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Dispatches from the Underground: Gendered Labor and Communications Technology in the Remaking of London, 1870 – 1916

Project Summary:

Between 1870 and the First World War, the British public entered a period of unprecedented communications expansion that has only been surpassed in the last fifteen years. Fuelling this exponential growth of electronic information transfer was the British state, which became telegraphy's retailer and regulator under the auspices of the Post Office. London was the focal point of telegraph and telephone technology: most dispatches went through the capital, and the demands placed on this highspeed communications system required large amounts of new types of specifically gendered urban labor. Thousands of young men and women were incorporated into an information system touted as the epitome of the modern age, essential for free enterprise and society. Uniformed teenaged boys hand-delivered telegrams, and young telegraphists and telephone operators enabled electronic communication to flow as quickly and cheaply as possible.

My dissertation contends that these Late Victorian postal communications workers best demonstrate a new type of labor required by the "liberal" city. Recently, historian Patrick Joyce has characterized the nineteenth century metropolis as a space of orderly motion and disciplined self-regulation, one where the aspirations of liberal rule were enacted in the design of urban environments. [footnote] While building on Joyce's insights, I add some important social dynamics to his picture. The telecommunications aspect of this liberal order was structured according to gendered logics, from the design of machines to the spatial organization of workers, to the separate pay scales men, women, and boys were subject to. Telegraph delivery boys, male telegraphists, and female operators each incorporated different strategies to manage the exploitative employment practices of the Post Office. These workers accommodated employment expectations to produce a system of speed and ubiquity integral to the "modern" urban environment. Yet they also disrupted the harmonious flow of the wires. Striking male telegraphists, promiscuous telegraph boys, assertive telephone operators, and the very presence of female laborers ensured that telegraphic cityscapes were not seamless hubs of commercial society and public discretion. They were sites of social stratification and contestations over shifting gender norms; and they offered new scope for heterosexual fantasy and homosexual transgressions.

Literary, theatrical, and press representations of postal telecommunications employees grappled with these contradictions. At the same time, the styles of discipline enacted by postal administrators to manage their troubling workforce became increasingly militaristic and authoritarian. These factors coalesced to provide symbolic fuel to those still disenfranchised by the state. In London, suffragettes attacked telegraph lines as instruments of a repressive male state, but also masqueraded as telegraph boys to move anonymously through elite political spaces. In Dublin, the original colonial second city of the British Empire, nationalists forcibly occupied the central post and telegraph office, embracing it as the founding site of a new republic. Both directly and imaginatively, communications workers were actors in a set of processes of

British city life that authorities wished to regulate. In turn, they became essential conduits for exposing the more disruptive mechanics of 19th and early 20th century governance.

While the telegraph has received plenty of scholarly attention in recent years, especially in terms of imperial rule, surprisingly little work has attended to the human infrastructure essential to the growth, maintenance, and representation of the new British and Imperial communications order. This project addresses this oversight. In doing so, *Dispatches from the Underground* conjoins the history of sexuality and British labor history and invigorates them with insights of other disciplines, including the history of technology, postcolonial studies, and political history. Following Bruno Latour and Michel Foucault, a set of historians including Joyce, James Vernon and Christopher Otter, have revisited the determining role of urban infrastructure such as sewers, street lighting and of course the telegraph in producing “self-regulating” modern subjects. I contribute to these studies by reanimating them with the protagonists of social history. By prioritizing laboring subjects rather than the infrastructural networks themselves, I highlight the human agents whose marginalization contributed to the urban “freedoms” of others.

Dispatches from the Underground draws on employment records, administrative minutes and correspondence, telegraph journals, parliamentary sources, trial records, police reports, memoirs, newspapers, teaching manuals, novels, and popular renderings of the telegraph system into a cultural history rich with material evidence. In particular, I rely heavily on the collections of the British Postal Archive and on the British Telecom Archive, two excellent and underused repositories. My findings are organized into 5 chapters. They are roughly chronological, each chapter developing the interplay between different social actors’ encounters with telegraphic work. Each chapter thus incorporates analyses of the human mechanics of communications systems and of the broader cultural rendering of these processes.

Chapter One, “The Labour of the Liberal City,” examines changes to the London landscape in the 1870s and the contours of its new telegraphic workforce. As the telegraph became a largely underground technology, its workers embodied its presence. I will demonstrate how urban telegraph operators and telegraph boys interacted with new systems of work discipline, how their mechanized bodies became fetishized, and how these young men and women responded to their roles in what had become Britain’s largest bureaucracy by the end of the Victorian era. Chapter Two, “Unintended Networks” considers the implications for a government telegraph system whose workers combine delivery work with sex work. I focus on three examples: a newly uncovered male prostitution investigation in 1877; an incident in Dublin involving sex between postal workers and aristocrats; and a tabloid sensation in 1889, in which five telegraph boys were linked to a major society scandal and trial, this time involving members of the aristocracy who frequented a male brothel.

Chapter Three, “Voices from the Cage,” focuses on female communications workers in London and their relationships with their machines, management, male coworkers, and consumers. Telegraph and telephone machine design started to incorporate the supposed needs and weaknesses of female operators. Spatial segregation, gendered wage scales, and working hours became more elaborate, then ultimately fractured as women and men’s use value shifted over this period. At the same time, telegraph and telephone users often viewed the aspiring female operator as a conduit of sexual transgressions, who aids and abets deviance. Chapter Four, “Managing Currents” considers how the Post Office became involved in subversive political activity in the early years of the twentieth century. The radical suffragette organization the Womens Social and Political Union stands out as a fascinating case study, as they attacked wires across the country while extolling the virtues of female telephone operators. The suffragettes also incorporated telegraph boys into a new form of subterfuge: WSPU members cross-dressed as telegraph boys in order to sneak into male-only government spaces in London. The mobility, ubiquity, and anonymity of boy messengers in the capital made them symbolic agents for women invested in political representation and traversing the modern urban landscape.

Chapter Five, “Imperial Networks in Flux,” concludes this study with the impact of 20th century military conflicts and the first unravellings of the British Empire on urban communications. I explore the “Boy Labour” crisis from 1905-1910, when “blind alley” short-term employment for male youth at the London Post Office was blamed for all manner of social ills, including the degeneration of the British race. An overtly martial work culture emerged as a result, encompassing boys, postmen and telegraph/telephone workers. I contrast this pre-war militancy in the capital with British telecommunications’ symbolic resonance during the Great War. Despite gender upheavals in the telegraph workforce, laboring subjects produced notions of domestic stability on the metropolitan and colonial homefront. Finally, I consider Irish Nationalists’ decision to make the Dublin Post Office their headquarters for their ill-fated revolt against British rule in 1916. I argue that, largely due to its workforce, telecommunications had reclaimed an aura of “benign” power that nationalists wished to incorporate into their vision of proper governance over the future republic.

Chapter 2: Unintended Networks

While the “Cleveland Street” or “West End” Scandal is familiar territory for historians of sexuality, the telegraph boys’ role in the affair tends to be overshadowed by those of its more glamorous and notorious participants. Yet telegraph boys were literally at the bottom of Cleveland Street’s revelations: an internal Post Office investigation at the Central Telegraph Office brought the Cleveland Street brothel to light, and while the scandal ultimately involved peers, politicians and journalists, the initial discoveries made by London Post Office officials uncovered a small but effective network of telegraph boy rent emanating from within the department’s head office. Cleveland Street ensured telegraph messengers’ inclusion in scholarly discussions of urban male prostitution, but their specific contribution to London’s sexual subcultures remains largely unexplored.ⁱ

To partially remedy this situation, I consider the administrative and symbolic implications for a government telegraph system whose young messengers combined delivery work with sex work. Telegraph boys embodied both the technological ordering

of time, space, and information in the metropolis and those more uncontrollable forces that modernizing agents wished to curtail. Their deliveries ensured the efficient flow of information to the wealthy and predominantly male consumers of the telegraph, and their concentrated presence in certain enclaves of London re-inscribed financial, state, and imperial might.ⁱⁱ And yet, as the Cleveland Street Scandal made abundantly clear, some telegraph boys were also workers in the underground male sex trade. What is more, previously overlooked archival sources at the British Postal Heritage Museum and Archive reveal that Cleveland Street, instead of being a singular revelation of the intersection of sexual culture, class and urban technology, was only the most public display of a longstanding problem for the London General Post Office (GPO) administration. An earlier series of events, culminating in the spring of 1877, left a trail of memoranda, letters, and reports that offers grounds for an re-evaluation of the key role that telegraph boys' sexual (mis)conduct played in the reordering of London's late-Victorian communications system.

Surprisingly enough, by following the Post Office Executive's reaction to the exploits of London telegraph boys, a picture begins to emerge of the odd centrality of homosexual practices to the contours of late Victorian urban communications regulation. Vague rumors of sinful behavior in telegraph boy kitchens spawned a full-scale investigation, run by the Missing Letter Branch and the Metropolitan Police, which uncovered widespread "immorality." The administrative response to these revelations had lasting effects and reverberations throughout the GPO's internal policing system. Telegraph boys found themselves subject to increased monitoring, as did the rest of the GPO's employees. Yet telegraph boys avoided sexual taint in the eyes of the public.

Victorian discretion helped, but telegraph boys were so deeply embedded in narratives of technological progress and communications might that it was almost impossible for most people to imagine them equally embedded in homoerotic urban landscapes. Thanks to anti-prostitution measures implemented by the GPO in the 1870s, by the late 1880s telegraph boys also represented the aspiring, respectable working class. Their sexual dalliances with elite men were thus reinterpreted by scandalized commentators as vestiges of ancien regime debauchery forced upon respectable, newly enfranchised innocents.

London's "unnamable" homosexual subcultures and its proudly touted communications systems were intimately networked, and the young telegraph/rent boys who exploited the possibilities of London's sexual subcultures while embodying state order, efficiency and prescribed mobility ultimately acted in their capacity as a unique type of modern labourer. Nineteenth century information technology, before the rise of the telephone and wireless, still depended on face-to-face human contact. The presence of telegraph boys in this period was a transformative moment of modern interactions with space and time, where strangers still had to ritually confront each other in order to pass on the latest information. London telegraph messengers' duty to cross boundaries and be party to secrets, to deliver the confidences and desires of their wealthy customers, made them strangely transgressive symbols of modern order. They not only rendered underground technology visible; they made manifest London's sexual underground, uniting high and low society.

The London Telegraph Boy

In the 1870s over 2,000 telegraph boys worked in telegraph offices and on the London streets. Unlike their female coworkers and non-uniformed indoor male staff who were kept inside seated at telegraph machines or behind counters, telegraph boys were expected to have almost limitless mobility. They were also cheap. Usually hired at 14, they were the lowest paid employees at the GPO, earning 5 shillings a week at the outset. Their wages would rise in increments, and in most London districts more experienced boys switch a “docket” system: the more telegraphs they delivered per day, the more money they received. Senior London telegraph boys, at aged 17, could use their accumulated knowledge of the fastest ways to distribute telegrams to make up to 12 shillings a week on average.

Messengers wore tight-fitting blue serge uniforms, with belts, boots and shako caps comprised of the cheapest grade fabric and leather. They were subject to morning inspections, and suspended without pay if their uniforms were disheveled or torn.ⁱⁱⁱ Their public behaviour was obviously circumscribed to a certain extent, as is demonstrated by an unfortunate encounter in St James:

Mr. Tilley met telegraph messenger No. 561 in St. James Street this morning smoking and looking dirty and untidy. Mr. Tilley told him not to smoke on duty; and he considers that if the boy passed before the Inspector before starting he was no Credit to that Officer’s supervision.^{iv}

The fate of Messenger No. 561 and his Inspector is unknown, but Mr. Tilley, soon to be Sir John Tilley, the Secretary to the Postmaster General (the second highest ranking member of the GPO executive), initiated a short-lived proposal to include more

identifying marks on telegraph messenger uniforms. The proposal was eventually thrown out because the cost of embroidering was deemed too expensive.

Messenger 561's example highlights the perceived downside of having cost-saving boys on the front lines of the new communications order. Youth combined with a working-class status made them a potentially vulnerable and capricious staff. Smoking was particularly evocative of troubling urban boyhood.^v The London press, heavy users of the telegraph, displayed either amused exasperation or patronizing enthusiasm when it came to the young messengers. Humorous anecdotes about telegraph boys mixing up deliveries or being distracted by street games while on duty were fairly common, and a grumpy poem in *Moonshine* went further and bemoaned “[t]he lazy and blundering /Telegraph boy.”^{vi} *The Licensed Victualler*, a gossipy, jocular London weekly, had the opposite to say about telegraph boys: “[W]hoever yet saw a telegraph boy run off his legs or distressed in any way whatsoever? [...] Who can come forward and say he is fallen in with any specimen of the *genus* who has not been sharp, perky, full of animal spirits, and, in a general way, up to date?”^{vii} Here we have a modern, ‘up to date’ telegraph boy who is a unique ‘genus’ of the busy streets. He is fuelled by ‘animal spirits’ which keep him happy and running. This combination of elite admiration and condescension of telegraph boys reveals both their appeal and their danger: those animal spirits were volatile components in the context of London’s possibilities.

Telegraph boys reportedly developed their own language to describe their experience of delivering and what to expect from their customers: a “lag” was an unusually long distance to cover; a “cop” was a house or business which tipped.^{viii} The city was being physically and mentally rezoned through the telegraph, both by

messengers themselves and by the calculations of the GPO. New stations sprang up to accommodate the expected speed of communication, with areas associated with business, government, affluence and retail (Westminster, the City, the West End) heavily catered to and other areas (North London, the East End) to varying degrees ignored. London was being divided along familiar class lines, but the commodity was now the speed of communications. Telegraph boys ensured that people at home and at work did not themselves have to interrupt their schedules and check for incoming messages at the post offices. To send messages, other than direct replies, telegraph customers who could not afford to rent their own lines and pay for an in-house telegraphist still had to make the initial connection with the GPO; but station proximity was making this trip more convenient, and besides, for many telegraph customers, servants and office boys often performed this task and provided a insulating link between home or the workplace and the bustle and annoyance of street traffic and post office lineups. To further enhance the importance, prestige, and efficiency of this system, telegraph dispatches were designed for single message delivery: unlike postman who carried multiple letters and delivered the post according to laid-out routes, urban telegraph boys were sent out with a single telegram, the moment it came up. This was at least the theory; in practice at busy London offices telegraph boys would be sent out with up to three messages, hopefully whose addressees were in close proximity to each other.^{ix} Messengers were instructed to appear as if the one message in their hand was the single focus of their run across town. This personalized service combined old ideas of deference with new expectations of the efficiency of wired communication.

As more post offices and telegraph boys began to appear, actual telegraph wires began to vanish. After 1870 the GPO systematically removed telegraph wires from the city rooftops and installed them “safely and quietly underground.”^x This was ostensibly done to better protect the wires, but it also served to “tidy up” the London skyline and thin obstructing telegraph poles. When the new Central Telegraph Office was built in 1874 at St. Martin’s-le-Grande, it housed a marvel of new technology that discreetly snaked its way under the city from the Tower of London to the House of Commons. This was a pipeline of ‘pneumatic tubes,’ designed to transfer written messages between the main telegraph stations “in a few seconds.”^{xi} Thirty-six miles of pipeline stretched east and west from the Central Telegraph Office beneath central London. Compressed air fired telegram-filled canisters along these tubes to their destinations, where the telegrams would then be transferred into the hands of the district telegraph boys. “A stream of telegrams...continually flow[ed]” under the metropolis, and the few contemporaries who were aware of the tubes thought them “very wonderful in their working.”^{xii}

All these measures of efficiency amounted to a reorientation of space and time with communication. As the pneumatic pipeline was largely unknown, the new speed of message transfer was vaguely understood by its users to be the result of unspecified scientific advancement – something that just ‘happened’ in the modern city.^{xiii} The new technology hid itself underground, shrinking time and space in the process. Those who relied on telegraphs developed new conceptions about information transfer and the city landscapes. Only the telegraph boy, dressed in the uniform of the GPO, remained as the last physical vestige of this largely invisible technology.

The consumers of the newly subterranean network were of vastly different class backgrounds than that of the messengers. In the 1870s telegrams cost 1s per twenty words, with free delivery in London. While cheaper than the private telegrams of previous decades, the cost of telegrams put them beyond the range of the majority of Londoners. Certain urban dwellers – elites, government officials, businessmen and traders, and gamblers – frequently communicated by telegram, but most people sent or received telegrams only in moments of extreme crisis. Telegraph boys certainly could not afford the messages they delivered.

In the 1870s, telegraph boys could expect to be hired as assistant postmen or mail sorters when they turned 18. Some of the ‘brighter boys’ were offered telegraph training, although most telegraph clerkships were reserved for boys with more schooling and higher up the social scale.^{xiv} Telegraph delivery was at this point more or less a form of apprenticeship for the GPO mail delivery establishment.

GPO telegraph boys were the latest addition to the uniformed members of Victorian London’s workforce. They joined their fellow postmen, along with police and soldiers, as visual staples of state presence in the capital. Also, like soldiers and policemen, telegraph boys exerted an erotic draw on upper-class men searching for ‘rough trade’ on London’s streets. Here too, telegraph boys’ youth made them a distinct subcategory in urban rent. These 14 to 18 year old messengers were uniquely available participants in the Late Victorian sex trade. They could literally arrive on your doorstep; they were expected to traverse every corner of the city; and their presence at almost any hour of the day or night, in almost every type of urban neighbourhood, was expected and unremarkable. Telegraph boys’ obligations to get around the metropolis as fast as

possible were aided by improved public transportation in this period, which, as Matt Cook has pointed out, also provided new opportunities for discreet, anonymous sexual encounters between men, often of different classes, and for greater access to homoerotically inflected urban landscapes.^{xv} Telegraph Messengers' GPO pledge to discretion and confidentiality when it came to telegrams was mirrored in their furtive sexual liaisons with elite male customers, who, as we shall see, could be just as compromised as the messengers if revealed.

Male Prostitution and the London GPO

1876 was an auspicious year for the telegraph network. The nationalized system had grown exponentially, and while it had yet to make a profit the new supposed ubiquity of telegraph offices was still the GPO's chief asset and bragging point. Throughout the year, plans were made to reroute London wires centrally. The district offices' role in transmission would be reduced, with almost all dispatches transferred through the Central Office at St Martins-le-Grand.^{xvi} Frederick E. Baines, the Surveyor General of Telegraphs for London, reported favorably on this transition throughout the year, and in his spare time he tried to arrange for reading materials and other wholesome activities to be provided for telegraph boys between dispatches. His new-found interest in telegraph boy welfare was directed by a memo from the Postmaster General, Lord John Manners, who had tipped Baines off that "disorderly conduct" of telegraph messengers had occurred at the Vere Street Post Office in 1875. A clergyman had sent a letter to the Postmaster General reporting on vague but disturbing behaviour admitted to by boys preparing for confirmation.^{xvii} In response, Manners began an informal inquiry into messenger supervision and whether the boys had anything to do in their down time.

Between dispatches, telegraph boys congregated in small kitchens, often sharing space in the basement of telegraph offices with lavatories and the extensive machinery that generated electricity for the telegraph machines and powered the underground pneumatic tube system. They were usually supervised by low-paid matrons or older telegraph boys who had achieved the rank of ‘corporal’ or ‘lance corporal. These spaces had tables and chairs, as well as small storage receptacles for the messengers’ overcoats and waterproof gear. The number of boys in these spaces varied greatly, depending on the size of office and the flow of telegraph business. Supervision was inconsistent, and in some London offices telegraph boys were left unmonitored or corralled near mail sorters and other indoor staff on the lower floors in the hope that some form of supervision occurred. Baines’ reading campaign, combined with other memoranda in 1876, illustrate a growing concern among officials about supervision of the messenger staff within the telegraph offices. By July, there were attempts by Tilley to standardize female matron supervision and pay, but this was left unresolved. A new concern over what was occurring off GPO premises had quietly taken priority.

A minute from Tilley to the Postmaster General appears on September 5, 1876, which indicates that an internal investigation of telegraph boys’ extracurricular activities was already underway:

I submit that the following boy messengers be at once dismissed from the service, viz.: Buck, Fovargue, Thompson, Juddick, Isaacs, Cave, Tindall; and I would suggest that copies of the report and its enclosures should be sent to the Home Office and Mr. Cross [the Home Secretary] be asked to consider whether the Police are altogether free from blame in not having called the attention of the Department to these proceedings of which they must have been cognizant.^{xviii}

This initial report, produced by Thomas Jeffery, Head of the GPO's internal investigation department then known as the Missing Letter Branch, is thus far unavailable, but there remains the names of the culprits and an indictment of police negligence in not alerting the GPO of its employees' practices. The boys came from at least three different offices: R Isaacs worked at the West Central District Office on the Strand; J E Tindall was stationed at Kensington; and later correspondence identifies the "Chief" office, at St Martins-le-Grand, along with the West Strand office and the West Central District in general, as the main source of the problem.

In response to this minute, the Postmaster General confirmed the telegraph boys' dismissal and ordered that Jeffery's report be sent to the Home Office, but cautioned the Secretary "to appear not to cast blame on the police."^{xix} As H.G. Cocks and Charles Upchurch have noted, the Metropolitan police in this period had adopted certain practices for regulating sex between men. Before the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, procuring enough evidence for a sodomy arrest between consenting partners could be difficult, and police wanted to avoid being themselves implicated in extortion or libel charges.^{xx} Aiding the police's reticence to pursue discreet homosexual encounters were powerful legal and moral discourses that discouraged public discussion of the "nameless offence" except by calling it just that and leaving homosexual behaviour literally below (or beyond) description. Lawyers, magistrates, doctors and politicians concurred that publically getting into the details of the 'infamous crime' would encourage its spread or at least adversely affect public morals.^{xxi} Furthermore, the Police Commissioner, Colonel Henderson, veered towards caution when it came to sexual policing: he had reluctantly agreed to clear the Haymarket's night-houses two years earlier and, in response to

numerous complaints, insisted that his officers leave female street prostitutes and clients well alone unless they became rowdy, indecent or impeded the free movement of the streets.^{xxii}

In any case, a squabble brewed between the two police forces and in November, the Home Office responded with another report on telegraph boy behaviour (also missing) that apparently cast aspersions on the Post Office Constables. In Secretary Tilley's summation of the report to the Postmaster General, Tilley's defense of the GPO's internal police reveals how Buck, Fovargue, et al. had been investigated:

On the occasion when Constable Butler [of the GPO] was accosted in the Haymarket by the Superintendent [of the Metropolitan Police], he had not... "been specially employed a considerable time in watching Telegraph Boys in the Haymarket in relation to these offences...."

The simple fact is this, that there being some reason to suspect what was going on, it was determined to have the Boys interrogated to see what could be elicited, but prior to doing so it was deemed expedient to send Butler to the Haymarket for a few nights just to observe their conduct without telling him the nature of the suspicions that were entertained.^{xxiii}

Regardless of whether Constable Butler knew why he was asked to observe telegraph boys in the Haymarket – which had been notorious for prostitution throughout the mid-Victorian era and still a haven, though less fashionable, for sexual bartering in 1876 - this glimpse of the London streets courtesy of undercover police investigations evokes the sexual nature of the GPO kitchen disturbances and the extent to which they had come out into the open.

By early January of 1877 the telegraph boys' kitchens were explicitly linked to homosexual practices, though what exactly went on is obscured by Victorian propriety. Next to the Secretary's Minute 149, titled "The Immoral conduct of Boy Messengers.

Assessment of Mr. Jeffery's Report," is a blank space. Underneath the Postmaster General remarked "These distressing disclosures conform in the belief that the kitchens have been the source of the evil. I approve of the proposal to be adopted."^{xxiv} Later that month the Postmaster General responded to another missing minute titled "Immoral conduct and dismissal of certain boys" by ordering Detectives to be stationed "about the Office concerned."^{xxv}

The previous evidence offers tantalizing peaks into a potentially well-developed youth sexual subculture within the GPO. It is plausible that the boy messengers' workplace sexual interactions paralleled those of privileged juvenile boys at public schools, with the obvious exception that telegraph boys accepted money for sex after work. The kitchens and basements in telegraph offices appear have been spaces of initiation into urban rent, and perhaps for homoerotic encounters between boys that may or may not have culminated in prostitution. That the dismissed boys came from different offices suggests a well-developed network of commercial sex that transgressed the boundaries of kitchen and street. Spaces like the Haymarket were incorporated into a broader landscape intimately connected with messengers' uniformed bodily display and dual occupations. Their knowledge of city streets, offices, theatres and residences – and how to navigate them effectively – so essential in their official capacity, proved a valuable asset in engaging with more liminal urban topographies. Some of London's modern mercuries had quickly plugged in to the sexual possibilities inherent in traversing certain parts of the metropolis.

One report, the draft of Jeffery's final report on "Immorality among Boys," survives intact. Presented to the Secretary on March 31, 1877, Jeffery provides an

exhaustive list of the causes and remedies for male prostitution at the GPO. He introduces the report rather dramatically by playing up the endemic nature of homosexual misdeeds among the messenger staff:

the discovery that the vice... as existing among the Telegraph Boys engaged on Night duty at the Chief Office, was found to exist in an equal, or greater, degree among a similar class of employés in some of the Metropolitan Districts... the facts brought to light by more recent enquiries give a clearer insight into the character and extent of the evil.^{xxvi}

For Jeffery, the “causes no doubt are various” but he breaks down his main findings into three zones of evil influence: “the bad source of supply for Telegraph Messengers;” “Things within the service that tend to this result;” and “Things outside the Service and beyond the control of the Department.”^{xxvii} The categories Jeffery employs are striking for their reliance on the divisions of inside and outside, and his delineations typify spatial divisions already built into GPO administration. They conform to his instinct to restore control and order in these unruly environments. Yet movement across these imaginary boundaries inevitably leaks into his assessment and destabilizes them. This fragility of his categories, routed in an idealized insularity of workplace and anarchic outer world, is most apparent in that the report often contradicts itself on which zones produces the greatest danger.

Jeffery’s first target of containment are the homes, neighbourhoods, and class of the telegraph boys. He notes that the offices most affected by immorality were supplied with telegraph boys from Bermondsey, Whitechapel, and “the low parts of Chelsea.” These boys, he writes, “had but one parent or none at all, and almost from their birth had been thrown on the care of some relative whose guardianship was but nominal.” The living conditions experienced by the marginalized youth of London was, for Jeffery,

enough to foster moral depravity: “The sad effects of bad training, or of extreme poverty, or both combined, were seen in many of the boys, in an utter absence of truthfulness, except when falsehoods would no longer screen them, in a greediness for money, and a willingness to prostitute themselves even for very small sums.” Jeffery surmises that the degenerate telegraph boys “had no particular liking for the vice, as a vice, but, whatever dislike they had for it, was entirely and easily overborne by the money which was tendered to them by their seducers.”^{xxviii}

Jeffery’s reading of poverty and moral depravity aligns with popular middle class discourses of the Victorian slum as producer of disease and moral, as well as physical and social, degeneration. Homosexuality, along with female promiscuity, incest, infanticide, rape, and all manner of sexual sins were outcomes of poor living conditions and the attendant collapse of ‘natural’ human sentiment.^{xxix} His further musings into this “bad supply” line of telegraph boys underscores the class dynamics underlying telegraph boy labour and telegraph boy vice: he notes that was impossible to get “a superior class of boy” on the 5 shilling starting salary offered to telegraph messengers. The GPO was left to hire “little more than the residuum.” The “superior class of boy” would not sell himself for cash, but the department’s terrible wages are essentially to blame for appealing only to the lowest, and therefore most corrupt, class of worker. For Jeffery, London’s slums, GPO efficiency and telegraph boy vice were all-too-comfortable bedfellows.^{xxx}

Jeffery goes on to posit what had long been assumed: that the structure of the workplace also fostered homosexual practices. He notes that the “idle life many of them lead when in the office” was conducive to vice, for “[b]oys when together in numbers, without useful employment or exercise, or recreation of any kind, are sure to be planning

mischief or doing something they should not.” Supervision was a key problem, especially when older boys supervised younger ones: “The evidence taken shews [sic] that the system of Corporals and Lance Corporals is of little or no value in a matter like this, as some of the worst boys were found in those ranks, and even when they were not personally involved, they often winked at, if they did not actually encourage, the vice in other boys.”^{xxxix} The repeated assertions of memoranda, letters, and ultimately this report that kitchens were the origin and focal point of “immorality” underscore a well-developed and dangerously mobile homoerotic youth subculture. As Jeffery reminds us, these unspeakable actions spilled out of the GPO buildings: “Another cause of mischief is that of sending off duty a large number of boys together, especially when there are two or three bad ones amongst them, as in such a case the corrupt influence spreads very rapidly.”^{xxxix} The seed of suggestion, the influence of older boys in charge, and the listless downtime between deliveries all coalesced to foster “immorality.”

“But of all the causes within the Service that have tended to promote this vice is that of Night Duty.”^{xxxix} Jeffery’s emphatic declaration precedes a lengthy summary of the evils of having boys working on the streets after 8pm, apparently the magic hour when respectable London lost its hold on the city. “It was very apparent that much of the demoralization came from the Streets,” Jeffery argues, and the longer telegraph boys were forced to be out at night the greater the chance of exposure to “temptations of the worst and most powerful kind.” The telegraph boys’ late night commute home was equally dangerous: with sleeping or absent parents, whose homes were “long distances from the Offices they are employed,” night duty boys, could “if so minded, keep out to any hour of the morning.”^{xxxix} The neglected children of the working class, whose

telegraph rounds necessarily segregated them for their working class neighbourhoods, had every opportunity to participate in the secret nighttime world of commercial sex and other illicit activities, so long as the GPO provided them with the means to do so. For Jeffery, city streets themselves infect its workforce. Day and night, “the naturally demoralizing influence of a Street life on juvenile character” was at work on telegraph boys, especially given that there was “no check on the conduct of the boys out of doors.”^{xxxv}

Jeffery’s final zone of evil influence, “Things outside the Service, and beyond the control of the Department” is the most unstable, for London’s streets, offices, pleasure venues and private residences were incorporated into the telegraph network, as Jeffery’s previous argument makes clear. He chooses particular places comprising this zone to make his case: the large number of brothels and houses of assignation where “committing this crime with comparative impunity” was a matter of course, and Public Houses. Jeffery apparently found “few cases of this evil... in which the boys were not in the first instance, and then repeatedly afterwards, taken into Public Houses and plied with drink.” He describes “[lewd conversations at the Bars or Counters and the exhibition of indecent pictures...” and is shocked how “openly was all this done.... it is difficult to understand how the proprietors of such establishments, or the persons responsible for order in them, did not know what was going on.”^{xxxvi}

Jeffery further alludes to the challenges of policing homosexual acts: “There are again the immense obstacles in the way of the Police obtaining the necessary evidence to prosecute for a crime of this kind, and the natural objection they have against taking legal measures, unless the evidence is of the clearest character.”^{xxxvii} As previously mentioned,

police were loath to prosecute unless there was clear evidence or overwhelming pressure to do so. The GPO ran into this legal obstacle:

Considerably more than a hundred boys have been under examination in the matter... a great many of these have been dismissed on very clear evidence of their guilt... the rest have been more or less involved.... [and] the names and addresses of the men concerned have in various instances been known, and yet out of all this only one man and one boy can be prosecuted for the capital offence.^{xxxviii}

Even taking into account some measure of hyperbole, telegraph boy prostitution appears to have been commonplace in the capital. The growth and spread of London's communications network fostered a culture of commercial sex among its young, exploited staff. Their liminal status in the department and the streets provided cover for after-hours work in the sex trade, and their youth, uniforms and availability made them desirable to Jeffery's final and most troubling outside offender: "the number of bad men who are always lying in wait, especially near Post Offices, to beguile the boys and bribe them with money, of which such men appear to have an ample supply."^{xxxix} He portrays London's wealthy sodomites lying in wait around GPO buildings, as if drawn to these hubs in their pursuit of telegraph boys through the London streets. Jeffery goes on to surmise that "But for these men to seduce the boys, this form of immorality would in all probability be quite or almost unknown, so far as the Telegraph Messengers are concerned."^{xl} In spite of what he has intimated before, Jeffery isolates homoerotic desire in the figure of the elite urban sodomite. The act of sex between men could be encouraged from below, but the desire for sex between men trickled down from on high. In describing the sodomite in this way, Jeffery also envisions a decidedly queer communications system. The telegraph draws the sodomite out in the open, desire intersects with networks of wires and boys; the class positioning of telegraph consumer

and worker is reiterated through sexual liaison; and the underground of vice, like the London underworld of wires and cables, is manifest in the figure of the telegraph messenger.

Notably, Jeffery's description of bad men lying in wait around Post Offices did not make the final report. Tilley crossed out this section, the only part of the draft to be cut. His editorializing may have been inspired by fears that Jeffery's analysis was flirting with paranoia, but it is a striking example of the literal "un-naming" of the carriers of homosexual desire. Across the board, government administrators embraced this tactic, referring to boys' "immorality" as code for the sexual market whose specifics they were forced to confront. There is also a class element underlying Tilley's omission: the GPO executive focused on their young employees, leaving the bad men with "ample" means unmentionable.

The logic of Jeffery's assessment confirms what other historians have suggested regarding English cultural understandings of class and homoeroticism before the rise of sexology: the role of the city itself as progenitor of vice is very much on display in this report, as are deeply entrenched views of poverty, disease, and moral degeneration. On another level, however, the GPO's investment in "immorality" maps out the interplay between the telegraph system and London's homoerotic landscape.

These sources, in conjunction with Home Office correspondence, also prove the hunch of James Smith, the "one man" who was convicted of corrupting telegraph boys in 1877. Smith appears in H.G. Cocks' thorough study of nineteenth century convictions for homosexual offences.^{xli} Smith's case seems fairly unique in that there were no

corroborating witnesses to testify against him. The telegraph boy who he slept with in his premises had accepted 5 shillings payment, which technically made him an accomplice. By English law, the evidence of an accomplice had to be corroborated; only the testimony of a sexually assaulted victim or an uninvolved witness could be legally be used. In Smith's case that fact was ignored.^{xliii}

More recently, Sean Brady has argued that Smith's treatment is an example of the "culture of resistance in Britain to public discussion of sex and sexuality between men."^{xliii} For Brady, the Victorian and Edwardian period was significant for its inflexible codes of appropriate manhood. "Alternate" masculinities were all suspect in a culture that required men to be breadwinning husbands above all else. Homosexual acts undermined the vulnerable balance at work in the movements between domesticity, the workplace, homosociability, and masculine display on the streets. Any public discussion of sex between men would amount to British social ordering being "shaken to its foundations."^{xliiv} Brady has pointed out the reticence of some of the state attorneys to go after Smith as proof of the state's unwillingness to expose a respectable and supposedly well-connected member of the masculine establishment. My reading varies somewhat from Brady's in that, while his point about secrecy and Victorian crises of masculinity is well taken, I see the evidence in this particular case pointing less to a concern over Smith's respectability (and masculine respectability writ large) and more towards an all-out effort to corral rather more flexible notions of Victorian boyhood into a legal response to state communications' involvement with youth-focused homosexual markets. It is late Victorian notions of boyhood subjectivity, rather than adult male respectability,

that drove the attorney general's office cautious approach to evidence and to adopt certain strategies of homosexual containment.

This reading relies on the crossover between two very different sources of archival evidence: the records of the Post Office and of the Home Office. Smith is solely a product of the latter; his name is never mentioned by GPO officials, whose priorities were to restructure their boy labour contingent so as to minimize homosexual dalliances on the street and at work. The Home Office sources obviously present the series of interactions between telegraph boys and their client Smith in the context of sodomy laws; this case's merit relied on the strength of evidence required to produce a conviction. Office kitchens, poor wages, night duty, and the intersections of wired communication and sex had no place in the language of this branch of the state's solution to the problem of male prostitution. Rather, the tricky matter of sexually complicit boys and the reliability of their evidence drove Home Office correspondence. Two very different forms of administrative knowledge were at work to understand and contain the problem of telegraph boy vice, and the point they agreed on was to find a scapegoat, an influence outside the civil service, a "bad man" on whom to lay the blame. Ultimately, however, James Smith's prosecution had very little to do with him and his claims to social prestige. It was the relative culpability of their telegraph boys which the state found distressing.

Smith, a self-described gentleman, was arrested at 3am on February 19th, 1877 near his home in Islington for sexually assaulting a messenger named Walter Bushrod. He was brought before Clerkenwell Police Court and remanded until February 27, at which point Bushrod drops out of the proceedings and another telegraph messenger, George Wright, enters the scene. Home Office Correspondence and Smith's later

appeals reveal that this switch in telegraph boys was carefully orchestrated: on February 8, 11 days before Smith's arrest, the Treasury Solicitor, Augustus Stephenson, sent a letter to the Home Office outlining his legal opinion on prosecutions related to telegraph boys. Three messengers were mentioned: Wright, Nichols, and Hawking. They had all admitted committing "the full offence" with Smith. In Wright and Nichols' case, "the want of corroboration...being each an accomplice" was the main legal obstacle for pursuing Smith's prosecution. Hawking's evidence might not have been enough to convict, as Smith had "probably made the victim almost helplessly drunk before committing the act;" though Stephenson thought a jury "looking at Hawking's youth might not discredit his evidence because he did not scream or complain at the time." For Stephenson, the question of prosecution was predicated both on dubious witnesses and on the risk of disclosing and detailing vice: Public scandal "[was] much to be depreciated," he noted, but he mused that "there is on the Men now in this case a matter for consideration which did not arise in the cases of Bolton [sic] and Park and men of the same character, when all those further implicated were grown men, of their own choice and free will indulging in these practices." Harkening back to the media sensation generated by the trial of Earnest Boulton and Frederick Park, a.k.a. Stella and Fanny, the crossdressing duo who were ultimately acquitted for conspiring to commit sodomy in 1871, Stephenson isolates the youth of the messengers in relation to their clients as the focal point for undermining thorny legal obstacles. For Stephenson, Smith was

a man, without doubt – whatever may be the legal evidence obtainable – making it his business to debauch and corrupt telegraph boys.... I think it is a matter for consideration whether some scandal should not be risked for the protection of children and to show that persons like Smith cannot indulge their passions with complete impunity [his emphasis].^{xlv}

Once again, the telegraph messengers' youth is crucial; whereas in previous assessments of the telegraph boys their age made them dangerous, untrustworthy subjects, here this danger is reframed as a lack of free will, that is, as their inability to achieve fully articulated, self-regulating citizenship. This provided a loophole for the prosecution. Paradoxically, the telegraph boys' evidence was admissible because they were not yet able to speak and act for themselves.^{xlvi}

The letter also makes it abundantly clear that James Smith was a walking target. Shortly after his arrest, memoranda proliferated between the presiding Magistrate, the Police Commissioner, the Treasury, and the Home Office. Stephenson was called in to conduct the prosecution, reiterating his conviction to "risk some scandal for the protection of mere boys."^{xlvii} Stephenson picked his most promising "victim." Bushrod's name vanishes from the proceedings, and seventeen-year old George Wright was brought in, counseled to plead guilty, and turned Queen's Evidence. This was enough for the Magistrate: both Wright and Smith were convicted of Buggery on April 11. Smith was sentenced to life in prison; Wright received a 10 year sentence.

In late April Smith appealed to the Home Office. He had a rather different take on the telegraph boys' free will. According to Smith, who proclaimed his innocence and noted his connections to various Tory luminaries, George Wright was either merely confused or involved in even more nefarious activities. He claimed that he ran into Wright at midnight the previous summer on a drunken meander home. He had often used Wright for errands, and did not think much of asking Wright to walk him back to his House at 27 Park Lane, Islington. Wright "lived on the Surrey side of the water," and Smith, it "being late...unwisely told him he could remain all night if he liked." He had

showed Wright a “book of Photographs of statuary (mythological subjects chiefly),” and on a later occasion showed the book to some of Wright’s “friends,” though he couldn’t be sure given that he was going through a period of heavy drinking. Later on, in January, he had found Wright and another telegraph boy waiting for him outside his house at 2am. He invited them in, and Wright had described to him how “there had been some unpleasantness at the office about the Book...that Scotland Yard had been consulted about it.” Wright had begged Smith not to go the Post Office and sort out the misunderstanding, and the two boys had spent the night. On the night of his arrest, he had met Walter Bushrod and “entered into conversation with him in order to find out if he knew anything about the alleged unpleasantness at the office.... [H]e did and hence, in order to draw him out, I said more than I should otherwise have done and eventually asked him to wait at my rooms whilst I wrote a letter for him to take to Wright.” On the way back to his rooms, Bushrod “guided” Smith to the police. Smith then went on to plead his case, arguing correctly that Wright’s testimony was legally inadmissible and that “the Treasury ought to have obtained some independent Testimony before pressuring for a conviction instead of relying on the unsupported testimony of lads who admitted having allowed themselves to be defiled for two shillings.” Smith’s telegraph boys were either too impressionable or willfully trying to ruin him; just as in Jeffery’s report, their cheap virtue made them less than trustworthy citizens.^{xlviii}

Smith’s relative status is an ever-present framing device. Telegraph boys appear in his imaginative narrative as all-purpose servants about town, whom a gentleman could call on at will. His access and reliance on them was part of his tactic of defending himself on the grounds that he was a rich and important citizen. He repeatedly

emphasized his respectability, going so far as to plead clemency on the grounds that having “been reared amidst every indulgence and luxury...penal servitude would mean death in a few years.” He argued that the telegraph boys were part of a larger conspiracy involving a man Smith had prosecuted for stealing his watch, and observed that “the crime for which I am sentenced has been very prevalent amongst the Telegraph lads and that many have been found out and dismissed in consequence and that the authorities were determined to prosecute me... as a warning to others...”^{xlix} He was right, but the pressure exerted by the state to convict him was enough to overrule the usual English legal requirements of corroboration. In follow-up correspondence to the trial, Smith’s pleas for genteel immunity were dismissed out of hand. A.C. Hepburn, one of Stephenson’s clerks at the Home Office, described the legal affair as a collaborative state effort to “put a stop to such revolting practices [in the Telegraph Department] and to bring the principal offenders to justice. Their endeavours cannot fail to be materially assisted by the Conviction of Smith and Wright and the exemplary punishment inflicted on them.”^l The divide between respectable and perverse had been compromised; the telegraph/rent boys who Smith relied on to do his bidding had revealed sexual transgressions which undercut his status, and the state creatively manipulated the law in its zeal to shut down the sexual networks proliferating from the GPO.

As it turned out, Stephenson’s fears of publicity were unfounded. Other than short mentions in a few London newspapers, including the *Times* - where James Smith was described as a “master tinman,” Wright’s occupation went unmentioned, and the popular euphemism “unfit for publication” took the place of specifics of the sodomy charges - the trial generated no widespread media attention.^{li} Smith and Wright’s case was presented

as a singular occurrence, the discretion of the State won the day, and the GPO's reputation remained intact.

George Wright was quietly released 2 years later; Smith, after three appeals to the Home Office, was released in 1896 for health reasons. More immediate aftereffects of the investigation were discernable in revised GPO labour policy. The contours of the GPO Executive's reading of homosexual practices among its youthful staff generated notions of spatial, sexual, and class discipline which had a lasting impact throughout the Post Office. Jeffery made a series of recommendations for eliminating prostitution among telegraph messengers and estimated that these measures would cost the Chief Office alone over 500 pounds a year. The GPO followed these almost to the letter, and the usually tight-fisted Treasury approved the additional expenditures without complaint.^{lii} For most Metropolitan Telegraph Messengers, the aftermath of the investigation was a pay raise. 7 Shillings a week was the price calibrated to stamp out homosexual licentiousness and entice "the better sort" of boy, whose poverty was not so bleak and whose morals were still intact. Efforts were made to allow telegraph boys access to postmen's libraries (often blocked by affronted postmen), and kitchens were nominally improved or at least finally all provided with wholesome reading material. Moreover, boys no longer supervised each other in London. A new class of inspector and matron were hired to monitor the messengers. Even thirty years after the fact, when the next generation of officials suggested reinstating corporals among the senior telegraph boys in London, members of the old guard strenuously resisted this measure, reiterating the damage that self-regulating boys could do to the urban telegraph service.^{liii} Another class of inspector was established to inspect prospective telegraph boys' homes and make

sure they were not too poor to be hired. This penetration of working class homes by GPO officials coincided with the growth of state inspection and philanthropic investigation into the homes and lives of the London poor. According to social gospel principles, this urban exploration and information gathering was motivated by a desire to improve living conditions, but in the Post Office's case the home inspection was a containment strategy to prevent the children of the most abject from sullyng their department.^{liv} In both cases, however, this new state interest and exposure heralded the beginning of more direct interactions between government, philanthropists, and those whose neighbourhoods were increasingly thought deserving of elite attention.

Pubs and night duty were off-limits for central London telegraph boys for the rest of the century. For these messengers respectable youthful masculinity was channeled into an urban topography typically reserved for respectable middle-class women. Undoubtedly many telegraph boys (and women) ignored these missives, but fears of prostitution in this instance transcended gender divisions, and GPO policy left young men as suspect as women when it came to sexual danger and (mis)adventure.

Initially these policies only affected telegraph boys; however, they ushered in a new wave of internal and external surveillance which over time spread throughout the GPO. Up to the 1876-77 investigation, the GPO had four constables who conducted investigations into post office irregularities. Non-GPO related crimes committed by employees were left to the Metropolitan Police. In the wake of the Immorality report, the GPO police force expanded its personnel and its mandate. Four new constables were added to the payroll, and this wing of the Post Office took up all manner of crimes involving GPO staff and miscreant postal consumers. As for Mr. Jeffery, he found the

telegraph boy case so distressing that after submitting his report he took four months off on sick leave. On his return to work he was rewarded for his vigilance by being promoted to Controller of the London Postal Service, leaving his assistant, John Philips, to replace him as head of the Missing Letter Branch.

Sex and the Empire: the Rise of GPO Policing

John Philips presided over a sea change within the Post Office, quietly influenced by telegraph boy prostitution and quite openly influenced by the Fenian bombing campaigns in the 1880s. The Missing Letter Branch was renamed the Confidential Inquiry Branch in 1883. By 1889 over 80 people worked for the CIB, including 15 plainclothes constables. It became another undercover wing of British law enforcement, patrolling the postal, telegraphic and eventually the telephonic networks for misbehaviour among its consumers and its workers.^{lv}

[...]

Telegraphic Foot Soldiers

As the GPO became more interventionist in the name of Imperial security, its administrators increasingly relied upon military imagery to describe and advertise communications networks. One senior GPO official described the role of postal staff as follows: “The army of the 130,000 Post-Office servants, established and auxiliary, scattered over the face of the land must be as exact and well ordered as would be an army in the field in fine condition and perfect discipline.”^{lvi} Henry Cecil Raikes, the Postmaster General from 1886-1891, perceived himself as a Field Marshall in a speech to his subordinates: “Talk of armies...The number of officers of whom I may say I am for

the time being Commander-in-Chief are more numerous than any regular forces which the Secretary of State for War can show within the compass of Her Majesty's dominions."^{lvii} F.E. Baines' vivid recollections of the instrument galleries is also telling: "The noisy hum of a thousand telegraphs in full operation salutes the ear. Busy clerks fill the vast saloons. Swift messengers flit to and fro; house-tubes at work from one part to another sustain a continual popping, as of the distant fire of some line of skirmishes."^{lviii} The wondrous, time-saving pneumatic tubes endlessly popped in the background, evoking the sounds of war.

The GPO's devotion to military metaphors and discipline can be understood as both a strategy and effect of an increasingly self-conscious British Imperial state. What employees made of this language is unclear. Doubtless many telegraph boys found aspects of these descriptions appealing. Indeed, throughout the 1880s military style bands for telegraph boys increased, and some offices even organized enthusiastic telegraph boys into drilling and marching corps. But even a cursory overview of boy-oriented literature reveals distinct tensions between this ideal of state-sanctioned youthful masculinity and other modes of boyish identifications. An anonymous author, 'reminiscing' about his days as a telegraph boy for *Boys Own Paper*, identified mostly with the uniform:

...[M]y thoughts have gone back to the nine months I passed in Her Majesty's Service – as a telegraph boy. Like most boys, I had often sighed for the uniform of a midshipman or a drummer, and when I found that the first was too expensive for my parents to provide, and that I was ignorant of the modus operandi of gaining the second, I turned my thoughts to the less ambitious garb of the telegraph boy. To wear that I should neither have to face either the storms of the deep or the "chaff" of the barracks; and it must be confessed that neither of these was specially attractive. It was only the uniform I vainly wished to don."^{lix}

While proudly self-conscious of his service to Queen and Country, this narrator outlines a slippage of meaning between uniform and representation. His ‘sighing’ over uniforms comes short of fantasizing over the duties that invariably come along with military service. The narrator wishes to appropriate the uniform’s status and realign it with an aesthetically-based vision of masculinity far removed from the rough “chaff” of the barracks. Another story, “My last Scrape,” illustrates a violent encounter between a telegraph messenger and some ‘civilian’ boys. The narrator remembers a schoolyard argument that was interrupted by a disconcerting sight:

This was a telegraph boy, crossing the playground....That was the first time that one of the new telegraph boys had appeared within our boundaries, and we all hurried off to inspect him, presently crowding round him, hooting at and hustling him, snatching off his cap, and even going so far as to lay hands on the pouch in which he carried those important dispatches of his. Vainly endeavouring to maintain his official dignity amid our turbulence, the Ganymede of the post office pushed on through the mob.^{lx}

The uniform was also a subject of derision and fear, a target of ‘mob’ violence when it intruded on the boys’ play space.

That striking description of a telegraph boy as a “Ganymede of the post office” reminds us of their more subversive associations. The boys in the previous narratives may have been both attracted and repelled by the messenger uniform, but it continued to hold an erotically charged attraction for middle and upper-class men in London’s homoerotic subcultures. The Uranian poets of the fin de siècle, who “...worshipped youth, spoke of the transience of boyhood, and delighted in breaking class barriers,”^{lxi}

praised the virtues of telegraph boys: John Gambriel Nicholson admired “the lad that’s lettered G.P.O.,” and Philebus (John Barford) complained that “ ‘these young modern Mercuries’ never wait[ed] long enough at the house where they are delivering a message.”^{lxii} While the Uranians had an ideological investment in telegraph boys, J.R. Ackerly’s explanation of his desires for guardsmen could also easily apply to telegraph boys: “Young, they were normal, they were working class, they were drilled to obedience.”^{lxiii}

For a variety of reasons, the telegraph boy was held in high esteem by elements of London’s sexual underworld. His iconic status as a militant but androgynous and youthful object of aristocratic homosexual desire put him at a crossroads between the modern Metropolis and the decadent city of Old Corruption. The broad thoroughfares of 1880’s London, under whose foundations lay networks of pneumatic tubes (not to mention the novel underground railway) were also multiple paths leading into the London labyrinth of mystery, vice, and secret pleasures.^{lxiv} The telegraph boys of Cleveland Street stood an intersection of the meanings of these vastly different urban landscapes. They also stood at the intersection of bureaucratic and aristocratic power: the GPO project of state indoctrination was at odds with the sexual desires of peers, and these two groups vied for control over telegraph boys, both in and out of their uniforms. In these multiple ways, the journey from St. Martin’s-le-Grand to Cleveland Street covered imaginary landscapes that pitted the telegraph boys’ actions against their vaunted public image, and this discrepancy proved impossible to reconcile.

The Cleveland Street Scandal

In the late summer of 1889 some fresh, salacious gossip began circulating in London's gentleman's clubs. Rumour had it that members of Society were regular visitors of 19 Cleveland Street, an unimproved Georgian terraced house on the fringes of the West End, near Middlesex Hospital off Tottenham Court Road. 'Revelations' from a routine investigation at London's Central Telegraph Office in July had uncovered 19 Cleveland Street's function as a house of assignation for gentleman and working-class men and adolescents; some telegraph boys had admitted "going to bed with gentlemen" there for extra cash after work, and they had apparently named some of their wealthy clients.^{lxv} As details of this investigation leaked from the Metropolitan Police and the Department of Public Prosecutions, London Society soon began to speculate who among their members had the proclivities to frequent this "den of vice." Lord Arthur Somerset, son of the Duke of Beaufort and equerry to the Prince of Wales, was top on the list of suspects.

Somerset was indeed one of many wealthy patrons of the male brothel and house of assignation at 19 Cleveland Street. It was run by Charles Hammond, who through various contacts at the General Post Office had obtained a supply of fifteen to seventeen year old boys to service those gentlemen who arrived at his house without already procuring an escort (usually guardsmen). Chief among Hammond's suppliers was Henry Newlove, a former telegraph boy who had recently been promoted to clerk in the Telegraph Secretary's office. According to unpublished police statements, at least four telegraph boys had admitted to sexual encounters with Newlove in the basement lavatories of the Central Telegraph Office, near St. Paul's Cathedral and across the street from the General Post Office headquarters at St. Martin's-le-Grande. After a series of

these clandestine hook-ups, Newlove suggested to each of them that they could make money “going to bed with gentlemen” at 19 Cleveland Street. They took up his offer. When this came to light in July, Newlove was arrested and went on to implicate some of his more illustrious clients, including Lord Somerset. This revelation set off a chain of events that caused serious consternation on the part of many government officials and politicians, not to mention rampant speculation among the clubmen. Meanwhile Charles Hammond, who had been tipped off by Newlove immediately after his initial interrogation at the Telegraph Office, escaped to the continent and was biding his time in France and Belgium, waiting for Lord Somerset’s lawyers to fund his passage to the United States.^{lxvi}

Newlove stood before the Old Bailey on September 19 on charges of gross indecency and conspiracy. Accompanying him was George Veck, an associate of Hammond and himself a former Post Office employee. They were sentenced to four and nine months’ hard labour respectively, and went to prison without publicly naming their wealthy patrons. Some facts from the ongoing – and confidential - police investigation had clearly been exposed, however, for the murmurs of clubland became shouts, then roars in certain factions of the London press. Liberal and Radical commentators took up the story and expressed fury that aristocrats had been left alone while working-class men had been sent to prison for the same crime of gross indecency. On September 28 Ernest Parke, editor of *the North London Press*, a weekly local with a small circulation but substantial clout in radical and Home Rule circles, published an article lambasting aristocratic vice and double standards.^{lxvii} He fumed that “ it was a scandal and disgrace that these things should be [...] the poor and the humble should have the barest measure

of mercy meted out to them, whilst if only a man be a peer... if he does not evade punishment altogether, it is made as light for him as it is possible to make it.”^{lxviii} Parke alluded to the identity of these peers, claiming that “[a]mongst them were the heir of a Duke, the younger son of another Duke, and an officer holding command in the southern district.” If the government would not take action against these men, Parke threatened to do so himself: “The names of these men are in our possession, and we are prepared to produce them if necessary.”^{lxix} Parke had received insider information concerning the investigation, either from the Metropolitan Police who had been frustrated that the Department of Public Prosecutions and the Treasury had effectively stalled their case against Somerset, or possibly from the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s famous editor W.T. Stead, who had commented on Veck and Newlove’s hearings in his paper two weeks previously and had excellent connections with Scotland Yard.^{lxx} *Reynold’s Weekly* reprinted and amplified Parke’s story in its late edition the following day, and its large circulation helped elevate this series of events from quiet legal proceedings and unsubstantiated gossip into a full-blown media scandal, immediately picked up by other organs of Liberal and Radical opinion. Meanwhile another figure had become a staple of prurient speculation in London society: none other than Prince Albert Victor, “Eddie,” the heir apparent to the throne.

Parke waited six weeks for the authorities to ‘take action,’ and they failed to do so: by November, Somerset had evaded arrest by fleeing to France, and he had yet to be publicly associated with Cleveland Street. Finally on November 16, in an article titled “The West-End Scandals,” Parke divulged the “Names of some of the Distinguished Criminals who have Escaped.”^{lxxi} He spotlighted Somerset, as well as Henry Fitzroy, the

Earl of Euston and heir to the Duke of Grafton. This was fresh information to the reading public, and Euston sued Parke for libel the next day. Parke's subsequent trial assured the 'West End Scandals' a place in the media spotlight, and it became a mainstay of tabloid and respectable news from late November to February. The international press took up the story and elaborated it further. Most notably, Prince 'Eddy' was named in American coverage of the scandal.^{lxxii} His supposed role in the affair, however, was and remains uncertain.

Euston won the libel trial, and the vast majority of the London press exonerated his character. The scandal was not subsequently put to rest, however. Radical MP Henry Labouchere decided to extend his accusations about a government cover-up of Cleveland Street from his magazine *Truth* into the House of Commons.^{lxxiii} On February 28, in front of a packed House, Labouchere outlined the evidence he had collected against the Tory government, which for the most part consisted of the same police statements leaked to the press.^{lxxiv} For Labouchere, Somerset's escape from justice proved "a criminal conspiracy by the very guardians of public morality and law with the Prime Minister at their head."^{lxxv} When the outraged Attorney General claimed that Prime Minister Lord Salisbury had no knowledge of Labouchere's evidence, Labouchere responded, "I do not believe Lord Salisbury."^{lxxvi} Effectively calling the Prime Minister a liar earned Labouchere a week's suspension from Parliament, but it also enshrined the accusation of government conspiracy in parliamentary records.

Another, less widely reported trial initially accompanied the Euston libel case and Labouchere's accusation. Throughout the fall, the Police had been monitoring the telegraph boys originally implicated with Newlove to ensure that they could be brought

to testify against Somerset should he ever be arrested. Lord Somerset's lawyers had also been keeping an eye on them and tried to bribe the boys into absconding to Australia. By December, the offer of £50, new clothes, and one-way tickets to the Colonies fell through, and the telegraph boys duly reported the lawyers' actions to police constables. On December 16, Somerset's solicitor Arthur Newton and his agents were charged with Conspiracy.^{lxxvii} After numerous hearings and lengthy trial delays Newton pled no contest, and in May he was sentenced to twelve weeks incarceration. Only the hearings, which occurred in January, were published in detail by the press as a follow-up to Euston's libel trial. When Newton's actual trial was delayed, the media aspect of the scandal all but dried up, and his eventual sentence was not widely published.

Shortly after Labouchere's outburst, all official sources pertaining to the Cleveland Street affair that had been kept out of the papers were rounded up and sealed by the government. No more leaked information appeared in the public arena, and gross indecency committed by debauched aristocrats only became news again in 1895, when Oscar Wilde's own disastrous libel trial led to his incarceration. The 1889 archives of police reports and evidence, government memos, trial transcripts, indictments, and correspondence remained closed to the public for 86 years, during which time commentators and historians who remembered the scandal or uncovered "Labby's" accusatory speech were left uncertain of the validity of these claims. When the records were opened in 1976, the scandal was quickly taken up by scholars intent on documenting the 'truth' behind the accusations. What H. Montgomery Hyde's *The Cleveland Street Scandal* and Simpson, Chester and Leitch's *The Cleveland Street Affair* revealed was a conspiracy of foot-dragging and buck-passing on the part of Treasury

officials, the Attorney General, the Lord Chancellor, Salisbury, and the Department of Public Prosecutions.^{lxxviii} These studies were also published at a moment in historiography which outlined and heaped significance on an archaic Victorian sexual system, and Cleveland Street was proof positive of the era's sexual prudishness, repression, and hypocrisy.

The characterization of Victorian England as a specific sexual epoch coincided with a growing interest in gay and lesbian history. As historians noted, the "Cleveland Street" or "West End" scandal was the first widely publicized case subject to new late-Victorian moral legislation. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 had explicitly outlawed acts of 'gross indecency' between men in both public and private venues. It made all sexual interactions between men illegal, regardless of consent or location, and numerous scholars have illustrated its significance for late-Victorian and twentieth century sexual cultures.^{lxxix} Cleveland Street has most commonly been evoked both as an example of late-Victorian male prostitution and as the backdrop for Oscar Wilde's fate six years later. More recently, historians of gay and queer sexualities have raked the sources of the Cleveland Street Scandal for further evidence of male homosexual subcultures and identities.^{lxxx} Morris B. Kaplan follows another line of inquiry. He links the narrative tropes of Cleveland Street to other late-Victorian media scandals, including the *Pall Mall Gazette's* "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" series of 1885, which featured innocent working-class girls as victims of a debauched, sexually insatiable aristocracy.^{lxxxii} His close reading of class dynamics brings to light one key but often overlooked factor of the Cleveland Street Scandal: the telegraph boys who were at the bottom of it all.

In all the complexity of the scandal, the telegraph boys tend to drift to the background; but this is largely the result of how the press, the legal system, and the general public chose to see them. Thus far, Kaplan has done the most to explain this phenomenon; as he observes, the Radical and Liberal papers railed against the Conservative government putting debauched aristocracy above the law. Key to these stories of condemnation was that these vile moral deviants had corrupted innocents. By contrast, the actual chain of events from Post Office toilet stall to Cleveland Street – information leaked to prominent journalists and their political allies - was publicly ignored.^{lxxxii} The Radical press was not alone in vindicating the telegraph boys: the judges and lawyers presiding over the numerous hearings, depositions, and court cases related to Cleveland Street also granted them amnesty from the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Even in the House of Commons the telegraph boys remained “more sinned against than sinning.”^{lxxxiii} The telegraph boys were never called “beasts” or “wretches.” Homosexual “vice” was contained in the figures of Newlove, Veck, Charles Hammond, Jack Saul –the flamboyant professional “MaryAnne” who testified at Euston’s libel trial - and “My Lord Gomorrah”^{lxxxiv} Arthur Somerset, whose silence and exile amounted to guilt in the eyes of the public.

Kaplan correctly points out that, as representatives of the ‘respectable’ working-class, telegraph boys were caught up in the dynamics of middle-class attacks on

...both upper-class decadence and lower-class brutishness... [A]ristocratic clients ready to pay for favours were portrayed as preying on the sons of working-class families eager to improve their lot. Much was made of the youth’s employment as uniformed messengers in the postal service; the implication was that their corrupters posed a threat to the nation itself.^{lxxxv}

The GPO had worked hard over the last twelve years to cultivate this respectable telegraph boy, one whose sexual corruption could seriously pose a threat to a specific configuration of the nation.^{lxxxvi} Regardless of what had happened behind the scenes previously, the very idea of telegraph boys as willful sexual agents at the Telegraph Office and at 19 Cleveland Street was literally incompatible with their predominant roles as symbols of modern technology and state-sponsored 'improvement' in late Victorian popular narratives. When W.T. Stead, Ernest Parke, Henry Labouchere, and others used the West End Scandal to attack the Conservative government (and the monarchy; Somerset was also a member of the Royal household), they mobilized a specific narrative of sexual depravity which positioned the telegraph boys as unknowing, passive working-class victims. Radicals were invested in bringing aristocratic vice to light, but they were equally invested in nullifying the evidence of telegraph boy vice, not only committed with aristocrats but amongst themselves, within the precincts of a government office. They weren't alone: this strategy of omission was accepted across the board, for telegraph boys did not fit comfortably into a cultural logic or generic formation of homoerotic deviancy; even those accused of government and sexual corruption did not openly defend themselves by attacking the telegraph boys' behaviour or credibility.

Narratives of aristocratic vice were common in Victorian England, but their victims were usually young innocent girls.^{lxxxvii} For telegraph boys to substitute as the victims in the Cleveland Street rendition of this story required a reconfiguration of the masculinity they represented with the interests of the modern state. The integrity of the GPO's system depended on public endorsement of governmental efficiency and discretion, and in the 1880s officials strove to present its workers as soldiers: hard

working, disciplined, and completely subject to the State. Writers and journalists reproduced this GPO mantra, particularly in the narratives presented in boy's magazines, but also in press coverage, which by and large was sympathetic to the GPO's mission and embraced telegraph boys as facets of the modern city. Throughout written commentary unrelated to Cleveland Street, telegraph boys were synonymous with the speed, noise, and interactions of city life.

As icons of progress, nationalism, and urban celebration, telegraph boys were incompatible with labyrinthine sexual underworlds: with their military style uniforms, they were a highly visible part of the up-to-date urban landscape. Public exposure of the messengers' sexual dalliances in the basement lavatories at telegraph headquarters and in a Cleveland Street brothel represented a serious rupture in the Post Office's – and by extension the governments' – hold over its modern system. Their behaviour posed a quandary to those who invested telegraph boys with symbolic meaning. How could the telegraph boy represent everything technologically superior and progressive about London while at the same time participate in one of its most reviled subcultures? The evidence of disarray therefore had to be suppressed. If not, the GPO's moral authority would be undermined. This was a serious problem for the branch of government responsible for monitoring the nation's communication systems. The GPO's motivation to distance itself from the boys' acts is clear, and luckily for the post office, almost everyone else also resisted the association of male prostitution with the GPO workforce: telegraph boys as both physical manifestations of the ascendancy of the telegraph age *and* degenerate sodomites haunting the back rooms of brothels proved too contradictory. This narrative incompatibility was instrumental in their redemption from any sexual

wrongdoings in the press scandal, the courts of law, and public opinion. Radical journalists, the courts, and politicians responded to this incompatibility by suppressing and modifying the evidence of the telegraph boys' indiscretions. By paying close attention to how settings, dialogue, and even the telegraph boys' uniforms function and vary between police reports and press, legal, and political representations, the cultural investments in London's telegraph boys, homosexual subcultures, aristocratic power, and state regulation in the modern city become clear.

[...]

ⁱ In almost every discussion of the Cleveland Street Scandal, Historians focus on the network of peers involved or on the behind the scenes agonizing of government officials on how best to deal with arresting one of their own. For a sampling of the extensive historical evocations of Cleveland Street, see H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Cleveland Street Scandal* (London: W.H. Allen, 1976), Colin Simpson, Lewis Chester, and David Leitch, *The Cleveland Street Affair* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London & New York: Longman, 1981), Chapter 5; Theo Aronson, *Prince Eddy and the Homosexual Underworld*, 2nd Ed. (London: John Murray, 1996); Trevor Fisher, *Scandal: sexual politics in Late Victorian Britain* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1995); H.G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London & New York: I.B. Taurus, 2003), 144-153. A notable exception is Morris Kaplan's *Sodom on the Thames: sex, love, and scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2005), Chapter 3.

ⁱⁱ For a comparable study of late Victorian Telegraph Boys in the United States, see Gregory Downey, *Telegraph Messenger Boys: Labor, Technology, and Geography, 1850-1950*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). Downey looks at the Nationwide Western Union system across the span of 100 years and argues that Telegraph Messengers "served different functions at different moments – sometimes working as technological components themselves, sometimes being sold as commodities along with the telegrams they carried, and sometimes acting as agents of change within the technological network itself (7)." This paper takes some inspiration from Downey in fleshing out the wider significance of telegraph boy labour and the wider machinations of the telegraph system. In the British case, however, the contours of the telegraph and its labour force are bound with the state's investment in the system (in the United States the telegraph was never nationalized). And in London, the telegraph system, thanks to its messengers, served a unique role in urban male homoerotic communities, an arrangement absent from Downey's evidence.

ⁱⁱⁱ Report by the Controller, London Postal Section on the appearance of Boy Messengers, Nov 27 1891. POST 61/7, BPHMA.

^{iv} Letter from Metropolitan District Surveyor to London Controller, January 26 1876. File IV: Telegraph Messengers' Uniform. London. Proposal to add District initials to Tunics. Not adopted. 1876. POST 30/295A, BPHMA.

^v See Matthew Hilton, "'Tabs', 'Fags,' and the 'Boy Labour Problem' in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Journal of Social History* 28:3 (1995): 587-607. Hilton argues that working-class boys' smoking became a serious concern in the 1880s and 90s, after cigarettes became cheaper and widely available. This

example demonstrates that boy smoking had a longer history. This telegraph boy was likely smoking a pipe rather than a cigarette.

^{vi} “Christmas Boxes,” *Moonshine*, 8 January, 1887, 21.

^{vii} “Our Sportsfolio,” *The Licensed Victualler*, no. 21, 20 May, 1890.

^{viii} “A Telegraph Boy’s Story,” *Boys Own Paper*, no. 697 (1892), 539.

^{ix} For the rules governing telegraph boys’ deliveries, see for example *Telegraphs. Instructions for Messengers in London*. 1887. POST 68/778, BPHMA.

^x John Durham, *Telegraphs in Victorian London* (Cambridge: Golden Head Press, 1959) 30.

^{xi} “A Visit to the Central Telegraph Office,” *Chums* no. 9 (1892), 141

^{xii} F.E. Baines, *Forty Years at the Post Office: A Personal Narrative* Vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1895), 75; “A Visit to the Central Telegraph Office,” 141

^{xiii} Baines, Vol. 2, 74.

^{xiv} Daunton, 203.

^{xv} Matt Cook, Introduction and Chapter 1. See also Katie Hindmarch-Watson, “Lois Schwich, the Female Errand Boy: Narratives of Female Cross-Dressing in Late-Victorian London,” *GLQ* 14 (2008): 77, 92, 93.

^{xvi} Memorandum to Postmaster General, February 8 1876. Metropolitan Telegraph Circuits, Rearrangement of 1869 Plan, POST 30/289B, British Telecom (BT) Archives, London.

^{xvii} John Manners to John Tilley, 26 May 1875, Minute 3368, Secretary’s Minutes to the Postmaster General, Volume 143, POST 35/365, BPHMA.

^{xviii} “Telegraph Messengers: Immoral Conduct. Mr. Jeffery’s Report.” Minute 5521, Secretary’s Minutes to the Postmaster General 1876 Aug 28 – Oct 11, Volume 158. POST 35/365, BPHMA.

^{xix} Response of Postmaster General to Minute 5521, Secretary’s Minutes to the Postmaster General 1876 Aug 28 – Oct 11, Volume 158. POST 35/365, BPHMA.

^{xx} Charles Upchurch, Chapter 4.

^{xxi} H.G Cocks, Introduction and Chapters 1- 2; For reflections on this phenomenon in relation to Victorian masculinities, see Sean Brady.

^{xxii} Stefan Petrow, *Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 130.

^{xxiii} “Telegraph Boy Messengers. Immoral Conduct. Reply to Report from the Home Office.” Minute 6898, Secretary’s Minutes to the Postmaster General 1876 Aug 28 – Oct 11, Volume 158. POST 35/365. BPHMA.

^{xxiv} “Immoral Conduct of Boy Messengers. Assessment of Mr. Jeffery’s Report.” Minute 149, Secretary’s Minutes to the Postmaster General 1876 Dec 28 – 1877 Jan 31. Volume 161, POST 35/368, BPHMA.

^{xxv} “Immoral conduct and dismissal of certain boys”. Minute 549, Secretary’s Minutes to the Postmaster General 1876 Dec 28 – 1877 Jan 31. Volume 161, POST 35/368, BPHMA.

^{xxvi} Jeffery, “Immorality among Boys. Mr. Jeffery’s Report and Recommendation.” March 31 1877. File 1: Telegraph Messengers, London, Immorality Among Boys POST 30/1052, BPHMA.

^{xxvii} *ibid.*

^{xxviii} *ibid.*

^{xxix} This is a standard trope referred to by Victorian Historians. For a study detailing specifically with the sexual contexts of environmental contagion, see Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, Introduction and 49-54; 64-66.

^{xxx} Jeffery, “Immorality among Boys. Mr. Jeffery’s Report and Recommendation.” March 31 1877. File 1: Telegraph Messengers, London, Immorality Among Boys POST 30/1052, BPHMA.

^{xxxi} *ibid.*

^{xxxii} *ibid.*

^{xxxiii} *ibid.*

^{xxxiv} *ibid.*

^{xxxv} *ibid.* For analyses of late Victorian London’s streets as portals to social and sexual underworlds, see, for example, Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, Chapter 1, 3, 7; Deborah Nord, “The Social Explorer as Anthropologist: Victorian Travelers among the Urban Poor,” In *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature*, ed. William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 122-34; D.L. Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx: the Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).

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- ^{xxxvi} Jeffery, "Immorality among Boys. Mr. Jeffery's Report and Recommendation." March 31 1877. File 1: Telegraph Messengers, London, Immorality Among Boys POST 30/1052, BPHMA.
- ^{xxxvii} Jeffery, "Immorality among Boys. Mr. Jeffery's Report and Recommendation." March 31 1877. File 1: Telegraph Messengers, London, Immorality Among Boys, POST 30/1052, BPHMA.
- ^{xxxviii} *ibid.*
- ^{xxxix} *ibid.*
- ^{xl} *ibid.*
- ^{xli} See Cocks, 35-36; 61-63.
- ^{xlii} For more examples and analysis of how both those accused of sodomy and the legal system grappled with issues of evidence and corroboration, see HG Cocks, "Making the Sodomite Speak: Voices of the Accused in English Sodomy Trials, c. 1800-98" *Gender & History* 18 (2006): 87-107.
- ^{xliii} Brady, 1-3; 89-90.
- ^{xliv} Brady, 2
- ^{xlv} A.K. Stephenson to Liddell (Home Office Solicitor), February 8, 1877, HO 144/20/58480A, National Archives.
- ^{xlvi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xlvii} A.K. Stephenson to Liddell, February 23, 1877, HO 144/20/58480A, National Archives.
- ^{xlviii} James Smith, First Petition to the Home Secretary, April 1877, HO 144/20/58480, National Archives.
- ^{xliv} *ibid.*
- ^l A.C. Hepburn, Memorandum, April 16, 1877. HO 144/20/58480A, National Archives.
- ^{li} "Central Criminal Court April 11", *The Times*, April 12 1877, p 11.
- ^{lii} Jeffery, "Immorality among Boys. Mr. Jeffery's Report and Recommendation." March 31 1877. File 1: Telegraph Messengers, London, Immorality Among Boys; File 2: Telegraph Messengers: Eastern Central District Office and Central Telegraph Office. File 4: Telegraph Messengers. Metropolitan District. Selection of Candidates; File 7: Telegraph Messengers. Additional Inspector, Appointments Branch, Secretary's Office for enquiring into character and antecedents of candidates. POST 30/1052, BPHMA.
- ^{liii} Correspondence re. Badcock, Bruce, Ogilvie et al, 1905-1907. Telegraph Messengers Drill: Award of Chevrons, File 4, Post 30/903A, BPHMA.
- ^{liv} See, for example, Deborah Nord, "The Social Explorer as Anthropologist." For a recent example of the intersections between slumming and sexuality, see Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2006).
- ^{lv} For a broader description of covert police activity in this period in which the Missing Letter Branch/Confidential Enquiry Branch participated, see Bernard Porter, *The Origins of the Vigilant State: The London Metropolitan Police Special Branch before the First World War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987)
- ^{lvi} Baines, Vol. 1, 242.
- ^{lvii} *Account of the celebration of the Jubilee of the Uniform Inland Penny Postage*, 1891, 52. Quoted in Robinson, 419.
- ^{lviii} Baines, Vol. 2, 76.
- ^{lix} "A Telegraph Boy's Story," *Boy's Own Paper*, no. 697 (21 May 1892), 539. This magazine was more populist than *Chums*. Some of its readers may have directly identified with this passage.
- ^{lx} Ascott.R. Hope, "My Last Scrape," *Young England*, no. 62 (1 November, 1886), 509.
- ^{lxi} Weeks, 204.
- ^{lxii} Excerpts from unpublished letters, quoted in Timothy D'Arch Smith, *Love in Ernest: some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, 29.
- ^{lxiii} J.R. Ackerly, *My Father and Myself* (London: Bodley Head, 1966), 135.
- ^{lxiv} The imaginary "Labyrinth" of London's sexual and social underworlds has been well documented. See Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, Chapter 1, 3, 7; Deborah Nord, "The Social Explorer as Anthropologist: Victorian Travelers among the Urban Poor," In *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature*, ed. William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 122-34; D.L. Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx: the Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).
- ^{lxv} Police Statement of Charles Swinscow, 4 July, 1889, Records of the Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP 1/95/3 File 3, National Archives of the United Kingdom. For a sampling of the extensive historical

evocations of Cleveland Street, see H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Cleveland Street Scandal* (London: W.H. Allen, 1976), Colin Simpson, Lewis Chester, and David Leitch, *The Cleveland Street Affair* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London & New York: Longman, 1981), Chapter 5; Theo Aronson, *Prince Eddy and the Homosexual Underworld*, 2nd Ed. (London: John Murray, 1996); Trevor Fisher, *Scandal: sexual politics in Late Victorian Britain* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1995); H.G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London & New York: I.B. Taurus, 2003), 144-153.

^{lxvi} He ended up in Seattle and likely opened another brothel just outside the city. See Chester et al, *the Cleveland Street Affair*, 221

^{lxvii} While the *North London Press* was a small enterprise, Parke was a respected and well-connected Radical journalist, with strong ties to the Irish Nationalists, including the MP Charles Parnell, who was forced to resign in 1890 over accusations in a divorce scandal.

^{lxviii} Ernest Parke, "Charges of Abominable Crimes Against Peers and Officers," the *North London Press*, 28 September 1889, quoted in *Reynolds*, "Last Week's Latest News," 6 October 1889.

^{lxix} *ibid.*

^{lxx} Chester et al, *The Cleveland Street Affair*, 84, 167-70.

^{lxxi} Parke, "The West End Scandals: Names of some of the Distinguished Criminals who have Escaped," *North London Press*, 16 November 1889. Quoted in Hyde, 106.

^{lxxii} See, for example, "Had them on the List: Names of the Participants in the Cleveland Street Orgies Known," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 December 1889, 4.

^{lxxiii} Henry Labouchere instituted the charge of gross indecency in the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. Indeed, this clause was known as the "Labouchere" Amendment.

^{lxxiv} At moments in his delivery, Labouchere quoted directly from police reports describing individuals arriving at 19 Cleveland Street. See Henry Labouchere, Speech to House of Commons, 28 February 1890, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3d ser., vol 341 (1890), col. 1540-41

^{lxxv} Henry Labouchere, Speech to House of Commons, 28 February 1890, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3d ser., vol 341 (1890), col. 1546

^{lxxvi} *Ibid.*, col. 1570

^{lxxvii} Arthur Newton was a successful prosecutor before taking on aristocratic clients. He defended Lord Alfred Taylor in Oscar Wilde's trials in 1895. He was eventually disbarred for fraud in 1913.

^{lxxviii} The only glimmer of an organized cover-up came from the Royal household: the Prince of Wales' private secretary and treasurer had snooped into the criminal proceedings against Somerset, and the former had tipped Somerset off about his pending arrest warrant in October. Somerset immediately fled to the Continent, where he was to remain in permanent exile until his death in 1926.

^{lxxix} See, for example, Jeffrey Weeks' seminal essay, "Inverts, Perverts and Mary-Annes: Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, Ed Duberman, Vicinus & Chauncey (New York: New American Library, 1989), 195- 211. For a revised analysis, see Charles Upchurch, *Before Wilde: Sex Between Men in Britain's Age of Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

^{lxxx} For recent examples see Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 50-56; 63-64; and H.G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century* (London & New York: I.B. Taurus, 2003), 144-153.

^{lxxxii} Morris B. Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: ex, love, and scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2005), Chapter 3. Other notable scandals include the Dublin Castle affair in 1884, the Crawford divorce case in 1886, which implicated Liberal MP Charles Dilke, and the O'Shea divorce case in 1890, which brought down the MP and Irish leader Charles Parnell.

^{lxxxiii} According to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Newlove became the 'wretched' pander who offered money out of his own hands to upstanding junior public servants just trying to get ahead. See Kaplan, 168, 188.

^{lxxxiiii} Henry Labouchere, Speech to the House of Commons, 28 February 1890, *Parliamentary Debates* 3rd ser., vol 341 (1890), col. 1541.

^{lxxxv} "Did 'My Lord Gomorrah' Smile," *North London Press*, 11 January 1890, 8.

^{lxxxvi} Kaplan, 205

^{lxxxvii} Matt Houlbrook's article "Soldier Heroes and Rent Boys: Homosex, Masculinities, and Britishness in the Brigade of Guards, circa 1900-1960" (*Journal of British Studies* 42 (2003): 351-388) both interrogates Week's conclusions about rent-boy culture and makes apparent the relationship between national identity-

building, masculine representations, and the construction of homosexuality. His scholarship inspired my own attempts to complicate assumptions regarding fin de siècle male prostitution and Sexual Scandal in London. By highlighting the role urban infrastructure and state expansion played in the treatment of telegraph boys in the Cleveland Street Scandal, I aim to expand on Houlbrook's insights.

^{lxxxvii} See Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1992), Chapter 3; Deborah Gorham, "'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' Re-Visited." *Victorian Studies* (Spring 1976): 353-79; Louise Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian London* (London: Routledge, 2000), Chapter 6.