographic variations in these samples all serve to inhibit a deep statistical analysis. But comparing three gaols over a similar time period at least gives a first glimpse at the faces of poorer men in Britain, giving a benchmark against which to measure both broad assumptions

about the homogeneity of facial hair fashions and also the particular conclusions drawn in Robinson's original study of elite facial hair styles.

First, if the data sampled here is in any way representative of either other areas of the country or other groups or levels of society, it suggests that a large proportion of Victorian men were potentially clean-shaven, even at the height of the beard movement, and an even larger proportion still needed to shave at least part of their faces regularly. Facial hair was obviously a matter of choice. The majority of men here did wear some form of facial hair, which could be seen as lending weight to the broad success of the beard campaign. But a significant proportion also clearly chose not to, suggesting in turn that the sustained arguments put forward in support of wearing beards was not necessarily as all-conquering as has previously been assumed. This is a theme that will be returned to in a later chapter exploring the marketplace for shaving products in the nineteenth century.

There are other factors in the sample that appeared to influence choices about facial hair. Age was one. Men under 20 seemingly preferred to be clean-shaven or were perhaps less able to grow beards in the first place – the archetypal beardless boys. Thereafter, facial hair dominated, with more men wearing it than not. It does not seem to be the case, though, that the face of the 'ordinary' Victorian working man was necessarily adorned with a mighty patriarchal beard, or even a moustache. Rather, his was most often a hybrid beard, still requiring much attention to keep it trim and in shape. Other styles such as 'goatee' beards still required much of the face to be shaved. As they grew older, a proportion of men also seemed to prefer a set of side whiskers to a beard, a style again, according to their size and thickness, requiring the chin and lips to be shaved. Given, as we have seen, the vociferous attacks on shaving and the supposed dangers of the razor, this seems all the more surprising. Occupation does not seem to have been a particular factor, although location could lead to the emergence of local variations in fashion.

Turning finally to Robinson's study, how does the evidence from prisoner photographs match with the patterns displayed in the *Illustrated London News*? Again, the discussion here is based on a much smaller sample, but it suggests that Robinson's study showing that less than 30 per cent of men were clean-shaven after 1850, with a further decrease each decade, may not necessarily be representative of all levels of Victorian society. In fact, among the lower orders, it appears that significantly more men may have been clean-shaven throughout the 1860s and into the 70s.