

## *Office Workers, Business Elites and the Disappearance of the 'Ladder of Success' in Edwardian Glasgow*

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In the late nineteenth century the nature and social meaning of work in offices witnessed a number of changes attendant upon the maturing of industrial society.<sup>1</sup> With Britain's industrial hegemony facing competition from newer industrializers, enterprises grew in size and scope to increase their competitiveness. Technological innovation and the division of labour, which had already revolutionized productive processes, would begin to do the same to administrative processes, while bureaucratization increasingly re-ordered business and the administrative functions of enterprises. These structural changes entailed social transformations among the people who worked in the offices which were both increasing in size, and altering in form and function. Chief among the social transformations taking place in the turn-of-the-century office were the feminization and proletarianization of office workers.<sup>2</sup>

This paper hopes to broaden understanding of the transformation of office work at the turn of the century by showing how a change in the demographics of the British business class in Glasgow acted as a prelude to these transformations by closing off the avenues of advancement into that group; avenues that had once seemed to offer young men starting off in clerical work the chance to achieve wealth, as well as high social status and recognition. It must be stressed that the offer may never actually have been widely available or even real but the perception that great success could be achieved through a start in office work was real and thus worked on the minds of young men just beginning their working lives.

In the early and mid-nineteenth century clerical work had offered young men one of two things. Some saw the counting house as a place where they could work their way into secure employment as a senior or head clerk – the 'right hand man' to the owner of the enterprise. As Gregory Anderson has noted, such a close working relationship with the

employer was also a source of status as well as security for men in positions such as head clerk or chief correspondence clerk.<sup>3</sup> Such a clerk would derive some sense of being part of a 'better' stratum of society because of his proximity to his successful and wealthy employer. The supposedly 'middle-class' identity of office work rested to a degree on this proximity to those at 'the top'. Others saw it as a route to much higher achievements.

In the mid-nineteenth century, in the years of new and booming industrial enterprises, the counting house was perceived by many to offer even more than just proximity to 'the top'. Even the low-status, routine work of producing, copying and preserving a company's written records served ambitious men as a generational phase of the capitalist strata of society – in effect, an apprenticeship for a business career as an owner and employer. This apparent path to 'the top' was one of the foundations of the 'middle-class' identity of clerical work that survived into the twentieth century. Men's office work was not socially 'better' in and of itself but it was sometimes seen to be a direct road to these 'better' levels of society. And though this view may always have been more apparent than real, it appears nonetheless to have been powerful and irresistible to many young clerks.

By the end of the century, though, the formation and entrenchment of an almost hereditary, industrial elite which occupied the top levels of business society was making it ever more clear that working one's way to success from a start in the counting house was unusual. First, the family element of business leadership meant that the ladder upwards no longer reached the highest echelons. Additionally, the increasing size of office staffs, coupled with the increasingly separate and elite nature of business leaders, meant the proximity of clerical workers to the employers was greatly reduced. Once this proximity, which had formerly afforded a young man the opportunity to observe the leaders of the enterprise and learn how they operated, had disappeared, the apprenticeship aspect of mid-nineteenth century office jobs also disappeared. Moreover, the closing off of these avenues also meant the erection of a status barrier between the business elite and the office workers they employed. Such a barrier removed any sense of reflected glory or shared social status from which white collar workers might have bolstered their own image as part of the 'business class.' Over time clerical work became more explicitly a permanent occupation not a step on the ladder of success. And moreover, it became work of serving and supporting others' business activities, not learning about business and advancing ones own career.

The opportunity to climb the ladder of success would be replaced by the ability of some to rise in large, bureaucratic hierarchies or to achieve a degree of independent prosperity through chartered accountancy but, as will be discussed, both bureaucratic hierarchies and chartered accountancy were new types of career. They did not, in any case, offer the kind of success that young men in Victorian Britain had aspired to during the height of Britain's industrial rise and power. As the prospects available to male clerks appeared to diminish, office work became less attractive. Despite the great rise in the total number of clerical workers at the turn of the century, there was a significant decline in the percentage of men in the occupational group of commercial clerks in Glasgow.<sup>4</sup> Many able men chose to leave their turn-of-the-century Glasgow offices; they went into small retail businesses, some returned to manual work, some emigrated. Younger men began to reject clerical work as a career.<sup>5</sup>

Thus a 'space' was created in the occupational group. This 'space' was part of the context in which the feminization of the office took place. For when this space in the occupation was combined with the absolute expansion of the numbers in that group, the introduction of new technologies deemed suitable for women, as well as the growing practice of dividing office jobs to encompass smaller and smaller levels of real responsibility, office work would be turned into women's work.<sup>6</sup>

## II

The aspirations and ambitions of young men entering clerical work at the end of the nineteenth century are central to understanding the eventual change in the gender identity of office work, because it was aspirations that had drawn many young men into office work in the first place. An article in the *Clerks' Gazette* in 1895 assumed aspirations on the part of its readers, '[...]few who start as clerks mean to remain clerks. Clerkship is only the stepping stone to higher things'.<sup>7</sup> Belief in the ladder of success was encouraged among clerks and frequently expressed by them and those around them.

Some of the role models to which Glasgow clerks might look were the successful businessmen of that supremely successful industrial city. One such Glasgow businessman was William Jacks, who was happy to regale the young members of the Scottish Clerks' Association with his own tale of rise from barefoot shepherd to business tycoon via the counting house. And Jacks was seemingly sincere in his belief that hard work, evening study, and economical living would result in any clerk becoming

'what all clerks ought to be, capital business men'. He told them that to enter upon 'the kingdom of success . . . the password is "personal labour and personal merit"', and that 'in due time "you shall reap if you faint not"'.<sup>8</sup> Other writings show Jacks to have been an unabashed disciple of Samuel Smiles, a fellow-Scot and the 'high priest' of the Victorian faith in the value of one's bootstraps for pulling oneself up by. Jacks speaks of 'that admirable book by Mr. Smiles "On Thrift"' as being 'one of the most useful and suggestive books in the English language'.<sup>9</sup> It seems likely that William Jacks would certainly have agreed with *Self-Help's* assurance that, 'Indeed, to start in life with comparatively small means seems so necessary as a stimulus to work, that it may almost be set down as one of the conditions essential to success in life'.<sup>10</sup>

And 'success' for a young man raised in the late nineteenth century was likely to mean being an owner/manager like William Jacks. This was the main model of success visible to him – to be one's own master, to get out of labour and move into capital. It is somewhat anachronistic to think that 'success' might have been envisioned as a high place on a corporate hierarchy. At the beginning of the twentieth century bureaucracy was new; complex hierarchies culminating in executive or professional managerial positions were just coming into being; and 'professional' educational credentials for managers simply did not exist. Not until later in the twentieth century would ambitious men come to be satisfied by the power available within middle management in a corporate hierarchy rather than the complete autonomy and independence of ownership.

When the turn-of-the-century members of the Scottish Clerks' Association envisioned a young man leaving clerical work they saw one of three possibilities. 'It might be that those who were clerks for the time being aimed at something else – some other profession, or it may be business for themselves or a trial of luck in another country'.<sup>11</sup> In such a statement 'profession' might mean accountancy but usually meant the law. Accountancy was still relatively new as an autonomous and independent free-lance profession. Its Royal Charters had only just been awarded and chartered accountancy's use as the arbiter of business probity, the development of its own educational standards and credentials, in short its metamorphosis from counting-house function to profession was still at an early stage.<sup>12</sup> The success of the chartered accountant with a prosperous private practice was a success more likely to provide a role model to the children and grandchildren of the turn-of-the-century male clerk than to himself.

In emigration too, Scottish clerks were encouraged to expect to move

beyond clerical work. Another speaker to the SCA told his audience that a recent US Congressional committee, which was considering the value of the various immigrant groups in the US, did not take much account of Scots as labourers, although there were many Scottish immigrants in the USA. The explanation for the relative absence of Scots in the labouring population was that 'many of them became themselves employers of labour before they were there any great length of time.'<sup>13</sup> The message implicit in such a story reported to a group of young clerks was that they had what it would take to become employers themselves.

And the Scottish Clerks' Association took on the message. Their own words and actions reflected the belief of many that to move from clerk to owner/manager was the natural order of things. When William Jacks assumed that, 'Every clerk must, I presume, hope to be an employer himself, some day'<sup>14</sup> he appears to have been speaking for many of them. The Secretary of the association told fellow clerks that for 'our members' their time as clerical workers was 'only the commencement of a real business career.'<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the rules of the association, which was largely a friendly society, allowed members going into business for themselves to continue to be contributing members to the association's various insurance funds and to receive benefit if need should arise. Should the business venture fail and the budding entrepreneur be forced to return to clerical work, he was allowed back into the full membership of the association with no loss or stigma.<sup>16</sup> In this way, the SCA encouraged its members to take the plunge into business on their own, by offering to allay some of the risk associated with such a move.

Another important focus of self-help among Glasgow clerks was the Glasgow Athenaeum Commercial College where many clerks spent their evenings after long days in the office. They attended evening classes to learn foreign languages, 'commercial accounting', 'political economy', 'mercantile law' and other academic subjects. Such courses were not training in office skills; they constituted a broad education useful for an independent decision-maker. After all, they were told, '[...] a person is appointed not so much for what he is at the moment as for what he is likely to become.'<sup>17</sup> And what he was to become was a successful businessman. A clerk who saw himself as on the way to success in business was seeing himself as part of the capitalist strata of society, not as part of a permanent occupational group within labour.

But these people were a permanent occupational group in society.

And as the nineteenth century drew to its end, the opportunities for success which might once have existed in the counting house grew rare. In some ways it was a matter of simple arithmetic, or perhaps geometry. In a society where the number of clerical workers was increasing, each enterprise can be visualized as a pyramid with an expanding base but a constant single point at the top. Not everyone at the bottom could end up at the top and as time wore on the expansion at the base made it less likely that a particular individual would ever make it anywhere near the top.

Moreover, the nature of 'the top' was changing in Glasgow by the end of the nineteenth century. In the early- to mid-nineteenth century most of what would become Glasgow's major industries, the Clyde shipbuilding and engineering firms, had been founded based on technologies which were new at the time. Once founded, shipbuilding had been gifted with space to grow by the city's decision to dredge the River Clyde, at public expense.<sup>18</sup> These firms, and many others in supporting industries, had established a secure base by the end of the century. By the beginning of the new century, executive positions had become the property of the owning family, passing from father to son and effectively excluding unknown individuals from gaining power in the firm.<sup>19</sup>

Nor was it only in shipbuilding that family influence had been established. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Glasgow was a city of vast wealth and administrative sophistication with well established public institutions and private enterprises built on networks of friendship and family. Personal power, personal influence, and personal relationships made a difference in lives and careers. This was no longer an environment in which to write oneself a life story which took a path from rags, through the counting house, and on to riches.

By 1907 when Glasgow Athenaeum Commercial College students were told

Just as Napoleon said that all his soldiers had in their knapsacks the Marshal's baton, so you may all[. . .] say to yourselves that you have the possibility of doing what Mr. M'Arly [chairman of the Glasgow Chamber of Commercial] has done.<sup>20</sup>

there was an element of delusion involved in the rhetoric. The speaker never mentioned that Thomas McArly was the son of a successful Glasgow merchant and had not actually had very far to rise to take his place in the Glasgow business community. As F.D. Klingender would put it, clerks at the beginning of the new century were still content to be 'dazzled, like Napoleon's recruits, by the mirage of a captaincy of

industry in the threadbare pocket of every office boy.'<sup>21</sup> By the early 1900s the ladder of success that started in the counting house was indeed largely a mirage.

### III

The second half of this essay will consider the relationship between successful careers and starts in clerical work in turn of the century Glasgow, focussing on the 'rich and famous' of early twentieth century Glasgow to discover where they came from and what, if any, help or obstacles they encountered on the way to their success.

In 1909 a special edition of *Who's Who in Glasgow* was produced listing 'nearly 500 Living Glasgow Citizens and of Notable Citizens who have died since 1 January 1907'.<sup>22</sup> By definition the citizens in the book were the successful of their time. The compiler, George Eyre-Todd's own account of his selection criteria is brief, stating only that he wished to give 'an account of the chief personages engaged in carrying on affairs, professions, and business of public interest'.<sup>23</sup> This volume gives the reader a quick overview of success in Edwardian Glasgow, and indicates the ways in which the careers of successful people had developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. It provides an unscientific survey of how often the ladder from counting house to boardroom had been climbed.

Another value of the work is that the compiler, George Eyre-Todd had an eye on posterity as he worked. In a brief preface Eyre-Todd expressed the hope that the book would be of use to 'everyone connected with the city at the present time' but he seemed most hopeful that it would turn out to be a 'compendium of contemporary history'. His wish was to 'throw important and authentic light upon the developments of Glasgow enterprise'.<sup>24</sup> He appears to have been trying to produce (and to have succeeded in producing) what would, seven or eight decades later, come to be called social history.

At first glance the *Who's Who* confirms the idea that the clerks of Glasgow would have looked mainly to businessmen as their role models. Business achievements and making money appear to have been the main measure of success. Moreover there does not seem to be any prejudice against people of poor or humble backgrounds. Nor would one expect to find any such prejudice in Scotland with its long tradition of exalting the 'lad o'pairs' who, in Scottish society, was allowed the opportunity to pull himself up from poverty through his own exertions.<sup>25</sup> This seeming egalitarianism and the prevalence of businessmen

in the *Who's Who* might have offered encouragement to those starting out in office jobs in commercial enterprises, but the dominance of businessmen among the successful of Glasgow did not mean that many of these people had reached their positions by starting with nothing and then travelling through the counting house.

The 459 entrants in the book can be separated into several broad occupational groups. One hundred and eighty had found their success in business – merchants, manufacturers, and those in financial institutions or service companies. Seventy-eight were well known for the positions they had attained in Glasgow's municipal administration, including those in city government or in non-profit institutions as well as individual philanthropists. There were sixty-eight who had achieved high place in the field of education; these were mainly university professors and headmasters of large, prestigious schools. Forty-eight had found fame and a greater or lesser degree of fortune in the arts – painters, sculptors, authors, and architects. There were twenty-four individuals noteworthy for their involvement in national politics; these were mainly members of Parliament but also some high-ranking civil servants. Finally, the ancient professions of divinity, the law and medicine showed thirty-two, seventeen and twelve representatives respectively.

**Table 1.** Entrants in 1909 *Who's Who* by occupational group

Business	180
Municipal	78
Education	68
Arts	48
National politics	24
Divinity	32
Law	17
Medicine	12
Total	459

In this list, people have been classified according to their field of endeavour in 1909. For example, the naval architect who became a professor of architecture is counted under Education. The chemistry professor who began his own chemicals consultancy and then became Public Analyst for Lanarkshire is counted as part of Municipal Administration. This method of classification may explain the seeming absence of successes in the fields of science or technology. Such experts are often found in Education, while others had parlayed their technological



inventiveness into business success. Some of these will be discussed more fully in the consideration of business success in general.

This paper will set aside the careers in Education, Arts and Architecture, Medicine and Divinity because these were specialized disciplines or professions with their own educational requirements and credentials. Any office workers involved in these areas were ancillary to the main functions of their employers and would not normally expect simply to work their way into the top of these fields. Nor was this expected in the Law and National Politics. Though these fields employed significant numbers of clerks, the ranks of the noteworthy lawyers and politicians of Edwardian Glasgow were overwhelmingly filled by the sons of prosperous families.

Business and Municipal Administration were more promising areas for ambitious clerks but even there the rags-to-riches stories appear to have been few and far between.

Unfortunately, in considering those whose success came in municipal life the *Who's Who* entries for only forty-two of the seventy-eight listed include information on family. The remaining thirty-six entries mentioned only the individuals' 1909 titles and achievements and very sparse hints as to background. These people may have been from poor or well-off backgrounds and there is no argument for assuming that they were all one or the other.

**Table 2.** Entrants in Municipal Administration and Business

	municipal administration	business
Total entrants	78	180
No background information given	36	56
Background available for analysis	42	124
Of these:		
From 'humble' origins	11	22
With significant family connections	31	102

Among the forty-two for whom there are more complete details there are only eleven who can be described as having achieved success after starting with nothing, or at least quite little. One of these, Lady Chisholm, is an example of one of a woman's only avenues to fame and fortune in the late nineteenth century. She was an important figure in the city's unpaid philanthropic work, having been born the daughter of a schoolteacher and married first a wealthy shipowner and then the Lord Provost of the city. The other ten who might

possibly be considered 'self-made men' include the sons of ministers, farmers, a schoolmaster and various skilled workers or unsuccessful small retailers. One of these is described as having come from Fife at sixteen, 'with less than the half crown of legend' in his pocket. The others are assumed to have risen from similarly difficult beginnings but such a judgement may err on the side of caution. Some of the men in this group of ten did attend university, which suggests that their families might not have been entirely insignificant or impoverished. But it is also possible, given the Scottish tradition of finding a way for any boy with talent to attend university, that they did achieve success on their own, and so they are included here as at least having possibly climbed the ladder of success.

The same is clearly not possible of the remaining thirty-one municipal notables in the *Who's Who*. Five of these were unpaid individuals known for their philanthropy or simply for their families. The remaining twenty-five were high-ranking employees of the city or local institutions. The fathers of these men were a varied group but most were successful businessmen or professionals and many had some connection to public service, ranging from a Lord Provost of Edinburgh to a Head Gardener at Methuen Castle.

Whether this last was an administrative job or a skilled artisan's position is debatable. In all likelihood the job was a mixture of both but the father's position and influence is unmistakable in his son's career first as head gardener at Glamis Castle and eventually as Glasgow's Superintendent of Public Parks. This family's multi-generational involvement in the 'park business' is an illustration of the small dynasties which developed in some fields of endeavour. It was not only the industrial entrepreneurs who staked out occupational territory for their progeny. Family networks were visible also in the growing webs of bureaucracy which underlay this modernizing society. A son might even follow his father into a specific salaried job, as when the Chamberlain of Baillie's Institute Library retired and handed his job to his son, a notary public, who was not even in the employ of the Institute at the time.

Bureaucracies like these in the municipal administration of Glasgow are meant to be places of explicit hierarchies, entrance exams, systems and schedules for pay increases and promotions which favour the talented over the connected. But it could be argued that at the turn of the century bureaucracy was only budding and not yet in full flower. Upbringing, family, social position – these still counted for much in Britain, in many walks of life. The individual departments of Glasgow's

municipal administration operated in some ways like separate small businesses, as did the various non-profit organizations. These were not yet fully-formed, hierarchical, bureaucratic enterprises. The person in charge of the department was usually free to run the department as he deemed best. The departments may have had carefully drawn up hierarchies and carefully defined positions but most seem to have operated like small fiefdoms, with power vested in the personality of the leader, not in the office he held.<sup>26</sup>

Some of these small municipal departments did, in fact, appear to operate like the meritocracies of the bureaucratic ideal, but even some of those show curious occurrences. It can be noted that of the ten city officials mentioned above who were judged to have been from backgrounds offering no special advantage there were two successive managers of the Tramways Department. John Young, a farmer's son, was manager until 1904 and was an advocate of promotion on the basis of merit.<sup>27</sup> All of the Tramways Department's employees were hired as boys and all vacancies were filled from within the department. And when John Young retired he was succeeded; that is, he chose as the man meriting the job as his successor, another of the city's rare self-made men. It is certainly only coincidence that Young chose a farmer's son, like himself, though farmer's sons were rare in municipal administration.

Even in the most meritocratic of city departments practices for hiring and promotions contained some element of the personal – dependent on the preferences and personalities of all involved. Given the large numbers of educated, capable clerical employees but the absence of an educational qualification for managerial work, the career and reputation of the father could and often would be added to the attributes of a managerial job candidate. Such a practice gave little hope to the ambitious clerk hoping to have a chance of working his way to success in the context of municipal life.

It will moreover probably have already been noticed that the small number of self-made men in Glasgow's city administration had in any case actually achieved only a somewhat limited kind of success. They had reached the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy in which each one worked, but they were and remained employees all of their lives. This was a modern kind of 'success' which had developed with the development of bureaucracies themselves. It was a success that did entail a good stable income and some local renown and status but such success was bought with the independence and autonomy that any employee must forfeit. As the twentieth century proceeded this would increasingly become the only realistically available level of success that most indivi-

duals could hope for, because as shall be seen, the fame and fortune of the significant independent business-person was beyond the reach of ordinary office workers.

#### IV

If the rewards of independent business success were far greater than those offered in a municipal administrative hierarchy, the need for connection was also much greater in the business world. As has been shown, among forty-two municipal leaders listed in the *Who's Who*, thirty-one were from successful families while eleven could be said to have come from humble beginnings. However, among the 180 business leaders listed, family background can be discerned for 124. Of these, fully 102 must be said to have come from successful or well-to-do families. Only twenty-two can even be considered to have started with little or nothing. (See Table 2 above.)

Of these twenty-two possibly self-made individuals in business, some indeed had spectacular careers and some illustrated more modest achievements. Two in particular must have their success qualified by the knowledge that theirs was a two-generation rise. A zoo-owner whose father had owned a travelling menagerie certainly built his career upon foundations laid by his father, as did the antique book dealer who had started from his father's book stall. Among other modest success stories were the minister's son who became manager of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Guardian Society, which collected and circulated trade information among businessmen in the West of Scotland. There was also the son of an Irish immigrant who became a well-known restaurant-owner and caterer, and the minister's son who became partner in a chartered accountancy firm. This last individual may not in fact have come from such humble origins in any case, as his schooling included Ayr Academy, Edinburgh, Glasgow and even Leipzig Universities.

Another five of the rags-to-riches stories did not make their way through clerical work but by skill or knowledge in some other field. William Arrol, son of a cotton-spinner, began work as a blacksmith's apprentice and achieved his fame and fortune as an engineer and builder of bridges. Similarly, H.A. Mavor's fame as 'the founder of electric lighting in Glasgow' and the success of his electrical engineering business came from his skill and talent for innovation in electrical engineering. Technological skill had also been the key for J.F. McIntosh, a farmer's son who rose from apprentice mechanical engineer on a railway to superintendent of Rolling Stock. Another farmer's son W.

Bilsland, built his biscuit manufacturing firm from a start in retail, as a grocer's apprentice. Finally, a master gardener's son, who trained as a teacher switched to journalism after only a few years' teaching. Eventually he was appointed Editor of the *Glasgow Herald*. These stories may have been encouraging for some ambitious young men, but not for those in clerical work. None of these successful careers included much experience of office work or the counting house.

There were three other careers whose progress is not fully known. The founder of the Inverary Steamboat Company came to Glasgow as a boy and worked for various steamboat companies. Similarly the chairman of a small metal-working firm started in the business as a boy, but whether either of these men started as a craft apprentice or office assistant is unknown. Finally, the early career of the farmer's son who became chairman of a firm of East India merchants is also unknown.

There remain then only ten individuals who climbed the ladder of success starting in the counting house. Seven of these ten rose within corporate hierarchies, attaining high management positions but not ownership. In this way their achievement is similar to that of the high ranking figures in municipal administration and is evidence of the changing nature of success in an increasingly bureaucratically organized and administratively complex society.

These seven were J. Anderson who rose from 'boy clerk' to railway manager. W.F.G. Anderson, a minister's son, began his working life in a law office then spent thirty years working for the Anchor Line where he eventually rose to a 'high position'. J. Henderson and D. McCowan were both farmers' sons. Henderson began at a branch of the Clydesdale Bank and after forty-five years rose to be the bank's General Manager, while McCowan started off in a law office, moved into insurance, and after forty-one years was head of an insurance company. D. Laidlaw, a schoolmaster's son, also ended up as manager of a large insurance company after his start in a chartered accountant's office. Another schoolmaster's son, R. Millar, spent ten years as a legal apprentice, then switched to a railway company where he rose to become its general manager. Finally, A. Sinclair rose from *Glasgow Herald* office boy to become a Managing Partner, having spent some sixty years with the newspaper.

Only three individuals can definitely be said to have embodied the 'Smilesean' dream of rising from nothing to become wealthy and successful and their own masters and who did it by starting as office workers. These were W. Borland, a farmer's son who began in the counting house of an iron foundry and eventually founded his own iron company. The second, J. Mann, was the son of an artist who died young.

From such difficult beginnings Mann found his way into one of the earliest chartered accountancy firms in Glasgow and rose to be its proprietor. Last, but not least in the group was William Jacks who was mentioned earlier as a promoter of the self-help philosophy and who had at least practiced what he preached. Jacks was the son of a shepherd and had begun his life utterly penniless. He attended local schools and then educated himself in the evenings while working as a clerk. Eventually he founded his own iron works, became Andrew Bonar-Law's business partner, and was very successful indeed.

It is important to note that these three men were all born in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Jacks in 1841, Mann in 1827, and Borland in 1839. They represent the oldest generation to be included in the *Who's Who*. The median age of the group surveyed by Eyre-Todd was 58.<sup>28</sup> Thus Jacks, Mann, and Borland were in 1909, the only surviving members of the generation that had reached maturity in earlier days of the industrial revolution. (Jack's entry in the book was in fact one of the few posthumous entries included despite his having died before Eyre-Todd's 1907 cut-off date.) Along with the founders of the great shipbuilding and engineering dynasties these three men had also taken advantage of new business opportunities which had been created by new technologies and new demands. Borland and Jacks, in the iron business, were obviously part of the Clyde's shipbuilding boom in the nineteenth century. As for Mann, chartered accountancy was an even newer kind of business. It was only brought into existence as a response to the needs of the massive expansion in the size and complexity of the enterprises spawned by industrialization.<sup>29</sup> Mann was there at its creation and was able to take advantage of an opportunity presented to him by the unique times in which he lived. However, by the late nineteenth century, the economy of Clydeside was established and maturing. There was less room left at 'the top' for completely new entrepreneurial ventures.

## V

The self-made men of Edwardian Glasgow were thus very much a minority of the notables who found their way into the *Who's Who in Glasgow in 1909*. As has been shown above, of the 124 business successes whose background was given, 102 must be said to have had significant help from their families in their business careers. Sixty-two of the 102 were the current generation at the head of successful family businesses while the remaining forty can be said to have received significant career boosts from family influence or connection.

Of these forty, fourteen followed their fathers into the same line of work. For example, three prominent stockbrokers had followed their fathers to seats on the Glasgow Stock Exchange. This group of fourteen who found success in the same line of business as their fathers, also includes one of the few successful business-women in turn-of-the-century Glasgow. This was Kate Cranston, founder of a chain of near-legendary tearooms and patron of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Her head-start came from her father's career as a hotelier. Cranston's success and fame were certainly her own but a family tradition in what is now called the hospitality industry would have given the young woman a degree of informal education, insight and business connections unavailable to the daughters or sons of people in other lines of work. Similar advantages would have gone to the Bank of Scotland agent's son who began working for the Bank at sixteen and eventually became manager of the Glasgow office. One can also imagine the head start that had been gifted to the *Glasgow Herald* sub-editor whose father and grandfather had owned the *Dundee Courier*.

Nor did one need to follow directly in one's father's footsteps to benefit from his success. Twenty-six of the *Who's Who* business successes went into some other business than their fathers but still started their careers far ahead of the sons of poorer and less well-known men. J.D.Hedderwick, whose father had founded the *Evening Citizen* newspaper, was certainly helped in becoming a stockbroker by his costly Glasgow High School and Glasgow University education, if not his father's reputation and influence. Another example is C.B. Renshaw who eventually became chairman of the Caledonian Railway and a baronet. He was the son of a Queen's Council who sent his son to be educated at a number of prestigious private schools in Britain and on the Continent. On a more modest level of success, Thomas M'Arly, part-owner of a calico printing firm and president of the chamber of Commerce was the son of a Glasgow merchant. M'Arly's father's influence may have been limited to paying for a prestigious education or it may have extended to helping his son find jobs, but it was influence nonetheless and something most hopeful clerks lacked.

However, the majority of the 102 individuals who achieved success in business did it in a family business. Fifty-two had inherited or stood to inherit a business created by or inherited by their father and a further ten were similarly situated in the business of an uncle, brother or father-in-law. These sixty-two men include the very biggest names in Glasgow and the West of Scotland's industry such as Beardmore, Denny, Mac-Brayne, Tennant, Coats and Clark – the very apex of success in Edwardian Glasgow. The experience of these few men was, by defini-

tion, atypical but it is not for their numbers that they are significant.<sup>30</sup> Rather, they illustrate what success had become in an industrially mature society. Success was perhaps 'bigger' – the wealth was greater, the fame more pronounced – than it might have been in the earlier years of industrialization, but this very fact made it more inaccessible than it had ever been before.

## VI

When one looks at the careers of the sons of these families one sees a pattern of career development that appears to be unique in the business community. Most of these men were trained and began their careers by serving in various technical departments in the family business before assuming their place on the board. For example, William Beardmore, head of Parkhead Forge as his father before him, began his 'apprenticeship' at the age of fourteen, then 'served in every department of the company before taking over from his father in 1886'.<sup>31</sup> But when we begin to talk about men like William Beardmore we are talking about the dynasties of Clydeside. It is in the very biggest dynasties in the very biggest industry that the creation of an hereditary entrepreneurial elite is most clearly visible.

For the scions of these families the technical expertise gained by the charade of 'apprenticeship' would have been useful when they became heads of their companies because it served to validate the power and wealth which they had, after all, gained by birth. In Glasgow at the turn-of-the-century the skilled shipbuilding workers were a respected and increasingly vocal and powerful presence among the city's working class. In order for the 'bosses' to maintain the respect of such men they had to appear to have not only their 'executive' abilities (which would have been unseen by and possibly mysterious to the skilled workers) but they also needed to be seen to be capable of the 'real' work of shipbuilding.

As for dealing with the office staff, the acquisition of technical expertise by the executive family members was also an important managerial device, and one which may have become important as the bureaucratization of business increased. With more and more people involved in the administrative functions of the business, the 'executive abilities' of the men at the top became transparent to the young men who still aspired to something more than routine office work, and who may have felt that they had whatever ability the highest executives had. Such transparency is anathema to control and power. The top executives



needed a barrier between themselves and the 'ordinary' men in the office and their supposed technological expertise was this barrier for the shipbuilding dynasties of Glasgow.

Not only were the sons of these dynasties trained in technological disciplines but they often chose to identify themselves as practitioners of those skills. The six Gilchrists and MacLeans who controlled the shipbuilding firm of Barclay Curle and Company at various times during the period of this study were all trained in the technical side of the business. Like the other sons of the big shipbuilding families they would also have spent some of their training time in the counting house, learning about the administrative side of the business. That side would, after all, have been where they actually spent the majority of their work lives. The Gilchrists and MacLeans of Barclay Curle made up the board of directors of a successful business. Their main functions were administrative. They conducted labour relations and sales negotiations; they made or approved decisions on hiring and firing; they managed the corporate budget and supervised the production of the financial statements. Yet rather than be called 'manager', 'businessmen', 'company director', or 'corporate officer' they all listed themselves in the Glasgow Post Office Directory as 'engineer' or 'ship draughtsman'.<sup>32</sup> They preferred to use the title which implied the closest relationship to the actual production of ships and thus gained some respect from the men in the yard, while also clearly separating themselves from the other men in their offices.

This group of businessmen thus had not only special family connections but special preparation for their roles as heads of firms. In some ways, their 'apprenticeships' and rise to the board room was a ritualized mimicking of the paths their fathers or grandfathers had taken in starting their businesses. By the turn of the century the purpose of such a ritual would have been to mark these individuals as unique and inimitable. Neither the workers in the yard nor in the counting house possessed comparable experience or knowledge. This then would have been these men's basis of control over their work-force.

At Barclay Curle and other shipbuilding and engineering firms, the clerical staff's barrier to the top managerial positions was thus professional as well as familial. Indeed, that barrier might almost be thought of as one of 'caste'. Sydney and Olive Checkland spoke of a 'breed' of Scottish industrialists by 1900. These 'industrial mandarins'<sup>33</sup> of late nineteenth century Glasgow were a status group whose combination of special technical knowledge, control of production, and reliance on family, were moving them, in Weberian terms, towards being an endogamous closed caste rather than simply a status group. Clerks who

saw themselves as sharing a 'class' with this group because they aspired to their positions and copied their clothing and other social behaviour were displaying no more than 'a mere individual and socially irrelevant imitation of another style of life'.<sup>34</sup> Whatever clerks heard or said or believed about the possibility of finding success through office work may always have expressed more dream than reality, but by the turn of the century it was clear that any continuing persistence in seeing a 'ladder of success' was self-delusion.

## VII

The realization of the delusional nature of young men's beliefs in the opportunities available through office work does appear to have dawned early in the new century. There is evidence of both a decline in clerical work's ability to attract young men as well as evidence of the changed perceptions of the prospects for young men in office work. By 1912 the Civil Service was having difficulty in recruiting young men. The Civil Service found it necessary to implement a plan to better the pay and improve the career paths available in an effort to counteract the 'diminishing number who enter' the service, as well as to stop young men from leaving for other fields of work.<sup>35</sup>

The changed perception of prospects for young men were expressed by Sir Henry Craik, the head of the Scotch [sic] Education Department, speaking to a gathering of the Glasgow Athenaeum Commercial College in 1904. Sir Henry tried to tell his listeners that even though the successful men they worked for and saw around them might encourage them in their belief that they could rise, the world had changed. As Craik told his audience, the entrepreneur and the innovator were not what was needed any longer.

We must not forget that what may be most helpful in the first movements of great commercial enterprise, may not be so helpful afterwards. You may have pioneers who choose their own rules, who find their own methods, who look to no one to help them, but those who follow them must be a disciplined army, ... they may not be gifted with the enterprise and the genius of the pioneer, but they must be trained officers of the great commercial army.<sup>36</sup>

Craik's use of 'officers' may have been a way of lending some dignity to the working lives of his listeners, for his message was a dispiriting one for ambitious young people. He was telling his audience of clerks that they were to be part of an army. The subtext is obviously that an army must subordinate individual ambition for the good of the whole.

Craik's army metaphor also concealed the truth that positions at the top of the ladder of business success had become unavailable because they were occupied by families of the 'pioneers' he had spoken of. New clerical workers must be content to support the success of the sons of the 'pioneers'. After all, supporting others' success meant serving the needs of their careers and not one's own. In 1908 one correspondent to the *Glasgow Herald* described clerks as men who, 'spend the best of their days in the service of others.'<sup>37</sup> The clerk's job had become, and remains, to take care of the mundane but necessary tasks so that the boss can get on with the important work. Clerical work had thus become work of serving, supporting, 'enabling' someone else's achievements. It had become women's work.

The rhetoric and belief that hard work would bring rewards masked the fact that the 'ladder of success' had become a pyramid with a huge base and tiny apex. Or perhaps it is even more appropriate to imagine that the dizzying heights of wealth, status and power, previously occupied only by the traditional landed aristocracy, had been invaded and claimed by a fairly small, often hereditary, entrepreneurial elite. This new elite knocked some of the old aristocrats off their perches, moved into their stately homes, accepted their titles, adopted their lifestyles and finally pulled the 'ladder of success' up after them, leaving the mass of employed men below with no hope of joining them at the top. The employed, having no hope of crossing the labour-capital divide, were left to squabble among themselves over the infinite hierarchical gradations developing within white-collar labour. These finely delineated hierarchies within office labour would eventually provide a substitute ladder of success for some men, but such hierarchies would culminate only in middle-management positions within a single enterprise rather than society-wide wealth, fame and power which had been the apex of achievement for the nineteenth century entrepreneurs and merchants.

In the meantime, while this new, lesser, twentieth-century style of bureaucratic success was still in its formative years, many men would eschew office work altogether. But of course, the great swathes of blossoming bureaucracy and the new kinds of office jobs therein, were attractive to women. The scope of paid employment available to women at the time was so narrow that even the work of service and support in offices was a welcome augmentation of the catalogue of women's work. And women took up these jobs in great numbers and would continue to do so throughout the twentieth century.

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## Notes

1. On the late 19th century as a period of change in economy and society see H.J. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (1989), and J.F. Wilson *British Business History* (Manchester, 1995), chapter 4. for accounts of the same period in the United States, see A.D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA, 1977), and O. Zunz, *Making America Corporate: 1870–1920* (Chicago, 1990), p. 4.
2. For the discussion of the feminization of office work see G. Anderson (ed.), *The White Blouse Revolution* (Manchester, 1988), S. Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter* (Urbana, IL, 1992), A. Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business* (Baltimore, MD, 1994). On proletarianization see D. Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker* (1958), H. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York, 1974), R. Crompton and G. Jones, *White-Collar Proletariat* (1984).
3. G. Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester, 1976), p. 20.
4. In the *12th Decennial Census of Scotland*, 1911, the total number of male 'commercial clerks' decreased slightly from 12,850 to 12,684 but this represented a decline in the percentage of men in the clerical workforce from 72% to 60%.
5. R. Guerriero Wilson, *Disillusionment or New Opportunities? The Changing Nature of Work in Offices: Glasgow, 1880–1914* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 218–224.
6. In 1881 women were 3.4% (5.0% in Glasgow) of the total in the occupational category 'commercial clerks' in Great Britain. By 1911 this percentage had increased to 26.7 (39.7% in Glasgow). Direct comparison of figures for the rest of the twentieth century is not possible due to changes in the census categories. Nonetheless, the feminization of clerical work remains unmistakable in the new occupational category of 'clerical workers'. By 1951, 58% of the total population in this group were women. By 1981 women were 76% of this total. Sources: G. Routh, *Occupations of the People of Great Britain, 1801–1981*, (1987), p. 74, and *12th Decennial Census of Scotland, 1881, 1911*.
7. Scottish Clerks' Association, *Clerk's Gazette*, Jun. 1895, p. 66.
8. W. Jacks, 'An address to clerks', delivered to a meeting of the Scottish Clerks' Association, Dec. 1887, reprinted in the *Clerks' Gazette*, 31 Aug. 1896, pp. 39–40.
9. W. Jacks, *Singles from Life's Gatherings*, (Glasgow, 1902), p. 93.
10. S. Smiles, *Self-Help*, Library of Management Classics (1859, 1986), p. 170.
11. *The Clerk's Gazette*, article on 'membership' (of the Scottish Clerks' Association), 29 Jun. 1895, p. 66.
12. J.C. Stewart, *Pioneers of a Profession: Chartered Accountants to 1879* (Edinburgh, 1977), pp. 7–15. The Royal Charter was given to the Glasgow Society of Accountants in 1855, but according to Stewart, it wasn't until well into the 1880s that independent auditing became an important part of chartered accountants' work.
13. A.D. Provand, M.P., 'Commercial education', a lecture delivered to the Scottish Clerk's association, 18 Mar. 1895, printed in *The Clerks' Gazette*, 30 Apr. 1895, p. 48.
14. A.D. Provand, lecture, *Clerk's Gazette*, printed Apr. 1895.
15. T. Berrie, address, *Clerks' Gazette*, printed Sep. 1895, p. 102.
16. Glasgow University Archives Business Record Centre, Scottish Clerks' Association papers, UGD303, 'Report of the Committee ... to revise the rules', 12 May 1893, p. 7. Printed booklet of the report inserted in Association Minutes at 8 Dec. 1894. This provision in the rules is restated elsewhere from time to time, e.g. Report of the 'Autumn meeting of the general council', held 5 Oct. 1901.
17. J.H. Jones, 'University Training for Commerce and Administration', *Proceedings of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow*, XLV (1913–14), p. 178.
18. S. and O. Checkland, *Industry and Ethos: Scotland 1832–1914*, *The New History of Scotland*, no. 7 (1984), p. 21.
19. An example can be seen in the shipbuilding and engineering firm of Barclay Curle and Co. which had been founded in 1818 by John Barclay. Robert Curle joined in 1845. In 1857 Andrew MacLean and Archibald Gilchrist joined and it was the sons of MacLean and Gilchrist who were running the company on the eve of the First World War. See A. Slaven and S. Checkland, eds., *Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography, 1860–1960, Volume 1: Staple Industries* (Aberdeen, 1986), p. 218.

20. Strathclyde University Archives, Glasgow Athenaeum Commercial College Papers, MS H2, Speech to students at annual presentation of prizes and certificates, *Annual Report (1907–08)*, p. 11.
21. F.D. Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labor in Britain* (1935), p. 23.
22. G. Eyre-Todd, compiler, *Who's Who in Glasgow in 1909* (Glasgow, 1909).
23. *Ibid.*, 'Preface'.
24. *Ibid.*
25. For one discussion of the supposedly egalitarian nature of Scottish society see A.A. Maclaren, 'Introduction: an open society?', in Maclaren (ed.), *Social Class in Scotland: Past and Present* (Edinburgh, 1976).
26. Guerriero Wilson, *Disillusionment or New Opportunities*, pp. 65–76.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.
28. R.H. Trainor, 'The Elite', in W.H. Fraser and I. Mavor (eds.), *Glasgow, Volume II, 1830–1912* (Manchester, 1996), p. 237.
29. Stewart, *Pioneers of a Profession*, pp. 2–4.
30. See S. Nenadic, 'Businessmen, the Urban Middle Classes, and the "Dominance" of Manufacturers in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Economic History Review*, XLIV, I (1991), pp. 66–85, for a discussion of the importance of perception and the possibly disproportionate influence of manufacturers in their own times and in subsequent historiography.
31. W.S. Murphy, *Captains of Industry* (Glasgow, 1901).
32. Strathclyde Regional Archives, Barclay Curle and Company Papers, TD265 Directors' Minutebooks, 1884–1912, and bundle of papers 'correspondence on staff matters', 1905–06. Glasgow Post Office Directories, 1884–1912.
33. Checklands, *Industry and Ethos*, pp. 177–78.
34. M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 'VII, Class, Status, Party' in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (trans. and eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (1946; 6th printing, New York, 1963), p. 188. See also Checklands, *Industry and Ethos*, p. 175, noting that these families were also linked by marriage to some extent.
35. 'Civil Service boy clerks – revised regulations', and also 'The Civil Service-assistant clerks', *Glasgow Herald*, (19 Dec. 1912), p. 9, and 3 Sep. 1913, p. 5.
36. Strathclyde University Archives, Glasgow Athenaeum Commercial College Papers, MS H2, H. Craik, address 29 Nov. 1904, printed in *Annual Report (1903–04)*, p. 10.
37. Letter to the Editor, *Glasgow Herald* (19 Jun. 1908), p. 5.